**Introduction**

Students with disabilities are often not included in discussions of campus diversity. Students with disabilities include those with physical disabilities or sensory disabilities; these students are easy to identify on the campus environment. But more often, they are invisible, as their disabilities may include such conditions as learning disabilities, mental health conditions, or chronic health needs. Legal rights to accessibility in higher education settings are conferred by the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. However, only 27% of high school students with disabilities go on to college and 88% of those leave without graduating.

**Objective**

The purpose of the Accommodations Training Project is to provide higher education students with the knowledge about reasonable accommodations and the self-advocacy skills to access the accommodations that will help them be successful.

**Methods**

**Training Materials**

1. **Online Tutorial**

   The knowledge-building component is an on-line interactive tutorial providing basic information about the Americans with Disabilities Act, exploration about kinds of accommodations, and identification of reasonable accommodations. It also takes students through a self-assessment process to help them think through their strengths and challenges in performing academic-related tasks, and a guided problem-solving process to help them identify relevant accommodations they will want to request. The process of identifying these accommodations together to learn basic communication skills enabling them to more effectively approach and negotiate reasonable accommodations with their professors. The workshop includes presentation of a basic, seven-step framework for requesting accommodations, followed by role play practice to build the skills.

   The seven step framework includes:
   1. Opening the Meeting
   2. Making the Accommodation Request
   3. Asking for Suggestions
   4. Asking for Referrals
   5. Planning Future Actions
   6. Summarizing the Meeting
   7. Closing the Meeting

   The workshop instructor takes the students through each step in detail, offering examples of appropriate and inappropriate statements. Students then have the opportunity to practice the seven steps to requesting an accommodation through role play. Students pair off and are provided example scenarios to act out. After students master the seven steps, they work on creating a personal scenario based on their needs. This scenario is then practiced with a partner.

   **Training Development Process**

   Three separate rounds of study were conducted to develop and revise the materials. The first and second rounds were conducted with students from the University of Kansas and Kansas State University. The third round was conducted with students from the University of Kansas, Kansas State University Haskell Indian Nations University and Kansas City Kansas Community College. For each workshop, staff from the relevant student disability service office helped recruit students with disabilities. Additionally, students provided feedback on the training materials and the delivery method and were also provided a monetary incentive for their participation. After each round, modifications were made to the training materials and the delivery method based on the feedback.

   **Round 1 – Summer 2010**

   In the first round, eight students with disabilities were recruited from the University of Kansas (6) and Kansas State University (2) to participate in the preliminary round of the project. Students reviewed an online tutorial created from a previous study which included steps in requesting an accommodation. The students were prompted to work with a partner to practice role-playing the steps. The students then attended a one day workshop where they learned further steps for requesting an accommodation. Students also did a pre and posttest role play for requesting an accommodation.

   **Round 2 – Spring 2011**

   In the second round, two separate workshops were conducted: one at the University of Kansas with seven students and the other at Kansas State University with ten students. Once recruited, students completed a modified online tutorial from round one which eliminated the steps to requesting an accommodation. The tutorial opened with a pretest and concluded with a posttest. The students then attended a two day workshop. The first day discussed material from the online tutorial including the self-assessments. The second day taught the seven steps to requesting an accommodation and included practice role plays. Students also did a pre and posttest role play for requesting an accommodation.

   **Round 3 – Fall 2011**

   In the third round, four separate workshops were conducted: at the University of Kansas with 18 students, at Kansas State University with 13 students, at Haskell Indian Nations University with nine students and at Kansas City Kansas Community College with 12 students. The same procedures were followed as in the second round, however, with modified training materials.

**Results**

A new tool for empowering students to request reasonable accommodations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Pretest</th>
<th>Posttest</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>University of Kansas</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kansas State University</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haskell Indian Nations University</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kansas City Kansas Community College</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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**Lessons Learned**

- We learned from the first round that students didn’t find a partner to practice requesting an accommodation on their own so we eliminated that portion from the online tutorial.
- Additionally, it was discovered there was too much information to cover in a one day face-to-face workshop. This was modified to two days for the remaining of the study.
- In the face-to-face workshop, students were having a hard time recalling each of the steps so a checklist was developed to follow along with while practicing with role plays.
- On some campuses (e.g. community colleges), there may be a need for greater guidance in requesting an accommodation.
- Family (e.g. socioeconomic background) and other factors such as student experiences before coming to college appear to influence the level of need for the skills instruction.

**Future**

- Pre and posttest data from the third round face-to-face workshops still need to be scored to see if the training resulted in skills acquisition.
- Currently, we are developing an online tutorial for the skills-based portion of the study (e.g. face-to-face workshop portion). This will be added to the current online tutorial.
- A dissemination method needs to be developed to provide the training materials to student disability service offices.
- Discussion has centered on possibly expanding the grant to incorporate the lessons learned in the next phase of research including work specifically with community colleges.

**Acknowledgements**

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