

Survey Measure on Experiences of Students with Disabilities

Amelia DeRynck, BSW, MPA Candidate

Jonathan Milligan, M.A. Candidate, CRC passed

Pammie Rodriguez, LEND Self-Advocacy Trainee

Abstract

Students with disabilities are attending higher education and an ever-increasing rate. Within the past 20 years, the number of students with disabilities attending higher education has doubled. However, many students entering college are surprised to find their rights to protective services and accommodations are greatly diminished (Timmerman, & Mulvihill, 2015). In addition to this, accommodations received are often not objectively based upon their disability, testing or needs (Weis, Dean, & Osborne, 2016). Recent studies have shown that students using only publicly available accommodations (e.g. student centers and tutors) are significantly more likely to succeed in a college environment, thought to be because of the stigma of having a disability (Newman, Madaus, Lalor, & Javitz, 2021). More needs to be done to prepare students for the transition from high school to college, students need more training in self-advocacy skills and more appropriate accommodations for their disability (Eckes, & Ochoa, 2005). Additionally, evaluating the efficacy and accessibility of accommodations for students is imperative for successful outcomes of individuals with disabilities (Schreuer, & Sachs, 2014). Finally, we need to empower the voices of students with disabilities on campus's; student's are more than willing to share their voices and experiences, they want to engage in the educational process, and it's up to us to make their voices heard (Yssel, Pak, & Beilke, 2016).

Objectives

Major gap in literature regarding college level accommodation
Individuals with disabilities want to be heard and included in discussion surrounding their own disability.

Our primary objectives are as follows:

- Investigate a gap in literature
- Provide a voice to individuals with disabilities
- Brainstorm ways to improve existing systems to provide better educational services
- Begin discussion about what is considered a "fair" accommodation based on the experience of neurodiverse individuals

Research question: Do individuals with disabilities feel they are being properly supported within the educational system by the existing systems, and if not, what do they feel could be done better?

Method

Created a qualitative survey to gather experiences of individuals with disabilities

Survey purpose: to be a pre-study non-experimental design to guide further research and gather the population's voices

Survey requests information from a protected population

- Unable to get IRB approval in time
- Needed to alter expectations
- Sent survey to field professionals for feedback/comments
- Changed survey accordingly to better fit our research goals

Summary of Findings

Common Themes:

In general revolved around how the questions were asked and gathering more information on various experiences that we may not have considered prior to creating the measure.

Method of questions:

- Ask more open-ended questions asking participants to go into detail about their experiences.
- Be careful with wording so survey is more accessible.
- Word the questions to be as inclusive as possible, as not everyone with a disability may know exactly how it affects them at the academic level or why they are receiving the services they are .
- Include more yes or no questions.

Delving more into gathering information regarding unique experiences

- Ask more about awareness on getting services.
- Include more on experience with Student Disability Services (SDS) advisor (because this could impact experiences).
- Ask about other disability services vital to your academic success that were not academic? (bionic bus, in/accessibility of buildings).
- Ask what accommodations are helping
- Class recordings during the pandemic
- Entered college with no accommodations then realized his first semester didn't go as well as it could have.
- After accommodations, was able to earn degree despite complications.
- Questioning if college is accessible for people with disabilities

Provide clear definitions:

- Use SDS terminology/categorization for technicality.
- Clarify by adding definitions, distinguish between *identifying* as disabled and *qualifying* (legally) per ADA's definition.

Results & Conclusions

Researcher 1

I have gone through special educational programs and SDS accommodations many times. My own experience has been mixed. The blanket model currently in use does not meet the needs of neurodiverse individuals. Whenever I must use accommodations, I think of a personal saying of mine: accommodations were made by people without disabilities for people with disabilities, pertaining to things they think would be helpful to them, in a system designed for and by neurotypical individuals. From my experience and from the literature review we performed for this poster, one thing is clear: individuals with disabilities just want to be heard, they want a say in how they are educated, and they want a fairer way to show their academic accomplishments, rather than trying to fit into a system not designed for them.

Researcher 2

Even with the best-intentioned instructors, accommodations fall flat. Microphones and subtitles are used for the first few days of class but then used sporadically until forgotten. Some classes remember to assign a notetaker, others request a classmate take notes, but no one volunteers so it's a forgotten request. As a graduate student I am responsible for ensuring instructors adhere to my letter of accommodation, but it gets exhausting reminding them constantly, so I just drop it. Since doing more research on the topic, I'm of the notion that accommodations are a performance put on by colleges, companies, society, etc. to seem like they are inclusive for students with a disability, but the best way to be inclusive is implementing more universal design.

Researcher 3

In my IEP plan for elementary school through high school, I had unlimited time or extra time outside tests and quizzes. If I was out for extended periods of time and got behind on work, I had to focus on the essentials and the rest of the make-up work was exempt. Everything worked well for me, and I succeeded and graduated!