ADJUNCT INSTRUCTORS' PREPAREDNESS TO SUPPORT STUDENTS WITH

DISABILITIES AND THE DIVERSE LEARNING STYLES OF ALL STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

ADJUNCT INSTRUCTORS' PREPAREDNESS TO SUPPORT STUDENTS WITH

DISABILITIES AND THE DIVERSE LEARNING STYLES OF ALL STUDENTS

William Leonelli

As noted by the National Center for Education Statistics (2020), the enrollment of students with disabilities in the higher education environment continues to grow. As more students with disabilities transition into the postsecondary environment, their diverse learning needs and required supports must be addressed to ensure their postsecondary success. There is a particular need to explore the experiences of adjunct faculty supporting students with disabilities within these classrooms, as this area has been researched infrequently.

In higher education there are regulatory requirements of four separate legislative acts to properly accommodate the supports of students with disabilities and all students with diverse learning styles and needs. This has created a highly complex set of rules and regulations for higher education faculty to navigate.

These facts, coupled with the persistent lack of equitable educational experiences for students with disabilities in higher education raise the importance of this study to a noteworthy level. The adjunct instructors who participated in this phenomenological study had all achieved the educational level of master's degree or higher. Three of the 12 had training and/or experience teaching at the K–12 level, seven of the 12 had personal experience interacting with a person with a disability, and five of the 12 work in one of the helping arts. They were employed as adjunct instructors at different institutions of

higher education, some at multiple institutions. The institutions were both private and public, with a mix of small and large institutions.

In higher education, we hold ourselves to the same standard of other professions; we continually seek out the information needed to keep ourselves at the forefront of our profession, but we can no longer ignore that we may have been neglecting a significant portion of our educational staff: those known as adjunct instructors.

I take comfort that, among the participants in this study, unanimous professionalism was expressed—they all shared the belief that they were hired to teach every student in front of them and providing every single student with an equitable educational experience in their classroom.

DEDICATION

I dedicate my dissertation to the many people who have influenced me throughout my life. My parents, Lorraine and Bill, who always allowed me the space I needed to find my way but who were always there to support me. To my Uncle Carl, my godfather, who always challenged all of us to be our best at whatever we chose to do.

I always taught my children, you cannot quit once you commit to something, so they made it impossible for me to stop even at my most frustrated moments, until it was done. They have always expressed their pride in my accomplishments as I have expressed mine in theirs, but their support now has been an inspiration.

To all of my extended family who have been there to encourage, to listen, and to support me in any way I needed. To my many friends and colleagues, who believed in my ability to accomplish this task, even at those times when I was ready to throw my hands up and walk away.

Of course, none of this would have been possible if I had not had the support of my partner, Sal, who allowed me to put "our" life on auto pilot so I could pursue this dream and realize this goal.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

As noted by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2020), there is a growing enrollment of students with disabilities in the higher education environment. Enrollment of students with disabilities in the 2007–2008 academic year included 10.8% of enrolled undergraduate and 7.6% of enrolled post-baccalaureate students and, by the 2015–2016 academic year, this student group's enrollment increased to 19.4% of undergraduates and 11.9% of post-baccalaureate students. As more students with disabilities transition into the postsecondary environment, their diverse learning needs and required supports must be appropriately addressed to ensure their postsecondary success. However, their transition into the postsecondary environment is governed by different policies and structure than the K–12 environment. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2006) enumerated the rules and regulations which provided students in K–12 with an advocacy structure, including individualized education programs (IEPs) and a team of advocates: education professionals and possibly family members. This diverges from the situation for students in higher education, where the guiding regulations require that students with disabilities register with the school administration and self-disclose when they want to advocate for accommodations.

In their transition to higher education, students are thrust into the position of advocating for their needs themselves, requesting supports from their individual instructors (Basilice, 2015; Cox et al., 2017). Once students with disabilities register at higher education institutions and advocate for the appropriate supports and potential accommodations, instructors are subject to a different set of regulations, as opposed to

one unified code, that serve as a guide for how they must properly support these students. They must follow these regulations in order to provide an equitable educational experience to level the playing field for students. There is no intention to provide an advantage to them but, as stated by Salmi and Bassett (2014), the goal of these regulations is to provide equal opportunities for access and success. In higher education, students with disabilities must register with the disability resource office (DRO) if they intend to formally request supports or accommodations. Instructors at institutions of higher education (IHEs) are required to follow the tenets of various regulations in order to properly support students with disabilities; these regulations include Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Section 504), the Americans With Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA), and the ADA Amendments Act of 2008 (ADAAA).

In addition to students' potential use of accommodations to support their needs within the postsecondary environment, the integration of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) can assist by providing the opportunity for all students to engage and succeed in an accessible and inclusive learning environment (Ohajunwa et al., 2014; Smith et al., 2009). An important set of tools for higher education instructors are those identified under the umbrella of UDL. UDL is a scientifically valid framework for guiding practice, provides flexibility in the ways information is presented, reduces challenges in instruction, and provides appropriate supports for all students' needs (Izzo & Bauer, 2015). Izzo and Bauer (2015) concluded that UDL offers a promising approach to improving the experience and meeting the learning needs of all students by design and inclusion of hardware and software applications where accessibility is a function in the original design rather than a modification after the fact. This approach allows instructors

to abide by the regulations that support the learning of students with disabilities and informally to provide a supportive environment to those students with disabilities who do not choose to disclose their status, as well as anyone else with diverse learning styles. Tzivinikou (2014) explored UDL within the higher education environment, indicating this learning approach better enables students who face both apparent and non-apparent disabilities, as well as any student with a diverse learning style, to learn more effectively. In an early article about UDL, Rose (2000) explained that the roots of UDL are in architecture, where two factors contributed to the birth of Universal Design; the usefulness of these alternatives for the population as a whole and the problems caused by retrofitting. He described UDL as analogous to the stairs into and inside of a building as providing people with access to the building, unless those people needed to use a wheelchair. Smith (2012) further described UDL as an educational framework for a college instructor that can maximize the design and delivery of course instruction which provides for the inclusion of materials using multiple methods.

Leenknecht et al. (2017) examined need-supportive teaching and the configuration of support, structure, and involvement as it relates to higher education instructors. They described need-supportive teaching as a powerful instrument for teachers to encourage students' motivation in order to increase students' achievement.

To best support students' diverse learning needs, instructors within the postsecondary environment can support student success through the implementation of accommodation plans within their classrooms, as well as through integrating UDL strategies for a more inclusive learning environment (Izzo & Bauer, 2015). Based on the current literature, additional exploration is needed to further investigate whether need-

supportive instructors and a conducive learning environment are needed by all students in order to succeed academically. The lack of a proper learning environment coupled with instructors who lack the skillset to create a supportive environment in the classroom creates a particular level of difficulty for students with disabilities.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to explore instructors' overall understanding and level of preparation for providing students with disabilities with an equitable learning experience within the higher education classroom. The research was completed using a qualitative method known as phenomenology, as described by Creswell (2013) and Peoples (2020). The study examined the awareness of instructors, specifically those of adjunct status, of the requirements related to Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the ADA, and the ADAAA to provide disability accommodations and access. The study also attempted to determine if these instructors possess the skill set needed to support students through UDL strategies within their class assignments. Although research has shown how all instructors need to be better aware of supporting the needs of students with disabilities within the postsecondary classroom (Cory, 2011), there is a particular need to exploring the experiences of adjunct faculty supporting students with disabilities within these classrooms, as this area has been researched infrequently. It is vital to explore adjunct professors' awareness of disability policies as well as UDL strategies, as instructors must support the needs of students whether they self-disclose their disability status or not; with UDL, the curriculum itself is flexible and customizable (Rose, 2000).

Questions that needed to be examined were whether the instructors are prepared and conversant enough about the legislation, whether they are aware of the legal obligations to appropriately support and accommodate student needs, and whether they understand the supports needed and know how to modify these supports to fit the core goals of their class while appropriately supporting their students. Additionally, it was necessary to investigate whether adjunct instructors understand the concepts of UDL and whether they are able to create a curriculum that is flexible and can be modified to properly support the needs of all students, regardless of their learning style or need.

Theoretical Framework

This study was guided by the theoretical underpinnings of critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970/2018). Inspired by the concepts of critical theory, critical pedagogy is vital when exploring equitable learning opportunities for student groups within the postsecondary education setting. For the purposes of this discussion, "*equity* is defined as *providing equal opportunities for access and success in tertiary education*" (Salmi & Bassett, 2014, p. 365). Salmi and Bassett (2014) continued by stating that equity refers to treating everyone exactly the same but to leveling the playing field to promote equal opportunity. This means designing and implementing policies to remove systematic differences in postsecondary education opportunities for groups and individuals who differ only based on place of birth, ethnic or cultural origin, gender, or disability status. Salmi and Bassett went on to describe three dimensions of equity: equity of access, equity of results, and equity of outcomes. They also indicated that the main non-mutually exclusive groups to be targeted are individuals from lower-income groups; groups with a

minority status linked to their ethnic, linguistic, religious, cultural, age, or residence characteristics; females; and people with disabilities.

It is important to understand the equity issues that have arisen in higher education because of changes in the demographics of the student population; many oppressed groups face issues unrelated to their intellectual and cognitive abilities as students. Several of the equity issues these groups deal with are described in Paulo Freire's work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970/2018), where he talks about the dehumanization and objectification of a group of people by another group of people: "Dehumanization, which marks not only those whose humanity has been stolen, but also (though in a different way) those who have stolen it, is a distortion of the vocation of becoming more fully human" (Freire, 1970/2018, p. 44).

Freire (1970/2018) described the banking concept of education, explaining that knowledge is a gift that those who are considered knowledgeable bestow upon those who are considered to know nothing. This has the effect of projecting ignorance onto others and can be seen as a characteristic within the ideology of oppression. When teachers present themselves to their students in this manner, they justify their own existence and alienate the students. These attitudes and practices among others demonstrate the oppressive nature of banking education—and when people are oppressed, they are not treated equitably.

Everyone deserves equitable treatment in all aspects of life, whether it be in housing, healthcare, or employment. A key to success in many other areas of life is an equitable educational experience. Whether working with students with disabilities or working with those with diverse learning styles or needs, it is essential that instructors be

equipped to meet the unique needs of all students in their classroom. Specific to this study is the exploration of adjunct professors' understanding of disability policies applicable to the higher education environment and the appropriate use of UDL strategies within the postsecondary classroom. This framework requires constructing a curriculum that is flexible and can be modified to meet the diverse learning styles and needs of all students.

Importance of the Study

The population of students with disabilities and the number of disabilities recognized have expanded. The increases that have been documented by NCES (2020), reflecting growth over an 8-year period in registration of both undergraduate and post-baccalaureate students with disabilities by 8.6% and 4.3%, respectively, contribute to the need for this study. Legislation currently exists to appropriately support students with disabilities to ensure an equitable educational experience. Limited research has examined the preparedness of adjunct instructors to properly support students with disabilities or diverse learning styles in accordance with these regulations. In addition to the foundation of support brought forth by legislation including Section 504, ADA, and ADAAA, it is vital that instructors provide an inclusive and accessible learning environment using the elements recognized as important to UDL. Ultimately, one of the most important elements that needs to be considered is whether postsecondary instructors can create and provide a teaching environment that is equitable and supportive. It is important to review instructors' ability to provide a UDL that will meet the needs of these students who possess a diverse learning style. If students with disabilities do not receive the supports they need in their learning environment, they will abandon their educational journey and

fail to succeed. This can have implications for the retention/persistence and completion for this entire at-risk student group.

In his article, Ouellett (2004) discussed the mounting challenges for higher education institutions, as increasing demands are placed on instructors. Instructors are dealing with larger class sizes, heavier teaching loads, and higher student expectations, coupled with the increasingly diverse student population. A recent change he cited is that the principles of Universal Design have been applied to classroom teaching and learning environments to support equitable access for students with disabilities. Smith (2012) stated that a first step in UDL underscores the importance of developing clear goals that are in line with meaningful and attainable objectives. Additionally, Smith (2012) stated that learners bring varied ways and preferences for how they engage in their learning environment. Fichten et al. (2001) indicated that with the advent of multimedia, web-based delivery of course materials, virtual communities, and learner- rather than teacher-centered approaches have inspired increased interest in improving postsecondary teaching and learning. They also stated that many higher education institutions and faculty are scrambling to acquire the basic skills needed to properly function while dealing with these new realities.

The theme of the study by Angeli (2009) was related to access and equity and the importance of providing for the needs of students with disabilities. Experts who contributed to the study identified a lack of preparation and training of the faculty who work directly with students with disabilities. This was related to a general lack of exposure on the part of faculty and staff to students with disabilities as well as a lack of training in alternative teaching models.

If there is a lack of knowledge and understanding of the regulatory requirements IHEs and instructors must follow, coupled with minimal to no comprehension of UDL, this places students at risk for not meeting their educational goals, further affirming the need for this study. These gaps, which may exist for a portion of the faculty, can also create fiscal challenges for the institutions themselves.

Connection With Social Justice and Vincentian Mission in Education

This study connects to the Vincentian values of the freedom to pursue education and learning. As the professionalism of educators is meant to provide educational opportunities for all, regardless of ability, disability, or learning style status, it is parallel to the Vincentian tradition of looking for causes of poverty and social injustice while providing solutions through education and training. By seeking paths to give students with disabilities and those with diverse learning styles an equitable experience and opportunity in higher education, this study can provide potential opportunities for these students to succeed.

Research Questions

1. What are adjunct professors' overall understandings of institutional policies and required legislation that support the needs of students with disabilities within the postsecondary environment?

    a. How do they respond to student accommodation plan requests within their course assignments?

2. What inclusive and accessible strategies do adjunct professors utilize within their course assignments to support students' diverse learning needs?

a. How do adjunct professors develop skills and strategies for incorporating UDL within their instruction?

Language can have strong effects on the lives of individuals—especially on those in groups that historically have been marginalized and that face ongoing challenges. Professionals and others are sensitive to the stigmas and stereotypes that language can incite. This research report uses the term *students with disabilities*—person-first language. Currently, based on a statement by the Association on Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD) there is discussion that this form of language is less desirable than identity-first language. Indicated in the statement by AHEAD (2021) is the fact that they are adopting identity-first language across all communication, information and materials, they state that it is not a directive or recommendation, but it is one way to model new thinking about disabilities.

Definition of Terms

Americans With Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA):

Is a civil rights law that prohibits discrimination based on disability. It was intended to establish a clear and comprehensive prohibition of discrimination on the basis of disability.

Americans With Disabilities Amendments Act of 2008 (ADAAA):

Is an Act intended to restore the protections originally mandated in the American with Disabilities Act of 1990 to eliminate discrimination against individuals with disabilities.

Association on Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD):

Is an international, multicultural organization of professionals committed to full participation in higher education for persons with disabilities.

Disability Resource Office (DRO):

Is the designated office to assist eligible students with disabilities by determining access needs, and coordinating academic adjustments in accordance with Section 504, ADA, and ADAAA.

Higher Education Institution:

Any institution which provides higher education recognized by the relevant national authority as belonging to the higher education system.

National Center for Education Statistics (NCES):

Is the primary federal entity for collecting and analyzing education data in the United States and other nations.

Professional Development Training:

Refers to the continued training and education of an individual in regard to his or her career.

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Section 504):

Was the first disability civil rights law to be enacted in the United States. It prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities in programs that receive federal financial assistance.

Self-Advocacy:

The action of representing oneself or one's views or interests.

Students With Disabilities:

Is defined as students between the ages of 3 and 22, inclusive, with educational

disabilities as established by federal and state regulations.

CHAPTER 2

Introduction

As noted in Chapter 1, this study explored the preparedness of adjunct instructors to properly support students with disabilities in accordance with the regulatory requirements of Section 504, ADA, and ADAAA. It also examined whether these instructors comprehend and use UDL in order to support the diverse learning styles of different students. As such, Chapter 2 includes the review of related literature pertaining to studies addressing the preparedness of higher education instructors to appropriately support students with disabilities and the regulatory requirements these instructors are mandated to follow. This chapter addresses the value and availability of professional development for faculty and staff and how it may enhance the experience of all students inclusive of students with disabilities. The literature review also examines whether instructors comprehend the appropriate methods, such as UDL, to respond to those needs in an effective manner, and the attitudes and perceptions postsecondary instructors hold with respect to students with disabilities in their quest to achieve their higher educational goals. The literature is inclusive of studies related to the experiences of students with disabilities in higher education. These studies have explored the stigma experienced by students with disabilities and examines the transitions students make from K–12 to postsecondary educational institutions. Exploring the preparatory training instructors receive is important; however, of equal importance is whether that preparation has translated into an appropriate classroom experience for students with disabilities.

The structure and culture of the organization are critical to IHEs as they strive to adhere to regulations. It is important to consider the services available to both students

and instructors and whether the IHE has implemented policies to assist instructors with curriculum development and students with the appropriate methodology to formally establish their need for accommodations. In their article Behling and Linder (2017) discussed a survey conducted on collaboration between two different offices on campus: the Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) and the DRO. This study examined the collaborative relationship between these two offices, in particular as it applies to students with disabilities and accessibility in online learning. The study found that while there is a diverse range of collaborations between these offices, the collaborations were flawed with many challenges. Behling and Linder did find, however, that these offices were offering new faculty orientations, overviews of the needs of students with disabilities, and assistance with one-on-one consultations. An earlier article by Ouellett (2004) discussed the fact faculty members traditionally receive preparation and guidance to support scholarly goals from within their discipline, but at he concluded that at the time of his study, most instructional staff—particularly teaching assistants, instructors, and faculty members—had limited experience in successfully meeting the needs of students with disabilities.

Based on the previously reported statistics with respect to the growth of the population of students with disabilities as reported by the NCES (2020), the percentage of students with disabilities enrolled in postsecondary education has increased in recent years. Those statistics for the 2007–2008 and the 2015–2016 academic years indicated there was an 8.6% increase of enrolled undergraduate and 4.3 % increase of enrolled post-baccalaureate students with disabilities over that period. The increased disclosure status of students with disabilities in the higher education environment has created a need

for educators working in the higher education setting to better prepare and support the needs of this student group. Based on these statistics, it is important to note the need to explore how or if preparation is provided to postsecondary instructors for the proper support of students with disabilities.

These findings of the studies by Behling and Linder (2017) and Ouellett (2004) demonstrate the need for this study to explore the scope of trainings readily available to higher education instructors, particularly those with adjunct status, which will allow them to enhance the skill set required to properly support those students with disabilities but also to develop their ability to support the diverse learning styles and needs of all students.

Theoretical Framework

This dissertation was guided by the framework of equity in education. For the purposes of this discussion, "*equity* is defined as *providing equal opportunities for access and success in tertiary education.* It means that circumstances beyond an individual's control—such as birthplace, gender, ethnicity, religion, language, disability, or parental income – should not influence a person's access" (Salmi & Bassett, 2014). Salmi and Bassett (2014) continued by stating that equity refers not to treating everyone exactly the same but to leveling the playing field to promote equal opportunity. This involves designing and implementing policies to remove systematic differences in postsecondary education opportunities for groups and individuals who differ only based on place of birth, ethnic or cultural origin, gender, or disability status.

Salmi and Bassett (2014) went on to describe three dimensions of equity; equity of access consists of offering equal opportunities to enroll in postsecondary education

programs and institutions, equity of results which relates to the opportunities to advance in the system and complete postsecondary education, and equity of outcomes which refers to the outcomes for various groups in the employment markets. They also indicated that the main non-mutually exclusive groups to be targeted are individuals from lower-income groups, groups with a minority status linked to their ethnic, linguistic, religious, cultural, age or residence characteristics, females, and people with disabilities.

It is important to understand the equity issues that have arisen in higher education due to changes in the demographics of the student population, many oppressed groups face issues unrelated to their intellectual and cognitive abilities as students. Several of the equity issues these groups deal with are described in Paulo Freire's work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970/2018) where he talks about the dehumanization and objectification of a group of people by another group of people.

Freire (1970/2018) continued, because dehumanization is a distortion of being more fully human, eventually being less human leads the oppressed to struggle against those who made them so. In order for this struggle to be more meaningful, the oppressed must not, in striving to regain their humanity in turn become oppressors of the oppressors but rather restorers of the humanity of both. The humanistic and historical task of the oppressed is to liberate themselves and their oppressors as well. The oppressors exploit, and rape by virtue of their power, but cannot find in this power the strength to liberate either the oppressed or themselves. He described the power that arises from the weakness of the oppressed as being the only power strong enough to liberate both.

As described by Freire (1970/2018), banking education maintains attitudes and practices which mirror oppressive society as a whole. Some of these are: the teacher

teaches and the students are taught, the teacher knows everything and the students know nothing, the teacher thinks and the students are thought about, the teacher talks and the students listen – meekly. These attitudes and practices among others demonstrate the oppressive nature of banking education, and when people are oppressed they are not treated equitably.

Everyone is deserving of equitable treatment in all aspects of their lives whether it be in housing, healthcare, or employment but a key to success in many other areas of life is an equitable educational experience. Whether dealing with students with disabilities or those with diverse learning styles or needs, the essential goal is that instructors are equipped to meet the unique needs of all students in their classroom.

In K–12, students tend to be grouped by academic track or into groupings based on common needs of those with a particular disability. This allows instructors to fashion the classroom experience to focus on the common strengths of those in their class and develop supports to accommodate the special needs of the classroom population they are facing. This is not the case in higher education, the students in any given class may share some commonalities or they may all have unique needs, they are there because of the requirements of their educational program or major.

In this study it is paramount to examine whether instructors, particularly those with adjunct status, are properly prepared to provide the supports needed by students with disabilities and those with diverse learning styles or needs. It is also important to explore student experiences to confirm they are receiving the equitable educational experiences the regulations have been promulgated to provide.

Review of Related Literature

In this review of related literature many aspects of the experiences brought to the classroom by postsecondary instructors are explored. This review includes literature on the preparedness of instructors to follow the regulations they are required to abide by, and the value of trainings they may have received. Additionally, the classroom experiences of students with disabilities are explored to determine if they are receiving the supports they need to continue in pursuit of their educational goals. Also examined is whether instructors or classmates have stigmatized students with disabilities.

The Persistence of Inequities in Higher Education

Appropriate support for students with disabilities or those with diverse learning styles is an integral element of an equitable educational experience in higher education. Professionals in the field and members of society who view these supports and accommodations as an unfair advantage rather than the leveling of the playing field, a handout as opposed to the hand up they are, may contribute to the persistence of these issues.

Research that dates back almost 30 years discussed the need to promote equity and participation for all students in postsecondary education. The Further Education Unit (1992) presented the idea that the support needs of people with disabilities or learning difficulties should be placed alongside the needs of other learners. The Further Education Unit suggested that this would be best done by higher education institutions that have identified and met the needs of all learners. It dismissed the conventions of the "norm," rejecting the concepts of the "average" student, who uses an "average" amount of resources and learns from an "average" approach. The Further Education Unit identified

the basic elements of need for all learners and then explained how variants of these needs could be common to many learners, or specific to a few. The broader the basic elements provided, the fewer the number of specific arrangements needed. This is good for students with disabilities as well as for those many other students who learn through diverse learning styles and who at times need additional supports.

In an article by Rose (2000), the subject of inequities in education was still under examination. He explained how stairs into and inside of buildings provided access to many but precluded those in wheelchairs from gaining access. He went on to discuss the retrofitting of buildings with ramps and elevators after the fact as a somewhat cumbersome method to resolve these accessibility issues. Rose explained that retrofitting, while a solution to accessibility problems, were often aesthetically displeasing and exorbitant to complete. Based on the negative aspects of these solutions a new movement in architecture grew, which was branded Universal Design and eventually inspired the development of UDL.

The California Postsecondary Education Commission (2008) studied inequities again, reporting that the Commission's intention was to ensure that all students have equal opportunities in higher education. Commissioners raised the concern that some students' needs were not being met; the groups they specified were lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) students and students with disabilities. The report indicated that evidence shows that many wish for better supports, but it is clear that both of these student groups face barriers to entering and persisting in college.

With respect to students with disabilities the report by the California Postsecondary Education Commission (2008) indicated that many in this group are

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placed in the "other" reporting category, which may make it more difficult to understand their diverse needs. This category can include individuals with disabilities ranging from attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder to mobility issues to cancer. The Commission speculated the supports needed may include good wheelchair access, Braille reading material, note takers, or sign language interpreters. They continued to explain that while campus-wide disabled student programs provide some needed services, they may not address the needs that arise from the disabilities of every student and, in addition, students must self-identify in order to receive services. In addition to the academically related issues for students with disabilities, many of them may face discrimination in social situations, which is another important element of the postsecondary education experience.

Inequity in higher education has been a topic of discussion for at least 30 years. Various researchers and groups of researchers have studied the issues surrounding the inequitable educational experiences of students with diverse learning styles, but these inequities appear to persist to this day.

Higher Education Adjunct Instructor Preparedness

Rules and regulations indicate that students with disabilities have a right to be accommodated in order to succeed in their academic endeavors; the regulations differ for students in K–12 as opposed to students in higher education. The specific legislation regulating the supports provided to students in the K–12 arena is the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 1997), which provides entitlement for a free and appropriate education in the least restrictive environment, but those supports end upon graduation from high school. In order to most effectively assist students with disabilities

in higher education, faculty and staff must be familiar with the following regulations: ADA, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Section 504), the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA, 2006), and ADAAA. They deal with the supports students should be able to expect and the privacy they should be afforded with respect to disclosing or exposing the fact that a student is dealing with a disability. Another complication these multiple regulations create is the fact that there is not one singular set of rules for instructors to follow when dealing with how to provide supports to students with disabilities.

Baker et al. (2012) stated college and university settings are the primary ways for students to gain access to knowledge, and faculty are directly responsible for understanding this student population. The area of sensitive and supportive environments needs to be further explored as the academic progress of students with disabilities is significantly affected by the attitudes of faculty and their willingness to provide accommodations.

As presented by Patton et al. (2016), ADA requires higher education institutions to align legally with other educational programs in creating access and accommodations for students with disabilities. According to ADA (1990),

> The term 'disability' means, with respect to an individual as—(A) a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities of such individual; (B) a record of such an impairment; or (C) being regarded as having such an impairment.

Familiarity with the regulatory requirements IHEs must adhere to is an indicator the instructor is better equipped to properly support students with disabilities.

Regulatory Requirements for Appropriate Supports in Postsecondary Education

To explore faculty knowledge and attitudes, regarding students with disabilities, Basilice (2015) assessed the influence of faculty knowledge, faculty attitudes, faculty ability to assist, faculty reactions and responses towards student self-advocacy, and faculty collaboration with the DRO regarding students with disabilities. The differences between the laws protecting the students with disabilities populations in the K–12 system and in the higher education system were examined, and the dissimilarities are noteworthy. The disparities in the type and amount of academic support and modifications have created a dilemma not only for the students with disabilities population, but also for the higher education faculty. Basilice also examined the differences of information available to faculty in the K–12 and higher education systems with respect to students with disabilities, and noted that in higher education the faculty perform in a vacuum unless the student chooses to self-disclose.

In this environment, instructors or other faculty members only know private information about students when students have chosen to share that information with them. Students can choose to disclose or not disclose their disability, but they are put in the position of stepping into an unfamiliar role of self-advocacy. No one is aware of the details of the student's disability unless the student opts to provide those details.

In a study conducted by Baker et al. (2012), findings indicated that a positive classroom environment is essential to the success of students with disabilities in higher education. They conducted a study of students and faculty members at a small liberal arts women's college in eastern Pennsylvania. Participants responded to statements about students with disabilities. The increasing numbers of students with disabilities in higher

education are attributed to the implementation of federal legislation and factors such as a demand for a better educated workforce and improved overall conditions to accommodate students (Hergenrather & Rhodes, 2007; Kiuhara & Huefner, 2008). Faculty and students are challenged to provide an atmosphere that is supportive and encourages academic success; however, there is still some concern that faculty may hold preconceived stereotypes that can be a barrier to a student's success.

Consistently, research has demonstrated that faculty members are willing to provide teaching accommodations such as permission to record lectures, extended time for projects and assignments and extended test time (Houck et al., 1992; Mathews et al., 1987; Vogel et al., 1999). However, these authors also have indicated that faculty members are less willing to provide classroom accommodations, such as copies of lecture notes, alternative assignments, and extra credit, and are unwilling to make exceptions for poor spelling and grammar on exams or provide an alternate form of an exam.

The classroom climate is further compromised for students with disabilities when the obstacles they face in the accommodations process is the result of a lack of faculty knowledge regarding disability law. In a study by Dowrick et al. (2005), the authors noted that students were experiencing difficulty in securing basic accommodations, such as room changes for students who use wheelchairs and appropriate text formats for students with low vision, as a correlate to low faculty knowledge about legal requirements for disability supports. In fact, Hartman-Hall and Haaga (2002) noted these resultant negative interactions were a reason why many students were unwilling to disclose and pursue support while the positive reactions of some faculty prompted students to seek out resources. Further, peer reactions/interactions had no effect on

student decision-making as it relates to accessing additional disability supports. Based on these conclusions, the authors indicated that student/faculty interactions are a significant factor in both the students' decisions to seek additional support and the climate in the classroom for students with disabilities.

The Value and Availability of Trainings Offered to Faculty for Support of Students With Disabilities

An important element to be considered is whether staff development is available to all members of faculty. Significant factors are whether the trainings available include information about the regulations that guide higher education, information about UDL, and whether they are readily available to adjunct faculty as well as full-time teaching staff.

In her article, Parker (2001) described a small survey of staff developers completed in the United Kingdom higher education sector to explore the awareness and knowledge of disability access in higher education. It was conducted with those responsible for mainstream or non-specialist staff development, and the intent was to prompt awareness of issues affecting curricular access and inclusion for students with disabilities. Based on another section of the survey, Parker discussed various topics of staff development, such as assessment, role play, audiovisual aids, resource-based learning, information technology, and computers. About 50% of the participants indicated that less than half of the trainings in 10 areas salient to educating students with disabilities included a reference to disabilities as part of the training.

Lechtenberger et al. (2012) examined the use of wraparound to support students with developmental disabilities in higher education. The article stated that the most

common barrier students with disabilities found in higher education was the lack of understanding and cooperation from faculty and administrators. It described wraparound as reminiscent of a non-traditional individual education plan, but this is conducted by a team of individuals such as educators, mental health professionals, and other community members chosen by the identified student to be served. In the article, Lechtenberger et al. indicated, as part of the case study they discussed, that it was disclosed that a faculty member had been trained in wraparound in order to properly implement the wraparound process. It was indicated that the lack of understanding by faculty and administrators can be tempered by the use of a wraparound framework. A major conclusion was that the use of wraparound as an important development tool for the success of students with disabilities in higher education is successful enough to prompt a study of the process and indicates the need to train educators to properly implement the process.

Leenknecht et al. (2017) examined need-supportive teaching and the configuration of support, structure, and involvement as it relates to higher education instructors. The expectation is that teachers play an important role in motivating students; they do so by providing and demonstrating support, structure, and involvement. The study intended to investigate the role of need-supportive teaching with a person-oriented approach in a higher education setting. The study was completed in the frame of the self-determination theory to understand how the behavior of teachers function as nutriments or threats for students' motivation and achievement. The results of the study discussed a correlation between the dimensions of need-supportive teaching, motivation, and the grade point average (GPA) of students. Results provided insight into how teachers in higher education can promote students' motivation and achievements.

Basilice (2015) examined the availability of specific trainings instructors had at their disposal to draw upon when asked to provide any type of accommodation for a student who requests something of them. The researcher went on to consider the perspective of the instructors and how they felt about the supports that were or were not in place to assist them to appropriately accommodate students with disabilities. Basilice disclosed that the institution where her study was conducted did not mandate or encourage staff to seek out professional development related to supports for students with disabilities.

Basilice (2015) provided another perspective on faculty preparation for dealing with the required accommodations needed by students with disabilities. It touched on the lack of faculty experience and training but also addressed the willingness of faculty to provide the appropriate classroom climate for students with disabilities in order for them to succeed.

In Angeli's (2009) study for the California Postsecondary Education Commission, the theme was related to access and equity and meeting the needs of students with disabilities. In addition to covering the need for increased access to instructional materials in alternative formats and the development of campus climates that are responsive to students with disabilities, a portion of the report was devoted to a discussion about faculty and staff development.

Experts who contributed to the report by Angeli (2009) identified a lack of preparation and training of faculty who work with students with disabilities. Additionally, the lack of diversity in the campus culture was viewed as a major impediment to the staff seeking out and taking these trainings. If campus culture is supportive of diversity, this

would encourage faculty and staff to become advocates for students with disabilities. If professional development were available, it could provide faculty with the tools to incorporate alternative instructional methods and alternative technology into their curriculum.

Additional recommendations in the Angeli (2009) study are to provide ongoing trainings to faculty in order to help them better understand the use of multiple teaching models, the needs of students with disabilities, and current and emerging instructional technology. Finally, the study indicated there is a need to promote emerging strategies to minimize physical barriers and learning barriers and to ensure that knowledge is accessible to everyone.

The purpose of a study by Barnhill et al. (2011) was to survey teacher educators at colleges and universities to (a) determine the prevalence of programs training teachers in this area; (b) identify the nature of the autism-specific coursework and programs currently being offered (e.g., the motivation for developing these courses, the number of such courses offered); and (c) ascertain the topics included in the ASD coursework and the depth in which these topics are addressed.

In the Barnhill et al. (2011) study they discussed personnel development with respect to higher education instructors and students with ASD. The dramatic increase in the prevalence rates of ASD, combined with special education teacher shortages and the increasing number of ineffective interventions, point to a critical need to examine the nature and type of personnel preparation for educators working with individuals with ASD.

There appears to be a significant shortage of programs available to train instructors on the best practices for working with students on the autism spectrum. Barnhill et al. (2011) administered a survey to 184 IHEs who identified as offering a program to provide personnel preparation training in autism and received completed surveys from 87 of these institutions, or a 47% response rate, and found the following. All but two of the 87 schools offered degrees in special education, most frequently at the graduate level. Thirty-six of the 87 IHEs (41%) indicate that they did not offer ASD-specific coursework.

The results of the study by Barnhill et al. (2011) confirmed the lack of training available to instructors when dealing with their students who have a disability. The current study attempts to fill a gap in the literature about teaching students with disabilities. This study examined another important gap that exists, which is the lack of professional development programs to properly train higher education instructors in order to equip them to properly accommodate students with disabilities.

In a study by Cox et al. (2017), it was stated that it is not possible, without performing a survey of educators, to gain knowledge about the specialized training staff may have received to properly implement the accommodations needed by students on the autism spectrum. Their familiarity with working with students with disabilities or their perceptions of these students may have an impact on the performance of these students. The policies of the schools indicate that accommodations are available, but is the classroom experience of students with disabilities consistent with these policies? As stated by Cox et al., there is a reasonable expectation for individuals with ASD to complete high school and continue into postsecondary education and attain success.

Additionally, Cox et al. stated that unfortunately, college educators are likely ill-prepared to provide appropriate support for these students. This article provided the students' perspective, which is valuable to consider when contemplating what needs to be done to properly accommodate these students and set them on a path to success.

The lack of sufficient resources for faculty to improve and hone their skill set related to creating a successful classroom atmosphere for students with disabilities and/or diverse learning styles brings forth a noteworthy gap related to the development resources for faculty.

Faculty Attitudes Toward Students With Disabilities

There appears to be a dichotomy of opinions of faculty perceptions of students with disabilities. In their study, Baker et al. (2012) did find prior research that indicated many faculty members demonstrated a positive attitude toward students with disabilities, but a study by Minner and Prater (1984), which Baker et al. included, reported that faculty viewed students with disabilities unfavorably when compared with students without disabilities. They also noted that in many studies, faculty behaviors were discussed that could contribute to the compromise of the classroom climate for students with disabilities.

In her study, Basilice (2015) included replies from one participant who referred in multiple responses to the possible use of alcohol or drugs by students who requested supports in his or her classroom. Basically, the instructor indicated their attitude was perhaps the students actually had motivational or drug and alcohol issues, and that they were possibly masking under the rhetoric of being learning disabled. In another response,

they indicated that having a learning disability did not mean that the student did not also have a drug or alcohol problem or family stress issues that was affecting their behavior.

These diverging attitudes of instructors may contribute to the negative experiences of students with disabilities as related to stigma, smooth transition to the higher education environment, and their ability to appropriately develop a healthy identity as a person dealing with the challenges presented when they are identified as having a disability.

Higher Education Experiences of Students With Disabilities

The data discussed here are related to students with disabilities, their perceptions of the classroom experience, and how they view the transition from K–12 to higher education. This section will examine what their expectations may have been and whether their actual experiences met, exceeded, or fell short of those expectations.

Stigma Experienced by Students With Disabilities. Previous studies have explored the various forms of stigma experienced by students with disabilities. Ehlinger and Ropers (2020) discussed in their literature review the fact that students with disabilities are often placed in the position of having to navigate stigma related to their disability. Baker et al. (2012) also discussed that there are different perceptions about the stigma experienced by students with disabilities by both instructors and other students. These stigmas affect students in varying ways and may discourage them from requesting the accommodations they need and are entitled to receive.

In their narrative study, Ehlinger and Ropers (2020) focused on the classroom experiences of 13 college students, as relates to what facilitated their learning and what created barriers for these students. They acknowledged the empowerment and

involvement of people with disabilities in the pursuit of equitable access, but they also considered the systemic oppression experienced by this group of people. In this qualitative study the authors explored the facilitators of and barriers to learning encountered by students with disabilities. They treated the students with disabilities as the experts with respect to their experiences in the classroom, and they highlighted their knowledge and insight on how to make postsecondary classrooms more accessible, inclusive, and socially just.

Ehlinger and Ropers (2020) reported the following as facilitators: instructor messaging and communication that expressed openness and concern for students' well-being and learning, instructors demonstrating care for the students' well-being by reaching out, sharing resources, and encouragement-facilitated learning. Instructors who talked about resources and disability positively affected participants' comfort when sharing information about their access and accommodation needs. Another characteristic that was viewed positively was community in the classroom from the perspectives of both the positive attitude of the instructor, inclusive of learning everyone's name, as well as getting to know other students, which made the participants feel more acclimated to the environment and helped them to share more during the learning process. The students also indicated that instructors who taught from the discussion space, were open to students' ideas and comments, did not view themselves as the sole teacher, and offered students the opportunity to facilitate class sessions added to the sense of community in the classroom. Peer learning and discussion also appeared vital to the classroom community. The third element that Ehlinger and Ropers found as a facilitator to learning

was with those instructors who validated the students' identity and brought diverse perspectives to the classroom, especially for students with marginalized identities.

When Ehlinger and Ropers (2020) asked participants to discuss barriers to learning, the instructor role was one of the most prominent themes discussed. Just as participants believed instructors could affect a positive influence over learning, virtually all discussed occurrences where the instructor was a barrier to their ability to thrive in a course. Underlying themes included messaging students received about their capacity to succeed or having limited communication and guidance from their instructor. This messaging could convey expectations of failure or struggle and made them question their ability. There were instances where instructors put limitations on the ways students could communicate with them, and some instructors caused the students to feel dissuaded from using their accommodations, while other instructors did not understand the university policy regarding accommodations. Another barrier many participants discussed was classroom dynamics, which is closely related to the theme of classroom community. Many participants talked about their hesitancy to participate, ask questions, or engage in class when there was little or no sense of community or the class did not represent a diverse perspective. They discussed some instances where the instructors seemed not to care whether students engaged in discussion. The final group of barriers discussed were those of oppression, ableism, and stigma. Participants with marginalized or underrepresented identities experienced oppression the most, often resulting from instances of stereotyping, tokenism, and bias in the classroom.

The results of a study by Baker et al. (2012) indicate that faculty and students have different perceptions of the classroom climate for students with disabilities. Two

comparisons were completed using the data collected: the first was between faculty and all students, while the second was between faculty and students with disabilities, and students without disabilities. The results reported from the comparison between faculty and all students showed that more than half of faculty members viewed the climate as positive for students with disabilities compared to the perception of students, of whom 30.6% viewed the climate as positive.

Baker et al. (2012) reported interesting results with respect to beliefs about students with disabilities: 67.3% of faculty and 41.6% of students agreed with the statement that "all students with disabilities receive accommodations to meet their needs in the classroom." Faculty and students reported that they know which students in their classes have disabilities at 59% and 23.4% respectively, yet 7.3% of faculty and 10.7% of students felt it is obvious to others if a student has a disability. Similar statistics were reported for both faculty (10.8%) and students (12.3%) who felt that students with disabilities are treated differently by classmates. Likewise, faculty (18.3%) and students (12.3%) expressed that students with disabilities are treated differently by faculty. Far more faculty who participated in this study (25%) than students (4.5%) thought that students with disabilities have learning problems, but the statistics for both groups, faculty (25%) and students (25.2%), were very similar with respect to how carefully they chose their words if students with disabilities were in their presence.

Baker et al. (2012) reported relatively positive statistics with respect to the views of faculty (73.6%) and students (86.8%) when it related to the fact that students with disabilities are just as capable as students without disabilities of meeting the demands of their academic program or major. Similarly, faculty (67%) and students (75.5%)

indicated they felt students with disabilities are as capable as students without disabilities at meeting the requirements of a job in their respective fields. Overall, the statistical results reported in this study reflected a somewhat positive view with respect to the experiences of students with disabilities as far as both faculty and students were concerned, but it is important to consider that the students with disabilities who self-identified for this study indicated that they do not self-identify to fellow classmates (74.5%), and about 61% do not self-identify to their professors.

A study by Borland and James (1999) summarized the results of an investigation about the social and learning experiences of students with disabilities in a university in the United Kingdom. There has been a long-standing debate over mainstreaming within the primary school system, whereas higher education has remained unaffected by any specific requirements to provide higher education for people with disabilities. In the United Kingdom, funding councils develop and control the funding for higher education. In the mid-1990s the Higher Education Funding Council for England and the Welsh Funding Council stated that they were making funds available to support developments for students with disabilities. The researchers indicated that at about this time the Councils created a requirement for disability statements to inform students of the services available to them, which are seen as an extension of the structure of public accountability established in British higher education in the 1990s.

In their study, Borland and James (1999) indicated these principles established a framework against which it is possible to measure the educational experiences of students in British IHEs. They examined the experiences of a group of students with physical disabilities and assessed those experiences within five specific areas: levels of student

support and guidance, learning resources, teaching/learning and assessment, curriculum design, and quality assurance in each IHE. Although the councils did not adopt these criteria to evaluate the educational experiences of students with disabilities, the researchers felt they were a useful place to begin a comparison of the experiences of students with disabilities and students without disabilities. They did recognize that these five criteria have a number of deficiencies with respect to the measurement of the experiences of students with disabilities: they are not "tuned" to take into account the impact of key aspects of disabilities and they do not address the areas of finance, housing, transportation, personal care, peer support, and the use of aids and adaptations.

Borland and James (1999) conducted their research at a British university with an overall student population of almost 7,000 that included a mix of 85% from the British Isles and 15% from overseas. The university was judged as being in the "first division" as a result of a teaching assessment evaluation and is regarded as having exceptional teaching quality. The senior administrative staff of this university has specific responsibilities for services to students with disabilities, and the school has close links with organizations associated with people with disabilities. Further, the university has committees which develop, coordinate, and monitor student provision. In addition to offering a full range of services for all students, the school has particular strengths in its ability to support students with communication impairments.

Borland and James (1999) indicated that in the mid-1990s, the school reported 4.8% of their undergraduate population as having disabilities, as compared to 3.9 to 4.5% of the undergraduate population in the United Kingdom as a whole. There were 97 with unseen disabilities such as diabetes, asthma, or epilepsy, 72 were dyslexic, 22 had some

form of physical disabilities/sensory impairment, and the rest were classified as having one or more unspecified disabilities. The study was largely directed by the Students with Disabilities Group and the University's Disabilities Working Party. It was funded by the university and sanctioned as part of its quality assurance process and was completed between October 1996 and March 1997. The students were asked about their experience at the university in relationship to the councils' criteria, the wider issues of concern for students with disabilities, and the changes that had taken place in their lives since they began their higher education. They examined the support and guidance that was offered in three different elements of the student experience at the University: admissions, the tutorial system, and other sources of academic and social support.

The university where Borland and James (1999) conducted their study claimed that there is a uniform system of entry for all students, but students themselves indicated that this is not the case. Most departments made admissions decisions based on academic grounds, and a few made an initial assessment of acceptance; however, the final decision to admit is only finally determined after an applicant with a disability has visited the campus and has been assessed. The personal tutor system is the mainstay of student support, involving the appointment of an academic staff member to provide advisement and to advocate for the student if needed. Additional supports in place are the Chaplain Service and College Counselors, and some supports were provided by the Students Union from the Research and Welfare Officer and the Students with Disabilities Group—and then, of course, there were supports given by family, friends, and fellow students.

The conclusions reached by Borland and James (1999) indicate that there were four areas of most concern based on their research: disclosure, access, quality assurance,

and the moral basis of the institution's "disabilities policy." What is meant by *disclosure* is the opportunity for students to inform the school of the accommodations they need related to their disability. A new initiative in the mid-1990s was for students to have the opportunity to disclose on their application, as a way of legitimizing the existence of disabilities in the student population. Good quality *access* refers to a rigorous use of the system, and it is regarded as a more straightforward area to deal with—but at times, there are still issues. For instance, it may be easy to convince instructors to record their lectures, but the system fails if those instructors forget to use the microphone. With respect to the school's quality assurance practices the issue was not with the academics but with the fact that these practices do not include any review of whether students with disabilities are being appropriately accommodated. The final area of concern the researchers discussed was whether the underlying moral and ideological values the school used to guide their policy making with respect to accommodations for students with disabilities was adequate to properly assist these students in their educational endeavors.

The stigma that students with disabilities may experience in higher education could be found to have an impact on these students' ability to succeed. This could also contribute to the level of difficulty they experience if their instructor does not comprehend the regulatory requirements IHEs must adhere to in order to properly support students with disabilities.

The Transition of Students With Disabilities to Postsecondary Education.
Another element of the students' educational journey that is important to consider is the transition students with disabilities experience when they move from secondary to

postsecondary school. They move from a highly structured environment with many supports, including a team of individuals who can advocate for them and provide personal support. Once they are in an IHE, they must take the appropriate steps to request the supports they need.

As discussed by Van Hees et al. (2018), another area that must be considered as students affected by disabilities approach the end of their high school career and begin considering higher education is how they and their parents will deal with the transition to an IHE. A group of 34 high school senior and first-year college students with ASD participated in a 2018 study which examined how the students and their parents navigated the higher education transition, and what impact this had on the dynamics in the parent-child relationships. The study was performed using interview questions to determine the perspective of the students and of their mothers and fathers about the students' ability to develop the identities they would need to succeed in higher education. The interviews were structured to deal with developmental milestones related to the development of elements of their social identities. Overall, although the students expressed some reservations about moving forward, they were clearly determined to move forward despite their fears. The responses of the parents were mixed (Van Hees et al., 2018).

Hewitt (2015) stated that in general, in comparison to decades ago, more people are now identified as having disabilities; therefore, more students attending our schools from K–12 and on into higher education have disabilities, and instructors must be better prepared to work with them more appropriately. Hewitt pointed out that "Transition planning for post-high school is mandated for students with disabilities by the age of 16 years, so there is an opportunity for targeted assessments in high school" (p. 313). If

similar planning meetings were held in higher education settings, it would ensure that students with disabilities were being supported in their higher education experience, which may result in these students being more successful in postsecondary education. Many higher education professionals have recognized and acknowledged the need for these advanced supports and interventions to further the success of students with disabilities.

In her study, Hewitt (2015) reported that individuals with diagnoses of attention-deficit disorder or attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder are at risk of having difficulties with self-management, organizing, and study skills. For those who had established effective relationships and interventions with a counselor, the distance between the counselor and student may cause that relationship to become ineffective once the student leaves for college. It is important to understand the need for a thorough case history about educational, psychological, and medical history as a cornerstone of effective planning for supports that are individualized and meaningful. The gathering of as much information as possible with respect to the student's psychosocial history, their personal interests, family background, and wider network of supports and experiences will be relevant to understand what strengths and challenges the student brings to their college experience.

Hewitt (2015) described specific types of goals and desires the student has for their educational experience as important to the student's success in college. These factors included their educational and career goals; motivation to attend college; concerns about previous educational and social experiences; hobbies and interests; a description of their current support network and how they will access that network while in college; previous experience with independence and living on their own and their experience with

self-advocacy; previous experiences and views of self-disclosure of their diagnosis to educators, support staff, and/or peers; and anything the student believes is important to share.

An aspect of the experiences of students with disabilities that Borland and James (1999) did not evaluate is the impact of the transition to higher education on the personal and social identities of the students with disabilities. They noted that data are collected on a subject/departmental basis, which creates fragmentation of the data related to these students in any one institution and marginalizes the specific perspective on disabilities issues which these students bring to the assessments. The focus of their study was to include the wider experience of students with disabilities while including the criteria of the Higher Education Funding Council for England and Wales criteria for determining excellence as the framework for the research. The experiences of students with disabilities have been addressed as a group within the school as a whole, rather than as a small part of a larger departmental group.

Cox et al. (2017) examined a large and fast-growing population of individuals with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). These students are completing high school with expectations of continuing to postsecondary education. College educators are likely ill-prepared to provide appropriate support for these students. The body of literature on individuals with ASD in postsecondary education is discouraging. Critical holes in the empirical literature presently make it difficult to develop large-scale, evidence-based interventions for college students with ASD.

The study by Cox et al. (2017) began to fill in these knowledge gaps by (a) defining salient issues affecting college success for individuals with autism and (b)

describing institutional initiatives with potential to promote college success for students with autism. The primary research questions for this study were: (a) How do students with autism make sense of their experiences with higher education? and (b) How do these students respond to potential barriers to postsecondary success?

Cox et al. (2017) outlined four strands of literature as the proper context for the study. First, the authors drew heavily from the medical and psychological literature to provide a brief overview of ASD. Next, they described the growing population of students with autism, they then summarized the major challenges facing college students with autism and highlighted several institutional initiatives designed to support these students. Finally, they offered a critical assessment of the available literature by noting the relative infrequency with which that literature has included the actual voices of college students with autism.

In Astin's (1991) study, as cited by Cox et al. (2017), the population of interest consisted of individuals who had been formally diagnosed with ASD. They fell into four specific categories: (a) nonstarters, participants who had not yet attempted college; (b) current students, participants who were currently enrolled in college; (c) departers, participants who had attended a postsecondary institution but left before completing their degree; and (d) completers, participants who had completed college and earned a postsecondary credential. A total of nine individuals agreed to participate in the study.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted at locations familiar to each of the study participants. Interviews centered upon student inputs, experiences, and outcomes in higher education (Astin, 1991, as cited in Cox et al., 2017). At the outset of each interview, participants reviewed an outline of the interview questions, which served as a

guidepost to which the researcher could return when the discussion strayed off topic. Participants were asked to describe their fears about going to college; their decisions about whether to disclose their diagnosis of ASD; and their development of academic, social, and independent-living skills. The interviews, all conducted in person and one on one in surroundings familiar to the participants, lasted between 50 and 90 minutes each, with occasional breaks therein as requested by participants.

The findings of the Cox et al.'s (2017) study were clustered around two topics. The first, pragmatic disclosure, reflects students' practical approach to whether or not to disclose their autism diagnosis to others. Academically, students typically revealed their diagnoses only as needed to acquire formal accommodations from the postsecondary institution. With peers, most interviewees waited until circumstances or another person's actions brought the issue to the surface. The second topic is related to identity development, which describes the subtle tension between students' inward self-acceptance and outward presentation of self, regarding the manner in which autism fit in to their own sense of identity. The decisions to publicly disclose their status or to seek formal accommodations, therefore, were the outward manifestations of an internal identity development process that was ongoing for each student.

The purpose of the study by Troccoli (2017) was to explore the attitudes toward requesting accommodations and academic well-being of college students with disabilities. The research questions the study contemplated are: Is there a difference in the attitudes of students who avail themselves and those who do not avail themselves of accommodations? and Is there a difference in the academic well-being of students who avail themselves and those who do not avail themselves of accommodations?

In the review of literature, Troccoli (2017) stated that a topic that is often discussed in research done on students with disabilities, at the college level, is the conflict between access and success. The laws put in place do make sure that students with disabilities have equal opportunity to be accepted into a program, but there are many things they do not regulate. The laws say that colleges must have accommodations available for students, but this does not specify the quality, types, or a specific standard for professors for accommodations. Because students with disabilities were previously given accommodations in high school, they may a lack preparedness to deal with a higher level of education without their accommodations; therefore, it is important that they advocate to receive the necessary accommodations to be successful in college. The author stated that on average about 9% of the college student population reports having a disability, but it is estimated that less than half of that population avails themselves of the accommodations they are due. This situation may exist because in K–12, accommodations are provided based on the students' individual education plans, but in higher education they must seek out and apply for the accommodations themselves.

Troccoli (2017) completed a study at a medium-sized public university in New Jersey to examine attitudes and well-being of students with disabilities as related to whether or not they are availing themselves of accommodations offered at an IHE. The sample was comprised of 92 students at the university where the study was conducted. At this school 1,100 students were enrolled with the disability services office, but only 800 of those students were receiving accommodations. The study referred to a statement that the attitude and perception of accommodations offered to students with disabilities affect whether many of these students avail themselves of these services.

The survey for the Troccoli (2017) study was administered online and collected demographic information about the students which included gender, ethnicity, years in higher education experience, and whether the students participating had a disability. No information collected that would allow the researcher to individually identify any of the participants.

After Troccoli (2017) collected the data, they were entered into SPSS, where there were a number of tests performed to determine the mean, standard deviation, range, skewness, and kurtosis; in addition, a nonparametric Mann-Whitney U was calculated. The primary variables compared were the attitudes toward accommodations, GPA, and well-being of students with disabilities. The study concluded that students availing themselves of accommodations were more academically satisfied than those who were not requesting these supports. Based on these results, the author concluded that there is a significant difference between students receiving accommodations and those who do not. This study added to the literature the dimension of the need to encourage students to take advantage of the accommodations for which they are eligible, as they are recognized as vital to the students' success and completion.

Movement or graduation from one school or educational level to another may present issues related to a smooth transition for any student. When considering the difficulties of dealing with a disability, there is an added layer of complication. The literature has not adequately addressed how IHEs may most effectively empower students with disabilities to seek and receive the supports they need to succeed in this phase of their education.

Universal Design for Learning

The UDL is a methodology of design used to develop a curriculum in a fashion that makes the course structure flexible in order to easily modify a class to fit the needs of students with diverse learning styles. UDL is defined in an article by Izzo and Bauer (2015) as a scientifically valid framework for guiding educational practice. It provides flexibility in the ways information is presented and reduces the challenges in instruction in order for all students to maintain high achievement expectations. The flexibility pertains to the ways students respond or demonstrate knowledge and skills and to the way they are engaged and challenges are reduced by providing appropriate accommodations and supports. This definition of UDL was formalized in the reauthorization of the Higher Education Opportunities Act of 2008; this inclusion in the law demonstrates its escalating importance in higher educational classrooms.

There has been an attempt, using Universal Design for Instruction (UID), to implement UDL in classrooms. As discussed by Tzivinikou (2014), the principles of UID are designed to support academic staff in their creation of accessible classrooms, developing inclusive and flexible curricula. The article presents findings from a study aimed at detecting the students' obstacles related to accessing information related to their studies and making the necessary modifications by implementing UDL. This was done in order to meet the needs of all students and assist them as they seek to overcome these obstacles.

Rose (2000) discussed Universal Design, which began as a movement in architecture and was the root of the development of UDL. He described UDL as analogous to the stairs into and inside of a building as providing people with access to the

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building unless those people needed to use a wheelchair. The Center for Applied Special

Technology (CAST) began to understand and view certain educational materials as

similar in nature to stairs. Books provide access to vast stores of knowledge, but for

learners with physical, sensory, and cognitive disabilities, among others, they become

barriers.

Smith (2012) further described UDL as an educational framework for a college

instructor that can maximize the design and delivery of course instruction, providing for

the inclusion of materials using multiple methods. It allows an instructor multiple ways to

motivate students and engage them in learning, while instructors also anticipate learner

variability. Using multiple formats, varied instructional methods, and the flexible features

of digital technologies, this design can enhance learning for all students. In effect, this

study viewed UDL in a broader sense; it has been deemed as a method to support anyone

with diverse learning needs, whether or not the student involved discloses or even has a

disability.

This review of existing literature reflects a gap that exists with respect to the

current state of higher education. IHEs are employing larger numbers of adjunct

instructors as compared to full-time faculty than they have in the past. Additionally,

many studies have analyzed data about the preparedness of faculty to appropriately

support students with disabilities and other students with diverse learning styles.

However, this review uncovered no studies that examined just the preparedness of

adjunct instructors to appropriately support students with disabilities or to support

students with diverse learning styles.

Conclusion

This literature review has discussed the issues acknowledged for many years as related to the accommodations needed by students with disabilities in higher education. Also noted is the increasing population of students with disabilities attending school at the postsecondary level in recent years, as well as the growth of adjunct instructors among the faculty at IHEs. One situation related to these issues that has not been researched individually is the preparedness of adjunct instructors to properly support students with disabilities and others with diverse learning styles. Based on the growth of the population of students with disabilities and the increasingly high proportion of adjunct instructors in the higher education arena, these circumstances may continue to be problematic to students with disabilities as they strive to be successful in their postsecondary education. That fact makes this an important study to complete to potentially improve the opportunities for all students with diverse learning styles and those who require special support to achieve their goals.

CHAPTER 3

Introduction

This study was completed by qualitatively exploring adjunct instructors'

understanding and application of disability policies and UDL approaches within the

postsecondary classroom. The study was completed using the qualitative

phenomenological research method. The participants in the study were a group of adjunct

instructors recruited by a purposeful sampling method using social media. The data

collected are related to the preparedness of the participants to appropriately support

students with disabilities and students with diverse learning styles.

Research Questions

This research is focused on the issues as enumerated in the questions below.

1. What are adjunct professors' overall understandings of institutional policies and

   required legislation that support the needs of students with disabilities within the

   postsecondary environment?

   a. How do they respond to student accommodation plan requests within their

      course assignments?

2. What inclusive and accessible strategies do adjunct professors utilize within their

   course assignments to support students' diverse learning needs?

   a. How do adjunct professors develop skills and strategies for incorporating

      UDL within their instruction?

Research Design, Data Sources, and Connection to Theoretical Framework

Various designs are available to use when completing qualitative research.

Creswell (2013) identified five broad methods: narrative research, phenomenology,

grounded theory, ethnography, and case study. In the following subsections the chosen

design and data sources will be discussed, and then a connection to the theoretical

framework will be drawn to demonstrate the appropriateness of these choices.

Research Design

As described by Creswell (2013), phenomenological research is a methodology, a

type of design in qualitative research. He stated that this method of research describes a

group of individuals' lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon. Phenomenologists

are focused on describing what the participants have in common as they experience a

phenomenon. Creswell went on to describe that the basic purpose of phenomenology is to

reduce individual experiences with a phenomenon to a description of the universal

essence. The specific approach used to complete this study is hermeneutical

phenomenology described by van Manen (1990, as cited by Creswell, 2013), which

allows for research oriented toward lived experience and interpreting the "texts" of life.

The data can be collected using various methods, including observations, journals,

interviews, audio- or video-recorded conversations, and formally written responses. The

characteristics of a phenomenological study as described by Creswell are:

- Focus—understanding the essence of the experience

- Type of problem best suited for design—needing to describe the essence of a
  lived phenomenon

- Discipline background—drawing from philosophy, psychology, and education

- Unit of analysis—studying several individuals who have shared the experience

- Data collection forms—using primarily interviews with individuals, although
  documents, observations, and art may also be considered

- Data analysis strategies—analyzing data for significant statements, meaning units, textual and structural description, and description of the "essence"

- Written report—describing the "essence" of the experience.

The final characteristic described is the general structure of study—introduction (problem, questions), research procedures (a phenomenology and philosophical assumptions, data collection, analysis, and outcomes), significant statements, meanings of statements, themes of meanings, and exhaustive description of phenomenon.

Peoples (2020) discussed various phenomenological designs—transcendental, hermeneutic, and existential phenomenology, among others—which rely on the philosophical traditions of various philosophers. The design used for this study was a reflective lifeworld approach which is characterized by understanding people through a holistic approach. The study was conducted using a sample population of adjunct instructors gathered by purposeful sampling using social media.

As stated by Peoples (2020), the purpose of phenomenological research is to generate the lifeworld experiences of a certain population. Even though there is no fixed set of methods to conduct phenomenological research, there are methodological guidelines to follow and expand upon.

As Donalek (2004) discussed, despite real differences within the phenomenological movement that have shaped research traditions, the methods of phenomenological research have much in common. These research methods are used to study areas where little is known or to explore sensitive content. The participants recruited to take part in the study have lived the phenomenon in question and are willing and able to describe their experiences. Participants may write of their experiences but are

more often interviewed. To conduct interviews successfully, interviewers must be engaged and show sensitivity. Donalek continued by stating that phenomenological research is more than a simple synthesis of the contents of a group of interviews. Phenomenological research is not truly phenomenological unless the researcher's beliefs are incorporated into the data analysis. For phenomenological research to be credible, documentation of this process must exist from the selection of the topic to all phases of the collection, analysis of the data, and creation of the essential description of the phenomenon. Why did the researcher choose a topic, respond to a participant's narrative in a particular fashion, feel drawn to a particular passage in a transcript, or see a particular pattern? This process is what makes our work phenomenological.

Gupta and Awasthy (2015) stated that research is a process to gain deeper insight into any concept, issue, or process. Designing a research study is as much art as science. Researchers base their work on the foundations of their ontological (study of being) and epistemological (theory of knowledge) positions; these are the factors they use to determine their research method. They also stated that the strength of qualitative research is its ability to provide complex theoretical descriptions of how participants experience a given research context. They further explained that a phenomenological study is a description of the meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a phenomenon, and it is conducted to arrive at a universal essence of the phenomenon from the individual experiences.

Data Sources

The sources for data collection for this study were created based on prior studies completed. Basilice (2015) explored higher education faculty perspectives pertaining to

students with disabilities using semi-structured interviews. A study conducted by Yssel et al. (2016) examined how support services and legislation contributed to the increased number of students with disabilities and whether obstacles that impeded success have been removed or if students with disabilities remain a marginalized group. Collaborations between CTLs and DROs in IHEs were discussed in a study by Behling and Linder (2017) where they focused on the challenges of these collaborations and how they serve to educate faculty as to the needs of students with disabilities.

The method that was used to collect data was semi-structured interviews with questions developed specifically for this study. They were scheduled and held virtually; each interview scheduled was allotted 45 to 60 minutes. Additionally, the study reviewed the syllabi and curriculum of each instructor's class(es).

This method was appropriate for this phenomenological research due to the fact that semi-structured interviews are developed with pointed but open-ended questions, which allowed me to collect data important to the determination of reasonable conclusions as they related to the research questions explored.

In an article by Lub (2015), there is a discussion of the premise that all research must possess a high value of truth but that the properties of knowledge within the rational or quantitative paradigm are different from the properties of knowledge within the naturalistic or qualitative paradigm. The criteria deemed important to the naturalistic paradigm are those of credibility, fittingness, and confirmability. The procedures Lub (2015) discussed that were developed to increase the credibility of qualitative research are negative case selection, peer debriefing, prolonged engagement and observation, audit trails, and member checks. Using an audit trail approach meant I would document the

research process and the choices made during that process meticulously and chronologically. That information can be collected using logs and memos, with the raw data included in audio files and written notes, using data analysis products such as field notes, summaries, and theoretical notes. Other methods used are process notes, such as notes on methodological choices; materials related to the researcher's intention and dispositions, such as the research proposal and expectations; and instrument development information, such as preliminary schedules and observation formats. This trail allows external evaluators to check if the findings can be supported by the data, the conclusions are logical, and methodological choices can be justified.

Connection to Theoretical Framework

The phenomenology method of research allowed for the exploration of the classroom culture created by these adjunct instructors. If they understand the regulatory requirements in the postsecondary environment and how to employ the UDL structure in their classes, they will provide an equitable experience for students with disabilities and others with diverse learning styles. Many equity issues related to the changing demographics of the student populations are unrelated to these students' intellectual and cognitive abilities. Many of the equity issues these diverse groups deal with are described in Paulo Freire's work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970/2018), where he discussed the dehumanization and objectification of a group of people by another group of people. Salmi and Bassett (2014) defined equity as providing equal opportunity for access and success in tertiary education. They went on to state that equity is not treating everyone exactly the same but involves leveling the playing field to promote equal opportunity. Often that would mean requiring a combination of general and special measures that

would actually promote equity. These are the intentions or objectives of the regulatory requirements and the use of UDL in the higher education environment.

Creswell (2013) identified phenomenological research as an appropriate way to study various aspects of postsecondary education related to students with disabilities. Behling and Linder (2017) concluded that continuing to explore the collaborative relationships within IHEs regarding accessibility issues and concerns will be a fundamental component to successfully developing resources, structures, and policies that help all students learn. They stated that further research is crucial to the success of higher education accessibility initiatives. In the study by Yssel et al. (2016), two of the researchers read through the transcripts of their interviews independently, identifying themes as they did so, and they then met to compare and discuss the findings. This was also done to reduce the possibility of interpreter bias and enhance internal validity. Basilice (2015) studied the review of the collected data with respect to faculty knowledge, faculty attitudes, faculty ability to assist, faculty reactions and responses to student self-advocacy, and faculty collaboration with the DRO regarding students with disabilities. A composite narrative of the faculty participants materialized to create a plethora of themes and patterns, with some notable discrepancies.

Participants and Recruitment

A group of 12 adjunct instructors were interviewed virtually, with 45 to 60 minutes allotted for each interview. The interview questions developed for these participants were fashioned to gather data relevant to the research questions and sub-questions. This group is important for this study because as adjuncts, they are often unable to participate in trainings available to faculty that would assist them to develop the

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skill set needed to meet the regulatory requirements set forth to properly support students with disabilities or to create a UDL environment for their classrooms in order to enhance the learning environment for all students. They were asked about their understanding of the regulatory requirements for providing supports and accommodations to students with disabilities, as well as about whether they have received training in creating a UDL. This skill set and understanding is important to those who have diverse learning needs and who require specific accommodations in order to succeed in the postsecondary educational environment. Additionally, the instructors answered a set of demographic questions which were reviewed to determine if they have worked or interacted with persons with disabilities in other aspects of their lives.

The participants for the study were recruited using social media to perform purposeful sampling. This afforded access to a complete cross-section of adjunct instructors with varied personal and professional backgrounds. During the conduct of the interviews, these varied backgrounds were considered, as they may have influenced the responses received.

The adjunct instructors whose lived experiences were examined for this study were recruited by using social media to complete purposeful sampling. Those who participated had all achieved the educational level of master's degree or higher. Three of the 12 had training and/or experience teaching at the K–12 level, seven of the 12 had personal experience interacting with a person with a disability, and five of the 12 work in one of the following helping arts; psychology, social work, and human services. They were employed as adjunct instructors at different IHEs, some at multiple institutions. The institutions were both private and public, with a mix of small and large institutions. Some

of the participants held non-instructional full-time positions at the institution where they taught in addition to their adjunct status.

Table 1

Description of Interview Participants

Adjunct Pseudonym	Gender	Educational Level	K–12 Training/Experience	Personal Experience With Disabled	Work in Helping Arts
Prof. Bond	Male	MBA	No	No	No
Prof. Carr	Female	EdD	Yes	Yes	No
Prof. Diller	Female	EdD	No	No	No
Prof. Edie	Female	MBA	Yes	Yes	No
Prof. Foote	Male	EdD	Yes	No	No
Prof. Green	Male	MSW	No	Yes	No
Prof. Hall	Female	MSW	No	Yes	Yes
Prof. Jager	Female	PsyD	No	No	Yes
Prof. Keen	Male	MS	No	Yes	Yes
Prof. Logan	Male	MS	No	No	Yes
Prof. Mead	Male	MS	No	Yes	No
Prof. Patton	Male	MS	No	Yes	Yes

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and for the safety of all involved in the study, in accordance with state mandates and institutional guidelines to social distance, all data were collected electronically via Webex or Zoom, and transcribed using the web-based Otter.ai. The instructor-participants were interviewed individually and were asked to

elaborate with as much detail as they felt comfortable sharing when responding to the semi-structured questions.

Each interview was audio and video recorded with consent using Webex or Zoom, and the interviews were then transcribed using Otter.ai, an online transcription service. The transcripts were then reviewed to check completeness and correctness of interpretation. Once the transcripts were determined to be correct and valid, the computer analysis program Dedoose was used to analyze the transcriptions for codes and themes.

Population

The population represented by this sample group was adjunct instructors recruited by use of purposeful sampling facilitated by social media. The participants were predominantly from Long Island in New York State. As reported on the NCES site, updated in May 2020, the composition of faculty was approximately 46% part-time or adjunct. The ratio of full-time-equivalent (FTE) students to FTE faculty as of Fall 2018 is 14:1, making the skill set of adjunct instructors an important factor in the successes of the students. As reported by NCES, the 6-year graduation rate (2013–2019) is 63%, and the retention rate is 81%.

Per NCES (2020), enrollment of students with disabilities in the 2007–2008 academic year included 10.8% of enrolled undergraduate and 7.6% of enrolled post-baccalaureate students and, by the 2015–2016 academic year, this student group's enrollment increased to 19.4% of undergraduates and 11.9% of post-baccalaureate students. These increases further confirm the importance of studying the population of adjunct instructors, as they are a sizable portion of the instructional staff in higher education.

Positionality

Positionality describes an individual's worldview and the position they adopt about a research task. As Holmes (2020) explained, positionality is defined using the following terms. *Ontological assumptions* refer to the individual's worldview or "where the researcher is coming from," *epistemological assumptions*, are related to the individual's beliefs about the nature of knowledge, and *assumptions about human nature and agency* are how an individual interacts with our environment and relate to it. These assumptions can all be colored by an individual's values and beliefs and are shaped by various characteristics of themselves, including political allegiance, religious faith, sexuality, and ethnicity, to name a few.

When completing research, it is important that preconceived ideas about the population and research subject not affect or influence the reported conclusions of the study. In addressing the question of positionality as it pertains to research, Gaus (2017) indicated that choosing the method to use in order to complete the research is not merely an action of alignment with the research questions but rather it transcends the boundary of any assumption about the reality the author brought into their research.

I am a professional who has been employed in support positions in multiple human service organizations serving different groups of individuals with disabilities. This places me in the position of being an outsider in the realm of higher education, but conversely very much an insider with respect to the supports needed by those with disabilities. However, I am also an insider with respect to the higher education environment, as I have been employed as an adjunct instructor for approximately 7 years,

attempting to properly support students with disabilities and those with diverse learning styles by employing the elements of UDL.

Data Collection

Griffee (2005) stated that because responding to an interview is perceived as "talking" and talking is natural, it is a popular method of gathering qualitative research data. Some of the limitations he discussed are that people interviewed may not be able to express what they think, may not have an opinion, or may not be able to clearly state their opinion. Griffee focused on the semi-structured interview, which was described as meaning the questions are pre-determined but the interviewer is free to ask for clarification. The article also indicated that certain issues need to be addressed and decisions need to be made. For example, the researcher must decide whom to interview, choose when to stop a particular interview, select a place for the interview to occur, decide which questions to ask, and consider how the data will be collected (listen only, take notes during the interview, make notes after or record the interview).

Data were collected by scheduling a series of interview sessions over the course of a few months, meeting virtually to accommodate the needs of the participants, with each interview recorded, with the permission of the participants, to ensure accurate transcription. Additionally, I am holding the data collected in a secure method and will safely and securely dispose of it, if and when appropriate. This method of data collection was appropriate for the study because it helped to keep the study properly focused in order to gather the information needed to draw conclusions with respect to the research questions.

Each participant was asked to review and sign a statement of informed consent that includes a brief description of the study and a statement with reference to the fact their participation is voluntary. The statements included a description of the method of storage that would be used to assure the confidentiality of the participants with respect to the data collected, as well as to the statements of informed consent.

Once the data were collected and analyzed, I reviewed the data and presented as they related to the research questions.

Analyses

Qualitative research, which dates back to the 1960s, has been used by researchers to obtain a more naturalistic, contextual, and holistic understanding of human beings in society (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007). Burnard et al. (2008) characterized the analysis of the collected data as one of the most bewildering aspects of qualitative research. They continued by discussing a method of analyzing and presenting textual data gathered in the completion of a study.

Leech and Onwuegbuzie (2007) stated that qualitative data have many positive features; they provide naturally occurring information, which assists researchers to increase their understanding of phenomena. Qualitative data tend to be collected in close proximity to the specific situation related to the research via direct observation or interview. They also often contain inherent richness and holism and are frequently collected over a long period of time and often center on people's lived experiences. Analysis of data is one of the most important steps in the research process, although many schools of education offer only one qualitative research course, and those courses often do not include much information about data analysis.

In their article, Leech and Onwuegbuzie (2007) presented seven different data analysis techniques as follows: method of constant comparison, keywords-in-context, word count, classical content analysis, domain analysis, taxonomic analysis, and componential analysis. These techniques represent the earliest formalized qualitative data analysis techniques. Many types of data are available for qualitative researchers; these data include interview data, survey data, observational data, and personal journals, to name a few.

This study used an analysis method described by Burnard et al. (2008) known as an *inductive approach*, which involves the analysis of data with little or no predetermined theory, structure, or framework. Instead, it uses the actual data to determine the structure of analysis. This approach is considered comprehensive, and hence time-consuming, but is most suitable where little or nothing is known about the study phenomenon. Inductive analysis is the most common approach used to analyze qualitative data. While there are a variety of inductive approaches to analyze qualitative data, the method Burnard et al. (2008) discussed, the thematic content analysis, is the one considered most common. The process of thematic content analysis is often very similar in all types of qualitative research; it is the process of analyzing transcripts, identifying themes within the data, and gathering examples of those themes from the text. As stated by Ghesquière et al. (2004), the final phase of data analysis in qualitative research is to consider the results alongside existing theories with the intention to adjust and deepen them—in this sense, qualitative studies may make a real contribution to the construction of scientific theory.

Those themes were analyzed to determine if the participants have demonstrated a detailed understanding of the regulatory requirements schools must meet to support

students with disabilities. Additionally, the analysis considered the instructors'

understanding of UDL in order to accommodate the diverse learning styles of the various

students who may enroll in their classes. In qualitative studies it is also important, as

stated by Ghesquière et al. (2004), to maintain a permanent, accurate, complete, and

dated record of the data collected.

The syllabi and curriculum of these instructors was examined to determine if the

coursework can be modified in order to meet the diverse learning styles of different

students who may demonstrate a need for supports to level the "playing field" in their

classroom experiences.

The participants in the study were also asked to provide any information they

could about educational trainings that may be available to them at their IHE to determine

if there are offerings available that provide information about the regulatory requirements

the institution must meet in order to properly support their students. Additionally, this

information was solicited to determine if information is offered about UDL and how to

appropriately design curriculum to meet needs of students with diverse learning styles.

The final element examined was the timing and accessibility of these trainings and

whether they are available to all faculty, both full-time and adjunct.

When conducting thematic content analysis, many researchers use coding to

identify and categorize the different themes identified in the collected data. Saldaña

(2021) defined a *code* as a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative,

salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or

visual data. When researchers codify, they arrange things in a systematic order, in order

to make something part of a system or classification, to categorize. Coding enables

researchers to organize and group similarly coded data into categories or "families" because they share some characteristic. Saldaña discussed that when performing qualitative research, it is important to pay meticulous attention to language and images and the deep reflection on the researcher-constructed patterns and meanings of human experience. Throughout the process of coding and recoding data, researchers must strive to refine codes and categories, and dependent upon the methodological approach used, to make codes and categories more conceptual and abstract.

A method known as *memoing* (Birks et al., 2008) will be used to identify an audit trail of sorts about how the analysis of the data collected evolves throughout the research process. Memos will be completed to memorialize changes in the research project and methods of analysis of the collected data.

Trustworthiness of the Design

In order to determine if the design is trustworthy, a researcher must consider the design's reliability and validity. Yin (2018) stated to truly prove reliability, a study would need to be repeated and conclusions reached would need to be fairly consistent if the study were performed a second time. He indicated the need to carefully and completely document the procedures followed to complete the study. The study procedures need to be documented as explicitly as possible to make it possible to duplicate the study.

With respect to validity of study, Yin (2018) discussed three forms of validity: construct, internal, and external validity. He indicated construct validity can be demonstrated by using multiple sources of evidence—for instance, interviews and other forms of evidence, such as documents. External validity is related to whether a study's findings can be generalized. In this study, the preparedness of adjunct instructors to

properly support students with disabilities may be shown to affect their success in higher education. Based on Yin internal validity would not be a factor in this study.

Research Ethics

Ethical considerations are paramount to the integrity of the entire field of research. As discussed by Schutz (1973), there was a statement particularly relevant to research in education with adult participants from the American Psychological Association titled the "Ethical Standards for Research with Human Subjects." When the decision is made to conduct research, the investigations must be designed to protect the dignity and welfare of those individuals who take part in the study. The researcher must carefully evaluate the study's ethical acceptability; they are responsible for the establishment and maintenance of acceptable ethical practice. The researcher must inform the participant of all features of the research that might be considered to influence the willingness to participate. There must be openness and honesty in the relationship between the researcher and participants. The researcher must respect the potential participants' freedom to decline participation. The research cannot begin before a clear and fair agreement between the researcher and participant is established. The researcher must also protect the participants from physical and mental discomfort. After the data are collected, any misconceptions about the study must be clarified, the researcher must detect and remove any undesirable consequences for the participants, and the researcher must maintain total confidentiality of all information obtained about the participants over the course of the study.

Another important element of conducting ethical research as stated by Yin (2018) is that the researcher must not approach the study with the intention to substantiate a

preconceived notion. Yin stated that one test of this bias is the degree to which the researcher is open to contrary evidence. If there is compelling evidence of this contrary evidence, it is critical to include that evidence in the research report. Additionally, Yin continued, a good researcher will strive for the highest ethical standards which include a responsibility to scholarship and will not plagiarize or falsify information. They must also be honest, avoid deception, and accept responsibility for their own work. Further, they must maintain strong professional competence, including keeping up with related research, ensuring accuracy, striving for credibility, and understanding and divulging any needed methodological qualifiers and limitations to their work.

Conclusion

This study is important in many respects, as it relates to various aspects of higher education. There are many important measures used to rate IHEs, including retention rates, completion rates, graduation rates, and years to completion, just to name a few. If the results of the study reflect that adjunct instructors are not properly prepared to support students with disabilities or those with diverse learning styles, this can have a negative effect on any one of the measures used to rate the institution. This has become an even more important factor as the population of adjunct instructors in the classroom and the population of students with disabilities has grown dramatically in recent years.

For phenomenological study Creswell (2013) indicated the analysis consists of gathering data from the participants to develop a universal essence about the phenomenon being studied. The participants in this study were a group of adjunct instructors recruited using purposeful sampling via social media. The research includes various sources of

data which were carefully examined to determine how they affected the conclusions

reached in the study.

CHAPTER 4

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to determine whether adjunct instructors are prepared to properly support students with disabilities and those with diverse learning styles. The specific approach employed in this study is hermeneutical phenomenology described by van Manen (1990, as cited by Creswell, 2013), as it allows for research oriented toward lived experience and interpreting the "texts" of life. Van Manen continued by stating that his approach to phenomenology does not have a set of rules or methods but instead it relies on a dynamic interplay among various research activities. As stated by Moustakas (1994), in hermeneutics there is a focus on consciousness and experience, which was explored in the interviews of adjunct instructors who participated in this study.

Some of the issues that have been important to question as part of this study are whether the instructors are prepared and conversant enough about the legislation pertaining to providing accommodations for students with disabilities; whether they are aware of and comprehend the legal obligations to appropriately support and accommodate student needs; whether they understand the supports needed and how to modify these supports to fit the core goals of their class while appropriately supporting their students; and whether they understand the concepts of UDL and how to create a curriculum that is flexible and can be modified to properly support the needs of all students, regardless of their need or learning style.

Findings

This study was an examination of equitable educational experiences in higher education for students with disabilities and all students with diverse learning styles. In Chapter 1, in the discussion of the theoretical framework, information was included from an article by Salmi and Bassett (2014), who stated there are three dimensions of equity: equity of access, equity of outcomes, and equity of results. They also stated that fairness is about more than understanding the rights to equality that exist theoretically; in fact, it extends to the enforcement of these rights in real life. Salmi and Bassett continued to explain that any society committed to promoting equity must ensure their education system, including higher education, is accessible to students from the broadest spectrum of underrepresented and traditionally excluded groups. These dimensions are the themes by which the data were analyzed using 15 different codes.

Theme 1: The Equity of Access

Access emerged as a theme from the data collected in the interviews, as a majority of the interviewees indicated a lack of detailed knowledge about the regulations that inform the policies required of IHEs with respect to the accommodation of the special needs of students with disabilities.

Regulatory Access. There was substantial awareness of the elements of ADA, and the various requirements created by that legislation. There was minimal intimate knowledge, as expressed by a majority of the interviewees with respect to the other regulations discussed: Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, ADAAA, and FERPA. Representative of all of the interviewees' familiarity with ADA is the statement

of Professor Patton who drew on his personal experiences with someone close to him who is successfully dealing with a disability:

> So the ADA influences how we treat the students in the classroom. Understanding that we have to make reasonable accommodations for students depending on their needs. The resources at the school are set up so the school will hear the students' needs first, then they will interface with the instructor to find whatever the most appropriate reasonable accommodation for the student. Whether that is a differential learning style, so presenting the material in a slightly different way, or facilitating test taking under different conditions, if that is the appropriate accommodation.

Similarly, the other interviewees shared the same understanding of the ADA while expressing minimal knowledge of the details of the other regulations. Another of the participants discussed ADA in significant detail but indicated that his level of knowledge was garnered from a different source. Professor Mead, who has a background in industrial and organizational psychology, made the following statement:

> Well, I know about the ADA because in the '90s when the law was passed that mandated provision of reasonable accommodation, I was employed at a certification company where we designed licensing exams for veterinary programs at some prestigious IHEs. We would receive notification from the State of New York that a student with a visual impairment needed a booklet printed in large print. So we would prepare the booklet in 22 or 24 point font, which we would send to New York State.

These two statements display a reasonably sound understanding of the ADA, but they also demonstrates that their knowledge of this regulation was derived outside of the higher education arena—something that could be viewed as a flaw in the system. How would these instructors possess this understanding if life experiences or other employment experiences had not informed them?

Some of the other interviewees discussed significant knowledge about some of the other regulations, but it was based on life experiences other than their knowledge as an adjunct instructor. For example, Professor Hall, who is credentialed as a social worker and has held various adjunct positions, disclosed the following about Section 504:

Section 504 is basically related to a medical disability, so more of a disability not based on a learning disability, so children with diabetes, children with asthma who may need food in the classroom or air conditioning, whatever the case may be.

Another example of knowledge important to the access of students with disabilities was discussed by another of the adjuncts. This interviewee was informed by his full-time non-instructional position at the institution where he works, and his comment relates to FERPA. Professor Green, a social worker by credential and financial aid counselor, responded as follows when asked about FERPA: "I am like an expert in FERPA, but that knowledge is based on my role as a financial aid counselor." These are additional examples of adjunct instructors who are informed about some of the regulations that institutions of higher education are bound by, but those institutions did not provide that knowledge to them in their role as adjunct instructors.

Policy and Procedure Access. As stated by Angeli (2009), IHEs must find ways to finance services that are far above the legal minimums and promote campus climates that are receptive and welcoming to students with disabilities. She went on to discuss how these "invisible" psychological or psychiatric disabilities are increasingly prevalent, and campuses must be prepared to provide a more robust range of resources and services.

When interviewees were asked about their experience as they began their career as adjuncts—specifically, about orientations they received—the responses were mixed. Some indicated they had received orientation; others stated it had been too long since their adjunct career began to recall; and a few indicated they began acting as an adjunct after they had been employed for a period of time in a full-time non-instructional position. The responses received included that some did not receive any orientation, and some did receive orientation, but none remembered receiving an orientation that included policies and procedures relating to the accommodation of students with disabilities or students with diverse learning styles.

Another aspect of access that was explored relates to the interviewees' mindfulness of the effect these regulations and policies had on the experiences of their students. Additionally, the prospect of whether these accommodations provided an advantage to any groups of students in higher education was raised and the responses were virtually unanimous. Instructors indicated that when preparing course work for their classes, they were aware of the potential struggles some students with disabilities and diverse learning styles might experience, but they did not view provided accommodations as any sort of advantage. Instead, they viewed accommodations as a "leveling of the

playing field." Professor Foote, who has been a science adjunct for 12 years and has a background in marine biology, addressed these aspects of the issue:

> I feel they were meant to give everybody an equal chance. So, if you have a vision-related disability, for example, then you have to have the accommodation to give you an equal chance to get the same education as everyone else. These policies are meant to provide an equal playing field.

This statement by Professor Foote demonstrates how an instructor, one with no connection to the helping arts, truly understands the basic connection to equity these supports and accommodations provide.

The next aspect explored was related to how students arrange to gain access to the accommodations they need to succeed. Discussion in this area was centered on the DRO or the resource corresponding to the DRO at the different institutions. Knowledge about what was offered ran the gamut from a fairly robust knowledge about what this office offered to students and how they could access these services to an unfamiliarity with what they offered and how students could access the services they needed. The disparity in this knowledge does appear to be related to the relationships some adjunct instructors had to the helping arts. Professor Hall, an individual credentialed as a social worker, stated:

> So, the students know that they have to go to the Office for Disabilities, or whatever it is called at each institution; provide the documentation about their disability; discuss the diagnosis and documentation; and then a decision is made about what services are needed. Then, in all three institutions where I adjunct,

the student receives a letter or other communication that details the

accommodations they are entitled to request.

When the same topic was discussed in the interview with a science adjunct, Professor

Foote, the response received was quite different: "The DRO . . . I must say I don't know

who that is, what the department is. If it is the department that deals with the testing area

of accommodations, then them I am familiar with." These statements demonstrate how

disparate the levels of knowledge can be. The importance of accommodations was

demonstrated by all, but an instructor informed by the helping arts demonstrated a

complete understanding of how the supports and notifications to faculty are developed.

Student Status Access. Another element of properly supporting students with

disabilities relates to the need to treat knowledge of a student's status as someone who is

dealing with the effects of a disability as confidential. Every individual deserves the right

to disclose their status to only those they choose to allow into their confidence. In

addition to the regulatory requirement to treat this knowledge confidentially, there is also

the issue of the stigma related to disclosure. As Cory (2011) discussed, disability services

are both a legal and ethical obligation, but it is uncertain how much the use of disability

service resources does or does not destigmatize disabilities. Also, it is debatable whether

the use of disability service resources creates a campus that is inclusive and welcoming to

all students.

When asked if Professor Carr, a foreign language adjunct who has personal

experience dealing with individuals with disabilities, had ever received any

communication with respect to a student's accommodations and whether she knew if this

communication had a confidentiality requirement, she responded:

The answer is yes and yes. Some students will give me a copy of their

accommodation letters, others will email it to me. I make some annotations

about what I need to do to accommodate the student, but the document, whether

physical or virtual, is held in confidence. In one institution where I have been an

adjunct, they email the letter with a confidentiality notice.

Here is yet another demonstration of an adjunct who is informed by circumstances other

than what she has received from her IHE. She taught in the K–12 arena, and her father,

two siblings, and two children all are dealing with disabilities. Her knowledge stems from

her experiences in all of these other areas of her life. She understands how the element of

confidentiality is of utmost importance, because without that, her actions could bring a

stigmatized experience upon her students.

Additionally, included in the interviews was discussion about whether the need to

accommodate students, whether those with disabilities or those with a diverse learning

style, created a burden for the instructors. The responses were overwhelmingly that it did

not create a burden, nor did any of the participants view them as such. As stated by

Professor Keen, who has worked for years in human services:

No, absolutely not. I think more of the burden is not being trained on what to do

about it. I can't say that I have never had a student take up more time than other

students. I certainly have, but it was not generally related to a disability.

The interviews also focused on diverse learning styles and UDL. The participants

all demonstrated understanding of different learning styles and were knowledgeable

enough to describe many of them. A description of how different teaching methodologies

can enhance certain students' ability to learn was clearly related by a number of the

participants, but Professor Hall, with many years of experience and credentialed as a social worker, provided the most comprehensive statement explaining this:

> So, as I stated I do not want to be that person that lectures for an hour and 15 minutes out of a 3-hour class. I don't like doing that, and I do not think students like it either. I always try to use different resources like films, or a therapy session from the series *The Sopranos*, or a therapy session from the show *House*, and we will examine and discuss that to study different elements. I may use a show, and we will discuss how they depict the LGBTQ community, or I sometimes use TED talks. I will sometimes use group activities to build on other materials. I do these things because I want to spur conversation and have discussions with each other. In some classes I have had students analyze song lyrics. You have to find ways to keep their attention. Anything I can do to connect with them.

She continued:

> If I am teaching something that I really need for them grasp and retain, I will show a film or a clip or role model it out and then break into groups and have smaller discussions—different things to emphasize whatever we are learning.

But, when it came to discussions of UDL, there was very little known about the design itself, at least by name. Some of the interviewees were able to describe actions they took in some of their classes to meet the needs of a student who learned by a different style that could be traced to the elements of universal design but they either expressed a lack of knowledge about the design or never realized that they were in fact following the theories of the design. Professor Edie, an adjunct with her MBA who teaches predominantly online, made the following statements with respect to UDL and

related information about actions she has taken in her classes. When asked if she knows

what UDL is, her immediate reply was: "No." But when she was asked if she ever

modified the method by which she presents information in her class to make it more

understandable for those with a diverse learning style, she responded:

> So, I always provide a PowerPoint, I teach online classes, and we pre-record our
>
> lectures. So the students receive the PowerPoint, they can listen to the oral
>
> presentation, and then they have the text from which these other two are derived
>
> to read the materials.

This methodology fits very well under the theories and methods of UDL, where the

materials are offered in multiple forms to facilitate the learning styles of various

individuals. This presentation would make the materials accessible and understandable to

those who learn visually (PowerPoint), those who learn orally (the pre-recorded lecture),

and those who learn by reading (the text). A few of the participants indicated that they

had heard of UDL, and a couple were looking forward to an upcoming training about

UDL that they were completing on their own. All others mentioned how certain elements

of what they now recognize as UDL were included in recent trainings, but they were

elements of trainings done by certain of the institutions to prepare their faculty for the

massive shift to online learning during the pandemic.

These statements by interviewees not only demonstrate again the fact that they

were informed by experiences other than their adjunct positions but they acted based on

an instinctual sense of what they can and should do to increase the chances for students to

succeed or even excel.

Theme 2: The Equity of Outcomes

The second theme that emerged from the review of the experiences of these participants relates to outcomes and what they may have done to foster the successes of students with disabilities and those with diverse learning styles. Newman and Madaus (2015) discussed how vital it is to understand the connection between accommodations and supports and how they help with schoolwork and postsecondary education outcomes for students with disabilities. Smith (2012) discussed that application of the UDL framework can result in instruction that leads to positive student academic and affective outcomes. These confirm the importance of proper accommodations and supports to successful outcomes in school in general, but in higher education in particular. Fortunately, the moral and ethical attitude of the participants inspired them to do the right thing for their students.

Outcomes Achieved Through Accommodations. Professor Carr, a former K–12 educator, indicated her realization that proper accommodations and supports are important factors in the students' outcomes:

> I am pretty mindful of the importance of the need for these accommodations in my classroom, what I have to do. I've changed teaching styles, for certain students I have changed test formats whether or not it is included on their accommodations letter if they indicated that they cannot complete the type of test I had planned.

Others indicated they understood the importance of providing the proper accommodation. Many of the participants also explained that they knew they could receive guidance from their chairperson or the DRO if they did not know how to provide the proper support to

students. Professor Bond, a banking and financial professional, who is an adjunct with experience at multiple institutions of varying sizes, stated:

> I can contact my chair, who will offer guidance with how to accommodate the student or advise me to contact the DRO. Of course, her background in human resources may help to inform her, but nonetheless I can get guidance.

It was evident the participants understood how the supports and accommodations are critical to these students' path to success in higher education; they are the only things that can level the playing field for them.

Outcomes Achieved Through Empathy. Other participants also discussed how they saw improvements in the outcomes of their students when they took advantage of the accommodations they were eligible to request. Another example of a participant who possessed an understanding of the value of these supports due to her training as a psychologist was in the following statement made by Professor Jager:

> I think, as a psychologist, I have a bit more empathy and tolerance for folks with mental illness or struggling in other ways. I try to be as open and available as possible because many college students struggle with different issues and if I can help them maybe they will achieve better outcomes.

One of the other participants expressed his awareness of the importance of providing the accommodations needed because of his experiences in the classroom. Professor Mead, who had extensive experience outside of higher education, demonstrated his professional approach to his adjunct position by:

> Well, for me, I am very sensitive to the need for accommodations and the fact that not all students will advocate for themselves. This knowledge comes from my

repeated experience as an instructor of freshman seminar. So, I am dealing with

brand new students, many of whom are assigned to me directly from the

Disability Services counselors. Of course, I don't ask inappropriate questions

related to their possible status but provide opportunities for them to approach me.

These participants, one with a connection to the helping arts and the other a business

professional, expressed their humanity in their understanding of the need for an

empathetic approach to supporting their students.

Outcomes Achieved Through Growth. Also discussed with the participants was

how mindful they were of the intended effect the policies created related to

accommodations and supports and the importance of these accommodations and supports

for student success. The participants indicated that they understood how these

accommodations provided students with a level of autonomy that allowed them to grow

on many levels. They can be given some latitude to develop their identity as capable

adults through using the supports they request of their instructors. This was expressed

comprehensively by, Professor Diller, an experienced adjunct with a business

background:

> Students can be very gun shy of parents, who can be very hovering at times.
>
> That is not meant negatively, but after coming out of the K–12 system, in
>
> certain cases the parents become uncomfortable because the students are
>
> coming out of systems where they have been handheld along the way.

She continued:

> The students are attempting to step forward and be independent. So, in some cases
>
> I have tried to give the student a bit of latitude. I am aware they may need a little

independence, but I am also aware that they may have come from an environment where not every decision has been theirs to make, or they may have never had the experience of making a decision on their own.

Different participants expressed these sentiments in other ways, sharing their understanding of how these policies are important to the outcomes of the students. Professor Patton, who works in a support position in human services and draws on personal experiences with someone close who has a disability, stated it as follows:

Of the policies that I am familiar with, they are guiding principles. They, in essence, form my instructor code of ethics, and so I encourage students to come to me if they need any referrals to any additional resources, or if they have identified their status to me and want to pursue additional resources.

Another important approach raised by one of the other participants brought up in a situation she discussed when she suspected that a student may be eligible for accommodations but had not been disclosing is to raise the issue with the student's academic advisor. Professor Hall demonstrated her social work skills when she stated:

When I have speculated that a student had a disability but had not disclosed to me or requested any accommodations and was not succeeding in my class, I have met with their academic advisor. They may have a meeting with the DRO about the student, who may then meet with the student to see what they can do to encourage the student to use the accommodations they are eligible to use and perhaps improve the student's outcomes.

Based on their responses, these instructors apparently recognized the value the accommodations provided to students with disabilities and those with diverse learning

styles, supporting these students by promoting their successes and improving their outcomes. They demonstrated by conveying these stories that they understood that these students with disabilities may have experienced a delay in forming their adult identity, which acts as a barrier to adult action.

Theme 3: The Equity of Results

The third theme that was identified through the review of the transcripts of the interviews relates to results and what affect the policies related to students with disabilities and their requisite accommodations and supports may have done to aid the students with disabilities and those with diverse learning styles. In her work, Troccoli (2017) discussed the significant differences of the results of the academic satisfaction of students receiving and not receiving accommodations. Troccoli concluded that students availing themselves of accommodations were more academically satisfied than those who were not requesting these supports.

Results Achieved Through Training. Students' academic performance can be improved when adjunct instructors who have no formal training in education receive training to properly accommodate and support students with disabilities and those with diverse learning styles. The following statement made by Professor Diller, a participant who previously held a full-time non-instructional position in addition to her adjunct role, addressed an aspect of the training issue:

> When I was full-time in my non-instructional role, I had enough issues finding the time to attend department meetings. Now that my only role is adjunct, I can arrange my schedule to attend the trainings that are of interest to me and make me more attractive as an adjunct.

Another participant discussed trainings and her experience in relation to trainings she had taken. Following is the statement by Professor Carr, who served as a parent liaison for her school district disability staff, when asked about trainings offered:

> I have not had the opportunity to attend trainings offered by the school. I attended trainings when I taught K–12, and I have attended workshops through my school district because I am a parent liaison to our disability staff. The only exception were the trainings we were required to take when the school was forced to move everyone to online instruction during the pandemic.

When discussing the Faculty Center for Teaching and Learning (or the corresponding training center for faculty at the given IHE) and what this center offered, the responses were mixed. Some of the participants indicated they rarely had time to even read the notices from the Faculty Center. Professor Keen who, based on his extensive experience working in human services, highly values training, made the following statement about trainings offered to him as an adjunct and his desire to attend:

> I think I would like to, but I think another challenge adjunct professors may have is they have multiple email accounts that they monitor, and they have limited time to check all of them. When I check my emails, particularly the school account, if it is not a message directly from a student or other individual, I may not even read the message; I just do not have time. If someone was able to summarize the trainings and email me individually maybe I would read the message and take advantage.

Another of the interviewees had a different response to this question. Professor Hall, one of the social workers, demonstrated the value she places on training when she stated the following:

> One of the institutions where I adjunct—it is a huge school—they have a robust training center and offer a lot of different trainings. They will also help you with other issues, like how to more effectively format the screens in PowerPoints and the student portal. The other two institutions, I am not really sure they have a faculty training center.

Yet another perspective expressed by another participant was in the following statement by Professor Foote, an adjunct with 12 years of experience, who stated:

> Generally, I am aware of the Center but I have not really used them until when COVID first hit. I had to rely on them to basically bring me up to speed for online teaching because I had never done it before. Because I teach science, and we were now forced to do science labs online, it was really challenging. I received online teaching certification through this department.

These are further instances where these participants, although their comments indicate they understood the value of trainings, were not always informed by their IHEs.

Results Achieved Through Experiential Information. Another area that was explored with the participants was what value they thought the professional experiences of adjuncts brought to the classroom and whether they thought those professional experiences outweighed the lack of instructional training. The responses in this area were virtually diametrically opposed. Some thought there were better ways to provide these professional experiences without giving up instructional training, such as by

incorporating guest speakers. Others felt the experiences adjunct instructors contribute are invaluable, while a few thought there were other factors to be considered.

The following is a statement by Professor Keen, an early-career human service professional: "No, I think the instructional knowledge is more vital because I think you can get that expertise to students in other ways." He went on to state: "I think it is a trade-off. I think there are benefits to being better informed about how to create an effective educational environment."

The following statement by Professor Patton, someone with a strong background in the value of data, expressed a different opinion on this matter:

> I wouldn't say the professional experiences outweigh the instructional knowledge; I think it informs me in a different way. I did not come to education through the traditional preparatory track, so I don't have those fundamental educator skills. I think that my professional skills provide me with another opportunity to engage with students in a different way. This provides a more real-world element to our conversations, where I can emphasize the concepts and applicability to real world.

An opposing view was expressed in the following statement by Professor Diller, a business professional with years of experience as an adjunct instructor, who stated:

> Yes, I think the professional experiences that adjunct instructors bring to the table outweigh the instructional knowledge because they are valuable real-life experiences. Adjuncts have the opportunity to relate workplace experiences almost backwards from the professional environment to the educational one. We can provide a vision of the real world students aspire to experience professionally.

The comments included here demonstrate that all of the participants understand the value this experiential knowledge affords the students, but they have varying views about whether the knowledge outweighs professional training as instructors.

Results Achieved Through Professional Actions. Among the elements related to student success in the educational environment, professionalism was most vehemently and resoundingly championed by all participants across the board. I will offer one statement that I believe sums this up in a clear and concise manner. It was a statement made by an MBA with experience in the K12 arena, Professor Edie:

> I am here to educate students, every one of them. So, signing on to teach a class, I have agreed to do whatever is necessary to help them understand the material and grasp or meet the objectives that I am trying to meet. I have said yes, I will do what I can to have students meet these objectives, and that means I will do whatever has to be done.

This demonstrates that the adjuncts who participated in this study have exhibited their fierce determination to see students succeed regardless of any lack of knowledge based in higher education procedures to properly accommodate and support students with disabilities or all students with diverse learning styles.

Conclusion

We have reviewed the findings of this study using the 15 different codes identified using the three themes and the nine sub-themes which emerged during this review. This analysis will inform the conclusions and demonstrate connections to prior research and the research questions, and we will discuss the implications for future research and practice in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 5

Introduction

  This hermeneutic phenomenological study was conducted to examine whether adjunct instructors are properly prepared or perceive that they are prepared to support students with disabilities and all students with diverse learning styles. Portions of the semi-structured interviews explored the adjunct instructors' knowledge and comprehension of the underlying regulatory requirements created by the various regulations that higher education institutions are bound to follow. Some questions assessed whether the instructors were mindful of their responsibilities to support students with disabilities and those with diverse learning styles, while others gathered the instructors' insights into whether they thought these supports were an advantage for the students in question. Still other questions attempted to determine if the instructors viewed the provision of these supports and accommodations as an undue burden on them or if they created any detrimental effect in their classroom or their courses as a whole.

  In the world of phenomenological research, by examining these perceptions of the participants, we are examining their *dasein*, the German word for *existence*, or their experience of being that is peculiar to human beings. As discussed by Peoples (2020), we cannot bracket our experiences because we are always in the world with others, and there is no way to separate ourselves from being within the world. Another element of the analysis of data in phenomenological research is consideration of the participants' foresight/fore-conception, which refers to participants' preconceived knowledge about certain experiences or situations; an additional element is the hermeneutic circle, which when used in the analysis of data refers to the understanding of the whole and analyzing

the whole as we read it, and then there is an understanding of the parts. As we analyze, we break down information into parts, then synthesize, and then look at the whole again.

Discussion of Findings

The research questions in this study address adjunct professors' overall understanding of institutional polices and required legislation that support the needs of students with disabilities within the postsecondary environment and how these adjuncts respond to student accommodation plan requests within their course assignments. The findings of all of the participants revealed that although there are gaps in the knowledge of many of the adjuncts, they still understood the importance of providing accommodations to those who need them, and they also understood these accommodations did not provide those students with any advantage over other students in the class. They did not view having to provide these supports as a burden on them or their work, and they understood the need for treating the knowledge of any students' status as strictly confidential. Most appeared to possess knowledge of the DRO and what services they provide to students, although they did not have a full grasp of how those students can access the services they need.

Additionally, the research questions address the inclusive and accessible strategies adjunct instructors utilize within their course assignments, if any, to support students' diverse learning styles, and whether they develop skills and strategies for incorporating the UDL within their instruction. The findings of the participants demonstrated a reasonable level of comprehension as it relates to diverse learning styles inclusive of the ability to identify and describe various styles and discuss some of the steps taken to make the materials more comprehensible for those with diverse learning styles. The deficiency

that seems to exist in this area is a lack of knowledge about UDL, at least by name. Some participants demonstrated knowledge of some elements of UDL but did not understand or recognize the theories of this design as such; they had developed some skills that reconcile to the theories of UDL and employed some of these in their syllabi and classes but were unaware of the comprehensive design theories.

Ultimately, despite the gaps in the detailed knowledge of regulatory requirements, which regulations endorsed the establishment of which policies or procedures, all of the participants in the study understood the necessity and value for the students receiving the proper supports or accommodations. Basically, they all demonstrated that they are professionals, which has compelled them to act in an ethical manner to provide the best possible equitable educational experience the students deserved to receive.

Connection to Prior Research

The data gathered from various peer-reviewed sources compelled me to complete this study. Many of the fundamentals related to higher education and the requirements to properly support students with disabilities and all students with diverse learning styles were important to examine in order to gather data to inform the conclusions.

Debate about the inequities among different student groups goes back over 30 years, and those inequities have probably existed longer than that. In a study by the Further Education Unit (1992), the idea was presented that the supports needed by people with disabilities or learning difficulties should be placed alongside the needs of other learners. This study dismissed the concepts of "the norm" or of "average students" who learn through an "average approach." In an article by Rose (2000) the concept in architecture of access was discussed and linked the architectural movement of Universal

Design to the development of UDL, which was developed in response to the need to accommodate students with diverse learning styles. In an additional study by the California Postsecondary Education Commission (2008), the indication was that the Commission intended to ensure all students receive equal opportunities in higher education while specifying the impacted groups include LGBT students and students with disabilities. These studies appear to be recognition that providing supports or accommodations to students with disabilities and those with diverse learning styles does not place them in an advantageous position but instead levels the playing field for those students to receive an equitable educational experience.

There are significant differences between the complexities of the regulations which are in force for the K–12 environment and the multiple regulations that establish guidance in higher education. The supports provided to students in K–12 are authorized by IDEA, whereas the rules for IHEs are developed by multiple regulatory acts: Section 504, ADA, ADAAA, and FERPA, making the rules in higher education much more complex to navigate than in the K–12 arena. Baker et al. (2012) stated that the area of sensitive and supportive environments must be further explored as the academic progress of students with disabilities is significantly affected by the attitudes of faculty and their willingness to provide accommodations. Although relying on multiple regulatory acts makes the interpretation of the requirements in the higher education environment much more complex, the requirements exist nonetheless.

Research indicates faculty members are willing to provide certain accommodations, such as permission to record lectures and provision of extended time for tests, but in those same articles the authors revealed that those faculty members were

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less willing to provide copies of lecture notes, alternative assignments, or make exceptions for poor spelling and grammar on exams (Houck et al., 1992; Mathews et al., 1987; Vogel et al., 1999). Dowrick et al. (2005) noted that students were experiencing difficulty in securing basic accommodations, such as room changes for students who use wheelchairs and appropriate text formats for students with low vision, as a correlate to low faculty knowledge about legal requirements for disability supports. Hartman-Hall and Haaga (2002) noted that negative interactions with faculty were a reason why many students were unwilling to disclose and pursue supports. The regulations not only address the need to provide accommodations but also stipulate that the accommodations provided fit the needs of the student involved.

Ehlinger and Ropers (2020) reported that instructor messaging and communication that expressed openness and concern for students' well-being and learning, involved reaching out and sharing resources, and provided encouragement facilitated learning. Instructors who talked about resources and disability positively affected participants' comfort when sharing information about their access and accommodation needs. Baker et al. (2012) reported, with respect to the views of faculty (73.6%) and students (86.8%), the view that students with disabilities are just as capable as students without disabilities of meeting the demands of their academic program and major. Additionally, the statistical results reported by Baker et al. reflected a somewhat positive view with respect to the experiences of students with disabilities as far as both faculty and students were concerned, but it is important to consider that the students with disabilities who self-identified for this study indicated that they do not self-identify to fellow classmates (74.5%) and about 61% do not self-identify to their professors.

Let us return for a moment to a significant element that Ehlinger and Ropers (2020) found as a facilitator to learning: instructors' validation of the students' identity and bringing diverse perspectives to the classroom especially for students with marginalized identities. When Ehlinger and Ropers asked participants to discuss barriers to learning, the instructor role was one of the most prominent themes discussed. Just as participants believed instructors could affect a positive influence over learning, virtually all discussed occurrences where the instructor was a barrier to their ability to thrive in a course.

Students with disabilities move from a highly structured environment with many supports, including a team of individuals who can advocate for them and provide personal supports. Once they are in an IHE, they must take the appropriate steps to request the supports they need. In a study by Van Hees et al. (2018), they stated that another area that must be considered as students affected by disabilities approach the end of their high school career and begin considering higher education is how they and their parents deal with the transition to an IHE. Although the students expressed some reservations about moving forward, they were clearly determined to move forward despite their fears; the responses of the parents were mixed.

In Hewitt's study (2015) she stated compared to in the past, more people today are identified as having disabilities; therefore, more students attending our schools from K–12 and on into higher education are known to have disabilities, and instructors must be better prepared to work with them appropriately. Movement or graduation from one school or educational level to another may present issues related to a smooth transition

for any student, especially when compounded by the difficulties of dealing with a disability, there is an added layer of complication.

In a study by Rose (2000) it was discussed that the CAST began to understand and view certain educational materials as similar in nature to stairs. This connection was disclosed as evidence as to why UDL was developed. The connection was made that similar to stairs as a barrier to a wheelchair user, books provide access to vast stores of knowledge—but for learners with physical, sensory, and cognitive disabilities, among others, they become barriers. Smith (2012) indicated that UDL allows an instructor multiple ways to motivate students and engage them in learning while anticipating learner variability. Smith (2012) deemed UDL as a method to support anyone with diverse learning needs, whether or not the student involved discloses or even has a disability.

Connection of Findings to Research Questions

Research Question 1. The first research question deals with supports for students with disabilities within the postsecondary environment and the policies created in response to legislation enacted to foster an equitable educational experience for those students. This examination was specifically related to whether adjunct instructors possess an overall understanding of these institutional policies and the related legislation.

The findings highlighted that the participants had an understanding of a portion of the legislation which had been enacted in an attempt to properly support students with disabilities. Although all the participants indicated they had been in a situation where a student requested accommodations of some sort, and their awareness of the legislation was not complete, all of them stated that they worked to support that student as completely and competently as possible. They have all had the experience of needing to

follow the policies and procedures created in response to the legislation enacted, and they all stated if they were unsure of how to properly provide the support needed, they could receive guidance from others. Included in the findings were indications that they also understood the right of a student to expect confidentiality when they disclose their status.

The participants also realized the importance of proper accommodations in the successes of the students in their class and they showed a level of understanding that these accommodations are not placing the students in an advantageous position over others but instead leveling the playing field for the students with disabilities. The participants demonstrated empathy toward students dealing with the effects of a disability, and they grasped the concept that these supports and accommodations will assist these students in their growth educationally and the development of their adult identity. Many of the participants discussed the impediments to participating in trainings offered in their higher education institution, whether it was availability of these trainings at a convenient time or modality or their inability to make the time to participate. Many also indicated the value they placed on experiential knowledge that they brought to the classroom: some felt it informed them and their students in a different way, others thought there may be a better way to bring that knowledge to them without getting in the way of the instructional successes of their students.

Research Question 2. The second research question deals with what inclusive and accessible strategies adjunct instructors utilize within their course assignments to support students' diverse learning needs. It also dealt with how adjunct professors develop skills and strategies for incorporating UDL within their instructional designs and methods.

A portion of the interviews dealt with diverse learning styles as many students, regardless of whether they have an identified disability, may have a diverse learning style or need. The ability to modify the methods used to convey information to students whether, it is related to only a diverse learning style or to the effects of a disability also, gives the students involved the best opportunity for an equitable educational experience. The participants were specifically asked if they knew what UDL was, and if they understood the purpose of the design in the classroom and in being prepared to support students with diverse learning styles. A few of the participants did recognize the methodology of design by name, and they were even anticipating training in it that they would be attending in the near future. Others of the participants recognized elements of the design once it was discussed in the interviews, but not by name. Those others did then realize they were in fact relying on UDL to inform modifications they were making in their classes to more appropriately convey information in the way most effective for students with diverse learning styles.

Connection to Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework or foundation upon which this research has been built is the framework of equity in education. In particular, the objective was to focus on adjunct instructors and whether they were prepared to properly support students with disabilities and all students with diverse learning styles. I approached this study realizing that I had to determine if adjunct instructors had a complete understanding of the values of accommodations, where the rules and policies were based, if they understood regulations that bound all higher education institutions to the requirement to provide an

equitable educational experience. In order to accomplish this, I examined various aspects of the instructional experiences of a group of adjunct instructors.

I attempted to determine if the participants understood the four different regulatory acts that guided higher education institutions, whether the schools at which they taught provided any orientation to adjunct instructors, and if that orientation dealt with policies and procedures related to students with disabilities. I explored the knowledge of the participants to determine if they understood the resource available to students with respect to disabilities, how students requested accommodations and supports, and how they needed to respond to those requests when received. I inquired as to whether the instructors understood the need to treat their communication with these students confidentially, and I also asked if the support they were required to provide created an undue burden for them or their courses as a whole.

Further, I investigated whether the instructors were aware of UDL, a recognized methodology of design to structure curriculum in a manner consistent with providing information to those with diverse learning styles. I also gathered information from the participants to determine their view on whether the professional and experiential knowledge they brought to the classroom outweighed their possible lack of knowledge as a professional instructor.

My intention was to examine all of these elements to assist me in reaching informed conclusions about whether adjunct instructors are properly prepared to provide equal opportunities for access and success in postsecondary education for students with disabilities and all students with diverse learning styles.

Implications for Practice

This research has uncovered the need for more or a re-fashioning of professional development policies by higher education institutions. Behling and Linder (2017) studied collaborations between CTLs and DROs, particularly as they apply to students with disabilities and accessibility in online learning. Their study found that while there is a diverse range of collaborations between these offices, the collaborations were flawed and faced many challenges. One of the topics that I discussed with participants during our interviews was that all of the instructors were aware of professional development trainings available through their educational employer, but they also discussed the barriers that exist for them to participate in those trainings. Basilice (2015) disclosed that the institution where her study was conducted did not mandate or encourage staff to seek out professional development related to supports for students with disabilities. Angeli (2009) identified the lack of diversity integrated into the campus culture as a major impediment to the staff seeking out and taking these trainings. If campus culture were supportive of diversity, faculty would be encouraged to become advocates for students with disabilities. Another positive that I found (and ironically, a positive that developed due to the COVID-19 pandemic) is that many trainings are now offered virtually, helping to decrease the barriers for adjunct instructors to participate in the trainings offered.

If they were employed elsewhere, in a full-time position that involved their professional background, adjuncts may have been aware of trainings offered during the day at their IHE that were offered in-person at a time they would not be available; hence, they could not take advantage of those trainings. If they are adjuncts at multiple institutions, they may be aware of trainings offered, but due to commitments at other

IHEs they may be unable to avail themselves of those trainings. In a third scenario that arose, some of the adjuncts worked a full-time non-instructional position at the institution where they taught, and their full-time position may preclude them from attending these trainings. If these trainings were offered in a virtual modality and/or if these trainings were recorded, they could be made available to adjuncts as well as full-time instructors for their participation. Another factor that I must consider is that adjuncts are not compensated for time spent that is not related to their instructional responsibilities.

Behling and Linder (2017) also found the CTL and DRO offices in their study were offering new faculty orientations, overviews of the needs of students with disabilities, and assistance with one-on-one consultations. Another factor that was discussed with the participants was a widely used function at many employers and one that needs to be re-visited in the educational arena. That function is orientation, which is another area that needs to be examined at IHEs. There were mixed reactions when the participants were asked about whether or not they had attended orientation for their role as an adjunct instructor: some indicated they may have, but it was too long ago to remember for sure; others stated they had attended an orientation, but according to their recollection it did not cover any regulatory issues or requirements particularly as it applied to students with disabilities.

Professionals in many disciplines are required to maintain their professional skillset and keep it up to date with the latest theoretical developments in their respective field. Accountants are required to complete annual trainings, medical professionals must work to maintain their skills, and other professions have similar requirements, as well. In higher education, we hold ourselves to that same standard of other professions; we

continually seek out the information needed to keep ourselves at the forefront of our profession. We strive to maintain our acumen in the classroom and provide to our students the best educational experience they can get. We read about research in our fields of expertise and complete research to further our profession, but we can no longer ignore that we may have been neglecting a significant portion of our educational staff, those known as adjunct instructors.

Implications for Future Research

With the completion of this research project it has become apparent that additional research needs to be done in a couple of areas. It would be important to work with staff from the DRO to recruit students registered with them to determine their experiences with adjunct instructors whose classes they have attended. Cory (2011) explained the concept of the core goals of a program precluding certain accommodations from being offered but very clearly discussed the need for accommodations and supports to, in some cases, require a dialogue between the student, disability resource staff, and the instructors on a case-by-case basis. These discussions would include both adjunct instructors to whom they have disclosed their status and any to whom they felt uncomfortable making the disclosure. Another element important to examine is if these students have regularly requested accommodations in other classes, and if there was any particular pattern in which instructors were involved. Basilice (2015) assessed the influence of faculty knowledge, faculty attitudes, faculty ability to assist, faculty reactions and responses towards student self-advocacy, and faculty collaboration with the DRO regarding students with disabilities.

As a part of this examination it would also be important to determine the student's successes and failures in their other classes and determine the relationship between grades earned with and without the request for accommodations. When the study is developed there would be a need to review student GPA and their instructional level in order to attempt to determine if the student's successes and progress improved over time in higher education or if their longevity as a student was related to some other factor.

Another topic for possible research is related to professional development programs in general and programs in higher education institutions in particular. Barnhill et al. (2011) identified an important gap that exists, which is the lack of professional development. Perhaps there is a need to explore whether the DRO should develop a curriculum related to the legislative requirements surrounding students with disabilities and what those requirements are. As stated by Angeli (2009), if professional development is available, it could provide faculty with the tools to incorporate alternative instructional methods and alternative technology into their curriculum. Angeli went on to state that these trainings should be offered on an ongoing basis in order to help faculty to better understand the use of multiple teaching models and the needs of students with disabilities, including current and emerging instructional technology. This information can then be provided to all instructors in multiple modalities, making it as widely available as possible. Perhaps another element of this that should be considered is whether those of adjunct status who complete these trainings would then be entitled to some enhancement to their compensation.

One additional area that would be interesting for further examination would be to repeat this study but to modify the characteristics of the participants to include adjunct

and full-time instructional staff to determine if there are significant differences in the findings between the two groups.

Conclusion

This study focused on adjunct instructors, students with disabilities, and all students with diverse learning styles, and it was an important undertaking as the instructional landscape at IHEs has changed. Adjunct instructors are now the vast majority of instructional staff in higher education, and the composition of the student population in this environment has evolved in many ways. The student population now includes a much larger proportion of non-traditional students, adult learners, those employed full-time while in school, those who have various family responsibilities in addition to school, those who are first-timers in their family to attend postsecondary education, and of course those students with disabilities, to name a few. Included in this population are students with diverse learning styles.

The theoretical framework or foundation upon which this study was built was the underpinnings of critical pedagogy, which was inspired by the concepts of critical theory and the writings of Paulo Freire (1970/2018) in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, where he discusses the dehumanization and objectification of a group of people by another group of people. This work is vital when exploring equitable learning opportunities for student groups within the postsecondary education setting. For the purposes of this discussion, we looked to the work of Salmi and Bassett (2014), where the word *equity* was defined as providing equal opportunities for access and success in tertiary education. Salmi and Bassett continued by stating that *equity* refers not to treating everyone exactly the same but to leveling the playing field to promote an equality of opportunity. They went on to

describe three dimensions of equity: equity of access, equity of results, and equity of outcomes, which emerged as the themes by which I analyzed the findings of this study.

I collected data by completing semi-structured interviews with 12 adjunct instructors at various IHEs. These instructors all answered some demographic questions about their educational background and their personal experiences with individuals with disabilities, as well as their professional background. They taught at various types of institutions: public, private, large, and small, some taught at one institution others taught at multiple institutions. They taught in various disciplines including business, science, language arts, human services, psychology, and social work, and a few held non-instructional positions at the school where they taught. This provided an adequate mix of disciplines and backgrounds from which to gather data.

The conclusion I reached was that a void exists among adjunct instructors with respect to the regulations by which IHEs are bound regarding the accommodations and supports for students with disabilities. Although all of the participants possessed fairly decent amounts of knowledge about the ADA, there was not a significant amount of knowledge related to the other three regulatory acts discussed for this study. The exception here were those individuals who had a background in the helping arts of human services, psychology and social work. When discussing the trainings available to instructors, most indicated that as adjuncts they did not have convenient access to trainings offered at the institution where they taught. Many of these IHEs offered seminars and conferences that appeared to be interesting and helpful, but they were held at times that conflicted with other obligations of the adjunct staff.

With respect to the DRO or other like resources available at the different institutions, those outside of the helping arts did not possess comprehensive knowledge of the workings of this office or the services offered. With respect to accommodations requested, all of the participants understood that this type of request was important and a definitive responsibility for them as an instructor. They also all expressed an understanding that these requests were to be treated confidentially, and they viewed whatever they needed to offer to meet those supports and accommodations as not burdensome to them in their role as an instructor. Another factor discussed with the participants was UDL, an important methodology of design used to develop a curriculum in a fashion that makes the course structure flexible in order to easily modify a class to fit the needs of the diverse learning styles of different students. Unfortunately, very few of the participants possessed knowledge about the design by name, but some of them did have knowledge of some of the elements of the design after the topic was introduced in our interviews.

Based on this study, it is clear to me that higher education institutions must develop some plan to better inform their adjunct instructional staff of the regulatory requirements they are bound to meet with respect to students with disabilities and those with diverse learning styles. As a professional in the field, I take comfort that, among the participants in this study, there was a unanimous professionalism expressed—they all shared the belief that they were hired to meet the responsibilities of their role, and those responsibilities included teaching every student in front of them and providing every single student with an equitable educational experience in their classroom.

APPENDIX A ST. JOHN'S UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

APPROVALS

IRB-FY2022-190 - Initial: Initial Submission - Expedited - St. John's

do-not-reply@cayuse.com <do-not-reply@cayuse.com>
Tue 12/21/2021 3:30 PM
To: czadoaqk@stjohns.edu <czadoaqk@stjohns.edu>; William Leonelli <william.leonelli17@my.stjohns.edu>

* External Email *

ST. JOHN'S UNIVERSITY

Federal Wide Assurance: FWA00009066

Dec 21, 2021 3:30:29 PM EST

PI: William Leonelli
CO-PI: Katherine Aquino
The School of Education

Re: Expedited Review - Initial - **IRB-FY2022-190** *ADJUNCT INSTRUCTORS' PREPAREDNESS TO SUPPORT STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES AND THE DIVERSE LEARNING STYLES OF ALL STUDENTS*

Dear William Leonelli:

The St John's University Institutional Review Board has rendered the decision below for *ADJUNCT INSTRUCTORS' PREPAREDNESS TO SUPPORT STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES AND THE DIVERSE LEARNING STYLES OF ALL STUDENTS* . The approval is effective from December 21, 2021 through December 20, 2022.

Decision: Approved

PLEASE NOTE: If you have collected any data prior to this approval date, the data must be discarded.

Selected Category:

Sincerely,

Raymond DiGiuseppe, PhD, ABPP
Chair, Institutional Review Board
Professor of Psychology

Marie Nitopi, Ed.D.

IRB Coordinator

CAUTION - External email. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

IRB-FY2022-190 - Renewal: Renewal Submission - St. John's

do-not-reply@cayuse.com <do-not-reply@cayuse.com>
Wed 12/7/2022 11:22 AM

To: czadoaqk@stjohns.edu <czadoaqk@stjohns.edu>;William Leonelli <william.leonelli17@my.stjohns.edu>

* External Email *

ST. JOHN'S UNIVERSITY

Federal Wide Assurance: FWA00009066

Dec 7, 2022 11:22:41 AM EST

PI: William Leonelli
Dept: The School of Education

Re: Renewal - IRB-FY2022-190 *ADJUNCT INSTRUCTORS' PREPAREDNESS TO SUPPORT STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES AND THE DIVERSE LEARNING STYLES OF ALL STUDENTS*

Dear Dr. William Leonelli:

The St John's University Institutional Review Board has rendered the decision below for *ADJUNCT INSTRUCTORS' PREPAREDNESS TO SUPPORT STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES AND THE DIVERSE LEARNING STYLES OF ALL STUDENTS* .
The study is approved through --.

Decision: Approved

Sincerely,

Raymond DiGiuseppe, PhD, ABPP
Chair, Institutional Review Board
Professor of Psychology

IRB-FY2022-190 - Renewal: Renewal Submission - St. John's

do-not-reply@cayuse.com <do-not-reply@cayuse.com>
Wed 12/7/2022 11:22 AM

To: czadoaqk@stjohns.edu <czadoaqk@stjohns.edu>;William Leonelli <william.leonelli17@my.stjohns.edu>

* External Email *

ST. JOHN'S UNIVERSITY

Federal Wide Assurance: FWA00009066

Dec 7, 2022 11:22:41 AM EST

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Dept: The School of Education

Re: Renewal - IRB-FY2022-190 *ADJUNCT INSTRUCTORS' PREPAREDNESS TO SUPPORT STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES AND THE DIVERSE LEARNING STYLES OF ALL STUDENTS*

Dear Dr. William Leonelli:

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The study is approved through --.

Decision: Approved

Sincerely,

Raymond DiGiuseppe, PhD, ABPP
Chair, Institutional Review Board
Professor of Psychology

APPENDIX B PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Title of Research Project: Adjunct instructors' preparedness to support students with disabilities and the diverse learning styles of all students.

Researcher: William Leonelli

Institution: St. John's University, Queens, New York

Introduction:
I am a fourth year doctoral student at St. John's University. I am doing research on the preparedness of adjunct instructors to properly support students with disabilities and the diverse learning styles of all students. Because you are an adjunct instructor I would like to invite you to participate in my study.

Procedures:
In this study, I will be asking you questions about your understanding of the regulatory requirements to provide supports to students with disabilities in accordance with various regulations and about your understanding of the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) which is a method used to support students with diverse learning styles. As a part of this process I will ask you to do the following: complete a brief questionnaire, participate in a semi-structured interview which should take no more than 90 minutes, and to submit a copy of your syllabus and curriculum related to the class(es) you teach as well as any information you may have about the Center for Teaching and Learning at your school.

Possible risks or benefits:
There is no risk involved with participation in this study. However, I will be asking you to give up some of your valuable time. The benefit of participation in this study is that you will be informing research about your experiences related to your role as an adjunct instructor and your understanding of the proper supports to be offered to students with disabilities and students with diverse learning styles enrolled in an institution of higher education. This research may help higher education institutions to better support students with disabilities and students with diverse learning styles.

Questions: If you have any questions regarding this study and your participation, please do not hesitate to contact me, the researcher, via email at william.leonelli17@stjohns.edu, or via phone at (631) 897-1909. You may also contact the researcher's advisor at St. John's University at czadoaqk@stjohns.edu or the St. John's University IRB Chair at irbstjohns@stjohns.edu.

Confidentiality:
As a participant in this research study, I promise to keep your name and information that you have provided, confidential. Your name and identity will not be disclosed at any time.

I agree to participate in the above-described study, and I confirm that I have received a copy of this consent form.

_____ I agree to be video-taped during the interviews.

_____ I agree to be audio-taped during the interviews.

_____   _____
Signature of Participant   Date

_____   _____
Signature of Researcher   Date

APPENDIX C DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS

Demographic Questions related to the Doctoral Research of William Leonelli

What is your professional background?

_____

What is your level of education?

_____

How long have you been an adjunct instructor at your current institution?

_____

Have you been an adjunct at any other institution of higher education? (Yes/No)

_____

Do you have any experience teaching in the K-12 environment? (Yes/No)

_____

Do you have any formalized training in educational instruction? (Yes/No)

_____

Are you aware of different learning styles such as hands on, visual, etc.? (Yes/No)

_____

Do you have any relatively extensive personal experience dealing with a student with disabilities (child, sibling, niece, nephew, child of a cousin or close friend)? (Yes/No)

_____

If you feel comfortable discussing the situation, can you describe the disability and what educational level the person has achieved?

Please describe any challenges they may have experienced in the education arena and why you think this occurred?

Are you aware of the composition (ratio of adjunct to full-time instructors) of the school's faculty both at your school and in higher education today, and do you think that composition will have a significant bearing on the student's experience in higher education?

Please provide a copy of the syllabus and any written curriculum you have related to the class(es) you teach regularly as well as any information you can provide about the Center for Teaching and Learning at your school?

APPENDIX D SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

William Leonelli Doctoral Study Interview Questions

1. Have you received orientation in the policies of the school where you teach? Did that orientation include the underlying regulatory basis for the policies followed and why?

2. Can you name some of the regulations governing higher education and explain your understanding of what the regulations were intended to accomplish?

3. Can you discuss/describe what you understand about the following regulatory acts and what significance they have in the higher education environment? What additional responsibilities do these regulations create?

- Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Section 504)
- Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA)
- ADA Amendments Act of 2008 (ADAAA)
- Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)

4. How mindful are you of the intended effect on the student experience these policies were created for?

5. Do you feel these policies are meant to provide any advantage to certain portions of the student population? If so, why, if not, why not?

6. Do you think the professional experiences adjunct instructors bring to the classroom outweigh any lack of knowledge they may have about supporting students with disabilities? If so, why and how do you think these students should or could be accommodated?

7. Are you familiar with the Disability Resource Office and what this office offers to students?

8. Do you think the regulations would allow for instructors to be informed of student status regardless of their choice? As an instructor, do you have the authority or right to approach a student who you perceive as being a student with a disability about their diagnosis whether or not they have disclosed to you?

9. Do you view these rules or requirements as a burden to your work in the classroom or your course as a whole?

10. Do you know what students with disabilities must do to request any special accommodations or supports and how that would be communicated to you as an instructor? Have you ever received this type of communication? Is there a confidentiality requirement surrounding these communications?

11. Have you ever communicated with the Disability Resource Office for guidance about how to meet a request by a student? Can you describe what supports or accommodations were requested? Can you talk about how you fulfilled the request?

12. Can you seek guidance from the Disability Resource Office or your own department chair when dealing with student issues?

13. Have you ever discussed with someone at school, when facing the prospect of dealing with a student with a disability how to better provide a successful learning environment for that student? Do you think this is an expectation above and beyond what should be expected of you?

14. What learning style do you use most effectively (visual learner, hands on learner, learn by reading, etc.)? Can you describe what you mean when you name your preferred learning style?

15. Based on my own experience I can tell you that learning styles can change, have you always learned with the style you currently identify with? If you learn by a different style now than you did previously how did you adjust to this change? If that is the case, was that a difficult transition for you?

16. Do you think this makes you more sensitive to the needs of students in your classes who may experience diverse learning styles then it might otherwise?

17. Have you ever heard of the Universal Design for Learning (UDL)? If so, can you describe/explain what UDL is?

18. Have you ever modified the method by which you present information in your class to make it more understandable to those with diverse learning styles?

19. Do you think the professional experiences adjunct instructors bring to the classroom outweigh any lack of knowledge they may have about supporting students with diverse learning styles?

20. Are you aware of a Faculty Center for Teaching and Learning at your school? Have you read about the trainings offered to the faculty?

21. Have you had the opportunity to take advantage of any of these trainings and if so, have they helped you to develop a stronger curriculum and teaching environment in your classes?

22. If you have not been able to take advantage of these trainings, why not and how can the school overcome this circumstance?

23. Have you ever participated in any training about the elements of UDL that you have employed in your classes when a student appears to be struggling with grasping something you are teaching?

24. Have you ever discussed with someone at school, when dealing with a student with a diverse leaning style in your class, how to provide a more successful learning environment for that student? Do you think this is an expectation above and beyond what should be expected of you?

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