

## Literature Review Fact Sheet

### Post-Secondary Education (PSE) for Students with Disabilities

#### Positive Experiences and Areas for Improvement

#### At a Glance

Research demonstrates that the number of students with disabilities (SWD) entering post-secondary education (PSE) has increased over the last 20 years (Kraglund- Gauthier, 2014; Petcu et al., 2017; Grimes et al., 2021; Kimball et al., 2016; Ostrowski, 2016). There are many reasons for this shift: For example, more students are disclosing their disabilities (Rajapuram et al., 2020), more students feel comfortable self-identifying as having disabilities (Gilles & Dupuis, 2013), and some feel that their lived experiences are taken more seriously by PSE administrators than in previous years (Jackson et al., 2011).

#### Positive Experiences in PSE

- *Online Delivery* - Flexible class time, asynchronous delivery, flexible due dates, and online delivery methods may increase opportunities for SWD to take part in classes. Online delivery often allows for cheaper tuition costs and less concern for navigating potentially inaccessible campuses (Lee, 2020). Since 2019, more PSE institutions have experimented with flexible course delivery methods, which is promising for the future of inclusivity in colleges and universities.
- *Student Advocacy* - SWD engage in disability activism and advocacy in three ways: 1) role modelling and teaching self-advocacy to other students 2) reducing stigma and negative perceptions about disability through education and storytelling 3) collective action through formal organizations. Often, SWD feel a sense of purpose while engaging in these activities (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 (Marquis et al., 2012).
- *Universal Design for Learning* - A UDL approach is a systematic framework that increases inclusivity in PSE by designing courses that suit different learning needs, regardless of disability (Scheffler et al., 2019). Sharing course content via online learning systems, providing students with clear guidelines for assignments and assessments, providing students with inexpensive and accessible information in a variety of formats, giving feedback in a timely manner, and posting grades online so students can see their progress are just some of the common UDL strategies (Kennette & Wilson, 2019; McGreal, 2017).
  - UDL is also consistent with the shifting learning environment that has emerged from the COVID-19 pandemic and meeting the diverse needs of students (Pichette et al., 2020).

#### Areas for Improvement

- *Issues with Accommodations* - SWD encounter many accommodation issues, including social and attitudinal barriers, inaccessible physical environments, lack of accessible technology, and high financial costs (Jackson et al., 2011; Statistics Canada, 2021; Stout & Schwartz, 2014).
- *Predominance of the Medical Model* - Research shows that PSE institutions most often operate from the medical model of disability, which means that disability is viewed as an individual issue, not a social phenomenon (lack of accommodations, etc). This implies that SWD must 'overcome' their disabilities to be successful in PSE (Sellameir, 2021; Fovet, 2021; Feig et al., 2019; Shanouda, 2019; Kraglund-Gauthier et al., 2014; Bruce, 2020). This can not only be discouraging for students in PSE, but can also impact students when trying to be accommodated. Relying on the medical model and individual ways of understanding disability means SWD must do extra work to "prove" their disability in order to be accommodated. (Bruce, & Aylward, 2021).
- *Discrimination* - One of the main barriers that exist for SWD in PSE is attitudinal discrimination based on biases about SWD expressed by students, faculty, and administration. For example, there are perceptions among support staff that there are too many options for SWD (Collins et al. 2019) and that they may exploit or take advantage of those supports (Collins et al., 2019; Marquis et al., 2012).

- *Lack of Resources* - Student debt and lack of resources for SWD are examples of barriers in PSE, when it comes to accessing funds, demonstrating their need for financial assistance, and justifying their social identities. The medical model creates further barriers for students accessing funding (Mou & Albagmi, 2021).
- *Violence* - Another barrier for SWD attending PSE is the trauma and violence that many students experience. SWD have heightened risk of unwanted sexual contact (Brown et al., 2017), sexual violence, intimate partner violence, and stalking (Reyns & Scherer, 2018). Future research and programing should consider ways of specifically supporting SWD with trauma or who have been victims of violence.

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