DISABILITY RESOURCES AND SERVICES

CAS Contextual Statement

Professionals who serve disabled students have had pivotal roles in expanding access to college and university campus environments by encouraging colleagues and administration to adopt the pedagogical principles and practices of universal design (UD), universal design for instruction (UDI), and in playing key roles in transforming sociopolitical consciousness of disability (Vance, Lipsitz, & Parks, 2014). In the 21st century, disability is now viewed as a form of diversity and a part of the range of natural expression of difference in the human condition rather than a deficiency by definition.

The language of disability has also undergone changes over time in response to ever-emerging scholarship from the field of disability studies as well as from the perspectives of social justice and disability advocacy. Further influences on the language of disability flow from concepts of universal design, which emphasize universal access through intentional design and barrier removal, thus moving toward equality of experience for all individuals and removing distinctions and stigmas of disability.

Person-first language has been used extensively since the second half of the 20th century and is typically seen in the phrases "persons with disabilities" or "students with disabilities." More recently, disability rights advocates and disability studies scholars have endorsed use of disability-first language when referring to a group of persons who have disabling impairments. Using the term "disabled persons" with pride and ownership recognizes disability as a social construct. The CAS standards and guidelines for Disability Resources and Services used person-first terminology in its 2013 revision; in that edition, person-first terminology was used when referencing individuals, and disability-first terminology used when referencing groups. It is important that DRS professionals and institutional administrators be alert to the evolving language of disability and its implications for and impacts on the design and delivery of resources and services.

Prior to the mid-20th century in the United States, disabled college students were supported primarily by rehabilitation services. In the rehabilitation model, college personnel and family members primarily assisted students by attempting to reduce barriers in postsecondary educational environments. However, buildings were not physically accessible; texts in accessible formats, such as braille, were limited; and most aspects of campus life remained inaccessible to disabled students.

Many U.S. veterans returning from World War II who were recently injured (wounded warriors) sought a college education and began a process of opening doors that coincided with the Disability Rights Movement (Church, 2009). Other voices for change included disability and independent living advocates like Ed Roberts, Judy Heumann, and Justin Dart, who knew that colleges needed to make their campuses and programs more accessible by removing barriers, not merely reducing them, if disabled individuals were to have true equal opportunities for education.

The Rehabilitation Act of 1973, which included Section 504 subpart E, stipulated that recipients of federal funds could not deny access or admission based solely on disability and must provide auxiliary aids and services to accommodate for a person's disability. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990, amended in 2008, expanded and further clarified the rights of persons with disabilities to equal access and accommodation in public and private spheres (ADA, 2008). Disability rights and inclusive education are also

international human rights issues, as seen in the 2008 United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (United Nations, 2008). Some countries have nationwide laws such as the Americans with Disabilities Act; others, like Canada, have enacted disability laws in their provinces or regions.

In the 1970s and 1980s, U.S. postsecondary institutions began to establish offices and departments to address the access needs of disabled students (Linton, 1998). These offices, aligned with student affairs or academic affairs, facilitated academic adjustments and modifications for disabled students. Services included administering tests when extra time or other accommodations were needed, arranging for sign language interpreters, securing accessible instructional materials, and coordinating room assignments in residence halls. The medical, or individual rehabilitation, model of disability was the framework for much of this early disability services work on campuses. As a result of these early initiatives, work of the disability services professional is now linked with all sectors of the campus community in a collaborative network that includes study abroad, residence life, food service, security, administration, financial aid, diversity, career services, library services, academic advising, and other campus services.

The Association of Handicapped Student Service Personnel in Postsecondary Education (AHSSPPE) was established in 1977 as a professional association for individuals working in disability resource and service offices around the U.S. In 1992, AHSSPPE became the Association on Higher Education And Disability (AHEAD), reflecting progress both in nomenclature and breadth of mission. With over 2,800 U.S. and international members, AHEAD is the principal, professional resource for disability professionals in higher education. Driven by its vision of "postsecondary experience that embraces disability and is free from barriers" ("Mission, Vision and Core Values"), AHEAD (n.d.) provides professional development, professional engagement and networking, information, and technical assistance; has 38 state and multi-state affiliate groups around the U.S., in addition to an international affiliate program; and is active with allied international organizations sharing common missions. AHEAD also produces a refereed publication, the *Journal on Postsecondary Education and Disability*.

Disability services professionals serving in colleges and universities have varied educational and career backgrounds, including counseling, social work, education, psychology, rehabilitation, and disability studies. The majority of directors and coordinators of disability resource and service departments have master's degrees, and many have doctorates across these academic disciplines (Kasnitz, 2011).

In the 21st century, colleges and universities are being challenged to provide inclusive education to an expanding population of disabled students (The Higher Education Opportunity Act, 2008). The number of disabled students attending colleges and universities continues to grow (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2009). Special education under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) has resulted in higher enrollment of disabled students at postsecondary institutions than a couple of decades ago (Wagner, Newman, Cameto, Garza, & Levine, 2005). Learning disability is the most prevalent type of disability, both in the PK-12 system and at the postsecondary level (Kasnitz, 2011).

In order to qualify for accommodations in post-secondary settings, students must self-identify as having a disability to disability resources and services or other designated office. Some students who experience disability could benefit from accommodations but, for various reasons, do not self-identify. Students who are wounded warriors or from other countries are examples of those who may not request disability

accommodations. The use of UDI as a pedagogical practice benefits all students, especially those who choose not to disclose disability.

Postsecondary disability services professionals are transitioning from a perspective of strict compliance to a resource-oriented model. This transition is in compliance with ADA regulations, as amended in 2008, and in alignment with emerging models of student development theory and disability philosophy. However, they continue to be aware that other campus departments and staff must provide equal access for disabled students (Colker & Grossman, 2014). Disability resources and services offices vary in size. AHEAD's guideline is that each campus must have appropriate levels of full-time professional staff in these roles; rarely can this be accomplished by just one person.

Challenges for institutions of higher education and disability services professionals and departments are numerous. They include retrofitting and adapting poorly designed services, programs, and offerings where accessibility by all students was not a consideration at inception; adapting to a new and emerging population of disabled students with, such as wounded warriors who do not self-identify as disabled; adapting to the rapidly evolving world of technology, in particular to technology designed for access by persons with disabilities; securing or facilitating use of accessible instructional materials; facilitating equal access in online course management systems; and educating campus personnel regarding the shared institutional responsibilities of creating just, equitable, and usable environments through the elimination of barriers in any and all areas of the academic experience.

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