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STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES AND ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE IN POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION

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Introduction

The purpose of this study is to determine whether services and social supports influence students with disabilities in their academic performance in postsecondary education. This study conducted quantitative research and created a survey through Survey Monkey to survey students with disabilities at Sacred Heart University. This research is testing if there is a relationship between academic performance and social supports provided to students with disabilities that could enhance their success.

Background

Before 1988, individuals with disabilities were not allowed to use public city buses; were not offered equal opportunities in education; and had limited career choice, resulting in discrimination against people with disabilities for their differences and obstructing them from achieving their goals. This discrimination was emotionally, physically, socially, and mentally affecting their lives. People across the United States fought against disability discrimination; however, it was not until 1989 that legislators and Congress passed the National Disability Act for individuals with disabilities (Arlene, 1992).

In 1964 Congress passed the Civil Rights Act which prohibited discrimination by race or gender when hiring was aimed at supporting all minority groups and should have included individuals with disabilities. However, the Civil Rights Act was only applied to racism, sexism, and women's rights. Individuals with disabilities protested how unfair that was. Disability advocates fought against discrimination by protesting, writing letters, and speaking publicly about the discrimination they faced. Not all government agencies supported individuals with disabilities and those who did, helped with funding and coming up with ways to create an act to directly benefit this group (Arlene, 1992).

The American Disability Act of 1990 applied to all individuals with disabilities. It provided services and reduced discrimination through affirmative action, requiring social supports and accommodation to students with disabilities in secondary and postsecondary education. It provided assistance to students with disabilities to achieve their academic goals and also protected them from being discriminated against by their disabilities in postsecondary education and transition into the workforce. Some students with disabilities might need more support than others and are entitled by law to extended times on tests, exams, and quizzes; a scribe to take note; as well as bringing their computers and recording devices into class. The number of students with disabilities in postsecondary education has been increasing over the past few decades as accommodation and services improve (Harris & Robertson, 2001).

The Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Section 504, aimed to end the isolation of millions of children and adults. It banned discrimination of individuals with handicaps in the workforce or in public places. The five causes that lead to discrimination toward individuals with disabilities are: Poverty, unemployment, impairment, treatment, and handicaps. For example, an individual with disability who lives in poverty might have a serious lack of supportive sources to find a job or work his or her way out of poverty. This person could be discriminated against because he is poor but what he needs is a strong and effective support system, because of the disability, to enable him to study and work (5 Common Causes of Discrimination on Disability, 2011).

It is more difficult for students with disabilities to complete a postsecondary education than those without disabilities. Students with disabilities must rely on their strengths and weaknesses in addition to possibly needing certain support systems and accommodations. Also, their disability affects everyday activities. In many cases students with disabilities must work their way around by doing things differently than those who are not disabled. Too often students needing assistance drop out of postsecondary education when they are not receiving accommodations, services, and social support from their community. But also, students with disabilities might have to drop out if they do not have appropriate financial support. The work load of a postsecondary education can also be stressful and overwhelming. Students with disabilities might also have medical issues that can interfere with their education. To resolve this issue, universities must provide students with services and assistance. otherwise, it is a form of discrimination against students with disabilities in postsecondary education (Wessel et. Al, 2009).

Background Continued: It is much harder for students with disabilities to be prepared for postsecondary education. They have more responsibilities to take care of to make it happen. Some of those responsibilities are making sure the university or college provides them with a support system and are responsible for what they need. Students must be proactive advocates for themselves, every day, in every class. There are many steps students with disabilities have to fulfill. In order to have access for special accommodations, students are required to provide documentation about the disability, such as medical records, documents, and other information that demonstrates the issue and needs. Also, students with disabilities must advocate for themselves to receive and follow the accommodations and services specified in the disclosure letter that is provided (OCR, 2011).

Theory

Bourdieu's theory is on social capital. Social capital according to Bourdieu, is when the cultural capital provides resources for individuals. Since it can be difficult for individuals without receiving resources they need from the capital, it can be very difficult for individuals to support themselves while resources are limited to them. Providing resources that individuals need can have an impact in their everyday lives in making life easier in a capitalist society. However, not all resources are provided equally to everyone. Bourdieu broke the society into two major group; the minority group and the majority group. Both groups are divided into the individual's ethnicity, race, gender, age, and disability. Without the needs of sources being provided to individuals from the social capital, it is a form of discrimination to any particular group. Students with disabilities have access to meet their needs in postsecondary education through social services providing students with accommodation, services, and assistance when it is necessary. If students with disabilities does not receive the proper accommodation or social services from their postsecondary education, then it would be a form of discrimination among them. Social services and accommodation are meant to be provided to students with any type of disability to guide them and assist them through hard obstacles that they may face while getting their education.

Methods

My research question is: Is there a positive relationship between students with disabilities receiving social supports and academic performance? According to my hypothesis, there is a positive association between receiving support services and academic performance.

The independent variable: The independent variable measures the extent of social support reported by the students. An social support index was created by combining seven Likert-scale indicators including provision of as a note taker, in-class and out-class assistance, tutoring, technologies, and extra time for test taking.

The dependent variables: Two dependent variables were used to measure academic performance. GPA and an index of academic confidence that included of five Likert-scale performance indicators including student reporting on test preparation, participation in class, class preparation, and earning high grades.

The control variables: The control variable used in this study is gender.

Research Methodology

For this research study a nonprobability, purposive sample was conducted. I reached out to the Disability Administration from Sacred Heart University by email and phone calls. Sacred Heart's Disability Administration sent out the survey to their students that have a disability. The questionnaire was administered on Survey Monkey by means of sending a link through email.

Sample

Participants included a total of 87 students with disabilities age 18 or older at Sacred Heart University. The sample included 29 males and 53 females. The sample was mostly white, with 78 white students, 3 Hispanic and 1 other. 69 participants identified as either middle class or upper middle class. 5 identified as working class and 7 as upper class. The sample also included 27 freshmen, 21 sophomores, 13 juniors, 13 seniors and 8 graduate students with disabilities at Sacred Heart University.

Results

A Pearson correlation test was conducted for the basic hypothesis test looking at the relationship between social supports and academic confidence. There was a significant positive correlation of .687 which was significant at the .001 level. Since the significance level was quite high, it showed that my hypothesis test was confirmed, there is a significant relationship between academic support and academic confidence.

Correlations			
	RECODESupportScale	RECODEAcademic	
RECODESupportScale	Pearson Correlation	1	.687**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	77	72
RECODEAcademic	Pearson Correlation	.687**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	72	73

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The relationship for social support and GPA was not significant with a Pearson correlation of .082 and significance of .563. Which according to my analysis, it seemed like many participants were not confident in establishing their Grade Point Average. But also, many participants from Sacred Heart University did not answer the question of what is their GPA which it caused an effect on the data to have a result of a no correlation between social support and GPA. In conclusion, it suggests that there is no relationship between the social supports and GPA.

Correlations			
	RECODESupportScale	What is your GPA?	
RECODESupportScale	Pearson Correlation	1	.082
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.563
	N	77	52
What is your GPA?	Pearson Correlation	.082	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.563	
	N	52	52

To control for gender for the advanced hypothesis test, a Pearson correlation was conducted on the subset of male students and the subset of female students. Both were significant at the .001 level. As a result, it showed that the relationship was significant for both men and women.

Correlations for Women			
	RECODESupportScale	RECODEAcademic	
RECODESupportScale	Pearson Correlation	1	.633**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	49	46
RECODEAcademic	Pearson Correlation	.633**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	46	47

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Correlations for Men			
	RECODESupportScale	RECODEAcademic	
RECODESupportScale	Pearson Correlation	1	.764**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	28	26
RECODEAcademic	Pearson Correlation	.764**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	26	26

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

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SURVEY QUESTIONS

- What is your gender?
- What is your race?
- Which of the following universities do you attend?
- What is your age?
- What is your economic class?
- What is your academic class year?
- I am provided with the in classroom assistance that I need.*
- I am provided with the out of classroom assistance that I need.*
- My school provides me with the technology I need, such as recording devices, computer programs, electrical magnifying glass, online books, etc.*
- My school provides me with tutoring when I need it.*
- I feel supported by the office for students with disabilities at my university.*
- My university provides adequate communication to my faculty members regarding my disability.*
- My university prioritizes the needs of students with disabilities.*
- I am well prepared for tests.*
- I participate actively in my classes.*
- I am always prepared for my classes.*
- I feel confident in my academic abilities.*
- I receive mostly B's and A's in my classes.*
- What is your GPA?

*Response categories for these questions were on a strongly agree to strongly disagree scale.