Understanding Disability at Fleming College

# In a Nutshell

A disability is an impairment that results in substantial limitations in one or more aspects of daily life. There are many types of disabilities and they can, “…affect a person’s vision, hearing, thinking, learning, movement, mental health, remembering, communicating and social relationships.” (<https://www.disabled-world.com/disability/types/> retrieved June 8, 2017). At Fleming, the most common types of disabilities experienced by students are learning disabilities and mental health disabilities.

# In Greater Detail

This section is written for those who are interested in more than a definition of the term “disability” but also the meaning of disability.

At Fleming, we use the Ontario Human Rights Commission [definition of disability](http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/policy-ableism-and-discrimination-based-disability/2-what-disability) to ensure we comply with the law. However, our commitment to our students, employees and others who interact with the college, means that we go beyond just complying with the law.

The United Nations Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which has been ratified by Canada, recognizes the social model of disability (<https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities.html>, retrieved June 8, 2017). The social model of disability is important not only because it has been adopted internationally and thus represents progress in the area of rights for persons with disabilities, but also because it was developed by individuals with disabilities and because it puts greater pressure on societies (and communities like Fleming) to remove barriers to inclusion faced by individuals with disabilities.

## So what is the social model of disability?

“The social model sees ‘disability’ is the result of the interaction between people living with impairments and an environment filled with physical, attitudinal, communication and social barriers. It therefore carries the implication that the physical, attitudinal, communication and social environment must change to enable people living with impairments to participate in society on an equal basis with others.” (<http://www.pwd.org.au/student-section/the-social-model-of-disability.html>, retrieved June 8, 2017).

The social model makes a clear distinction between an impairment and a disability. An impairment is a condition that leads to a disability while a disability is the outcome that arises when a person with an impairment is affected by the physical, attitudinal, communication and/or social barriers in their environment.

**Fleming Example**

Theo, a student with a learning disability, has an **impairment** that affects his learning from written text. The **barrier** he encounters in his classes is course materials that are text based. The interaction between his impairment and his learning environment causes a disabling condition.

When we remove the barrier of text-based learning materials by providing him with a screen reader and electronic versions of all the text-based material in the course, he is able to participate to his full potential in the class just like his peers.

When you view disabilities from the social model, it becomes clear that our efforts to create inclusive learning and working environments at Fleming, requires us to focus on removing barriers and designing curricula that are accessible from the start. The latter is done through [Universal Design for Learning](https://department.flemingcollege.ca/lds/learning-design/universal-design-for-learning/). The goal here is to allow persons with disabilities to participate on an equal basis with others.

# References

Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). (n.d.). Retrieved June 8, 2017, from <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities.html>

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