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Transcription Louise Wasylikiw

Introduction: A video in which Louise Wasylikiw, Professor at Mount Allison University, talks about her experiences in accommodating students with nonverbal learning disability in her classes.

How did you accommodate a student with a disability in your class?

When I first started teaching, my colleagues informed me that there were some guidelines that came with students who had been diagnosed with learning disabilities, and that I was free to follow them or not. My default was to follow them simply because they were based on diagnostic criteria that I believed were appropriately done so I was happy to give extra time or have the student write a test on a computer for example, and I'm still happy to do those things, except that I think I've realized that what differentiates a successful student from the less successful student is not the presence or absence of a learning disability but rather the motivation and the perseverance to access opportunities for them to learn. So what do I do? A couple of things. One thing that I do is I try to increase the resources in my courses. So that doesn't just mean posting articles that complement lectures on Moodle but more recently it means posting videos and podcasts and I think those are really beneficial for everyone. Not every student learns in the same way and that might be particularly true for students diagnosed with learning disabilities, but that's not up to me to decide, that's up to them. They have a multitude of options they can choose from. So that's one thing that I do. I try to increase my availability and I really encourage students to come and see me. I find they don't do that enough. It's something that I think is really beneficial because it allows me to see their strengths and weaknesses. The second thing that I do that is, I think, a big component is testing. I don't alter the final exams any differently that what I have but my midterms have changed in the last couple of years. Primarily I am now holding them outside of class time, so there isn't the hurry to get into the classroom or the rush to get out to another class. There isn't a class waiting outside trying to get into the room. Now the students have a bit of luxury around that—all students, not just students with learning disabilities. So I think that's been beneficial.

How was the experience from your perspective?

I will still accommodate students according to the things that they individually need. I try to get to know my students, so one of the things that I've always encouraged my students to do is come and meet me, independent of office hours. I'll make room—my schedule is flexible enough—and that allows me to identify those strengths and weaknesses and potentially to work with the individual students. The experience of working with students with learning disabilities has been somewhat of an eye opener in that it is the perseverance that makes the difference, it's not the learning disability, and that's been a really nice lesson to learn in some ways because it's not the disability, it's the individual.

What would you say to a colleague who will have a student with a disability in his or her class?

Get to know the student, get to know what his or her strengths and weaknesses and needs are. Get to know the resources available on campus, and not just the Meighen Centre which is a great one—it offers an awful lot of resources for our students and is well recognized as being stellar. I think there are

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other resources on campus—there's a writing centre, there are even individual instructors and lab techs—they are great resources to go to. I try to get the students to come in to see me and that doesn't always work but that can be a resource. So that would be those things that I would think of.