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Disability Studies 194
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Disability Studies Capstone Research Proposal

Introduction

My interest in researching UCLA students with physical disabilities stems first and foremost from my own college experience as a UCLA undergraduate with muscular dystrophy, a physical disability that affects my daily life, mobility, and access throughout the UCLA campus. My interest in this area led me to become a part of the Disability Studies minor, which subsequently led to become the Office for Students with Disabilities' first undergraduate intern. I believe that having a disability strongly alters a student's college experience in a way that the absence of a disability does not. Because a physical disability is usually very visible, this affects not only campus access, but also the attitudes of the people who share in the college experience. This, I believe, leads to an overwhelmingly unique college experience that can best be studied through the lens of Disability Studies.

Research Question

How often do UCLA students with physical disabilities encounter institutional barriers?

Miniature Literature Review

Singh, D. K. (2005). Students with disabilities and higher education. *Journal of American College Health*. Retrieved from www.csa.com

In a random sample of 137 institutions (including public, private, in all regions of the country, and offering a variety of programs), Singh aimed to discover the extent that colleges offer structural accessibility, academic accessibility, dorm accessibility, and recreational accessibility for students with orthopedic disabilities. The results show that only 10% of the institutions in the sample provide structural accessibility as defined by the author in all of the campus buildings.

Hindes, Y. & Mather, J. (2007). Inclusive Education at the Post-Secondary Level: Attitudes of Students and Professors. *Exceptionality Education Canada*. Retrieved from www.csa.com

The authors asked students and professors at the University of Lethbridge to indicate their acceptance of three different levels of inclusion (included in classes, provided with assistance and provided with professorial accommodation) for students with five categories of disabilities (including motor disabilities). Attitudes were more negative toward students with less visible disabilities, but students with motor disabilities still experienced a lack of acceptance and inclusion.

Hanafin, J.; Shevlin, M.; Kenny, M.; McNeela, E. (2007). Including Young People with Disabilities: Assessment Challenges in Higher Education. *Higher Education: The International Journal of Higher Education and Educational Planning*. Retrieved from www.csa.com

This study examined the experiences of two groups of young people with physical disabilities and with dyslexia in two higher education institutions in Ireland. It was concluded that access issues within higher education have been inadequately conceptualized, and have failed to address fundamental needs for students with physical disabilities and with dyslexia. The authors have also concluded that the lack of addressing basic needs has transformed into increased social attitudes against students with disabilities in higher education.

Proposed Methodology

In order to answer my research question, I would like to incorporate two different methods. I would first like to review relevant literature about students with physical disabilities and higher education in order to gain a general understanding of my topic. My goal is to first orient my readers and to give them a clearer picture of what it is like to be a college student who faces daily challenges in both their personal and academic lives as a result of their disability. Furthermore, I would like to interview or survey current UCLA students with physical disabilities to gauge their

opinions of how their college experiences have been affected by their disabilities, and vice versa.

In order to do this I plan to continue interacting with my internship site (UCLA OSD) and utilizing their assistance in making contact with current registered students with physical disabilities.

Connection to Disability Studies Minor

In doing research for previous papers and especially for this capstone project, it has come to my attention that there is very little research about disabilities and their implications for higher/postsecondary education. The majority of the research seems to revolve around obtaining equal access to education for younger persons with disabilities, and especially for persons with developmental or psychological disabilities. Still, I have come across little research revolving around persons with physical disabilities, and an even smaller amount that relates to college students. I believe my research will make two very important contributions to the minor. First and foremost, it will enhance this undiscovered area within Disability Studies, and shed some light on the importance of postsecondary education for persons with physical disabilities. Second, since the Disability Studies minor is meant to be a program for undergraduate UCLA students to experience, I believe I could contribute a greater understanding to why the field of Disability Studies is an important and valuable field for college students to study. I hope that my research has the potential to initiate policy changes at UCLA that will affect future students like myself.