ACCESS AND FLEXIBILITY:
WHAT IS THE EXPERIENCE OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES IN ONLINE UNIVERSITY PROGRAMS?

Djenana Jalovcic
Athabasca University
October 16-19, 2017
ICDE 2017, Toronto, Canada
Students with disabilities in online university programs
Why?

WHY NOW
• Increasing number of post-secondary students with disabilities
• University participation rates still lag behind
• New technologies
• Anti-discrimination and accessibility laws
• Less-researched area

WHAT WE KNOW
more supportive the online learning environment, the greater the benefits for students with disabilities

BUT THE LITERATURE IS
▪ Focused on technology and support services
▪ Diverse to compare
▪ Often small to generalize
▪ Lacks theoretical and conceptual underpinning
▪ Lacks descriptions of experiences of students with disabilities
How?

Qualitative, descriptive phenomenological study according to Giorgi (2009)

- 9 undergraduate (self-paced) and 6 graduate students (cohort), 13 registered with disability services, 9F/6M, Average age 48
- Various physical, mental and learning disabilities
Results

- Complex, multifaceted experience
- Continuum - not a singularity of constituents

Students not registered with disability services
"[Studying online] feels really good because I feel so much in control about stuff. I think that actually is about my restriction because I'm not in control of the way my mind processes things, but on campus, there's someone in control in the classrooms. So it means I have to adhere to their way of deadlines and stuff. But here, I can control the way how my learning's going to happen."

Isabel
So, they've ranged from really awful to really, really amazing... at one end I've had really critical instructors who make me justify every accommodation and why I might use it in an accusatory way that feels like they're accusing me of not being organized or being lazy or procrastinating. And at the other end, I have had instructors who trust me to be able to manage my own situation through the course. And there's been a lot of middle areas. It's been a full spectrum.

Megan
Structure of experience of interactions for students with disabilities in online university program

- Having access
- Working harder
- Being supported
- Belonging
- Becoming
Once I learned how to navigate the University Moodle format, I have no problem with it. Now it just feels like my online University home, just as if I was going on campus to the brick and mortar university. I know where all the classrooms are.

Jennifer

Having **access** to

1. Mainstream and educational technologies

2. Accommodations

**KEEP IT SIMPLE**
I just feel that we should all be on the same wavelength and understanding about disability, that it's not hidden. That it should be out there in the world. I know that some people have difficulty and don't want to disclose their disabilities, but I feel that the more you do disclose, the more other people are learning from you how it is to be a person with various disabilities.

Study Girl

Working harder

1. Planning
2. Communicating
3. Organizing
4. Learning new technology

THERE IS A POSSIBILITY FOR DISCRIMINATION
The professor, he was a student helper ... he always offered suggestions on how to improve. I probably learned most from him. He just gave so many examples of how to improve your writing, how to improve your thought process throughout your presentations and the assignments. He was just so good. He was probably one of the better ones; one of the best.

Linda

Being supported by

1. Instructors
2. Student support services
3. Students

THOSE ARE KEY PEOPLE IN YOUR SUCCESS
Being connected

1. Being isolated
2. Being connected

STUDYING ONLINE IS ISOLATING BUT GIVES FREEDOM & INDEPENDENCE

“Four of us worked together on an initial collaborative project, and we had some delightful Skype sessions planning that, and that really helped me to feel part of the group. We connected and have a bit more of an understanding of the experiences of the people around me.”

Paolo
I go out to the community and speak about my disabilities and how the art therapy and my schooling has helped me stay quite healthy; mentally, physically.

Study Girl

“Becoming

1. More self-confident
2. A new professional
3. Healthier, physically and mentally

THIS IS MY TIME, LAUNCHING MYSELF IN A NEW AREA
Action

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES (SWD)
- Know yourself
- Know your rights
- Speak up
- Register with disability services

INSTRUCTORS
- Recognize diversity of SWDs
- Design flexible, inclusive environments
- Know the rights of SWDs
- Be available, responsive, & supportive

SERVICE PROVIDERS
- Streamline the process of getting accommodation
- Eliminate repetitions in the process
- Educate instructors about accommodation
- Improve response time

ADMINISTRATORS & POLICY MAKERS
- Stream the policies
- Minimize the need for individual negotiations of accommodation
- Ensure implementation of policies

RESEARCHERS
- Understand experiences of diverse SWDs
- Examine outcomes for SWDs when different learning theories and approaches are used
Limitations

Self-selected participants

1. No participants with major hearing or visual impairments

2. Participants were older than an average undergraduate or graduate student who study online

3. Participants came from one institution
The study is supported by the Wayne Perry Ed.D. Student Research Award, the Athabasca University Excellence in Research Scholarship Award and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada Doctoral Fellowship Program
Special thanks to all the people who made and released these awesome resources for free.

- Presentation template by SlidesCarnival
- Photographs by Unsplash
- Learn more about slidedocs at duarte.com/slidedocs


Thank you!

You can find me at
djenana.jalovcic@gmail.com
@JalovcicDjenana
https://atdistance.wordpress.com/