

Research Summary

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Accommodation Experience: Challenges and Facilitators of Requesting and Implementing Accommodations Among College Students with Disabilities

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A Quick Look

The authors wanted to understand what college students experience when using disability services and accommodations. They looked at the challenges a student faces and the factors that help them use their accommodations. From a survey of 289 students at six public colleges and universities, they identified various challenges and helpful factors.

The study noted that the disability support service (DSS) office is just one resource for students with disabilities. The survey included open-ended questions, providing insights beyond the specifics of accommodations and services. The survey answers were analyzed using qualitative methods. Findings aligned with previous research about the need for individualized and knowledgeable support and increased awareness regarding support available to students. For example, one respondent shared,

"I never receive[d] extended time on assignments as it was not made clear that there were options for me. If I had known, I likely would have taken advantage of them."

—Survey respondent

Key Findings

The survey revealed three themes that indicated the most significant differences regarding challenges and facilitators: the role of the instructor/faculty, DSS and DSS staff, and individual student perceptions and initiative.

Overarchingly, an instructor's caring attitude was an "essential ingredient" for student success with their accommodations. When instructors demonstrated care and attention to students in various ways, that fostered success. Researchers also found that, in addition to an instructor's attitude, students' awareness or knowledge of access to disability-related services in college impacted their experience. Access to disability-related services can significantly impact a student's educational experience and expertise. When students are aware of and can easily access these services, they can receive the support they need to succeed academically and personally. Furthermore, the findings spoke to the importance of the DSS offices, the support provided, and the instrumental role staff played in improving student outcomes. Disability support staff can contribute to improved student outcomes by assessing and planning, coordinating services, offering emotional and social support, and advocating by building awareness within the campus community.

Putting It Into Practice

The authors of this study spoke to the need for collaboration and training between high school transition-related services, transition organizations, and DSS offices on college campuses. Some of the practical applications they suggested were:

1. Providing training on college expectations, resources, and accommodations by DSS or related transition organizations.
2. Offering opportunities for students to practice disclosure and accommodation requests in high school.
3. Raising awareness in college settings about disabilities, allyship, and available support for students and faculty.
4. Enhancing faculty training on classroom technologies that support diverse learners.
5. Encouraging open dialogue and safe spaces for sharing experiences in high school and college.
6. Establishing peer support models to foster community and resource awareness.

Where To Go from Here?

This research underscores the lived experiences of students with disabilities by highlighting what has worked and what hasn't worked regarding accessing their accommodations in college. As the authors point out, instead of considering accommodations as an afterthought, colleges, faculty, and students need to build systems and structures to foster support for students with disabilities—from disclosing a disability to effectively leveraging one's accommodations to achieve student success.

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