Program Standards for Disability Services: Practical Recommendations for Standards Implementation

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Agenda

• Overview of AHEAD Program Standards
• Review and Discuss of Each Standard
  • What they say
  • Associated challenges
  • Recommendations for implementation
• Future of the AHEAD Program Standards
Why are standards important?

• Shared language across a field
• Promote the development of “high quality” programs/professionals
• Profession/association-wide view of what constitutes “best practice”
• Provides a model from which to conduct evaluation
• Establishes credibility of the DS office among campus constituencies

Overview of AHEAD Program Standards and Performance Indicators

• Developed by Shaw and Dukes (2001)
• First adopted by the Association for Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD) in June 1999
• Revisions adopted by AHEAD in November 2004 and published by Shaw and Dukes (2006)
• Developed for use by programs across institutional type
• Purpose: To provide “a research-based direction for postsecondary institutions, consumers and governmental agencies with respect to the services necessary to provide equal access for college students with disabilities” (Shaw & Dukes, 2001, p. 81)
AHEAD Program Standards

• Sometimes used by DS offices for self-assessment
• Used in external reviews conducted by AHEAD
• **Emphasize that the responsibility for disability service (DS) not be the sole responsibility of the DS office, but be distributed within the institution**
• Present minimum essentials
• Unknown to many disability services professionals
Broad Challenges with AHEAD Program Standards

Resources are limited:

• Time
• Money
• Staff
• Operationalizability (can be highly varied)
1. Consultation/Collaboration

• 1.1 Serve as an advocate for issues regarding students with disabilities to ensure equal access.

• 1.2 Provide disability representation on relevant campus committees.
1. Consultation/Collaboration

1.1 Serve as an advocate for issues regarding students with disabilities to ensure equal access.

- Collaboration between DS and administration regarding policy implementation.
  - E.g., syllabus statement; availability of syllabus; accommodations and technical standards

- Foster a strong institutional commitment to collaboration on disability issues among key administrative personnel (e.g., deans, registrar, campus legal counsel).
  - E.g., names of key administrators and their second in command

- Work with academic affairs on policy regarding course substitutions.
  - E.g., get input from AA before identifying a policy (foreign language)

- Foster an institutional commitment to promoting student abilities rather than a student’s disability. E.g., workshops on student success; success and diversity;

- Foster meaningful inclusion of students with disabilities in campus life (e.g., residential activities, extracurricular activities).
1. Consultation/Collaboration

1.2 Provide disability representation on relevant campus committees

• Advise campus student affairs regarding disability-related issues (e.g., student discipline, student activities) *E.g., take a case-based approach to get buy-in*

• Participate on a campus-wide disability advisory committee consisting of faculty, students, administrators, and community representatives
  • *E.g., partner with diversity committee or accessibility committee; consider non-stigmatizing vocabulary*

• Participate on campus administrative committees such as a campus committee on individuals with disabilities. *E.g., celebrate disability awareness month (October)*
Challenges with Consultation/Collaboration

• Not always at the table
• Don’t always invite others to our table
• Not always viewed as equal partners because of lack of subject matter expertise
• Not always trained on how to effectively communicate with diverse constituent groups
• Not always aware of or trained on organizational structure of institution
• DS sometimes limit responsibilities to issues of access with little attention paid to success
General Strategies

• Find your allies on campus!
• Establish relationships with key administrators and faculty members
• Identify what is important to constituents and start conversations there (e.g., student success, social justice, sustainability)
• Resort to “it’s the law” only when other methods of alliance-building are unsuccessful
2. Information Dissemination

- 2.1 Disseminate information through institutional electronic and printed publications regarding disability services and how to access them.

- 2.2 Provide services that promote access to the campus community.

- 2.3 Disseminate information to students with disabilities regarding available campus and community disability resources; include traditional and current avenues (social media) for information dissemination.
2.1 Information Dissemination

• Distribute policy and procedures(s) on availability of services via all relevant campus publications (catalogs, programmatic materials, web sites, etc.) *E.g.*, documentation; protocol for accommodations; extended absence; residential life

• Ensure referral, documentation, and disability services information is up to date and accessible on the institution’s web site. *E.g.*, assign responsibility

• Ensure that criteria and procedures for accessing accommodations are clearly delineated and disseminated to the campus community.
  • *E.g.*, don’t get text heavy; use user friendly language

• Provide information on grievance and complaint procedures when requested.

• Include a statement in the institutional publications regarding self-disclosure for students with disabilities.
Challenges with Information Dissemination

• Institutions are reluctant to promotion DS “front and center” on their home page [e.g., BU class action law suit, 1996]

• DS is not always proficient in marketing and communication; or don’t have the resources

• Difficult to stay abreast of changing policies and protocol within the community [e.g., athletes with disabilities]

• Channels through which students, faculty, and staff communicate are varied and changing
Broad Strategies

• Develop relationships with other departments (e.g., advising, counseling, health services, marketing, human resources, etc.) for outreach and messaging
• Seek to make DS information part of the strategic plan of the college
• Use both traditional and digital approaches for information dissemination
  - social media; apps and so on
• Collect data and have a database on DS
3. Faculty/Staff Awareness

• 3.1 Inform faculty regarding academic accommodations, compliance with legal responsibilities, as well as instructional, programmatic, and curriculum modifications.

• 3.2 Provide consultation with administrators regarding academic accommodations, compliance with legal responsibilities, as well as instructional, programmatic, physical, and curriculum modifications.

• 3.3 Provide disability awareness training for campus constituencies such as faculty, staff, and administrators.

• 3.4 Provide information to faculty about services available to students with disabilities.
3.1 Faculty/Staff Awareness

• Inform faculty of their rights and responsibilities to ensure equal educational access. E.g., *share aware information with HR*

• Inform faculty of the procedures that students with disabilities must follow in arranging *for accommodations*. E.g., share information with faculty student advisors; adjunct instructors

• Collaborate with faculty on accommodation decisions when there is a potential for a fundamental alteration of an academic requirement. E.g., changing grading rubric; attendance and absences; medical leave
Challenges with Faculty/Staff Awareness

• Outreach requires resources (Raue & Lewis, 2011)
• Places additional responsibility on DS for ensuring that student needs are met (i.e., issues of access and inclusion need to be the responsibility of all at the institution)
• Not always aware of faculty/staff learning preferences
• **Difficult to get an audience with faculty/staff**
• Faculty/staff sometimes resistant to receiving information about disability
• Some faculty/staff hold discriminatory and prejudiced views
• **Faculty/staff prioritize other aspects of their jobs over access**
Broad Strategies

• Keep expectations reasonable for faculty/staff awareness
• Think incremental change
• Identify empathetic leaders in faculty and staff and solicit their help in educating their peers
• Identify allies in every department (at least one)
• Link education to professional, institutional, and social goals (e.g., enhancing student academic success through universal design)
• Incorporate student and faculty experiences of how PD has improved practice
• Create videos to educate faculty (Murray, Lombardi, Wren, & Keys, 2009)
4. Academic Adjustments

• 4.1 Maintain records that document the student’s plan for the provision of selected accommodations.

• 4.2 Determine with the student, the appropriate academic accommodations and services.

• 4.3 Collaborate with faculty to ensure that reasonable academic accommodations do not fundamentally alter the program of study.
4.1 Maintain records that document the student’s plan for the provision of selected accommodations

• Create a **confidential file on each student** including relevant information pertaining to eligibility and provision of services. E.g., determine what you will put into a confidential paper file vs. digital

• **Document the basis for accommodation decisions and recommendations.** E.g. *Use necessary efficiencies for recording*

• Develop a **case management system** that addresses the maintenance of careful and accurate records of each student. E.g., *input data into a data base and/or CRM*
Challenges with Academic Adjustments

- Can be difficult to get students, faculty, and staff to meet
- Some record keeping systems are cumbersome
- Time consuming processes—implications for staffing
- Difficult to identify “reasonable” accommodations and those that do not violate “essential requirements” of the program of study
Broad Strategies

• Movement to electronic files may speed up processes if systems were designed and refined to collect needed information
• Essential to engage with students on a regular basis to ensure that appropriate accommodations have been received and are addressing access needs
• Meeting the Academic Adjustments standard is time consuming and labor intensive, but essential. Minimizing resources consumed by other standards may be necessary (e.g., designing videos to provide professional development, dividing and conquering meeting representation with your ADA coordinator, offloading marketing to your marketing department)
7. Program Administration and Evaluation

• 7.1 Provide services that are aligned with the institution’s mission or services philosophy.

• 7.2 Coordinate services for students with disabilities through a full-time professional.

• 7.3 Collect student feedback to measure satisfaction with disability services.

• 7.4 Collect data to monitor use of disability services.

• 7.5 Report program evaluation data to administrators.

• 7.6 Provide fiscal management of the office that serves students with disabilities.

• 7.7 Collaborate in establishing procedures for purchasing the adaptive equipment needed to assure equal access.

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7.1 Provide services that are aligned with the institution’s mission or services philosophy

• Develop a **program mission statement and philosophy** that is compatible with the mission of the institution. *E.g., mission statement for the DS office*

• Program personnel and other institutional staff understand and support the mission of the office for students with disabilities *E.g., new DS personnel orientation to mission and philosophy*
Challenges with Program Administration and Evaluation

• DS not always experts in program evaluation
• Sometimes difficult to determine what to measure
• Difficulty connecting evaluation to institutional priorities/efforts
• Students may not wish to engage in evaluation efforts
• Limited resources for evaluation
• DS coordinator may have other non-disability-related job responsibilities
• Questions of who pays for equipment, renovations, etc.
Strategies

• Coordinate with institutional research
• Use extant data that your institution has
• Provide students, faculty, and administrators with varied opportunities to provide feedback
• Examine your mission to determine what should be evaluated
• Identify goals/purpose of evaluation at outset
• Connect evaluations back to mission of your office and institution
• Try to phrase costs for equipment and accommodations as accounting matters rather than departmental matter
8. Training and Professional Development

• 8.1 Provide disability services staff with on-going opportunities for professional development.

• 8.2 Provide services by personnel with training and experience working with college students with disabilities (e.g., student development, degree programs).

• 8.3 Assure that personnel adhere to relevant Codes of Ethics (e.g., AHEAD, APA).
Challenges with Training and Professional Development

• Limited funding for professional development
• Limited time for professional development
• DS professionals have widely different backgrounds and training
• Limited awareness of ethical codes and professional standards (e.g., those of AHEAD)
• Not all DS professionals agree with and value AHEAD codes, standards, guidance, etc.
Broad Strategies

• Develop a professional development plan for every DS provider
• Identify competency strengths and gaps for individuals and the team as a whole through 360° evaluations
• Identify methods for professional development that exist on a continuum (i.e., no-cost PD to high-cost PD)
• Determine and be explicit about your office’s code of ethics, program standards, professional standards. If they are the code and standards from AHEAD, make sure that all in the office are familiar with them
What can DS do now?

• Make a priority list of what can be achieved and what cannot be achieved by your individual DS office regarding standards

• Create a dedicated time with your DS team and others to review current standards in light of your current responsibilities—what can you do that is not being done and what can you change

• Set measurable goals for addressing standards on an annual basis

• Determine who in the chain of command should be notified about your assessment/progress in meeting the Program Standards and methods for communicating assessment/progress
Future of AHEAD Program Standards

• Will be reviewed and revised
• A committee was being sought as of Summer 2018
• No timeline for revision
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