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Research Problem

"Research on disability in higher education maintains a singular focus on compliance with legal regulations and its cultural inclusion remains undertheorized." **(Kim & Aquino, 2017)**

Growth in the number of individuals with disabilities has stashed a significant need to understand more intentionally how higher education staff can establish a culture of inclusion for its diverse disabled constituents.

Unfortunately, dis/ability continues to be an underrepresented element of diversity and inclusion initiatives in higher education, and has been positioned as a compliance requirement, rather than a shared responsibility in alignment with the institution's commitment to create a culture of inclusion for all constituents.

Research Problem Continued

- An **inclusive approach is needed** to guide the inclusive practices of those who are most involved in dis/ability inclusion, dis/ability resource professionals (DRP).

- **Barriers** to inclusion must be **validated quantitatively**.

- Effective, **inclusive practices must be validated.**

Purpose of this research

To have dis/ability resource providers (DRP) in higher education **identify and validate barriers** to dis/ability inclusion, thus informing other DRP of what common barriers they may encounter, so that they can better prepare to mitigate or avoid them.

To have DRP in higher education **validate recommended practices** that are effective in their institutions so other DRP will have access to peer validated effective practices.

To offer **insights that cultivate** a dis/ability inclusive culture with higher education diversity discourse and initiatives.

Research Questions

1. Which types of dis/ability inclusion barriers (e.g., attitudinal, environmental, or institutional) are most frequently observed or encountered by DRP?

2. Which dis/ability inclusion practices do DRP perceive as most effectively implemented and used in higher education institutions?

Relevant Literature:

- **<u>CULTURE:</u>** In addition to dis/ability accommodations and compliance work, **inclusive cultural work is needed** (Hopson, 2019). The historical framing of dis/ability as an individual deficit, rather than **an institutional problem**, continues to justify and sustain segregated accommodation practices in response to requests by dis/abled individuals in higher education (Kim & Aquino, 2017; Shallish 2016).

- **<u>DRP</u>**: Higher education staff, such as **DRP must be informed, trained and qualified** to know how and when to adjust practices to better serve individuals with dis/abilities. (Evan et.al., 2017)

Relevant Literature: 2

- **BARRIERS:** Barriers to disability inclusion can be found in the literature; however, there is **limited inquiry into disability in higher education apart from compliance**. (Kim & Aquino, 2017)

- **Common barrier categories** include attitudinal (Lipson & Rogers, 2000; Heera and Maini, 2021), unequal access, and systemic institutional barriers (Dolmage, 2017; Hutcheon & Wolbring, 2012). Heera and Maini (2021), attempted to divide the **barriers into two broader concepts**, psychological terms (feelings) and organizational characteristics (practices and procedures).

- **INCLUSIVE PRACTICES**: **Universal design approaches** are highly recommended throughout the literature (Dolmage, 2017; Kraus, 2021; Kim & Aquino, 2017; Leake & Stodden, 2014; Shallish, 2016).

Significance – So What?

- **Few DRP have training and/or expertise** in mitigating institutional and attitudinal barriers that negatively impact the experience of people with dis/abilities. (Kim & Aquino, 2017)

- Moreover, **new DRP lack knowledge of effective inclusive practices**, beyond compliance guidance, to help them work with their higher education institutions to establish an inclusive culture for people with dis/abilities.

- Without further insight into what barriers exist in higher education and what inclusive practices are most effective, individuals in the dis/ability community will **continue to be secluded or excluded**, resulting in a:
  - Lack of institutional awareness and training on dis/ability and accessibility
  - Lack of dis/ability representation and participation
  - Lack of an inclusive culture/sense of belonging

Research Methodology:

Conceptual Framework: Critical Dis/ability Studies and Social Justice Dis/ability Model

Worldview: Transformative

Approach: Quantitative

Design: Participatory Action Research

Research Tool: Qualtrics Questionnaire – Likert Scale

II. Methodology

Coded Categories

3 Barrier Groups

o Attitudinal

o Environmental

o Institutional

5 Inclusive Practices Groups

o Systemic institutional changes

o Dis/ability representation

o Community of dis/ability champions

o Counter Narratives

o Use of capacity building practices

III. Research Methods

Primary Site: AHEAD Professional Membership Association; A research proposal form was required.

Participants: A convenience sample of higher education DRP who currently or previously worked in a higher education dis/ability compliance office and engaged in service provision, consultation and training, and policy development in the last 3 years.

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Results

Data Collection: 5 weeks, online

Participants: The goal was to recruit at least 200 participants. 428 Questionnaires were opened; 400 met the criteria as a DRP to complete the survey; 386 completed it.

II. Results

DRP Demographics:

- Majority of the participants identified as either a Director/Executive Director (130/363), Associate/Assistant Director (51/363) within a dis/ability compliance office,
- Most (296/363) spend between 76-100% of their time dedicated to dis/ability services with higher education,
- Majority serve between 50-3000+ people with dis/abilities annually, predominantly (266/344) serving dis/abled students.
- More than half (206/352) reported identifying as a person with a dis/ability or as culturally Deaf, and
- The largest group (131) of DRP reported 3 years or less of professional experience as a DRP

III. Results

Institution Characteristics:
- Majority (180/330) work in higher education institutions in the Midwest(97) or Northeast (83),
- Located within predominantly White (208/285),
- 4-year (185/330),
- Public or state-sponsored institutions (200/326),
- Awarding doctoral degrees (85/327), and
- Dis/ability Directors (244/316) and ADA Coordinators (96/316) are the primary postsecondary roles involved in the inclusion of dis/ability within these institutions.

Research Question

1. Which types of dis/ability inclusion barriers (e.g., attitudinal, environmental, or institutional) are most frequently observed or encountered by DRP?

- **Answer: Attitudinal barriers (42.5%)**

- **Two most commonly ranked attitudes:**

    1) Beliefs that people with disabilities are considered medically or psychologically **abnormal,** and

    2) Beliefs that individuals with severe functional limitations (i.e., chronic physical health, intellectual or developmental disabilities) are **not qualified to be in higher education**.

- Noteworthy open-ended finding: Open responses overwhelmingly referenced a *lack* in some area.

Hypothesis Results: *Combined Average of Open-Ended & Ranked Dis/ability Inclusion Barriers*
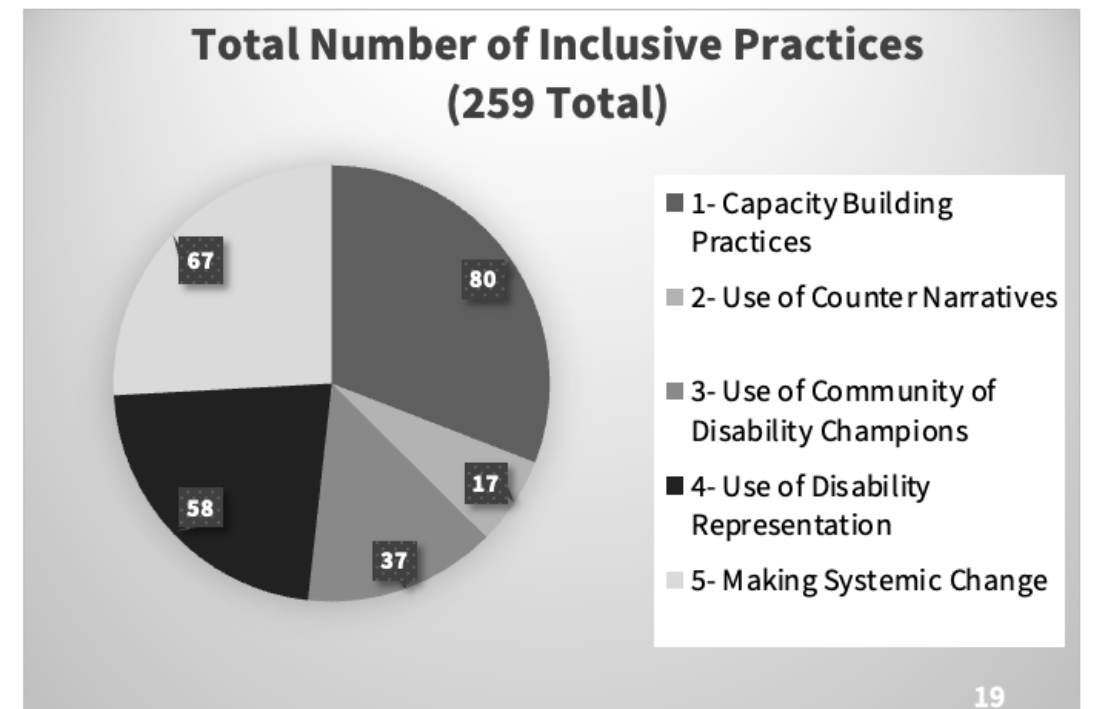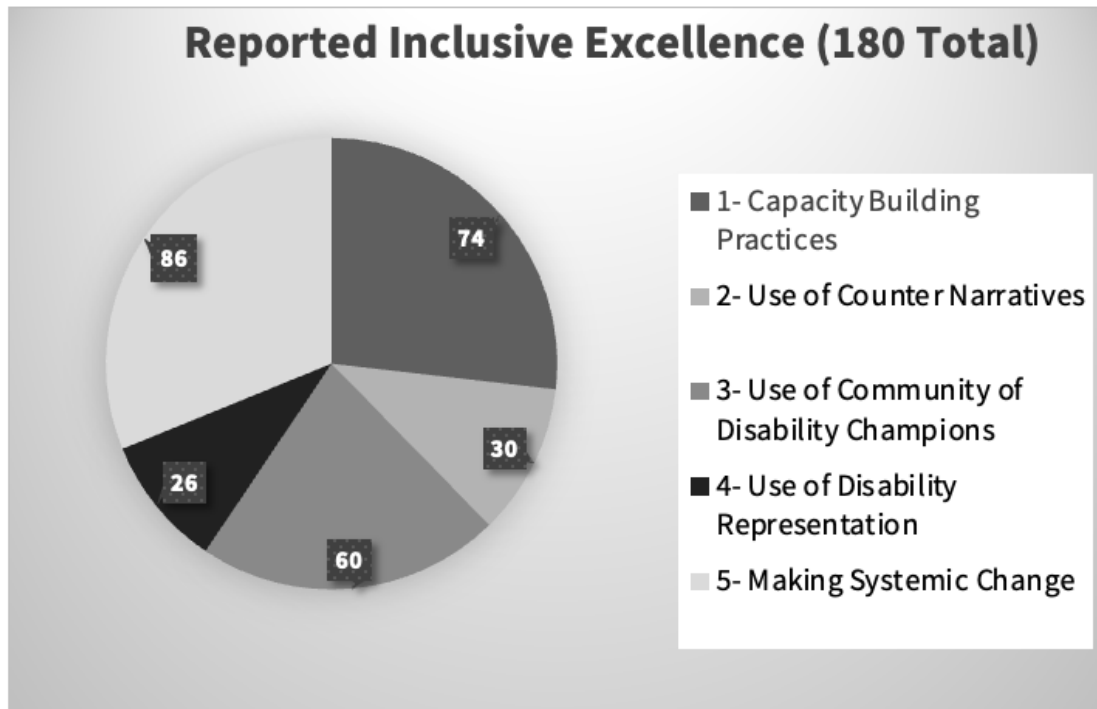
Code#	Barrier Group	Common Examples Reported	Ranked Barrier Response	Open-Ended Barrier Responses	Average
3	Attitudinal Barriers	Ableist attitudes; compliance focused; medical model; faculty/staff push-back/resistance/no buy-in; ignorance/limited understanding; ignored/ disregarded/afterthought; exclusion from DEI/lack of saliency; disability legitimacy/disbelief; fear; stigma	4285/9649 (44%)	113/276 (41%)	**42.5%**
2	Institutional Barriers	Training/awareness; Funding; Staffing Needs; Lack of support/prioritization/buy-in; Lack of disability representation; Culture of Ableism; Exclusionary policies/practices/silos; Insufficient guidance/communication/clarity	2680/9649 (28%)	104/276 (38%)	**33%**
1	Environmental Barriers	Physical inaccessibility; Digital/Technology inaccessibility; Inaccessible course content/communications	2684/9648 (28%)	43/276 (22%)	**25%**
0	No Barriers Reported	N/A; Never; Not Sure	1623/9649 (17%)	16/276 (6%)	**11.5%**

Research Question

2. Which dis/ability inclusion practices do DRP perceive as most effectively implemented and used in higher education institutions

- **Answer:** **Most Effective: Counter Narratives**

  Most Reported Use: Capacity-building strategies (31%) and Making systemic institutional changes (31%)

Reported Inclusive Excellence (180 Total)

- 1- Capacity Building Practices
- 2- Use of Counter Narratives
- 3- Use of Community of Disability Champions
- 4- Use of Disability Representation
- 5- Making Systemic Change

Values: 74, 30, 60, 26, 86

Total Number of Inclusive Practices (259 Total)

- 1- Capacity Building Practices
- 2- Use of Counter Narratives
- 3- Use of Community of Disability Champions
- 4- Use of Disability Representation
- 5- Making Systemic Change

Values: 80, 17, 37, 58, 67

Results: *Combined Average of Most Commonly Reported and Ranked Dis/ability Inclusive Practices*

Code	Inclusive Practice Category	Q1. Open-Ended (Demonstrated Inclusive Excellence)	Q2. Open-Ended (Top Two Inclusive Practices)	Q3.Ranked (Most Effectively Implemented)	Average
1	**Use of capacity building practices** – working towards a shared responsibility to be inclusive; decentralizing disability inclusion or accessibility work; offering disability or accessibility resources and training to all stakeholders. (1)	74/180 = 41%	**80/259 = 31%**	206/1024 = 20%	**31%**
2	**Use of counter-narratives** – re-framing disability, disrupting norm narratives, broadly sharing disability as diversity messaging or individual stories of dis/abled individuals, universal design, social justice models, disability studies, disability pride, crip culture, non-ableist language, acknowledging ableism. (2)	30/180 = 17%	17/259 = 7%	**208/1024 = 20%**	**15%**
3	**Use of a community of disability champions** – collaborations with existing institutional allies, recruiting new inclusion champions, networking with other allies (e.g., digital accessibility, facility ADA staff, students, staff, or faculty with dis/abilities). (3)	60/180 = 33%	37/259 = 14%	202/1024 = 20%	**22%**
4	**Use of disability representation** – Ensure dis/abled individuals are represented in programs and recruited for positions, and they are able to fully participate and influence decisions that impact them. (4)	26/180 = 14%	58/259 = 22%	203/1024 = 20%	**19%**
5	**Making systemic changes** - Transforming systems, practices, procedures, and policies that were implicitly or explicitly exclusive and intentionally implement disability-inclusive practices; Implement universal design principles institution-wide (e.g., all videos are automatically captioned, ASL interpreters are hired for all public events, require all units to annually report on disability statistics, earmark funding for accommodations). (5)	**86/180 = 48%**	67/259 = 26%	198/1024 = 19%	**31%**

Conclusion

1. DRPs were able to identify and validate different types of dis/ability inclusion barriers in all three groups: attitudinal, environmental, or institutional, with **attitudinal barriers** being the most common barrier group. This study suggests that attitudinal barriers should be the primary focus. More importantly, we learned that the use of **counter narratives** would serve as the most effective strategy to address **negative attitudinal barriers** throughout the institution.

2. While DRP also identified and validated that all 5 dis/ability inclusion practice categories, we learned that the most effective practices of inclusion include **making systemic changes** (e.g., institution wide digital accessibility policies) and the use of **capacity building strategies** (e.g., training and awareness) are also effective at including dis/ability as part of the institution's diversity.

Limitations of the Study

- This study:
  - did not address dis/ability inclusive education specifically; rather, it focused on the barriers that impact the educational climate within higher education.
  - centered the perceptions and experiences of DRP, excluded other HEI stakeholders.
  - limited inclusive practices to only 5 categories

Recommendations for Future Research

- Use the existing data to conduct a comparative analysis of the DRPs who identify as dis/abled compared to those who did not identify and explore whether are differences in the types of barriers the two groups reported and ranked.

- Use the questionnaire instrument on different stakeholders in higher education to compare differences.

Q & A

Relevant Literature: Culture

- In addition to disability accommodations and compliance work, **inclusive cultural work is needed** (Hopson, 2019).

- The historical framing of disability as an individual deficit, rather than **an institutional problem**, continues to justify and sustain segregated accommodation practices in response to requests by disabled individuals in higher education (Kim & Aquino, 2017; Shallish 2016).

- Establishing **an inclusive culture intentionally goes beyond merely ensuring a person has equal access**, to ensuring they have access, representation, and are engaged as valued members of the community (Hopson, 2019; Kikabhai, 2021).

Relevant Literature: DRP

- Campus service providers, such as **DRP must be informed, trained and qualified** to know how and when to adjust practices to better serve individuals with disabilities. (Evan et.al., 2017)

- The **more years of experience** in working as a DRP, the more likely they are to implement universal design approaches and use socially just disability models.

Relevant Literature: Inclusive Practices

- Gould et.al., (2021) shared a **3-step approach to disability inclusion**: build, sustain, and grow.

- **Universal design approaches** are highly recommended throughout the literature (Dolmage, 2017; Kraus, 2021; Kim & Aquino, 2017; Leake & Stodden, 2014; Shallish, 2016), and when implemented by colleges and universities, they can result in a decreased need for disability disclosure and accommodation requests processed by a compliance office.

Dr. Charnessa Warren | Director
Student Disability Services
The University of Chicago

Personal Email: warren.char75@gmail.com

Work Email: charnessa@uchicago.edu

www.linkedin.com/in/charnessa-delashment-warren