Student-to-Staff Ratios: Caseload Benchmarking and Budget Advocacy for Disability Services

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We ask you to join us in creating a culture that reflects…

Access and Inclusion

and

Civility and Respect

…consistent with the AHEAD Statement of Civility during our conference and in all aspects of our organization.
Learning Goals

• Understand how to use national data as a benchmark.

• Identify 7 strategies for using data in budget advocacy.

• Apply data & budgetary advocacy strategies at your institution.
Summary of Relevant Literature

• Caseload is a ratio measure of work calculated by dividing the number of students by the number of staff.

• AHEAD data indicate average caseload of 164 students and stated that “no single number reflects a ‘typical’ case load for DS professionals” (Scott, 2017, p. 13).
Depiction of the Problem

- At least 25% of disability practitioners reported that their institutions are not AHEAD members (Brown, 2017).
- Benchmarking is important in advocating for new positions or defend against budget cuts.
- Using student-to-staff metrics as a sole rationale to justify budget confuses caseload with workload.
Purpose and Methods

• Promote the use of more nuanced and varied metrics.

• Disaggregate nationally representative data.

• Data collection methods:
  • One-stage stratified random sample
  • N=1,245
  • Response rate = 38.8%; Return rate = 41.9%
  • AHEAD membership varied by institution type
Average Caseload Findings

- One practitioner was 154.9 students (SD=110.9; n=144);
- Two or three practitioners averaged 140.7 students (SD=85.4 n=132)
- Four or five practitioners averaged 126.6 students (SD=72.6; n=58).
- Six or more full-time professionals carried an average caseload of 135.2 students (SD=71.6; n=44).
Implications for Practice

- Socially Just Staffing
- Seven Strategies
- Tailor to Institution
Track and Project Trends Over Time

• Current caseload is often not meaningful unless paired with historical data.

• Also track operational space:
  • Number of testing accommodations administered.
  • How much space students in private testing rooms require.
Define Current & Aspirational Scope

- Foundation for contextual evidence that demonstrates the limitations of budgets driven solely by caseload.

- Scope of work includes services provided and DRC operational hours.
Know & Connect with Your Institution’s Strategic Plan

• Data collected by the DRC, including caseload metrics, should be tied to, and evaluated through the lens of the strategic plan.

• Diversity and inclusion are common goals frequently found in strategic plans.
Use Student Satisfaction Data to Support Budgetary Requests

• Opportunity to center the students’ voices.

• Use in conjunction with longitudinal data about service use (e.g., private testing accommodations).
Track Service Hours per Accommodation

• Metrics should take into consideration the complexity of accommodations & the robustness of existing resources.

• Upper level administration may view enrollment growth as increasing staff service hours *additionally*.

• However, enrollment growth increases service hours *exponentially*.

• It is imperative to highlight how institution specific resources influence DRC staff time and avoid discrimination.
View the DRC Annual Report as a Grant Application

• Technique to demonstrate the need for space & staffing.

• Clear, concise, & use data to tell a story.

• Track overtime hours worked & the amount of time from accommodation request to implementation.
Finance the Unpredictable, as Predictable

• Use data to forecast trends.

• Provide evidence of how DRC resources are spent.

• Engage in ongoing budgetary discussions to address unexpected accommodations.
Constantly Educate Your Audience

• Invite administrators to attend DRC sponsored events.

• With permission, sharing student stories that highlight the way the DRC works to support institutional strategic priorities.

• Tailor educational materials to match the specific constituent.

• Send quarterly updates on legal guidance to the directors of relevant areas.
Applying Strategies and Covid-19

• Track & Project—Physical distancing and testing space

• Student Satisfaction—Learning from spring experiences

• Finance the Unpredictable—Changes in cost/needs due to Covid-19
Reflection

Pick one strategy -- How could you use this at your institution?

- Track/Project Trends
- Define Scope
- Strategic Plan
- Student Satisfaction
- Service Hours/Accommodation
- Report as a Grant
- Finance the Unpredictable
- Educate Audience
Discussion

• Tell us about your institution type/size

• Which strategy did you pick

• How did you apply it
Wrap Up

• Goal is to foster socially-just staffing practices.

• Not all strategies are feasible or useful for all campuses.

• Use nuanced caseload benchmarks in combination with additional data-driven tools.
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Session Evaluation

• [Link to Session Evaluation Form](tinyurl.com/AHEAD2020-SessionEval)

• Your feedback helps shape future programming.

• Thank you for attending!