Trying to Do the Right Thing:
Faculty Attitudes Toward Accommodating Students with Learning Disabilities

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Abstract

The following study explores faculty attitudes toward students with disabilities at a large research university. In the first phase of a three-year demonstration project, 14 instructional staff, including teaching assistants, faculty, and faculty serving as administrators, were interviewed to determine their informational needs and attitudes toward students with disabilities. Analysis of these narrative interviews reveals that the participants viewed learning disabilities differently from other disabilities and had questions regarding providing classroom accommodations for students with learning disabilities. This uncertainty stems from preexisting attitudes toward students in general, principles of academic freedom, and questions of the legitimacy of learning disability diagnosis. Recommendations for open discussion of faculty and student responsibilities toward teaching and learning on campus are discussed.

This article explores the relationships between instructional staff and students with learning disabilities and highlights the power of preexisting attitudes to color perceptions of present events (Polkinghorne, 1988). Previous survey research of faculty attitudes toward accommodations for college students with disabilities has demonstrated that, despite limited experience with individuals with disabilities and limited knowledge of disability legislation, most faculty express a willingness to make classroom accommodations and consider teaching adaptations (Leyser, Vogel, & Wyland, 1998). Our research further explores faculty attitudes through narrative interviews.

Background of the Study

This research was part of the development phase of a three-year demonstration project addressing the postsecondary institutional environment for students with disabilities (Krampe & Berdine, in press). A central goal of this phase of the project was to clarify campus policies and procedures regarding students with disabilities and to determine points of conflict and informational needs relative to students with disabilities that might be addressed in a web-based resource that was the end product of the demonstration.[1] Focused interviews were conducted to examine the attitudes and informational needs of university administration, instructional staff, and support personnel. In this article, we focus on the interviews conducted with instructional staff and their perceptions of students with learning disabilities.

The instructional staff who participated in the interview study are not necessarily representative of the faculty as a whole. Because participants were recruited for their knowledge of the campus, its policies, and its students, they represent those instructors most likely to be aware of the legal requirements of reasonable accommodation and most likely to have positive attitudes toward improvements in undergraduate education. It is all the more interesting, therefore, that our interview data revealed that these instructors viewed learning disabilities differently from other disabilities and had questions regarding providing classroom accommodations for students with learning disabilities.

Related Literature

According to Tinto (1993), an integral part of student persistence is the ability of the student to develop meaningful relationships in the college community. One important aspect of the relationship that must be cultivated is the student-faculty relationship (Astin, 1993). However, for various reasons, including the lack of communication described below, students in general often fail to develop these integral relationships with faculty members (Graff, 1999). Students with learning disabilities are even less likely than their nondisabled peers to develop meaningful relationships with faculty members (Bourke & Strehorn, 2000; Fichten & Goodrick, 1990).

Although research has shown that most faculty members are willing to provide accommodations for students with learning disabilities (Leyser et al., 1998; Scott, 1994), it has also been demonstrated that faculty members struggle with ethical concerns regarding the effects of those accommodations on the academic integrity of individual courses, overall programs, and the institution as a whole (Bourke & Strehorn, 2000). Our research confirms Bourke and Strehorn's explanation that numerous factors such as faculty belief in the efficacy of accommodations, ease of implementation, and type of accommodation affect the way faculty members feel about providing accommodations. Research by Fichten and Goodrick (1990) indicates that professors prefer students who approach them and initiate dialogue; however, Norton (1997) found that students were not comfortable approaching faculty members to request accommodations. Furthermore, research has shown that students with disabilities are less likely than their peers without disabilities to seek out help from professors or other sources when special considerations may be needed (Fichten & Goodrick, 1990). In their study, Fichten and Goodrick found that students frequently would only approach professors for assistance as a last resort.

Students with learning disabilities benefit from interaction with faculty members (Fichten & Goodrick, 1990). This benefit is not restricted to students with learning disabilities, however, as previous studies have confirmed that students in general who interact with and work closely with faculty experience positive educational outcomes (Astin, 1993). What is significant is the way in which the special needs of students with disabilities—accommodations such as extended test times and substitutions for particular coursework—challenge previously held beliefs of faculty and instructional staff regarding the academic integrity of their work. That challenge arises in ways that cannot be captured in abstract discussions of teaching and learning.

The challenges of serving college students with disabilities are likely to increase in the future. Specifically, students with learning disabilities are already a rapidly growing population on the college campus. In 1999, the National Center for Educational Statistics released a comprehensive report profiling students with disabilities in postsecondary educational settings (Horn & Berktold, 1999). At that time, approximately 6% of the undergraduate college student population were estimated to have a disability. Roughly 29% of students with disabilities were diagnosed as having learning disabilities. The population of students with learning disabilities is increasing on college campuses due to increased societal influences on postsecondary education. First, federal legislation, such as ADA and the reauthorization of IDEA, places a greater emphasis on the possibility that students with disabilities can attend and succeed in college. Second, the number of students with mild disabilities (e.g., LD, ADHD) has grown in the K-12 setting, which translates to larger numbers enrolling in postsecondary schools. Finally, advances in medicine mean that we have more individuals with disabilities at all age levels.

Although the numbers of students with learning disabilities enrolling nationally in postsecondary settings are encouraging, the rates of persistence are not. Overall persistence rates (i.e., still in college or graduated after five years) for students with learning disabilities were 52% compared to 64% for nondisabled students. Further, only 36% of students with learning disabilities received a degree within five years in contrast to 50% of nondisabled students (Murray, Goldstein, Nourse, & Edgar, 2000). These rates of persistence indicated that students with learning disabilities are not experiencing the same rates of academic success as their nondisabled peers. This discrepancy was the impetus for the federal funding of demonstration projects to improve the quality of postsecondary education for students with disabilities—funding that supported this project.

Method

The goal of our interview study was to identify points of conflict on campus and to delineate areas of information needed to improve the quality of education for students with disabilities at a comprehensive research university. The results of this inquiry were used in the knowledge base development phase of the project (Krampe & Berdine, in press). This phase included quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection consisting of a university-wide survey distributed on-line and focused interviews with administrators, instructional

staff, and students. Fifty-two individuals participated in individual interviews. The participants included academic administrators, auxiliary service administrators, instructors, and students with disabilities. An advisory committee made up of administrators and students with disabilities was consulted at each stage of the project.

This article focuses on the interviews conducted with instructional staff including faculty, administrators who currently teach undergraduates and a group interview with three teaching assistants.[2]

Selection of Participants

Using purposive sampling, interview participants were recruited for their experience teaching on the campus under study and their expressed interest in undergraduate education.[3] The research team attempted to achieve representation from across the core curriculum of undergraduate education, including four of the six undergraduate colleges. Members of the project advisory committee were asked to recommend instructors with experience teaching undergraduate core courses (courses that most first- and second-year students would be likely to take to meet baccalaureate requirements) and who had an interest in serving students. It was understood that these criteria would naturally result in participants who were more aware of campus policies and issues of undergraduate education than the average faculty member. These instructors were then contacted with a request to participate. If they were not able to participate, we asked for further referrals and those individuals were contacted.

The resulting group of participants included at least one representative from the faculty of the colleges of education, engineering, and communication and at least one member of the faculty from the departments of psychology, political science, and history in the college of arts and sciences. In addition, the group included three teaching assistants from the department of English with at least two years of undergraduate teaching experience. Of the participating faculty, four were serving as academic administrators at the time of the interview. Once interview participants had been selected, the advisory committee was again consulted to ensure their satisfaction that the pool of participants was broad enough to offer rich responses relative to perceptions of students with disabilities.

Data Collection

The interviews were loosely structured around a set of grand tour questions. Spradley (1979) defines grand tour questions as those intended to focus participants on a particular topic without restricting their interpretation of that topic or its scope. Our interview questions included the following:

1. What memorable experiences have you had with students with disabilities?
2. What is your understanding of the term disability?
3. What information would be helpful to you in accommodating students with disabilities in your job?
4. What types of questions related to educating students with disabilities have you been asked by others?

As participants responded to these questions, they were questioned further and asked to elaborate on their comments. Thus, each interview unfolded as a narrative derived from the participant's personal experiences and perspective. The interviews were audio taped and transcribed.

Analysis

The interview transcripts were analyzed through a process of open and focused coding from multiple independent readings of the transcripts by four members of the research team (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). Each transcript was read independently and coded openly, creating a rudimentary scheme of codes. The team then met and constructed a focused scheme that included all the insights of the first reading. Each transcript was reread at least once using the focused codes to identify rich case examples for reporting (Glesne, 1999). The process of multiple readings with multiple readers increases the credibility of our analysis by allowing for triangulation of our analytic readings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Results: "Doing the Right Thing"

Several strong themes emerged from the analysis. Overall, comments by the instructors centered on their desire to do the right thing, meaning that they were willing to make classroom accommodations and felt a duty to do so. Participants were generally aware of campus procedures regarding certification of disability by the disability resource office and of their legal obligations to provide reasonable accommodation. At the same time, there was distinct overriding concern to protect academic integrity. Particularly when discussing learning disabilities, participants' comments reflected a deep mistrust of how learning disabilities are assessed and how far faculty and instructional staff should be expected to go to accommodate students with learning disabilities. This grudging acceptance of students with learning disabilities was further complicated by comments indicating a general distrust of all student motives, making it unclear at times whether respondents were describing students

with disabilities or students in general. There seemed to be an attitude that students habitually try to cheat the system and get through college without really doing what is expected.

Faculty in the study regularly distinguished their comments about the logistics of accommodating students with physical or sensory disabilities from their uncertainty about providing accommodations for students with learning disabilities. Despite official letters of accommodation from the Disability Resource Center on campus, disabilities that are not visible, such as learning disabilities, were difficult for the faculty in our study to recognize and their comments reflected that ambiguity. One administrator complained that it was difficult to engage teaching assistants in a dialogue about working with students with disabilities because, "They don't think they're going to have them in their classes; they never noticed students with disabilities when they were in college and can't imagine working with them now." Furthermore, learning disabilities often incorporate subtle markers such as language or social behaviors that can be misread as having other causes, including a lack of academic preparation or lack of organizational skills. For this reason, the faculty often could not distinguish between students with learning disabilities and unprepared students.

Sources of conflict for the participants in our study with regard to interpreting reasonable accommodation for students with learning disabilities were preexisting attitudes toward students in general, principles of academic freedom in the classroom, and questions about the legitimacy of diagnosing learning disabilities. The following sections highlight the key questions held by the instructional staff: How do I do the right thing? How do I know "hidden" disabilities are legitimate? And, How do I know they're not just trying to "beat the system"?

How Do I Do the Right Thing?

When defining the term "disability," most of the respondents referred to the need for accommodation. Most of the faculty and instructors in the study indicated that they wanted to meet their responsibilities as teachers, but were unclear as to what "reasonable accommodation" means in the college classroom. "Issues of reasonable accommodation hit some faculty as just a broadside whack," one senior faculty member explained. The issue of accommodation for students with learning disabilities included more than providing an equal opportunity to students with special needs; for many faculty members, it became an issue of fairness for all. Not only do accommodations take time on the part of the instructor, but there was also a sense of injustice. "… It's un-

fair to give accommodations to some and not others," one instructor explained.

Implied in the attitude of "doing the right thing" is the student's responsibility for his or her learning, including knowing how to ask for help. For example, one instructor commented on the need to encourage students to identify themselves:

Perhaps we haven't been as effective in making students feel comfortable identifying the fact that they have a disability. I know there are students who have disabilities who would qualify for some accommodation to be made, but they are reluctant to identify. And maybe there is a place where the university needs to work more in terms of its atmosphere or its making students feel like it is perfectly reasonable and acceptable for them to bring this information forward.

Certainly, students should feel comfortable asking for accommodations and talking to their instructors about their needs; however, research on student populations has shown that students in general are often reluctant to talk to instructional staff, and students with disabilities are even less likely to initiate a dialogue with faculty (Bourke & Strehorn, 2000; Fichten & Goodrick, 1990). Thus, the difficulty in communication may run in both directions. Neither faculty nor students are likely to *easily* begin a dialogue and both expect the other to initiate the conversation.

Responsibility for learning also raises the issue of effective pedagogy. Assuming that a student has taken the responsibility to coordinate the support he or she needs, accommodation further implies that the current methods of instruction are appropriate for all students. The two issues were often intertwined in our interviews; as one social science professor told us:

I want to do this. I want to help. You know … I've got 300 people. How do I determine if this person has a disability that I truly should drop everything and accommodate, or whatever?

This instructor saw helping as changing the way he would normally teach a very large class in order to accommodate one student. This required more time on the part of the instructor, time that may be deducted from the attention paid to hundreds of other students. When the rights of a student with disabilities are framed in this reasoning of "fairness," it becomes easier to see the ambiguity for faculty surrounding accommodation and "doing the right thing".

How Do I Know "Invisible" Disabilities Are Legitimate?

The following comment from one of the administrators echoed the sentiments implied or stated in many of our interviews:

> Some of the problems are the diagnostic instruments and the people that are using them and controlling them are not as refined as we need them to be. So there are people who are using learning disabilities as a way of getting their children into better schools because they have longer time to take exams and make a better score. … So there is a basic distrust that I think … there is a distrust of the secondary school's data and now there's a distrust of the data coming in about special needs…

The implication that a diagnosis of a learning disability may be false or that students, or their parents, may be using questionable diagnoses to improve their chances to succeed academically only adds to the ambiguity surrounding the responsibility of the instructor to accommodate students with learning disabilities.

Furthermore, all learning disabilities were not viewed equally. One faculty member explained,

> The very good examples are a student that is doing extremely well in everything except one area. Let's say math. He's got a (3.3) average and he's taken the math course twice and failed. To me, there's something wrong. This is a motivated student. And the test scores come back and in this particular case … there's a legitimate science behind that. We talked about the foreign language learning disability. I think the science behind that becomes much weaker. There is no test that I know of that you can give and know, to validly measure the inability to learn a foreign language.

Public awareness of learning disabilities in math and reading made such claims easier to accept; but, when such diagnoses translate into a difficulty in a subject area like foreign languages or science, our participants suspected the validity of the diagnosis. Participants in the study gave other examples, including cases of students who were able to pass introductory courses but not the subsequent upper-level courses. These examples not only raised questions of the diagnostic process, they also highlighted how attitudes regarding why individuals seek out a diagnosis and under what conditions they ask for accommodation influenced how faculty members view their responsibilities toward helping students.

Another point raised regarding substitutions and accommodations had to do with whether or not students with learning disabilities are able to keep up, despite receiving accommodations. One instructor explained,

> I'm letting them have another place to take the exam and a longer period, but still what they are producing, for the most part, is less organized than the students I've been giving A's on or sometimes even B's on. And I'm finding that some students want to use that learning disability that, "have a right to the B because of my problem." And yet I say, "Well, we're giving the longer period of time to take the exam, but I have to grade your exam in relationship to the other students."

Some instructors questioned whether providing accommodations for students with learning disabilities may, in some ways, mean providing remediation as well. And again, the issue of fairness to all students was a constant concern.

How Do I Know They're Not Just Trying to "Beat the System"?

The instructional staff in our study held deep-seated attitudes about students that not only influenced the structure of their classes, but also how they perceived and work with students. Our study indicated that faculty concerns regarding students were not limited to students requiring accommodation. When trying to explain their unease with providing alternatives for students with learning disabilities, interview participants shared attitudes they held toward students in general. Conflicts between faculty expectations for students and the reality of student performance became apparent.

Making reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities was complicated by instructors' beliefs regarding the academic motivation of students in general. Thus, their comments tended to focus on the "fairness" of providing one student with a service or opportunity, but not another. Underlying these comments lay an assumption that students are, on the whole, looking for the easy way out of intellectual work. If this is true, then "fairness" refers to a system to control for cheating or academic "slacking." In this framework, students with disabilities may be seen as providing excuses rather than evidence and, if all students are seen as generally devious, then all excuses are suspect.

When referring to student behaviors, two opposing stances prevailed in the interview responses: (a) students in general will try to get by with as little effort as possible, and (b) faculty feel burdened by requests for extra

work or alterations in their instructional practices. These two views, while representing conflicts in how instructors and students view the roles of each other, also derived from quite similar attitudes about power relations in postsecondary education.

Although we asked about instructional accommodations, our interview participants responded by verbalizing attitudes about power and responsibility. For instance, the attitude of instructors as "gatekeepers" was often constructed as a responsibility to protect academic integrity. Given all the possible constructions of teaching and learning, we found little deviation in faculty attitudes toward their responsibilities to convey information, measure the extent to which information is remembered, and prevent students from an innate tendency to get by with the least amount of effort.

Discussion: Examining Attitudes

Although instructors at a research university have other responsibilities, most of the participants in our study described themselves as teachers. The role of "teacher," however, includes a wide range of expectations regarding the responsibility of the instructor in student learning. This responsibility is often narrowly defined as a responsibility to evaluate, often causing tensions when evaluation practices such as testing are altered by accommodation. We do not wish to paint these instructors as "bad" teachers. Rather, our research indicates that faculty attitudes—accurate or not—influence their interactions with students. Making meaning of rapidly changing conditions, in this case increasing numbers of students with disabilities in postsecondary education, is often anchored in preexisting beliefs and attitudes (Anderson, Reder, & Simon, 1996).

Questions of pedagogy are rarely raised in university settings outside of isolated workshops and orientation sessions; most university instructors teach as they were taught and consider these techniques appropriate for "college-level work." However, since instructors in higher education typically were above-average students in college, the learning strategies and resources they use and have used in the past are probably different from those of their current students (McGrath & Spear, 1991). As a result, expectations faculty members hold for themselves as teachers are likely to fall short of the instructional support that most students need in order to be successful. As one administrator explained:

In some ways it's [providing accommodations] easy. The technology is out there. The methods of accommodation are fairly straightfor-

ward. … So I think that's one thing that people need to know how. And I think it implies more than just a technical knowledge. They may not know how to communicate with students maybe on a more intimate level. … When you have a student with a disability, I think that sort of forces the issue of learning how to communicate with that person. That's something that a lot of instructors are not good at.

A lack of academic support in the classroom becomes magnified when a student has a disability that makes traditional or typical classroom practices less effective for successful learning and requires communication between instructor and student to work out better strategies.

For example, instructors' mental constructions of "typical" college students may exclude the possibility of individuals with disabilities, especially individuals with learning difficulties. In such cases, preexisting understandings about who "belongs" in college serve as perceptual screens that can prevent creative approaches to requests for academic accommodations. Even though instructional personnel know that the question of whether to admit a student has already been determined and, in any case, does not fall within their responsibilities, doubt about a student's suitability to the institution or the course arises all too often when they are faced with students' requests for accommodations. Thus, beliefs serve as perceptual screens that inhibit ability to imagine new and different possibilities (Wertsch, 1998).

Attitudes have been defined as "predispositions to respond" that "provide direction for subsequent actions" (Simonson & Maushak, 1996, p. 984). Such predisposed responses to requests for instructional accommodations may in fact be a foundation for polarity between students and faculty. For example, if a faculty member views herself as a gatekeeper, upholding academic standards of postsecondary education and preventing unprepared students from "getting by," her approach may convey a struggle for power with students rather than an effort to negotiate a reasonable accommodation with those who have legitimate claims.

Attitudes and beliefs as "habits of mind" make it difficult to solve problems in new ways. Thus, as students and faculty make meaning of accommodations in the classroom by associating those events with existing understandings, they build schemas that become dominant mechanisms for restructuring memory and organizing behavior. As a result, recall is often distorted to fit existing schema (Anderson et al., 1996). Providing information through campus orientations or faculty work-

shops without addressing a priori attitudes about faculty expectations of students in general, and attitudes toward learning disabilities specifically, may not effectively change the dominant mechanisms individuals use for sense making in practice and, therefore, not change the adversarial relationship in the classroom.

Academic Freedom and Learning Disabilities

The tension between providing reasonable accommodation and the ambiguities regarding the responsibilities of teaching and learning are not new. *Guckenberger v. Boston University* directly addressed the tensions involved in providing accommodations to students with disabilities on two fronts involving academic freedom: (a) the rights of the institution to decide how to recognize a learning disability and (b) the rights of the institution to decide what is a reasonable accommodation (Bors, 1999). In that case, the president of the university publicly aired his skepticism of the diagnosis of learning disabilities, refused to recognize some students as having a disability, and refused to provide the letters of accommodation to others. The court's decision resulted in perceived victory for both sides. University policy to refuse to offer course substitutions that would alter program requirements for a liberal arts degree was upheld and the plaintiff's claim that the university did not use appropriate procedures for assessing requests for accommodations was also upheld in the court's judgment (Bors, 1999).

However, *Guckenberger* did not delve into epistemological questions regarding the manner in which courses are taught or the pedagogical responsibilities of instructors and students discussed in this article. The principle of academic freedom that protects postsecondary institutions' rights to control their academic standards was upheld but not complete freedom to refuse students' requests for accommodation. However, the implication of *Guckenberger* for faculty-student relationships is important to our thesis. Faculty members have autonomy in the classroom to decide their own standards, and students have the right to demand reasonable accommodation. If communication between the two parties is not well established, it is likely that an adversarial, or at least unproductive, relationship will ensue.

Requests for accommodations such as extra time for testing, taking tests in an environment free from extraneous sound or movement, or extended time to complete assignments raise fundamental epistemological issues for instructional staff. For instance, when a student with a documented disability requests extended time to complete an assignment, the request brings into focus a range of perspectives on how we know and evaluate what is known or understood and who is responsible or accountable for students knowing. While such questions are fundamental in the field of K-12 education, they are rarely raised in most courses of study in the postsecondary arena.

Learning differences in a postsecondary environment, especially in a research university, are overshadowed not only by standardized levels of achievement, but also by standard expectations of "academic" behavior. In this educational environment, crucial epistemological and pedagogical questions are often rhetorical. Such questions rarely lead to further inquiry, instructional adaptations, or changes in the ways information is delivered or learning is evaluated. However, when differences exist and accommodations are mandated, questions regarding how learning occurs and how the acquisition of knowledge is demonstrated or evaluated become active inquiries that have the potential to lead beyond rhetoric. As one participant in our study from the college of engineering explained:

> *It's these sorts of problems that challenge us to think out of the box, which is what the field of engineering is all about. The term engineering comes from ingenuity and students with [learning] disabilities challenge us to be more resourceful and creative in how we teach and how we measure academic achievement.*

Recommendations

Changing faculty attitudes toward students with learning disabilities should start with open discussion of the responsibilities involved in teaching and learning on the part of both faculty and students. The didactic information that is provided in most faculty orientation sessions regarding legal requirements and processes of accommodation is not enough. Based on our study, it may be beneficial for disability service practitioners to address preconceived notions regarding the different kinds of disabilities faculty may encounter in their classrooms and recognize how those preconceptions are shaped by instructors' attitudes toward students in general. Although they want to be good teachers, faculty may have doubts about the process of diagnosis and documentation or of their own abilities to meet students' needs. Recognizing these doubts may be an effective way to engage instructional staff in dialogue.

Instructors need information regarding the process of diagnosis, guidelines for working with students with disabilities, and resources for providing accommodations.

However, an open and honest discussion of reasonable expectations for student work in general, relative to instructional staff's understandings of their role as teachers, is also necessary to clarify what it means to make reasonable accommodations. The principle of universal design may be a useful approach to this discussion. Most people recognize the democratic fairness of universal design in architecture—that widening a doorway, for example, makes it easier for all users to enter and exit. Likewise, universal design in the classroom—clarifying curricular expectations for all students—may improve communication between instructors and their students. Content enhancement routines, for example, such as those developed by the Center for Research on Learning at Kansas University are beneficial for all students, and helpful to students with learning disabilities (for a full list of publications on content enhancement, go to http://www.ku-crl.org/htmlfiles/articles/article-1.html). These kinds of teaching strategies focus on the content to be learned rather competitive measures of achievement, alleviating the tension reasonable accommodations may cause to an instructor's sense of fairness and academic freedom.

Pedagogical discussions of content enhancement and clear course expectations require collaboration across campus and would require administrative support. Centers for teaching and learning, for example, may be appropriate partners for disability services—a relationship that is often underdeveloped. For example, the formative assessment process required by our project resulted in increased dialogue across campus about serving students with disabilities. Just by setting up the interviews, we were able to raise epistemological and pedagogical questions that stimulated active or goal-oriented discourse across the institution. Going further, as part of the demonstration project, we captured the most salient parts of the interview conversations, which emphasized points of conflict between students with learning disabilities and instructional staff, and presented them as learning activities, embedded with questions and responses, in an on-line learning environment. This learning environment is now being used to a limited degree in instructional orientation sessions and in departmental conversations, but further institutional commitment is necessary to continue use and promote further conversations on campus.

A similar process of examining processes and policies on campus is recommended. This might include meeting with administrators, lead instructors of core classes, and disability support service practitioners to clarify current practices and policies. We were told that often individuals who support students with disabilities and their counterparts in academic affairs rarely meet unless there is a problem to be resolved; therefore, a proactive session to define what is reasonable and what is ideal for students with disabilities can be very beneficial. We also found it beneficial to bring an outside voice to this process as we did with a project manager who was not under the supervision of any of the participating units.

Finally, our inquiry revealed the need for further research into faculty attitudes toward students with disabilities. These attitudes are not formed in isolation; therefore, it is strongly recommended that future inquiry examine instructors' perspectives on student learning behaviors in general so that the provision of reasonable accommodations for students with learning disabilities may be understood in that context. A deeper understanding of how instructional staff understand and interpret their responsibility for student learning will inform the ways in which the legal requirements for accommodating students with disabilities may be presented by disability service providers and campus administrators.

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Notes

[1] Procedures for providing reasonable accommodation to students with disabilities on this campus are administered by a Disability Resource Center (DRC). Individuals employed by the university are introduced to policies and legal requirements regarding accommodation during staff orientations. This is true for instructional staff as well; however, students are ultimately responsible for notifying their instructors of their need for accommodation by providing documentation in the form of a letter from the DRC outlining the type of accommodation they require.

[2] Three teaching assistants were interviewed as a group due to scheduling difficulties. The interviewer followed the same protocol as in individual interviews.

[3] Purposeful or theoretical sampling refers to a process whereby the researcher determines a sampling criteria based on theory or relevant existing research and then recruits individuals who meet those criteria (Glesne, 1999).

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