

Occupational Performance Beyond the Classroom: The Needs of Postsecondary Students with Disability

Introduction

The number of students with disability (SWD) on college campuses has rapidly increased in the past quarter century. Despite this increase in enrollment, academic success and satisfaction continue to elude numerous SWD (Quick, Lehmann & Deniston, 2003). College success is bolstered by adjustment to the range of demands and experiences associated with college life. These demands extend beyond the classroom and necessitate a set of life skills that are complex and challenging. The needs of SWD extend beyond standard academic accommodations.

Purpose: Understand the broader needs of post-secondary students with disability

Methods

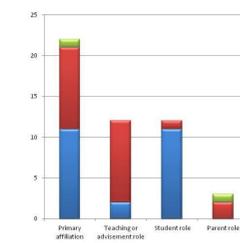
- 2 Focus groups = 4 per group
 - 1 student group
 - 1 faculty & staff group
- 14 Individual in-depth interviews
 - Participants lead dialogue to topics of saliency
 - Student version: Questions re: experiences re: campus life & in classrooms
 - Faculty/Staff: Questions re: experiences working w SWD & university policy re: SWD
- Thematic analysis: Nuanced description of experiences
 - audio-recording & verbatim transcriptions
- IRB approval & written informed consent

Participants

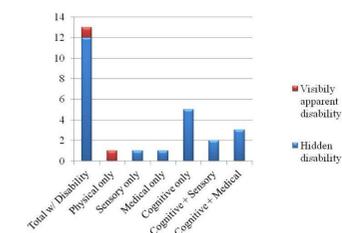
N=22

- n=1 Parent of traditional age SWD
- n=10 Faculty/Staff (mean affiliation 17 yrs)
- n=11 Students (5 undergrads/6 graduate) 6/11 traditional age

Participants (N=22)



Participant Disability Status



Themes

"It's not enough to have ramps. It's not enough to have length of the test extended. You know there are other kinds of things that have to be done."

Added complexity

"It's one thing to have academic help, but everything that affects you in school affects you in your daily life too."

Negotiation & 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."

ADDED COMPLEXITY

- Time** - "Time and a half for exam... [no] extra time for homework!"
- Group work** - "I don't want to slow anyone down...!"
- Balancing & prioritizing** - "I have to pick & choose because I have a [disability/health] priority.?"
- Health** - "...mom's not there to [do daily health task] and stuff like that?"
- Social** - "[Disability] definitely prevents me reaching out.!"
- Housing** - "...couldn't handle it all, he didn't have the skills?!"
- Daily life organization!** - Preplan daily life e.g. meals! Rely on family!
- Daily grind of dealing w/ disability** - Vigilant! Mindful of how disability impacts everyday situations!

NEGOTIATION & DISCLOSURE

- Weighing privacy!** vs. need to justify vs. need of instructor to understand
- Ill-equipped instructors make it harder!** - "...They just don't understand that people are receiving accommodations for this kind of thing?!"
- It's always an awkward conversation!**

Self-determination

"...it's up to you to fill it out. It's up to you to pick it up...it's mainly the student's responsibility"

Mature Self-determination
Meta-learning
Critical assessment
Judicious use of accommodations!

Tenacity - "That's all you do. Just keep explaining!"

House of cards & Prior successes - "If I was 20... I would have quit!"

Knowing bounds - "Let's see how you do without it!"

Difficult - "They wouldn't give me extra time on the test.!"

Self-Advocacy!
Communicating needs!
Getting needs met!

Self-Management
Understanding of needs!

Self-direction!
"...Onus being on the student...!"

SELF-DETERMINATION

Testing the bounds - "I thought I could do this without it & now I realize I can't!"

Grappling w/ identity - "I'm not ready yet... Just have to be ready before I ask for the next set of services!"

Disability identity - "...learning how what it meant!"

Self-Management
Understanding of needs!

Self-direction!
"...Onus being on the student...!"

Support

"It's nice having the right kind of support around me."

Support network!
"It's nice having the right kind of support around me, my family & all the right doctors...!"

Supportive Instructor!
"Obviously if I can do it, I will!"

Health System support - "Really it was the MDs... who knew inside & out what I was dealing with...!"

Campus Disability Services
Central to students' experiences!
Valued - Perceived as beneficial
Advocacy & Support

Navigation from family!
"How is he going, to understand the system - call and call and call?!"

Family steering
"My mother made the appointment!"

Instructor steering
"I spoke to my teacher before the first time I used disability service.!"

Navigation via advisement
"She just took me under her wing and figured out what was going on!"

Self-management
"...If its standing out that much, I probably need to go!"

Health personnel steering
"...We can connect... whenever they need confirmation...of disability!"

Stigma & unfairness

"...I often think that they are judging me... so I rarely like to disclose..."

Hidden disability!
"The only understanding is [I have a physically broken thing]"

Conveying unfairness!
"You're all going to have an hour and a half.!"
SOME OF YOU are going to have a little longer.!"

It's always an awkward conversation!

It's always an awkward conversation!

Discussion

- ❑ The need for disability-related supports extend beyond the classroom into areas of medical and health, social, and daily life.
- ❑ SWD must simultaneously manage academics and health. Conditions resulting in disability are diagnosed and managed through the medical and health system. Navigation of both health and academic systems needed.
- ❑ Urgent need for disability training in matters unique to hidden disabilities.
- ❑ This research expands understanding of disability-related needs impacting matters of academic, social, and everyday life.

Conclusion

For post-secondary SWD, health management, self-advocacy, communication, and everyday life skills have an impact on academic performance and college participation. Findings have implications for OT interventions focusing on transition services for academically successful middle and high school students with disabilities.

- **Reference:** Quick, D., Lehmann, J., & Deniston, T. (2003). Opening doors for students with disabilities on community college campuses: What have we learned? What do we still need to know? *Community College Journal of Research & Practice*, 27, 815- 827.
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