IMPACT STUDY: STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES WEBSITE

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INTRODUCTION

Faculty and staff are often at a loss for information and accommodation recommendations when they have a student with a disability in their class or program. The "Supporting Students with Disabilities" course was designed to provide practical information and easy-to-use strategies to help faculty and staff to better support the learning of students with disabilities in their classrooms and programs. Course goals include the ability to:

- Define what is meant by having a disability and become familiar with a wide range of disabilities and how they impact learning
- Identify the concepts of "duty to accommodate" and understand the process of "reasonable accommodation"
- Apply strategies and tools from Universal Design for Learning (UDL) to create an inclusive learning environment to accommodate your students
- Develop personal goals, address institution-wide responsibilities and identify next steps for creating inclusive campuses

This study explored participants' knowledge and awareness of issues in dealing with students with disabilities (SWD), what resources they know, how they access those resources, and how they have accessed resources previously. The purpose of this research was to increase the usability and effectiveness of the JIBC Supporting Students with Disabilities website and resources.

METHODS

This study collected individual data through interviews with a small sample of instructor participants drawn from three participating Institutions representing academic and trade/vocational areas of study. Interviews consisted of recorded audio interviews and in one case, in order to accommodate the participants' availability, a written submission. All participants volunteered to participate in this study. The interviews focused on five areas of investigation and framed from the perspective of faculty/instructors.

The interview scope consisted of questions designed to elucidate experience from an instructor's standpoint while being framed within the goal and objectives developed for this project.

Research Goal
The goal of this project is to assess the usability of the SWD web based resources.

Objectives
• Identifying the range of experience that participants have in dealing with students with disabilities in the classroom
• Assessing participants' awareness of internal and external resources that support SWD
• Given case studies involving typical faculty encounters with SWD, identify the range of strategies that participants employ to meet the student's needs
• Compare their answers to case studies with how they have actually responded to similar situations in their past experience.
https://sswdcourse.jibc.ca/courses/supporting-students-with-disabilities-in-bc-postsecondary/

KEY FINDINGS

The first area asked participants to relate challenges they had encountered when dealing with SWD.
- Students' tend not to disclose any issues at the start of a course or programme
- Students tend not to go to the Student Support Services Centres as they feel self conscious
- Participant faculty are not told what the student's underlying issue is if the student chooses not to disclose and is still seeking accommodations
- Satellite campus access to service is an issue.

Secondly, what information and resources are most helpful to the instructor in their support of SWD.
- Campus Student Support Service Centres are the first point of contact for faculty
- Preferred early disclosure from students that they may need additional support/accommodations
- Students tend to avoid seeking supports until they are in trouble, feeling stigmatised or marginalised
- Knowing the specific disability was considered to be a missing piece in the support of faculty.

Third, a case study was presented to participants that required them to consider where they could find suitable support resources.
- Speak to the student first followed immediately with the student support service centre
- One participant independently sought out web based resources
- Faculty did not (except one) report seeking support on their own outside campus resources
- Documents online for instructors to read, but mostly directed at the academic role rather than the vocational, trades.

The last area asked participants to consider whether, as faculty, they look for information on a possible learning disability based on the student's presentation in class or by condition.
- Most report looking for information based on the students' presentation in class from the student and/or support centre
- Most make contact with the student support centre, even make an appointment for the student.

DISCUSSION

Data rigorously supports the fact that faculty use campus student support service centres as their first point of contact when concerned about any student they identify as needing additional support in their studies. However, a universal challenge felt by all faculty participants centred on the fact that if a student attends to and receives accommodations from a student support service centre, faculty are not privy to the student(s) underlying issues, e.g. mental, physical, psychological or medical problems.

Present data found the focus available in current resource centres is skewed to academia as opposed to trades/vocational programmes. Trade/vocational programme faculty were clear that they feel there is a profound need for an additional level of considered support and enquiry into the practical course component of trades available to faculty and students in these programmes. Trades faculty perceive a need for a better balance of support in the area of practical application in shop/lab activities. This speaks to student safety as participants reported preventing serious injury 'just in time' on more than one occasion in cases of students with learning disabilities performing practical tasks even though faculty paired a challenged student with a high achieving student in the hope of adding strong peer support.

ESL appears to be a very common and substantial faculty challenge in all programmes sampled. Data demonstrates faculty find student literacy challenges are as serious as any diagnosed learning disability. As international students represent a large percentage of students within the programmes of the present participants, faculty felt challenged to determine whether the student had a 'learning disability' per se or ESL literacy challenges.

CONCLUSION

Present participants, without exception, are very willing and do whatever they can to support a student achieving success no matter the challenges, and in some cases, have gone to great lengths to do so without any formal resource.

It is clear that faculty utilise the student support services on their campus a great deal and hold great faith in their ability to influence student outcomes, although faculty do not always consult with the student support centres. The research clearly shows a perceived gap in appropriate support provided to students in academic programmes versus the trades/vocational programmes.

Development of a mandatory, modified on-line SWD course for annual review by faculty may be an option similar to other required courses from Human Resources on an annual basis; However, faculty preferred a face to face faculty course , recognizing that learning alone in this area was a challenge to one participant who had completed the course.

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