ADA-Audio Conference Series:
Best Practices in Accommodating Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders, Intellectual Disability and other Emerging Groups within Postsecondary Education

Scott N. Friedman, M.S.Ed.

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Welcome

• Presenter background:
  • Adjunct Professor with the Elmhurst Life Skills Academy at Elmhurst College
  • Faculty Access Consultant with the Disability Resource Center at the University of Illinois at Chicago
  • Holds a master’s in Adult & Higher Education
  • Ph.D. candidate in Disability Studies and master’s candidate in Special Education at UIC
  • Research focuses on serving college students with disabilities
Presentation Overview

- Current status of college students with disabilities
- Models for serving students with disabilities
- The Law and “the law” in serving students
- Emerging groups
  - Autism Spectrum Disorder/Asperger’s Syndrome
  - Traumatic Brain Injury
  - Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities
  - Injured Veterans
- Utilizing Universal Design to reduce barriers
- Future best practices for serving students

Abbreviations

- ASD- Autism Spectrum Disorder
- AT- Assistive Technology
- I/DD- Intellectual and/or Developmental Disabilities
- LD- Learning Disability
- P-21- Preschool through age 21 education
- TBI- Traumatic Brain Injury
- UD- Universal Design
Status of College Students with Disabilities

- U.S. Census Bureau (2008) reports that 19% of Americans have a disability
- 1995-1996 academic year, about 6% of college students identify as having a disability (Horn, Berktold, and Bobbitt, 1999)
- 2003-2004 academic year, nearly 11% identify as having a disability (Snyder, Dillow, and Hoffman, 2007)

- Notice any trends here???

Status of College Students (con’t)

- Problems with current statistics:
  - Federal law states that students must self-identify to receive services (unlike P-21 where schools are required to seek out students needing academic intervention)
  - There is a lack of consistent disability categories across studies or Federal student surveys
  - No national benchmarks or readily available tools for regular follow-up studies

- New programs for students with I/DD…where do they fit?
Models of Disability

- Individualistic- provide accommodations that work to mediate limitations by equaling the academic playing field

- Universal- work to make physical and technological aspects readily accessible to all, therefore reducing the need for individual accommodations

- Social- work to reframe culture by removing sociocultural barriers that prevent people with disabilities from fully participating

Intent versus Spirit of the Law

- Like all legislation, there is a discrepancy between what was intended and how the law actually works

- Both the ADA and Rehabilitation Act sections relating to students are good examples

- With limited budgets, underprepared service providers, inaccessible university spaces, and rising costs for serving students with disabilities...sometimes the reasonable accommodation is not always the best accommodation

- Students have a severe lack of understanding about their rights to services under the Law
Emerging Student Groups

- Autism Spectrum Disorder / Asperger’s Syndrome
- Traumatic Brain Injury
- Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities
- Injured Veterans

ASD/Asperger’s Syndrome

- Autism and Asperger’s are often viewed as the extremes on a continuum
- Autism is associated with cognitive, verbal, and social delays and/or limitations
- Asperger’s generally has little cognitive or verbal delay
- Characteristics also include: problems socializing and repetitive patterns or interests (APA, 2000)
- Growing numbers of students with Asperger’s Syndrome are entering higher education
Asperger’s Accommodations

- Generally, no accommodations are necessary because Asperger’s is a social functioning disorder.

- When comorbidity exists with LD, accommodations include:
  - Extended time for assignments or exams
  - Assistive technology
  - Alternative formats
  - Breaks (especially sensory)
  - Assistance for required out-of-class activities

Asperger’s Practices

- Realize that the student may not look at or posture toward another individual
- Be aware that social relationships may be difficult; especially those assumed to be at the college-level
- “Teach through” repetitive mannerisms or patterns
- Utilize partnerships to strengthen social behaviors that are appropriate for the college setting
- Understand that most people with Asperger’s have only social functioning problems but no cognitive deficits
Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)

- An acquired, sudden injury in which an individual’s head hits another object or an object pierces the brain
- TBI also occurs along a spectrum

- TBI can affect any or all of the following functions:
  - Cognitive
  - Sensory
  - Communication
  - Behavioral

TBI Accommodations

- Extended time for assignments and/or testing
- Use of notes, book, dictionary, calculator for exams
- Note taking or voice recording for lectures
- Assistive technology
- Alternate formats
- Breaks during class or exams
- Assistance during orientation or out-of-class activities
- Adapted athletics
TBI Best Practices

- Utilize documentation when collaborating with the student to determine classroom accommodations
- Realize that TBI spans a number of functional areas, and not all may be affected
- Work with the student to determine if previous accommodations have been successful
- Frequent contact with instructors is beneficial in ensuring that the accommodations are effective
- Disability Services staff should keep in mind that students with TBI may have exacerbation of symptoms at any time

Intellectual/Developmental Disability

- Most of these disabilities fall onto a spectrum in terms of severity or increasing limitation
- Often, I/DD displays cognitive deficit comorbid with LD

- General categories include (APA, 2000):
  - Mental Retardation
  - Motor skills disorders
  - Communication disorders
  - Pervasive developmental disability (Autism, Rett’s, Asperger's)
  - Down Syndrome
I/DD Accommodations

- Extended time for assignments and/or testing
- Use of notes, book, dictionary, or calculator on exams
- Answer directly on exam copies; no answer sheet
- Note taking or voice recording
- Assistive technology
- Orientation assistance
- Verbal description or physical manipulation
- Adapted athletics

I/DD Best Practices

- I/DD ranges from significant impairment to only a slight level of cognitive difficulty
- Many of the accommodations and AT options that serve students with LD also benefit students with I/DD (for example: tracking and text-to-voice software)
- Frequent contact with instructors is helpful in ensuring that accommodations are effective
- Students are enrolling in specialized college programs designed to meet the needs of students with I/DD
I/DD Programs

- Colleges are adding both separate programs and support initiatives for students with I/DD
- One example is the Elmhurst Life Skills Academy (ELSA):
  - Students completed high school and read at a third-grade level
  - Classes are tailored to meet individual needs
  - ELSA students are involved in many student activities
  - Students take academic (Geography), life skills (cooking), career, social issues, and fine arts courses
  - The students are integrated into many aspects of college life
  - The end goals are providing skills and collegiate experiences that will benefit the individual throughout their life

Injured Veterans

- Returning war veterans can have any number of injuries
- Because of broad access due to financial support, more injured veterans are attending college

- A recent sample (Vance and Miller, 2009) of veterans served in higher education found:
  - Psychological- 34% (males) and 11% (females)
  - Acquired health condition- 16% and 4%
  - Learning disability- 9% and 7%
  - Physical/mobility- 8% and 1%
  - Hard of Hearing- 5% and 1%
Accommodations for Veterans

- Extended time for assignments and/or testing
- Note taking or voice recording for lectures
- Assistive technology
- Possibly alternate formats
- Classroom relocation or accessible furniture
- Breaks during class or exams
- Assistance during orientation or out-of-class activities
- Adapted athletics
- Housing or parking accommodations

Best Practices for Veterans

- Coordinated campus services are vital
  - Financial
  - Disability Services
  - Psychological and counseling
  - Career counseling
- A welcoming environment which provided respect and resources for veterans
- Provide services and coursework during the evening to accommodate veterans’ schedules

(Vance and Miller, 2009)
Utilizing Universal Design

- UD is based on architectural principles and has been expanded to technology and education
- Increase access and inclusiveness
- Work to remove unnecessary barriers
- Provide for multiple means of representation
- Allow for multiple methods of assessing learning

- UD takes a proactive rather than reactive approach

(Scott, et.al., 2003)

Future Best Practices

- Asperger’s:
  - Institutions need to become more aware and be able to work across the campus to provide social supports
  - Assess accommodations for Asperger’s students with LD

- TBI:
  - Utilize more AT to allow students with TBI to continue pursuing education after injury
  - Provide flexible accommodations that meet changing needs
  - Develop guidelines for reintegration/continuation after injury
  - Better assessment should lead to targeted accommodations
Future Best Practices (con’t)

- I/DD:
  - Utilize more AT to ensure access to materials
  - Allow for flexibility in assessment of learning
  - Incorporate more UD into lectures and assignments

- Veterans:
  - May have physical injuries and psychological needs
  - Disability Services should maintain ongoing contact with the student to determine if the VA can provide supports
  - Staff across campus should prepare to work together to meet veterans’ accommodation, financial, and personal needs

Future Best Practices (con’t)

- Disability Service Providers Practices:
  - A more standardized process and set of criteria for providing accommodations are needed on a national scale
  - Comprehensive and systematic training in this field for Service Providers is necessary
  - Large-scale and institutional assessment must be done

- Faculty Practices:
  - Increase awareness of disability issues and incorporate these into the curriculum (like other underrepresented groups)
  - Utilize UD and take a larger responsibility in providing some student accommodations
Questions and Discussion

- The next approximately 30 minutes will be available for questions and discussion.
- Please jump in and share your experiences in providing exceptional services to these groups.
- I can discuss generally how the institutions within which I work have served these emerging students.

Additional Resources

- Association on Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD)
  - http://www.ahead.org/
- Curriculum Transformation and Disability
- DO-IT Center, University of Washington
  - http://www.washington.edu/doit/
- Think College (students with I/DD)
  - http://www.thinkcollege.net/
- Veterans Best Practices (from AHEAD)
THANK YOU FOR PARTICIPATING!!!

Please feel welcome to contact me with additional questions at:

sfried3@uic.edu

References


