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# Faculty and Student Awareness of Disabilities on a University Campus

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# Purpose

To assess the attitudes, beliefs, and knowledge of University students and faculty on disability-related issues in the University context

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# Background

- About 9% of undergraduates in postsecondary education institutions report having a disability
  - This number has tripled in the last two decades
  - 26% of students with disabilities attend public four year institutions similar to the University in this study
  - Negative attitudes toward students with disabilities can result in barriers to successful accommodations for students who require them
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# Importance

- Before the ADA, research indicated that negative attitudes towards persons with disabilities created obstacles and deterred people with disabilities from fully participating in society
  - Few studies have examined whether or not faculty are providing the accommodations required by law
  - There is also minimal research on student perceptions of full inclusion in postsecondary education
  - Negative attitudes toward people with disabilities are linked to full usage of skills and abilities, self-concept, and job-related outcomes
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# Methodology: Undergraduate Students

- March 2006
  - Interviewers stopped students at a variety of locations on the University of Connecticut campus and respondents filled out a paper survey
  - 881 undergraduate students:
    - 191 freshmen
    - 258 sophomores
    - 241 juniors
    - 191 seniors
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# Methodology: Faculty & Grad Students

- January 2007
  - Online survey sent to all faculty and graduate students at UConn, including the Health Center, Law School, and satellite campuses
  - 2,056 faculty and graduate students:
    - 38% graduate students without teaching responsibilities
    - 36% faculty members
    - 25% graduate students with teaching responsibilities
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# Survey Questionnaire

- Both surveys were developed by the UCEDD and the University of Connecticut Center for Survey Research & Analysis
  - Surveys consisted of between 28 and 33 multiple choice questions that focused on three main areas:
    - 1) Information on interactions with people with disabilities
    - 2) Opinions about disability-related issues
    - 3) How well the community/classroom treats and provides for individuals with disabilities
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# Survey Questionnaire:

## Undergraduate Students

- A weight was designed to account for differences between the number of students observed in each category and the estimated population parameters
  - Results presented are based on weighted analysis to account for students in different majors and class years
  - The margin of error for a sample of this size is a maximum of + 3.3% at the 95% confidence interval
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# Survey Questionnaire:

## Faculty & Grad Students

- There was concern that people may answer questions with a positive bias
  - Survey included the Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Index
    - This scale measures peoples' internal feelings to answer questions in a way that they feel their answers will be viewed favorably
  - Index was calculated and run by every question to highlight possible discrepancies across responses
  - Survey has a sample error of no more than 1.65 percentage points in either direction with a 95% level of confidence
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# Undergraduate Students

<b>Year in School</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Freshman	19%
Sophomore	23%
Junior	27%
Senior	32%

<b>Location of residence</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Year in School</b>			
		<b>Freshman</b>	<b>Sophomore</b>	<b>Junior</b>	<b>Senior</b>
On Campus	79%	93%	92%	84%	59%
Off Campus	21%	7%	8%	16%	41%
Total	881	191	258	241	191

# Faculty & Graduate Students

Status	Percentage
Graduate students without teaching responsibilities	38%
Faculty members	36%
Graduate students with teaching responsibilities	25%

School/Program	Total	Location		
		Storrs	Health Center	Regional
Liberal Arts and Sciences	39%	48%	4%	29%
Education	11%	15%	-	4%
Medicine	10%	0%	75%	-
Business Administration	9%	5%	-	32%
Other Schools/Programs	30%	30%	18%	34%
Prefer not to respond	2%	1%	4%	1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,056</b>	<b>1,442</b>	<b>276</b>	<b>338</b>

# Disabilities & Undergraduates

Do you have a disability	Total	Year in School			
		Freshman	Sophomore	Junior	Senior
No	94%	94%	94%	95%	93%
Yes	6%	6%	6%	5%	7%
Total	881	191	258	241	191

Friends or family with a disability	Total	Year in School			
		Freshman	Sophomore	Junior	Senior
No	55%	57%	52%	56%	55%
Yes	45%	43%	48%	44%	45%
Total	881	191	258	241	191

# Disabilities & Faculty/Graduate

Do you have a disability	Total	Status		
		Faculty	GA Teach	GA Not Teach
No	91%	91%	91%	90%
Yes	5%	5%	7%	5%
Not sure / Prefer not to respond	4%	4%	2%	5%
Total	2,056	746	519	791

Friends or family with a disability	Total	Status		
		Faculty	GA Teach	GA Not Teach
No	45%	39%	51%	47%
Yes	51%	58%	47%	47%
Not sure / Prefer not to respond	4%	3%	3%	6%
Total	2,056	746	519	791

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# Feelings of Pity & Awkwardness

- Occasionally or often feel pity when encountering persons with disabilities:
    - Undergraduates: 79%
    - Faculty and graduate students: 60%
  - Occasionally or often feel awkwardness and/or embarrassment when encountering persons with disabilities
    - Undergraduates: 66%
    - Faculty and graduate students : 61%
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# Interactions & Admiration

- Almost 50% of undergraduates indicate they are never enthused about encounters with people who are disabled
  - Occasionally or often feel admiration when encountering persons with disabilities:
    - Undergraduate students: 72%
    - Graduate students: 79%
    - Faculty: 83%
  - However, 54% of undergraduates surveyed report having been taught how to approach and behave with individuals having disabilities
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# Interactions with Students with Disabilities

- 79% faculty and graduate students do not find themselves looking away more in conversations with a person with a disability
  - 34% of undergraduates and 18% of faculty and graduate students are unsure if it is helpful to finish sentences or supply words for **individuals with speech impairments**
  - 26% of students and 18% of faculty and graduate students indicate they are unsure of how to respond to an **assistance dog**
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# Ties with the Disabled Community

- While 45% of undergraduates surveyed have family or friendship ties with persons having disabilities, the remaining 55% having limited relationships with individuals with disabilities
  - Faculty and graduate students report similar ties with the disabled community:
    - 34% of faculty members have a co-worker with a disability
    - 48% interact with someone with a disability almost every day in the workplace
    - 52% report having a student with a disability in at least one of their classes
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# Socializing

- 45% of undergraduates surveyed and 43% of faculty and graduate students report “none” when asked about the number of individuals with disabilities with whom they socialized outside of classroom time or work time in the last 30 days
  - 3% undergraduate students and 8% of faculty and graduate students indicate they have socialized with three or more individuals having disabilities in the past month
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# Equity in Social Opportunities

- 45% of undergraduates and 34% of faculty and graduate students feel that individuals with disabilities are treated fairly
  - 20% of undergraduates and 7% of faculty and graduate students suggest there is not equitable treatment
  - 35% of undergraduates and 59% of faculty and graduate students were not sure
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# In the Classroom

- 87% of the undergraduates surveyed believe UConn's provision of accommodations does not give an unfair advantage to students with disabilities
  - 63% of undergraduates believe that individuals with disabilities receive fair treatment in the academic arena
  - 55% of faculty and graduate students report that individuals with disabilities are treated fairly in the classroom, yet 40% are not sure
  - Faculty members (43%) were more likely to have applied the University's *Academic Accommodations Policy* than graduate students with teaching responsibilities (28%)
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# Accommodations in the Classroom

- 32% of undergraduate students had no professors this semester who asked - either through announcements or syllabus information - that students with disability needs meet to discuss accommodations
  - Of faculty members and graduate students who teach:
    - 46% of faculty and 53% of graduate students wait until the end of class for a student with a disability to approach them about accommodations
    - 18% of faculty and 35% of graduate students announce the availability of accommodations during the first class of the semester
    - 18% of faculty and 34% of graduate students include the University's Academic Accommodations Policy in their class syllabi
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# Provision of Accommodations

- The majority of faculty (65%) and half of graduate students who teach (51%) have provided accommodations for students with disability:
    - Of these, 71% said it required little to no extra preparation time to provide accommodations
    - A very small percentage (7%) felt making accommodations inconvenienced them as it disrupted class flow and created feelings of unfairness from other students
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# Disability Topics in the Classroom

- 65% of the undergraduates feel that courses and classroom discussions at the University **have not prompted greater awareness** of disability-related issues
  - 65% of faculty and graduate students **do not include discussions that promote awareness** of disability-related issues in their classes
  - 45% of faculty and graduate students feel that disability related topics are **not relevant to their class**
  - Of the 24% who included these topics in class discussion, 36% of them say that they do work these issues into one or more classes a semester
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# Areas for Improvement

- 88% of faculty and graduate students do not think they should do anything different for students with disabilities compared to what they are doing now
  - When asked what the University can do to make the campus more hospitable for individuals with disabilities:
    - 37% say better accessibility
    - 22% think more support and accommodations should be given
    - 19% report transportation improvements
    - 13% cite improvement in the Center for students with disabilities
    - 6% think increasing disability awareness
    - 3% report having more opportunities for people with disabilities
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# Summary & Implications:

## Interactions

- University awareness and attitudes toward people with disabilities can create a culture of acceptance or negativity for students with disabilities
- The majority of students and faculty feel pity and embarrassment when interacting with students with disabilities
- There is a need for more social interactions and daily interactions with students with disabilities
- The campus needs to refocus their efforts on increasing social opportunities in order for the campus community to be more welcoming for students with disabilities

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# Summary & Implications:

## Accommodations in the Classroom

- Under the ADA faculty members must provide students with disabilities accommodations
  - The data collected in this study do not necessarily indicate that faculty are not providing accommodations when requested
  - However, if students do not perceive availability of accommodations, then many disabled students may not be receiving required accommodations
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# Summary & Implications: Disability Topics in the Classroom

- More than half of faculty and graduate students who teach do not include disability-related topics in their classrooms
- About half feel that disability related topics are not relevant to their class
- Increasing awareness and creating a culture of understanding and inclusion for students with disabilities needs to begin in the classroom
- Including topics and discussion on disability issues will create a comprehensive curriculum to students

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# Contact Information

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