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Examples from the University of Connecticut demonstrate how outreach and services may require collaboration with campus and off-campus resources, particularly for students with disabilities transitioning from high school.

Collaboration Strategies to Facilitate Successful Transition of Students with Disabilities in a Changing Higher Education Environment

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According to the latest data available from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES 2009), close to 11 percent of students enrolled in post-secondary education are students with disabilities. The 2008 reauthorization of the Americans with Disabilities Act, the Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008 (HEOA), and the Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2008 all have the potential to further increase these numbers (Burke, Friedl, and Rigler 2010). Despite growing numbers, it is unlikely that most disability service (DS) offices have had a corresponding increase in staff to meet the demand. Depending on a variety of institutional variables (e.g., size of institution, public or private entity), many colleges and universities have given the responsibility of disability services to other departments on campus that are already stretched thin, such as health services, counseling centers, or the dean of students (Harbour 2008). In addition, the complexities of disabilities, including students with multiple chronic health conditions and severe psychiatric disorders, may necessitate more than just academic accommodations (see, e.g., Cory, this volume). Accommodations often need to go beyond the classroom and require the DS professional to collaborate and problem-solve with colleagues across campus in order to provide appropriate support.

DS offices today need to be resourceful, creative, and forward-thinking in order to meet the needs of college students with disabilities. A key strategy to meeting these needs is to develop relationships with colleagues across

the campus, in both Student and Academic Affairs (Whitt et al. 2008). The Center for Students with Disabilities (CSD) at the University of Connecticut has fostered and developed dozens of collaborative relationships with departments across campus. While the CSD is housed in the Division of Student Affairs, providing physical and programmatic access to students with disabilities is an institutional responsibility that can be accomplished only by building partnerships and creating a sense of shared ownership. This chapter will begin by describing some emerging populations of students requiring a coordinated and collaborative campus. Several initiatives and strategies employed by the CSD to foster collaborative relationships and better these populations will be presented, each of which could be replicated on other campuses.

Emerging Populations of Students with Disabilities

There are several emerging populations of students on campus who demonstrate the importance of collaboration between DS and other units. While not exhaustive, this list provides some examples for consideration.

Asperger's Syndrome. The National Institutes of Health (2010) estimates that two to six of every 1,000 American students are on the autism spectrum (which includes autism and Asperger's syndrome). While much is already known about students on the spectrum, there are several characteristics typical to this population that present important considerations for college and university personnel. Although each student on the spectrum presents differently, one of the defining characteristics of this population is their "qualitative impairment in social interaction" (American Psychiatric Association 2000, 59). As any Student Affairs professional can attest, college environments are highly social in nature, and, according to Farmour-Dougan, James, and McKinney (2000), a student's level of engagement is often tied in part to interactions and dealings with other students. Students with Asperger's may be highly intelligent but often miss, or misunderstand, nonverbal cues and the subtleties of language in social situations. Thus, interacting with peers, staff, and faculty can be a challenge and a source of anxiety and frustration (Wolf et al. 2009). In order to evade these feelings, students with Asperger's syndrome often become isolated and reluctant to ask for help, further exacerbating their social deficits and level of engagement. It is essential that DS personnel educate campus colleagues and assist with ongoing adjustment issues.

GLBTQ Students. Historically, students with disabilities who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered, or questioning (GLBTQ), have not been considered as a cohesive group; rather, they have been viewed as being part of one population or the other (Henry et al. 2010). This feeling of not belonging or "fitting in" with any particular group may lead to isolation, depression, anxiety, or even substance abuse (Dworkin 2000), and it is estimated that GLBTQ populations are almost 2.5 times more likely than heterosexuals to have had mental health disorders (National Alliance on Mental Illness

2009). Collaboration across campus units, particularly with GLBTQ, counseling, and residential life professionals can serve to create supportive and inclusive environments to address these issues in an informed manner taking into consideration the multiple cultural identities and perhaps enhancing their comfort and the frequency with which they access services.

Veterans. Colleges and universities should expect to serve approximately two million veterans returning from the conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq (American Council on Education [ACE] 2008). Of these, approximately one-third report symptoms of a mental health or cognitive condition. From 2001 to the present, approximately 1.64 million American troops have been deployed to Afghanistan and Iraq for Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) (Rand Center for Military Health Policy Research 2008). Eighty-five percent of veterans who were injured in these two conflicts survived due to improvements in body armor, coagulants, and the modern medical evacuation system. Although more soldiers are surviving, more veterans are also returning home having experienced physical or mental trauma. More specifically, 18.5 percent report posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or depression, 19.5 percent report experiencing a traumatic brain injury (TBI), and 7 percent met the criteria for both PTSD and a TBI (Rand Center for Military Health Policy Research 2008). Substance abuse often is also an issue and occurs in approximately 50–85 percent of those diagnosed with PTSD (Coll et al. 2009).

Difficulty with readjusting to civilian life, managing new physical and mental conditions, and limited or no understanding of disability accommodations may be barriers to veterans who are considering higher education. Postsecondary DS providers, in collaboration with colleagues across campus in both Student and Academic Affairs, need to be proactive and creative in order to meet the needs of this emerging population. Other key players include, but are not limited to, external veteran affairs organizations, campus counseling and mental health centers, financial aid offices, and residential life and academic advising professionals.

Chronic Illness. Improvements in medical treatments have resulted in greater numbers of young adults with chronic illness pursuing postsecondary education (Barakat and Wodka 2006). While students with chronic health illnesses have similar needs to other students with disabilities, they also have unique and challenging issues that may require a deviation from the more standard accommodations. Due to their invisible nature, some illnesses may lead others to doubt a legitimate need for accommodations (Royster and Marshall 2008) and may require frequent absences from class during acute episodes or exacerbations. Students may then be reluctant to self-identify and request accommodations from faculty who may not see any obvious impairment. It is imperative for DS providers to foster supportive environments that inform faculty, in order to determine reasonable accommodations that do not compromise the academic integrity of the institution and to ensure appropriate treatment of students.

Student Athletes. Student athletes with disabilities can have a very different experience in college than athletes without disabilities. These students often try to perfect a balancing act between practice, games, classes, and homework. It is critical that more focus is placed on time management due to the increased complexity of college-level work, a busy athletic competition practice and game schedule, and how their disability affects them at the collegiate level (Stone 2005). Students must also comply with the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) eligibility requirements, which vary based on the institutional placement in Division I, II, or III. If students choose to engage in the NCAA process to have eligibility modifications made, they must identify their education-impacting disability and fill out specific forms. Depending on the institutional requirements for receiving accommodations, students may also be required to self-identify with the appropriate college or university official in order to receive academic accommodations (Walker 2005). The NCAA does not share the student's disability status with the institution (NCCA Regulations 2010–2011). While many student athletes have been diagnosed with learning disabilities (LDs) and attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADD/ADHD), other disabilities including anxiety, depression, and other psychiatric disorders persist and are not widely talked about within this community (Walker 2005). Based on these complexities, collaborative efforts with athletic counselors are particularly important for DS to reassure student athlete concerns regarding self-identification to the disability service provider, out of fear of stigma from coaches and peers.

International Students. International students with disabilities have their own unique challenges in their transition to postsecondary environments. While their transition issues may be similar to other college-age students, they are also adjusting to a completely new culture. It is important to remember that the term *disability* and how people become “disabled” varies in every country (Reid and Knight 2006). Essentially, some students may have been considered nondisabled in their home country but disabled in the United States, or, quite possibly, the reverse. This can create confusion and challenges to adjustment and may adversely affect whether students self-identify to campus disability services providers. International students with disabilities who are more confident, more fluent in English, and have a sense of well-being often make a more successful transition to U.S. campuses (Hannigan 2000). With an increasing focus on globalization, it is critically important that international students are apprised of their rights and responsibilities under U.S. disability rights statutes, given that such legislation may not exist in their home country. DS professionals should also appropriately counsel students with disabilities who plan to study in other countries (Sygall and Lewis 2006). Proactive collaborative strategies and cross-training with study abroad offices and international student personnel is essential to ensure that students are fully apprised of the complexity of these issues.

Collaborative Programming Liaison System

The main goal of developing and cultivating liaisons across campus is to create relationships that foster opportunities to share and exchange information in an effort to meet the needs of students with disabilities more effectively and efficiently. At the CSD, each staff member serves as the liaison to specific departments across campus. Examples include but are not limited to: Admissions, Facilities and Engineering, Health Services, Registrars, Athletics, Dining Services, Study Abroad, and Career Services, as well as individual schools and colleges. Each liaison is charged with several responsibilities: (1) to share pertinent information as it relates to students with disabilities with each of their assigned departments; (2) to explore opportunities for collaborative programming for students with disabilities; (3) to provide technical assistance with regard to access concerns (whether physical or programmatic); and (4) to communicate information back to students in order to keep them apprised of opportunities for involvement. The liaison system has been extremely effective and, in fact, was adopted by other departments within Student Affairs at the University of Connecticut. By partnering with colleagues across campus, DS professionals can do their jobs more efficiently in order to meet the needs of this growing population of students, while assuring that colleagues from other functional areas understand the needs of students with disabilities and do not unwittingly discriminate against students.

External Outreach Initiatives

Students with disabilities often begin their college searches early, as it is important that the institution they choose is the right fit for them. These students will pay more attention to the special services and programs available at colleges and universities than their nondisabled peers (Korbel and Saunders 2008). It is vitally important that students are aware of the programs and services offered at a given institution, and that they understand the distinct differences between high school and college. Understanding the critical nature of this process, the CSD has several initiatives that facilitate this planning.

Secondary Personnel Day. This is a full-day collaborative program that invites secondary personnel to participate in an interactive and informative workshop to address the unique needs of students with disabilities transitioning to college. While the program resources are specific to the University of Connecticut, much of the information is transferrable to other settings. Connecticut's State Department of Education transition coordinator assists in the planning and assists with information dissemination. In addition to learning about the programs and services offered by the Center, there are also presentations by various campus departments, and a resource

fair where attendees have an opportunity to address specific issues and concerns directly with campus representatives or DS personnel. Some of the offices represented include Financial Aid, Residential Life, and Admissions. Due in part to the ongoing collaborations between the Center and other departments at the University, this workshop is an exceptional medium to demonstrate the entire University's commitment to serving students with disabilities.

Survivor: College Edition. This informational workshop offers high school students and their family members a forum to learn about specific transition issues. Students participate in a college lecture and tour the campus. Two strands are provided—one for students and another for family members. Student participants learn about their rights and responsibilities under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), the college application process, accommodations, learning strategies, and technologies, and participate in a college lecture.

Lunch and Learn. The CSD established the “Lunch and Learn” workshop series in an effort to reach out across functional areas of the Division of Student Affairs, promoting inclusion and encouraging conversations regarding students with disabilities. In addition, it is an exceptional opportunity to professionals to collaborate and share relevant information about working with students with disabilities. “Lunch and Learn” workshops are presented by CSD staff on various disability-related topics, such as the ADA and the recently passed Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act (ADAAA) and its implications for service delivery. Other topics include working with various types of students with disabilities, community standards, learning technologies, and other topics of interest to student affairs professionals. Presenting this information in a casual milieu allows colleagues to come together to share ideas, ask questions, and learn effective and useful strategies to bring back to their respective departments. On occasion, workshops are presented with professionals from other departments. The learning outcomes consistently focus on enhancing an inclusive environment and promoting success for students with disabilities. Likewise, this learning experience allows representatives from various student affairs offices to share information about policies, procedures, and events in their own departments with CSD staff. Exchanging knowledge in this manner is deliberate and comprehensive, and also ensures that staff will provide accurate information to students. The ability to offer students information about multiple departments in one setting affords students with more time for school work and extracurricular activities, ultimately leading to better student engagement (Whitt et al. 2008). For students with disabilities, feeling engaged in the campus community is vital for their development and success, perhaps more so than for other students (Nichols and Quaye 2009). It is with this knowledge that the CSD designed the “Lunch and Learn” model. These informal meetings have strengthened relationships within the division and enhanced opportunities for departments to join resources and

create innovative programs for students. They also enhance the student experience and provide connectedness to the institution, which is critical for all students (see, e.g., Kuh 2009).

Summary

With an ever-changing higher education landscape for students with disabilities, it is increasingly important for student affairs practitioners to make certain that the campus community is not only prepared to accommodate these students and to ensure nondiscriminatory practices (Burke et al. 2010) but to also assist in the increasingly complex transition process. Collaboration will continue to be the cornerstone of accessible and inclusive transition strategies to promote student success.

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