

December, 2015

## Transcription Kate

**Introduction:** A video in which Kate describes her experience with accommodation for chronic health conditions.

What impact has your disability had on your college or university experience?

My name is Kate MacKay and I'm an undergraduate student here at the University of New Brunswick. That's in my second undergraduate degree—I finished a BA in Sociology and I liked it so much I came back to do a BA in Economics. I was diagnosed at 47 years of age with a very serious cardiac disease and then later on I was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis. For me there's two aspects to it: one is the physical in that I often need a cane to get around and I decided to go to a university that was built on a hill. So I sometimes struggle to get over some of the physical obstacles of getting to classes, getting into the library, finding a parking space that's available because sometimes I need to take the car. I cannot walk from Engineering to the Harriet Irving Library—that takes me about 40 minutes to do on my own so I need to be able to drive from one to the other, so there's that aspect. The second thing is there is a cognitive aspect to my disability, one of which is exacerbated by fatigue, so I really have to manage my time and my assignments and my course load very carefully because if I become overtired, it's very difficult for me to keep up. Also, medications that are used to treat my physical disability can sometimes have a cognitive function that just makes things slower. Sometimes it's like thinking through cotton candy—it can be difficult to concentrate on things. Fortunately it's not all the time, but when I have those periods and those episodes, it is very difficult to manage a normal course load.

What accommodation measures have you received to help you succeed in your studies?

I have been so grateful for the faculty here at UNB because they have provided me a great deal of latitude for me to pursue my studies. They have been very supportive. I've had professors change course requirements, allow me to work almost like an independent study. This year in particular I had a flare-up of Multiple Sclerosis partway through the term and I've had professors turn courses I was taking into an independent study so that I no longer had to go to classes. I've had them change from two or three small papers into 1 longer paper; I've had them accommodate assignments coming in late. The university of course here, the Student Accessibility Centre has been very supportive in helping me fill out government grants for some assistive technology. Andrew Daley down at the Harriet Irving Library has been very helpful in getting me some equipment that really makes a huge difference in my ability to study and to concentrate. And, finally, it's the ability to take a longer period of time to write my exams which, for me, especially if I'm having one of those days where I'm a little bit on the slow side from the medications, having that extra time—I may not take the full 1.5 times that I'm given but an extra 15 minutes, or knowing I have that time so reduces my sense of anxiety. And also sometimes it can be very difficult for me to write, so being able to use a computer to write short answers or essay questions. I'm sure the professors really appreciate it too, because they wouldn't have to read my cramped up chicken

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scrawl, so it works all round. But I cannot say there's ever been a condition that I've come up with that I've not been accommodated.

What other things have helped you overcome your challenges and be successful in your college or university life?

A big part of it is that my disability came to me when I was much older. I was 47 years old when I was diagnosed, so I already had good communication skills around that. I have been very open about it with my faculty and other students as to what my problems are. I also have conditions that are socially acceptable and I realize that not everybody with disabilities can go in and say, "Look, I'm having a problem with X" because we still have stigmas around certain disabilities but I've been lucky—I've been able to go in and say to faculty, "This is my problem, this is what I'm experiencing." I don't have something that's really rare—everybody's heard of MS, and everybody's heard of cardiac disease, and so they understand it intuitively and immediately and so I've been very fortunate in that, for me, the best thing is to communicate. I also appreciate that some people for whatever reasons, that is not a possibility for them.