Disability-related needs and experiences at
the University of Florida

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Presented at

The 6th Annual Conference of the Social Sciences

University of Florida

October 23, 2010

UNIVERSITY *of*
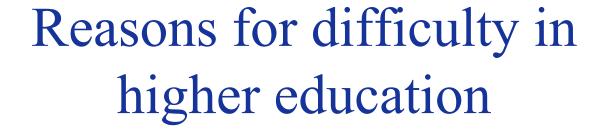**FLORIDA**

The Foundation for The Gator Nation

Background

- Under represented population
- Rapid growth in enrollment in higher education
- Difficulty w/ college retention & degree completion

Reasons for difficulty in higher education

- Inadequate academic prep

- Lack of transition support

- Inconsistency in service provision

- Lack of faculty knowledge & use of appropriate accommodations & modifications

Research Purpose

- I-Cubed: Broadening participation of under-represented groups at UF
- Needs of university students with disability (SWD) extend beyond the classroom

- Purpose: Better understand the *range* of needs & experiences of UF for SWD

Methods

- Focused ethography: 14 Individual interviews & 2 Focus groups

- Email list serve, flyers, word of mouth & chain sampling

- Data collection & initial analysis: Summer C Qualitative Field Methods   IRB-02

- N=22: 11 UF SWD; 10 UF personnel; 1 Parent of UF SWD

Themes: Added complexity

- Daily life
- Social
- Disability related health/medical management
- Work readiness
- UF Pressure to compete – harder because of disability

Juggling

- *"…I was making new friends and trying to hang out. So it was a balance. It was all a balancing act of what you can do and what you can't do."*

- *"… it takes me a lot longer than most students … to get some assignments done so then that then cuts out of my time to go to a meeting for an organization or something like that."*

Difficulty with Negotiation

- *"I wasn't feeling confident to go in with my [medical] documentation…which I legally don't have to show [the instructor]."*

- *"Please don't make me go back and make me reiterate what the letter already says!"*

- *"It's always an awkward conversation."*

- *"… I really don't want to approach an instructor and discuss it with them…It would have been wonderful for me to to give them the letter and them be held accountable from that moment forward."*

Disclosure

- *"I think the hardest part of that process is going to the teachers and explaining. ... And then like trying to not tell them what's the disability but letting them know what's going on."*

Stigma

- *"… I often think that [the instructors] are judging me… so I rarely like to disclose…"*
- *"If you are feeling suspicious of me [regarding accommodations] then I don't even want to talk to you about it."*

- Unfairness

- Not wanting to be "marked": *"everyone knew who he was talking about"*

- Diagnostic desensitization

Striving to normalize

- Don't want to be that person anymore

- Got in without accommodations

- Wanting to minimize accommodation use *"[DRC] give you a whole list of stuff…I try to use it minimally as possible cause out in the work force…so I figure the less I do in college, the better I'll be able to adjust once out in the real world."*

Self-determination

- *"…Onus being on the student to get the documentation to the instructor… I see that as being empowering…you are in college, you take responsibility"*

- *"…it's up to you to fill it out. It's up to you to pick it up. It's up to you to deliver it to your professors and everything so it's mainly the student's responsibility"*

- *"So as instructor I felt life, you know, I want to accommodate. I will go out of my way to do it…. At the same time, I need you to work with me…get this to me in a timely manner."*

Navigation

- Direction finding: *"I spoke to my teacher before the first time I used disability service"*

- Steering: *"[The student] would be out of UF if I hadn't been here. I mean, what was he going to do? How is he goin', to understand the system - call and call and call?"*

Support

- Connecting: *"...she just took me under her wing and figured out what was going on..."*

- Medical/health system: *"we can connect a student whenever they need some kind of confirmation that they have any form of disability"*

- Disability Resource Center: *"The role of [DRC] is being there to support students in their decision to request accommodations and then kind of helping them facilitate with their instructors;..."*

Limitations of available support services

- *"I think they offer you a bunch of options. So, technically they are there, but it's not accessible. If you need this, you can go through all these loopholes, and you can get the services. Disability services should be made accessible on an as needed basis rather than just being there. You are technically allowed, but they make it too hard for you to use."*

Lack of instructor information

- *"I don't know what to tell a student when they come to me with … just being diagnosed … [and] they don't know what to do."*

- *"…There is some professors that I kind of felt like they didn't have any empathy and there is some professors that have some empathy but they don't always know what to do with like the issues."*

- *"…That didn't explain what you are supposed to do or why you need to do it or anything…It was just like 'They are going to come to you and may give you a letter and then you know fill out paperwork' and that's it."*

Inclusive pedagogy - difficult but worth it

- *"When I end up helping [the SWD], it helps me get my stuff better. I haven't had an accommodation issue that actually didn't end up making, helping me, do my job better."*

- *"What can I do for you?... I'm going to accommodate you because I have this good feeling... that I want everyone to do well. I actually ENJOY it. It makes me feel...like a better instructor"*

- *"I have a PhD student that I know has learning disability... It's twice amount of work for me, but it's worth it for me because I recognize other strengths..."*

Discussion

- Both academic and beyond the classroom needs exist for SWD
- Beyond the classroom needs are extensive & complex
- Strategies must be tailored – *one size fits all is one size fits none*

Implications for practice

- Increase education

- Incentivize

- Increase networking & mentoring capacity

Acknowledgements

- Research supported by a grant from the University of Florida I-Cubed program

- Sincere thanks to Dr. Roxanna Bendixen and those involved through NRG 7814 Summer C 2010; Dr. Barbara Lutz, Dr. Kim Cox, Hyo-Chol Ahn, Audrey Asbey, Christa Cook, Kerry Creasy, Lois Ellis, Sun Kim, Pablo Saldana, & Laura Smith.