

## **Survey Measure on Experiences of Students with Accommodations**

Amelia DeRynck, BSW, MPA Candidate; Jonathan Milligan, M.A. Candidate, CRC passed;  
Pammie Rodriguez, LEND Self-Advocacy Trainee

### **Research Mentor and other collaborators:**

Erica Kaldenberg, PhD

### **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:**

Based upon our literature review, it became clear to us that there is a major gap within the literature relating to accommodation given to students at the college level. Furthermore, a common theme within the literature is that individuals with disabilities first and foremost wish to be heard and have a voice within the discussion of their own disability. Based upon this our primary objectives are as follows:

- Investigate a gap in the literature in preparation for future studies
- Provide a voice to individuals with disabilities to empower them to make decisions about their life and care
- Brainstorm ways to improve existing systems to provide better educational services
- Begin a debate about is what is considered a "fair" accommodation based on the experience of neurodiverse individuals, not neurotypical individuals

### **Method:**

Based on our literature review, we created a qualitative survey to gather the experiences of individuals with disabilities to be heard. This survey's purpose is to be a pre-study non-experimental design designed to guide further research into the area and gather the population's voices. Because this survey is working with a protected population, we found we would be unable to get through IRB approval in the allotted time-period and as such we had to alter our expectations. We sent our survey to professionals in the field for feedback and comments, and based upon this, we changed our original survey to better fit our research goals.

### **Common Themes:**

Common themes that we received from generally 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 receiving
- 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 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)
- 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 getting accommodations, he was able to get his degree despite the complications.
- Questioning if college is accessible for people with disabilities

#### **Provide clear definitions:**

- Use Student Disability Services (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**

As an individual with a disability, I have gone through special educational programs and SDS accommodations many times. My own experience has been mixed, to say the least. Although I believe that generalized accommodations are helpful for some, the blanket model currently in use does not meet the needs of neurodiverse individuals whose disability does not fit generalized disability definitions. 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.

This brings us to the importance of this research and why we're doing this. Individuals with disabilities should be the ones creating and implementing accommodation. From my own 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 accomplishment that allows them to shine, rather than trying to fit into a system not designed for them.

### **Researcher 2**

I acquired disabilities at 15 years old and it was not until college that I understood what accommodations were. My rural high school did not provide me with any assistance, and I did not know it was within my rights to ask for them. I enrolled in college and accepted the accommodations that "fit my disabilities," or so I was told. I stopped using them after my first semester and for the remainder of undergraduate college because they did not really address my needs. To be honest, I did not know what addressed my needs but was too embarrassed to figure it out because all I ever heard were words questioning my disability status, which I began to internalize.

I began using accommodations again as a graduate student, but even with the best-intentioned instructors, the 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. Extended test taking in a quiet area seems to work but the other accommodations don't help, or at least don't consistently help. 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!

### Final Thoughts

Overall, there is no one size fits all for accommodations, to have met one person with a disability is to have met one person with a disability. Because of this the most important factor in success is flexibility, patience, and a willingness to work with the person to arrange the accommodation they need, with an understanding of what they need to be successful. High schools are more willing to work with students to provide customized and necessary accommodations and supports but may leave the student with a poor understanding of why they are receiving those supports and inadequate self-advocacy skills. Colleges, however, expect students to self-advocate, state what they need, and take a one-size-fits-all approach to accommodations. Our goal is to bridge that gap and identify areas for improvement within the system and to empower the voices of individuals with disabilities at the college level and increase awareness of the need for accommodations and accountability.