

# Understanding the Role of Accommodation Programs in Supporting College Students with Disabilities Based on Literatures

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**Abstract**— Obtaining a college degree is profoundly valuable for every individual. It is through education, all students, with or without disabilities, should be empowered to achieve their maximum potential for both personal and societal progress. Globally, the enrollment of students with disabilities in higher education institutions is increasing, often facilitated by legislative and policy changes aimed at enhancing their access. However, developing appropriate accommodation programs to support these students effectively has posed challenges. Given this context, the role of accommodation programs for college students with disabilities is crucial for their academic success, personal well-being, and retention in higher education. These programs are designed to provide equitable access to education by removing barriers created by disabilities, without compromising academic standards. Therefore, this literature review aims to explore studies that offer a deeper understanding of accommodation programs and their impact on students with disabilities, particularly how these programs enable students to manage the rigors of college life.

**Keywords**— Accommodation program, college students and disabilities.

## INTRODUCTION

In many countries, students with physical or intellectual disabilities or mental health conditions are increasing in numbers in higher education institutions. And, in the Philippine education system like many others has struggled with the integration of students with disabilities. While special education has been established at the basic education level, the transition to higher education often presents a significant hurdle.

Thus, legislation and policy changes have enhanced enrolment of students with disabilities in higher education (Schreuer & Sachs 2014). The study of Herrero, et al (2021) confirms that from the students' perspective, university environments can be suitable for the education of students with intellectual disabilities therefore the creation of inclusive higher education programs and accommodation services should really be encouraged.

All students have different needs and all students deserve the best education possible. Likewise, universities need to face this challenge of delivering accommodations service successfully to students with disabilities.

While it is true that disabilities can significantly impact a student's ability to focus, concentrate, attend classes, complete assignments and perform well in exams. Accommodations address these challenges directly, allowing students to engage with course material and demonstrate their knowledge effectively.

Institutions especially those that admit students with disabilities should focus on proactive, inclusive policies, raise awareness of available resources, and train faculty on disability inclusion (Romhild & Holiederer, 2024). The aforementioned policies can improve retention and graduations rates of students with disabilities (Knight et al., 2018).

This literature review aims to explore studies that offer a deeper understanding of accommodation programs and their impact on students with disabilities, particularly how these programs enable students to manage the rigors of college life. With this, universities can identify strategies for establishing successful accommodation program practices that ensure academic success among students with disabilities.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The study makes use of a narrative review to examine the existing literature on understanding the role of accommodation programs in supporting college students with disabilities. Through the summary and synthesis of literatures gathered, such method can gain a holistic understanding of the topic without being limited by the rigid structure of systematic review protocols (Rammal, 2023).

The literature search was conducted using the following search terms (accommodation programs, disability accommodations, disability-related services) and (Disabilities, conditions) and (College students, undergraduate students, university students, tertiary level students).

For the inclusion criteria, this study focuses on articles related to accommodation programs, college students with disabilities and conditions that have been peer-reviewed and published within the last 10 years (2014-2024) to ensure the relevance and appropriateness of the findings. For the exclusion criteria, all articles that are not involved in the topics mentioned above were excluded. More so, publications not written in English and from 2013 and below were excluded in the study.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

### ***Types of Accommodation Programs***

Accommodation programs are established to support students with disabilities integrated in higher educational institutions. Accommodations are an adjustment to a course or degree requirements made to allow a student with disability to have equal access to the course or degree and by definition are intended to ensure that student with disabilities have educational experiences as equivalent as possible to students without disabilities (Gin, et al., 2022). These programs offer a range of adjustments tailored to individual student needs. Schreuer and Sachs (2014) developed a scale known as Physical, Human and Academic Accommodation Services (PHAAS) which eventually became the types of accommodation may be offered to students with disabilities. This scale evaluates the use of accommodations and their efficacy.

According to Gloria et. al (2024), the students with disabilities face major challenges in learning, infrastructures and other school services. In order to address those challenges, accommodations can be broadly categorized as academic accommodations wherein students with disabilities are given extra time on tests and modified exams formats (Kim, 2016) and are offered with multiple ways to engage with course material, flexible deadlines (Grimes

et al., 2021) and one on one academic coaching (Williams-Hall, 2018). Another type of accommodation is physical or human accommodations, these include adequate disability-friendly facilities, accessible campus navigation aids and mental health support services (Gloria et al, 2024). This is to ensure students with disabilities receive the necessary resources to thrive in higher education.

However, despite the effort of universities to establish accommodation programs, not all students with disabilities use them because there are factors that stop them from availing accommodation programs and services particularly the decision to disclose their disabilities. Other reasons identified for non-disclosure include stigma, fear of discrimination and lack awareness about available support services (Grimes et al., 2021; Newman et al., 2019). Higher education institutions must always take into account the voices of these vulnerable group of students in order to eliminate those existing barriers (Herrero, et al, 2021).

Consequently, the scale by Schreuer and Sachs (2014) is helpful in evaluating the efficacy of accommodation which is usually crucial to improve participation of students with disabilities in higher education. Legislation and policy changes have tried to enhance enrolment of students with disabilities in higher education. These changes will encourage educational institutions to provide accessible facilities and services in order to minimize barriers to the utilization of accommodation programs (William-Hall, 2018).

### ***Benefits and Impact on Student Success***

Many literatures collectively support the idea that disabilities and mental health conditions negatively impact academic performance, and that providing appropriate accommodations can mitigate these effects, leading to improved student engagement, grades, and overall academic achievement.

Students with disabilities are legally required to be supported by their institutions to ensure equity of access and outcome (Grimes et. Al, 2021) because Parson et al, (2021) believed that having a disability significantly affects academic performance at university for many students. Studies have shown the benefits and impact of accommodation programs on student success. Sangley (2018) reported significant positive impact of academic coaching on grade point average and on intention to graduate (Fichten 2014).

Likewise, Schreuer and Sachs (2014) found out that accommodations significantly correlated with higher GPA, increased participation in academic and social activities, and higher satisfaction with educational experiences. Students who used accommodations perceived their institutions as more supportive and accessible. Accommodations also significantly contribute to graduation success for students with learning disabilities, particularly extended test time, note-taking assistance, and flexible deadlines (Williams-Hall, W. 2018).

On the other hand, the increasing social demands at university can be particularly challenging especially for students with disabilities who may have social communication difficulties like those with autism (Anderson et al. 2017; Knott and Taylor 2014; Longtin 2014; Ward and Webster 2018). Research conducted by Fleming, Oertle, Plotner, and Hakun (2017) found that for students with disabilities, a higher sense of belonging within the social environment improved students' satisfaction, increased their sense of self-advocacy, and improved their perceptions of the campus climate toward students with disabilities. Thus, appropriate accommodation program

will foster social interaction and sense of belongingness. These are associated with an increased retention in college.

Therefore, access to support and accommodations fosters a sense of belonging and reduces stigma, stress and anxiety often associated with navigating college. This will also help students with disabilities develop coping mechanisms and resilience that extend beyond their academic careers (Gloria et al., 2024).

### ***Best Practices for Implementation***

Effective accommodation programs require a multi-faceted approach. Recognizing that each student's needs are unique and offering personalized accommodations rather than a one-size-fits-all approach. To avoid negative relationship between accommodations and academic performance, universities should collect information regarding the students' high school accommodation, noting how they change once they arrive at university. This information should then be used to inform learning strategies progress for all students with disabilities which ought to be customized to address the specific learning deficits and the severity of the condition has to be collected as well (Parsons et. al., 2021). A thorough assessment of the level of disability experienced by students applying for academic accommodation is essential to ensure that students in true need are assisted while avoiding unfair benefits to their neurotypical peers (Lisboa, et al., 2023).

Hence, universities need clear and accessible guidelines for students to request and receive accommodations, including documentation requirements and appeal processes. The decision to grant accommodation must be based on the individual student's need and not on external perceptions. Students with disabilities will be perceived differently by their peers based on the disability they have, its visibility and the accommodation that they receive. Negative peer perceptions of the appropriateness of accommodations may create attitudinal barriers that make it difficult for students with disabilities to integrate into the college social environment and hinder their chances of academic success (Jones, A. & Duell, M., 2018). Therefore, it is essential that educational institutions implement programs that break down attitudinal barriers, address the stigma of disability, and help students with disabilities feel welcome on campus.

Strong collaboration between school administration, faculty, counseling centers and students is essential for a successful implementation and ongoing support. Even training or educating the faculty about the students' conditions and how to effectively implement accommodation is paramount to ensure consistent and supportive environment (Edwards, et al., 2022).

### **CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATION**

In conclusion, accommodation programs are not just a legal requirement but a fundamental component of creating an equitable and supportive higher education environment. By addressing the specific challenges faced by college students with disabilities, these programs empower students to succeed academically, foster their well-being, and ultimately contribute to a more inclusive and resilient campus community.

Universities should indeed adapt the best practices of accommodation programs mentioned in this literature review. In implementing the programs and services, universities should actively advertise and promote available

support in order to reduce barriers to seeking help, including addressing stigma. Without this promotion, students may not know the extent of support available to them. Further, student without disabilities as well as other members of the school community will be aware and involved in making the university safe and accepting.

The accommodation programs must be regularly assessed for proper monitoring of its effectiveness.

Lastly, Researchers with similar interest in establishing support to students with disabilities are encouraged to advance the literature relative to successful disability accommodation practices that ensure students' academic success in the tertiary level.

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