ACCESSIBILITY OR HOW TO REMOVE BARRIERS FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES IN ONLINE HIGHER EDUCATION?

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22% of first-year students self-identify as having a disability, according to Canadian University Consortium Survey, 2016.
22% in 2016
Students self-identify as having a disability

9% in 2013
Students self-identify as having a disability

1/3
Required accommodation

Digital technologies = new opportunities
Assistive and Educational
It’s the law!

EQUAL ACCESS FOR POSTSECONDARY STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

It’s the law!
What do we know about students with disabilities in online higher education?

- Lower academic attainment
- May perform better in online courses
- Students with access to accommodations were more likely to succeed
- Feared stigma and disability disclosure
- Lack of understanding by faculty
- Lack of interaction
- Spent more time studying than their peers without disabilities
- Flexibility gave them opportunities for academic success
lived experiences of students with disabilities remain under-researched area
barriers and facilitators experienced by students with disabilities in online university programs
DESCRIPTIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

- Phenomenological philosophy
- Adapted Moore’s theory of interaction
- Human rights framework
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Undergraduate programs</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8 (1 F &amp; 1 M did not register with ASD)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certificate programs</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate programs</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6 (1 F completed BA online)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Average age of participants: 48
Average age of students in Master’s programs: 56
Average age of students in Bachelor’s programs: 40

Disabilities: Multiple sclerosis, Asperger’s, learning disabilities, mental health disorders, multiple disabilities, health condition, traumatic brain injury, concussions
Students with disabilities experienced barriers in learning interactions when there was a mismatch in their needs, university policies, and the processes they had to go through in order to get their needs met.
BARRIERS

- Process of accessing accommodation
- Inconsistencies in getting accommodation
- Lack of awareness of disability
BARRIERS

Lack of responsiveness

Over-reliance on a single mode in courses
FACILITATORS

Knowing themselves

Flexibility
Flexibility is...

a multidimensional concept related to
→ time,
→ people,
→ processes,
→ infrastructure,
→ course design, and
→ funding.
Action

- improve understanding of disability and accommodation among faculty and staff
- ensure flexibility of infrastructure and course design
- streamline services and make them known to all
- consistently implement polices at the university
Limitations

Self-selected participants

➔ No participants with major hearing or visual impairments
➔ Participants were older than an average undergraduate or graduate student who study online
➔ Participants came from one institution
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CREDITS

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Bibliography


Thanks!

Any questions?

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