



What Are We Missing? Discussing Inclusion and Accessibility at UNC Pembroke.

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Abstract

Our society has an abled bodied mindset, thus everything that we've created is with lack of accessibility in mind. On an average day, abled bodied college students can walk to their class, listen to their lectures, grab food, and do all these tasks without much thought. To an individual with different abilities, all these mundane tasks we have listed become increasingly harder. When we limit the accessibility on campus, these already increasingly hard tasks become inaccessible and almost untannable. Every student, regardless of gender, sex, sexual orientation, ability, religion, etc. deserves to have equal access on campus so they can pursue a quality higher education. Using various methods of research, the Graduate Assistants at UNC Pembroke's Accessibility Resource Center has found a lack of accessibility awareness and access on this Campus. By the information we have provided, we are aiming to not only raise awareness, but to also help contribute ways in which we can improve this for our current and future students with different abilities.

Research Gathered From Literature

People with physical and mental disabilities that attend universities and colleges graduate at a lower rate than those who do not have a disability (Caroll, Pattinson, Muller, & Sutton, 2010), One reason for this is a lack of accessibility for people with disabilities on university campuses (Caroll, et al, 2010). There has been research data to prove that people with disabilities have limited access to completing their education not due to the context of their disability, but due to the way the educational institutions are structured for "healthy" individuals (Caroll, et al, 2010).

Why Is This Important?

Accessibility on the University of North Carolina at Pembroke's campus is an important topic because education needs to be available to anyone that desires to pursue it. Any barriers that are in the way for people with disabilities present an unfair disadvantage for those that are just as capable in the aspect of pursuing a bachelor's, master's, or doctoral degree. Additionally, UNCP prides itself on being the most diverse University within the UNC system, so it should also be inclusive of everyone as well. It is imperative that awareness is raised on the issue of accessibility on several fronts, and that ways are developed to bridge the current gaps that exist between a world set up for non-disabled individuals and those with disabilities. The Graduate Assistants at UNCP's Accessibility Resource Center gathered feedback about how accessible the campus is through individual sessions and surveys from students that receive accommodations.

Why Is This Topic Unique?

The issue of accessibility on college campuses is a unique topic in that, most times, unless you have a disability or a close loved one with a disability, making something accessible is not something that everyone thinks of right away when creating spaces, media, classes, or anything of that nature. People tend to take for granted the abilities that they do have. It is important for education to be set up with equity, rather than equality. Additionally, for the campus of UNCP, the concept of diversity is highly celebrated, so it is important that this campus celebrates all aspects of diversity: sex, gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, and disability status.

Accessibility on UNCP's Campus

There are certain concerns that people with disabilities have on the University's campus that do not apply to those that do not have disabilities. For example, in classes where videos are shown, those who have hearing impairments or those who have trouble processing at a quick speed may need captions to get the same level of information that those who do not need captions get.

Data and Results

Using surveys and information from individual sessions with the students that Accessibility Resource Center serves, the graduate assistants at the Accessibility Resource Center have identified ways that students with disabilities at UNCP feel that the school can bridge the gap in accessibility on campus. The first thing discussed with students at UNCP was making accessibility a "first thought," rather than an "afterthought." An example of this is providing captions to events automatically instead of at the request of the student. Another way the graduate students believe UNCP can fill the gap in accessibility is by advocating more for their disabled students. An example would be to host accessible events that focus on disability and celebrating awareness day like Autism Awareness Day.

Looking Forward

Looking ahead, it is important that we get the input of the students, faculty, and staff regarding the accessibility concerns at UNCP. There is a need for regularly-scheduled check ins with those at the university with disabilities to ensure that the campus is doing everything in their power to make sure that everyone has equal access. UNCP prides itself on our diversity and inclusion and we want that to encompass our disabled students as well!

References:

Caroll, J. M., Pattinson, E., Muller, C. & Sutton, A. (2020). Barriers to bachelor's degree completion among college students with a disability. *Sociological Perspectives*, 63(5), 809-832. Doi: 10.117/0731121420908896