

Literature Review Executive Summary Post-Secondary Education (PSE) for Students with Disabilities Positive Experiences and Areas for Improvement

Executive Summary

As more students with disabilities enter post-secondary education (PSE) (Kraglund- Gauthier, 2014; Petcu et al., 2017; Grimes et al., 2021; Kimball et al., 2016; Ostrowski, 2016), it is important to ensure that all students are safe and supported in these environments. When exploring the area of PSE, our analysis largely focuses on critiques of PSE. However, there are indeed positive elements to highlight, which include, but are not limited to, accommodations including online learning due to COVID 19, student advocacy and faculty partnerships, and an uptake in Universal Design for Learning (UDL).

Online delivery can create more accessible options for students with disabilities (SWD), including more flexibility around course content and assignments. Online delivery can also be helpful accommodation for students who have trouble navigating possibly inaccessible campuses (Lee, 2020). Our analysis also suggests that PSE institutions should consider providing online courses for a reduced fee as these courses are often less expensive to operate (Lee, 2020).

Student advocacy has also been shown to provide a sense of purpose for students with disabilities and allows students to influence PSE and create more inclusive spaces (Kimball et al., 2016). However, it is important to note that advocacy is not required from SWD, and support is needed from faculty and staff. Student coalitions are important for improving accessibility, and collaboration with faculty can be further help in improving accessibility (Stout & Schwartz, 2014; Marquis et al., 2012).

Universal Design for learning (UDL) presents promising possibilities for more inclusive design in PSE, especially when done systematically. UDL broadly means designing courses and learning environments in a way that considers the different ways that individual students learn, regardless of disability (Scheffler et al., 2019). UDL provides diverse course-related options and forms of technology so students can engage in the course material (Scheffler et al., 2019).

Our analysis also pointed to areas for improving access to PSE for SWD. Overall, SWD express lower satisfaction with their PSE experience than those without disabilities. Students with a variety of disabilities encounter many accommodation issues, including social and attitudinal barriers, inaccessible physical environments, lack of accessible assistive technology, and high financial costs (Jackson et al., 2011; Statistics Canada, 2021; Stout & Schwartz, 2014).

Issues with accommodations are widespread and are often connected to other barriers. For example, a key issue in our analysis is the reliance on the medical model in PSE which means that disability is viewed as an individual issue, not a social phenomenon. This implies that SWD must 'overcome' their disabilities to be successful in PSE. This also means that students must have a medical diagnosis and must share personal medical information with administrators to be accommodated, which can create more work and strain for students with disabilities (Bruce, & Aylward, 2021).

Further, these issues can be made worse by discrimination as staff and faculty may have biases that create more barriers for students trying to get accommodated. Other key issues noted in the analysis were lack of funds and resources for SWD, and lack of support and care for SWD who experience violence (i.e., Sexual violence, intimate partner violence etc.).

Our analysis found that while there are many positive experiences that SWD have while attending PSE, there are several areas requiring attention to create inclusive and welcoming spaces for students with a variety of learning styles and abilities. These findings are drawn from research Eviance completed in collaboration with its partners at Toronto Metropolitan University, OCADU, St. Francis Xavier University, and ARCH Disability Law Centre.

Recommendations

- Creating a culture where disability is welcomed in PSE, including:
 - More streamlined processes for obtaining medical documentation (Grimes et al. 2019; Kendall, 2016). If and when possible, we also suggest a long-term goal of reducing the requirement of medical documentation altogether and providing students with the supports they require based on self-expressed need.
 - Ensuring that adaptive technologies are readily available for students (Buhler et al., 2020)
 - Adapting collaborative and innovative ways for faculty, administration, and students to work through accessibility issues together
- Recent studies have also found that faculty and staff in PSE could benefit from:
 - Training on types of disabilities (Vukovic, 2016)
 - Supports available through disability offices
 - Working with disability offices in planning field trips, internships or co-op placements (Roth et al., 2018; Bunbury, 2020)
- A general knowledge base about human rights, and an awareness of the process of filing claims when discrimination occurs may also be helpful ensure that SWD are equipped to self-advocate.
- Adapting inclusive practices (such as UDL) may improve accommodations for SWD, yet students remain skeptical about how inaccessible PSE may impact their future endeavours once they graduate.

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