Creating an Inclusive Campus: Supporting health and human service students with disabilities

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Introduction
Labor market participation is strongly associated with education. This connection is even stronger for people with disabilities.

Although universities have developed support programs for students with disabilities, low enrolment and high first-year dropout persists. There is limited research on the needs and experiences of students with disabilities in health and human service educational programs.

Health and human service programs can facilitate students’ transition into employment. There are, however, unique challenges related to educational requirements and professional standards, client safety and comfort, and the complex contexts associated with academic and clinical settings.

Lack of understanding and appropriate support may contribute to limited access and low representation of people with disabilities in this employment sector.

Objectives
Evaluate the implementation and effectiveness of an individualized support strategy called my Accessibility Plan (myAP).

Methods
Participants: Students with disabilities from medicine, nursing, occupational therapy, physical therapy, social work, and teacher education, at UBC-Vancouver and UBC-Okanagan; myAP N=7, workshop N=4.
Tools: myAP: Canadian Occupational Performance Measure (COPM) and Measure of Process of Care (MPOC); Disclosure Workshop: qualitative analysis of workshop transcripts.
Procedure: 6 month implementation of the myAP with Pre-Post questionnaires

Results
The average change score for the COPM satisfaction scale was 3.4, which is above the clinically significant value of 2. The average change score for the COPM performance scale was 1.9, which is almost at the clinically significant value of 2.

MPOC scores indicate that participants positively evaluated the service they received, thus suggesting that the implementation of myAP was client-centered and supportive.

Workshop Themes:
Theme 1: Damned if you do, damned if you don’t
- Drawbacks of Non-Disclosure
  “When you didn’t disclose and then it becomes an issue” Ada
- Drawbacks of Disclosure
  “Stigma. If someone already has a preconceived idea about your disability, then they have these false beliefs about what that means and about who you are.” Cora

Theme 2: There is more than the eye
- Barriers/Influencing factors to Inclusive Experience: “[the response] was everything you would not expect to hear from someone who you just thought was supportive of the fact that we’re different individuals, and we all have different needs.” Cora
- Accommodations: “There’s not a one-size-fits-all accommodation for things.” Bella

Barriers/Influencing factors to Inclusive Experience: “When you come to an institution like this… you would think that these people should be better than that. They are judging you… it totally broke my heart. I shouldn’t have to deal with it here of all places.” Cora

Summary
Individualized supports and accommodations are effective. Students engage in a process of identity management related to their disability and disclosure.

Positive faculty attitudes facilitate inclusion while power differentials make inclusion more difficult.

Conclusions
To increase the participation of students with disabilities we must address systemic institutional barriers, provide individualized support, and educate stakeholders regarding how to support inclusion in professional programs.

The pilot test of myAP demonstrates that offering students support can increase both their performance and satisfaction related to educational goals.

The next phase of the project will focus on further developing and evaluating myAP as well as providing support and education for faculty and students.

Implications
Future Directions:
Educate faculty regarding disclosure, disability, and accommodation.
Develop a safe community space to share experiences and support other students with disabilities.
Continue developing and evaluating the myAP.
What can you do?
Start the conversation within your community.
Examine your practices and assumptions regarding the inclusion of students with disabilities.
Participate in education initiatives for faculty and staff.
Contact the Inclusive Campus team for more information and support.

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Educational Strategies
Workshops
Individualized Support
Mentorship
System Navigation
myAP
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