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Spring 2020

# Accessibility for Student with Disabilities

Amanda Martin
am845986@wcupa.edu

## Recommended Citation

West Chester University

Higher Education Policy and Student Affairs

THESIS



ACCESSIBILITIY
FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Amanda Martin

May 2020

Accessibility for Students with Disabilities

A Thesis

Presented to the Faculty of the

Department of Educational Foundations and Policy Studies

West Chester University

West Chester, Pennsylvania

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for

The Degree of

Master of Science

By

Amanda Martin

May 2020

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge the entire faculty and staff, and my thesis advisor Dr. Dana Morrison, which have been dedicated to my success throughout this graduate program. A particular heartfelt thank you is needed to all those from the student affairs community who have supported me.

To those who have inspired and continued to support me in my time as a student early on to present, I would never have dreamed as of making it this far as a first generation college student without you; Dr. Kendrick Mickens, Allyson Gleason, Darren Lipscomb, Amber Moore, Thom Nixon, and Doug Wolcik McCann. I do not know if I would be where I am today as a higher education professional without your mentorship, guidance, and wisdom.

Dear Stephen, my husband, thank you for your support through countless late nights of writing that often turned into early mornings. I would not have gotten through these two years without your support and those endless meals you always seemed to have ready.

Finally, thank you to my friends and family for your endless amounts of love and encouragement, particularly Kate Carroll, Stephanie Harshbarger, Sandra Carroll, and Cyndy Maguire Martin.

Abstract

Accessibility for students with disabilities on university campuses is important to our field as student affairs professionals because students with disabilities make a growing population of the student body on university and college campuses (Burgstahler, & Moore, 2009). I believe that it takes someone who passionately cares to make a difference in the higher education community. A value that is significant to understand me would be my fierce belief that all people deserve a chance to earn a higher education regardless of their background, socioeconomic status, and ability levels. I believe a chance at higher education is not only growth for an individual, but an opportunity for a better tomorrow and a better community through educated citizenship. Experiences throughout my entire higher education career have shaped my perception of this concern for accessibility of students with disabilities in higher education.

*Keywords:* Higher education, Student affairs, Students with disabilities

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## Chapter One: Introduction and Positionality

Accessibility for students with disabilities on university campuses is important to the field of student affairs because students with disabilities make a growing population of the student body on university and college campuses (Burgstahler, & Moore, 2009). I feel that it takes someone who passionately cares to make a difference in the higher education community. A value that is significant to understand me would be my fierce belief that all people deserve a chance to earn a higher education regardless of their background, socioeconomic status, and ability levels. I believe a chance at higher education is not only growth for an individual, but an opportunity for a better tomorrow and a better community through educated citizenship.

## Why This Concern?

I want students with disabilities to have the same opportunities that I held throughout my educational career. I want students with disabilities to be able to learn in a learning style that works for them. Students with disabilities should be able to easily navigate the physical campus. I want students with disabilities to be able to be involved student leaders. I want students with disabilities to be able to be leaders of student clubs and organizations. I want students with disabilities to be able to join a sports team or a theater group and not feel limited because of their abilities. I want students with disabilities to be able to work campus jobs beside their peers successfully.

Students with disabilities deserve the same opportunity at success, education, and happiness as their peers. All of the opportunities and experiences from being campus leaders to student workers are milestones of a college student experience. These experiences will mold and affect a student's life for a lifetime to come. These opportunities create a network of future connections to draw from for support and potential future career possibilities. Students with

disabilities have every right to have those same opportunities as students without disabilities.

**Personal Experiences**

   This concern is critical to me because I have witnessed various times how students in higher education settings can be affected by holding a disability. This concern has impacted me personally by the experiences and testimony I have seen and heard when working with students with disabilities in higher education. I have seen how this concern has impacted friends and classmates I personally know. I have observed this concern in my work experience through the student services office that I am employed in that specifically was created to aid students with disabilities. A value that brought my attention to this issue was my strong belief that all people deserve a chance to earn a higher education regardless of their ability levels. Experiences throughout my entire higher education career have shaped my perception of this concern for accessibility of students with disabilities in higher education. From my time as a community college student through my time in this masters program, I have seen concerns for students with disabilities.

   A personal experience that impacted how I look at this concern for accessibility of students with disabilities in higher education was when I saw the higher education experience was different for friends and peers with disabilities than it had been for myself. For example, I have seen students I have known suffer because their disability and that often distracted them from learning. I have seen students who have had attention-deficit/ hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and struggle to pay attention in the classroom or while studying. Frequently educators will down this as poor behavior issues, when it is not. It is a lack of accessibility to students with disabilities and their needs in the learning environment. I have seen students with autism struggle just to engage with their peers because of the challenges in social environments. Autism as well

is often put down to the student's poor behavior and not how the environment is inaccessible to the student's way of learning. Try to imagine participating in a classroom discussion when eye contact alone is painfully uncomfortable or stressful to you due to your disability.

**Professional Experiences**

A professional experience that impacted how I look at this concern for accessibility of students with disabilities in higher education was my time working in an office that was created with the intended purpose of helping those students with disabilities. I worked with students individually and in groups, and hearing the various struggles that many of these students go through on a daily basis illuminated the privilege that many students without disabilities do not know that they have. There are students with disabilities who have to make sure to plan out a path just to get to class to make sure that their wheelchair will be able to go that way. There are students who cannot see or cannot hear and have to find alternative means of receiving information that students without disabilities do not have to worry about. There are students with life threatening food allergies that must avoid campus events and dining halls. These students with disabilities should not have to go through a hardship to earn a higher education. A higher education that is very much needed and valued in today's society. Students with disabilities should not be barred from a better life just because they hold a disability. Students with disabilities should have a better accessibility to higher education without having to put forth more effort than students without disabilities.

**Perception**

A situation where my vision of this concern for accessibility of students with disabilities in higher education was constructed occurred once I became more involved with the disability community through my work in the student disabilities office. One experience I went through

was working one-on-one with a student and the local office of vocational rehabilitation that works with the university. It was rather challenging to get the agent to come to the university due to the fact that one agent had to serve several institutions and their students. This meant that she was booked rather far in advance and took a fair amount of time before she would be able to contact back to our student disabilities office. This delay led to a semester's lack of accessibility of specialized home assistive technology and software for a low vision student. I learned just how challenging it could be to be able to access the needed resources for students with disabilities. I would agree that my perception of this concern has most certainly changed over time. When I first noticed the issue I did not think much about it even though I did not agree with it. Coming from a place of privilege it was not something that touched my world. Although as time passed the concern grew greater and greater for myself because it started to touch my world.

I saw the struggles people I went to class with, or became friends with, had to go through that students without disabilities did not have to go through. This is one of the reasons I feel so intensely about speaking out to the concern of accessibility for students with disabilities. I come from a more privileged place and should use that privilege to make room for students with disabilities to join the conversation and speak their stories.

I attend a public university in Pennsylvania. I am a graduate student in a master's degree program for higher education policy and student affairs. I am a graduate assistant in an office that assist students with disabilities. I was born and raised in Southern Chester County, Pennsylvania. Identities of mine that are of note to understand me are: able-bodied, first generation college student, female, cisgender, Christian raised, and Caucasian. Of students that I have worked with, they express that I am kind, that I listen to them, and that I always make time for them. Although I am a first generation college student, I still hold many privileges. I know

because I come from a place of privilege that I cannot speak for students with disabilities. And even if I could, one voice cannot speak for the masses. Although I know I have at least, if nothing else, the passion to make others know that this is a concern that should be addressed.

## Introduction to Concern

My concern regards the accessibility for students with disabilities on university campuses. This concern arises from the fact that students with disabilities make a growing population of the student body on university and college campuses (Burgstahler, & Moore, 2009). Others should care about this concern because if students with disabilities are becoming a growing population of the student body on university and college campuses then that will become a larger population of students who will have very real needs (Burgstahler, & Moore, 2009). To prevent future problems from occurring, university and college campuses should wake up and pay attention to this data. Ignoring it helps no one and will discourage students from attending. Or, students with disabilities will continue to attend, but will not preform as well as they could have if given the proper support and resources.

## Thesis Preview

In chapter three of this thesis I will explore my personal philosophy of higher education, the historical context of students with disabilities, the current research on students with disabilities and the impact of the power on students with disabilities. So why change higher education for students with disabilities now when the past has worked for other students? This is how power for abled body students are reproduced again and again through each continuing graduating class of majority non-disabled students while the majority of students with disabilities continue to struggle. This barrier to higher education creates a historic power struggle, class struggle, and an ethics struggle for students with disabilities. This seems to be the point though.

Why change the system of higher education when it is keeping those in power unchecked to continue their upper hand? Higher education and student affairs professionals often think that students with disabilities are being included in the university when they are really not being supported at all. In chapter four I propose a programmatic intervention that will explain though the purpose of my intervention for students with disabilities, the theoretical frameworks of my intervention for students with disabilities, the intervention program proposal for students with disabilities, and implementation of my intervention for students with disabilities. In chapter five I will explain my views on effective leadership in my intervention for students with disabilities, how assessment and evaluation play a role in my intervention for students with disabilities, and end with my limitations and looking ahead.

**Chapter Two: Thematic Concern, Conceptual Framework, and Definitions**

**Thematic Concern**

Accessibility for students with disabilities in higher education is momentous to our field as student affairs professionals. Students with disabilities make a growing population of the student body on university and college campuses (Burgstahler, & Moore, 2009). Students with disabilities don't have access to a level playing field when it comes to higher education (Burgstahler, & Moore, 2009). For students with disabilities to meet their needs in higher education academically they must jump through obstacles, such as, obtaining a letter of accommodations from their institution. Students with disabilities frequently miss out on higher education milestones, such as on campus employment, housing, dining, sports, clubs, and general student activities, due to issues of inaccessibility.

I plan to focus my intervention on accessibility for students with disabilities by having all classes preventively using Universal Design, Universal Instructional Design, and assistive technology in learning environments. I plan to focus my intervention on accessibility for students with disabilities by having student affairs professionals, faculty, and students attend workshops on how to implement Universal Design and Universal Instructional Design along with assistive technology tools into daily campus life. Imagine a student resident assistant using Kurzweil 3000 © assistive technology to assist with their low vision needs as they work throughout the day. Imagine a student affairs student leadership conference with a sign language interrupter present for Deaf students. Imagine the campus admissions office training their student tour guides to stop only at ramps and elevators not to single out new potential students who may be physically unable to use stairs. Imagine the student activities office presenting a leadership opportunities luncheon that has taken common food allergies into consideration or even reconsidering objects

such as latex balloons in consideration for students who would have a reaction to latex. Experiences that have shaped my view of this concern in higher education are my years of experience working in higher education. From my very first job as a student mentor to my time now as a graduate student who works in an office aimed at working for students with disabilities.

In my very first job working on a college campus I was a student mentor who had every single one of my students disclose a type of disability to me. I was shocked because I did not know that many of my mentees dealt with such concerns because most of their disabilities were not visible. I ended up helping these students connect with the student disability office on that campus and many of my students later thanked me stating that it made a world of a difference to get support services. Many of these students were first generation students like myself and had not even known that there was an office on the campus that was able to help them succeed so.

Now I am able to assist students every day at work to have an improved college experience through a very similar office on another campus. Although now knowing more and seeing students with disabilities regularly, I see reoccurring concerns that students continue to face on university and college campuses. I believe that there is a superior way to serve students and help them succeed. I believe that there is still so much more that colleges and university could offer students with disabilities today.

The impact of this concern for higher education is that students with disabilities are a growing population on university and college campuses everywhere (Burgstahler, & Moore, 2009). Others should care about this concern because if students with disabilities are making a growing population of the student body on university and college campuses then that will become a larger statically population of students who will have very real needs (Burgstahler, & Moore, 2009). To prevent future problems from occurring university and college campuses

should wake up and pay attention to this data. Ignoring it helps no one and will discourage students from attending. Or, students with disabilities will continue to attend but will not preform as well as they could have if given the proper support and resources

**Conceptual Framework**

Historical influences have certainly shaped my concern for accessibility for students with disabilities. To completely understand the historical analysis of where students with disabilities in higher education are today, student affairs professionals need to acknowledge the imbalance of power this population of students face in the past to the current present day. Students with disabilities are often found not in a position of power. All students come to campus excited to start a new chapter in their lives. They attend classes, co-curricular activities, and continue the same process of learning the way they have been taught through years of early grade school education. However, now this educational process has changed for students with disabilities. No longer do students with disabilities have individual education program (IEP) plans from early grade school education. They must venture forth to the campus disability services office and seek educational accommodations.

There are many factors that influence students with disabilities in higher education, but I would like to focus on the position of power. Students with disabilities are often found not in a position of power. Students as a whole are often found not in a position of power as they start their college degree. They come to an institution of higher education a new and unfamiliar place to meet new and unfamiliar people. They follow the well known to them conduct of a well-behaved and trained student who attends their classes and co-curricular activities. They follow the traditional framework of ideology in education for students to obediently absorb information from those who are in power over them such as professors or other employees of the university.

As you will read in chapter three I will draw on the philosophical frameworks of Williams (2012), Schlossberg's Theory of Mattering and Marginality (Patton et al., 2016), Chickering's Seven Vectors (Patton et al., 2016), and Intersectionality (Patton et al., 2016). My overarching thesis is that higher education should be accessible to students with disabilities. Making higher education accessible to students with disabilities would benefit the higher education system and community.

**Definition of Terms**

- Assistive Technology - Equipment that aids people with disabilities to work overcome barriers.

- Disability Office - An office dedicated in a higher education setting that supports the advocacy of students with disabilities.

- First Generation Student - A student whose parents did not complete a higher education degree.

- Individual Education Program (IEP) - "A written plan for the provision of services for the education of students who are disabled or gifted" (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2020).

- Letter of Accommodation - A documents given to a student with disability that explains to faculty reasonable accommodations that are to be made for the student due to their disability.

- Mainstreaming - A term used to describe bringing students with disabilities into the same environment as other students (Higbee, Katz, & Schultz, 2010).

- Proctoring Center - A location where a proctor in a distraction free area monitors students as they take an exam or quiz that the student would have taken in the classroom.

- Student Affairs Professional - A professional that works in higher education by serving support and services to students.

- Students with Disabilities - Students of a college or university that have a disability.

- Universal Design - The basis of Universal Design formed originally from architecture (Edyburn, 2010). Universal Design is used to create so that all people can use (Edyburn, 2010). A simple example would be a ramp instead of stairs so that all people can move forward with no barriers.

- Universal Instructional Design (also referred to as Universal Design for Learning) - Universal Instructional Design or Universal Design for Learning is to do the same concept as Universal Design, but to do so in the classroom setting (Edyburn, 2010). This was created not specifically for those with disabilities, but has become a great barrier remover and asset for this population and others (Edyburn, 2010).

**ACPA/NASPA Professional Competencies**

- Personal and Ethical Foundations - This competency applies to my concern and intervention as professional development to self-awareness, professional practice, and mentoring students.

- Values, Philosophy, and History - Values, philosophy, and history are critical points to any student affairs practice. This is especially so when concerning a student population that has had historic movements made in the past.

- Assessment, Evaluation, and Research - Within my intervention I aim to create a model classroom and workshop with Universal Design and Universal Design for Instruction. To find out if the intervention was successful I will need to assess, evaluate, and research my concern and intervention.

- Law, Policy, and Governance - To work with my concern and intervention I will need to be knowledgeable about legal constructs and policies regarding students with disabilities.

- Organizational and Human Resources - To work with my concern I will need to be able to

work with facilities management, fundraising for the program, and motivation of other university staff among other tasks.

- Leadership - To create and organize my concern into reality I will need to have the skills and knowledge a leader. I will need to work with student affairs colleagues, faculty, and students.

- Social Justice and Inclusion - This concern came about because of the lack of equability for students with disabilities. This concern faces issues of oppression, privilege and power. I believe that I hold a social responsibility to help students with disabilities. By creating more accessible college and university campuses it better directs resources equitably. In addition, this concern includes the ability for students with disabilities to hold leadership and advocacy for themselves.

- Technology - Technology is a resource that can lead to improved performance of students, student affairs professionals, and faculty. My concern requires technology usage to make the learning environment a more equitable setting.

- Advising and Supporting - My concern for students with disabilities requires supporting students with my knowledge and skills as a students affairs professional.

**Chapter Three: Narrative**

**Philosophical Positionality**

*Philosophy of Higher Education*

In 2011 and 2012 only 11.1 percent of undergraduate students had stated they held disabilities in higher education (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2016). This may be due to the fact that students with disabilities in higher education are not disclosing that they have disabilities. This may be due to the fact that students with disabilities in higher education do not know where to disclose that they have disabilities. This may be due to an even worse possibility. Students with disabilities are not able to succeed in the current higher education environment, and are therefore underrepresented in our colleges and universities. I intend to examine access to higher education for students with disabilities. In order to address this concern I will draw on Williams (2006 & 2012), Schlossberg's Theory of Mattering and Marginality (Patton et al., 2016), Chickering's Seven Vectors (Patton et al., 2016), and Intersectionality (Patton et al., 2016). My overarching thesis is that higher education should be accessible to students with disabilities. Making higher education accessible to students with disabilities would benefit the higher education system and community.

How do we accommodate the swelling number of students with disabilities in higher education colleges and universities today (Burgstahler, & Moore, 2009)? I believe that accommodation happens when it is acknowledged that there is a problem with the system of higher education in the United States. I believe that accommodation happens when the problem is spoken into existence and it is acknowledged as more than a statistic of a specific student population in higher education. It is supported that accommodation happens in higher education when there is thought, action, and affirmative transformation (Burgstahler, & Moore, 2009). My

philosophy of higher education as a student affairs professional is that higher education should be accessible to everyone. In order to confirm my philosophy of education that higher education should be accessible to everyone I will pull support from the following authors below.

**Jeffery Williams and *Deconstructing Academe*.** In this work by Williams he states that colleges and universities should be recreated to better support students (Williams, 2012). As students with disabilities in higher education are not being accommodated (Williams, 2012). An example of such an issue would be "…reducing regular faculty positions" (Williams, 2012, p. 3) that support students. Another example of such an issue would be that, "…undergraduates are captive objects of exorbitant banking profits" (Williams, 2012, p. 3). It is time to find proposals for alternatives (Williams, 2012). Williams points to the "…unmaking of the public university" as it currently stands today (Williams, 2012, p. 2).

I believe that students with disabilities have the capacity to develop into educated citizens in the future. The prospective developing student with disabilities in higher education today is halted by things, such as, financial exploitation, racism, and patriarchy (Williams, 2012). An example of this would be "…exploiting students by requiring them to work more and take on more debt" (Williams, 2012, p. 3). Political imagination should come into play to combat these issues (Williams, 2012). An example of this would be changing rules, policies, and mission statements to become more inclusive and reflect all students.

Higher education should be a value that is attainable and accessible for every student. It has proven to have benefits for the entire community, not just the individual who attends a college or university (Williams, 2012). According to Williams (2012), higher education needs to be "a national right and value for the larger public good" (p. 167). I believe that students with disabilities need to advocate with the support of higher education professionals to reconstruct

their higher education experience like Williams (2012) stated. To do this I believe that professionals in higher education need to call attention to the lack of accessibility in and out of the classroom. To be successful in higher education I believe that students with disabilities need to demand supports such as easy access to assistive technology in the classroom and elsewhere on campuses. To often this assistive technology is costly or unavailable. To be successful I believe that students with disabilities need to demand an affordable education because many students with disabilities already have to be saddled with disability related debt making a higher education inaccessible. I believe with Williams (2012) that there is an alternative future possible for higher education, which is how I came about my intervention.

> **Jeffery Williams and *The Pedagogy of Debt*.** As stated by Williams (2006,):
>
> Debt is not just a check every month but color the day - to - day experience of my life, whether I live in a smaller or larger apartment, whether I can buy a house (not yet), whether I can travel to Europe (not since grad school), whether I can eat out (too often considering the debt). It has only been in the past few years, over a decade out of graduate school and a full professor, that I can end each month without going further into debt. (p. 156)

Unfortunately, this story is similar to many students who find themselves paying for their education long after their graduation day. Now imagine a student with a disability. The student has mounting medical bills from expensive medications, therapy, and doctor visits to pay off in addition to those student loans from their time in college and probably for the remainder of their life. How will they be able to pay off their student debt? Simply put, I believe they will never be able to shake off the shackles of their student debt in their lifetime without undue hardship on their lives or families. Or, at the very least, I believe that they will not be able to pay off their

student debt for an exceedingly longer time than most student populations.

Rising cost of higher education in colleges and universities are being passed to students (Williams, 2006). This is not a new fact. "This represents a shift in the idea of higher education from a public entitlement to a private service" (Williams, 2006, p. 159). Higher education in colleges and universities are no longer seen as a shared improvement for the community (Williams, 2006). As explained by Williams (2006), "this also represents a shift in the idea of higher education from primarily a social good to an individual good" (p. 160). Presently, higher education is seen as a business move to improve your self worth instead of your educational knowledge and abilities (Williams, 2006). "Now higher education is conceived almost entirely as a good for individuals to get a better job and higher earning potential through one's life" (Williams, 2006, p. 160).

Student debt is seen as acceptable by society for students because it allows them to market their skills after graduation day. As argued by Williams (2006), "loans are a personal investment in one's market potential rather than a public investment in one's social potential; like a business, each individual is a store of human capital, and higher education provides value - added" (p. 160). I believe that this vicious attack on the financial state of students is unacceptable and inexcusable. I believe that student debt is an enormous setback that cannot and should not be ignored and is a negative intersectional component that touches numerous student lives. I believe that student debt needs to be removed from the equation of higher education completely. As Williams (2006) stated, "just as you should not have to pay a poll tax to vote, you should not have to pay to become a properly educated citizen capable of participating in democracy" (p. 161). I believe that if this problem is not corrected, it will continue to create even more barriers for students with disabilities in higher education because, as stated by Williams, "students from

less privileged classes will not go to college" (p. 162) if it is such a financial burden.

I believe that higher education is becoming less and less an equal playing field for students with disabilities to have a chance at a better life after graduation. As explained by Williams (2006) "The current system of funding has skewed the scales of equal opportunity, and meritocracy is waning" (p. 162). Why even attend a higher education if you will be stuck in an endless cycle of debt afterwards? To get a so-called better career where you will have to work, as much, or more, than if you never attended higher education in the first place. As Williams (2006) contends, however, there is a better option. "A more far - ranging solution, that goes to the heart of the problem, is free tuition" (Williams, 2006, p. 166).

Higher education should be a value that is attainable and accessible for every student that wants it. Higher education has proven to have benefits for the entire community, not just the individual who attends a college or university (Williams, 2006). According to Williams (2006), higher education needs to be "… a national right and value for the larger public good" (p. 167).

**Schlossberg's Theory of Mattering and Marginality.** Schlossberg's Theory of Mattering and Marginality explains that when an individual changes to a new role, such as a college student, one may feel marginalized (Patton et al., 2016). These individuals need to feel that they matter in order to fit in (Patton et al., 2016). This connects to my thematic concern of accessibility for students with disabilities by making sure these students are feeling that they matter. This accessibility shows them that they do matter as a part of the higher education community.

The lens of Schlossberg's Theory of Mattering and Marginality has informed my philosophy of higher education and student affairs through the need for students with disabilities who have unique lived experiences to exhibit a sense of integrity and inclusion, not just tolerance

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or passive acceptance (Patton et al., 2016). An example of this would be a student with disabilities wanting to matter to somebody (Patton et al., 2016). They want to feel important to someone just as much as any other student would.

**Chickering's Seven Vectors.** Chickering's Seven Vectors theory is based on what students must go through to develop their identities (Patton et al., 2016). These seven vectors are gauges of growth for each student (Patton et al., 2016). As the theory title suggest there are seven different vectors for a student to go through (Patton et al., 2016). Vector one is "developing competence" (Patton et al., 2016, p. 300). Vector two is "managing emotions" (Patton et al., 2016, p. 300). Vector three is "moving through autonomy towards interdependence" (Patton et al., 2016, p. 300). Vector four is "developing mature interpersonal relationships" (Patton et al., 2016, p. 300). Vector five is "developing identity" (Patton et al., 2016, p. 300). Vector six is "developing purpose" (Patton et al., 2016, p. 300). Lastly, vector seven is "developing integrity" (Patton et al., 2016, p. 300).

The lens of Chickering's Seven Vectors has informed my philosophy of higher education and student affairs through the needs of all higher education students (Patton et al., 2016). Students with disabilities are students who will still go through development during the college years just as any student and that should certainly be taken consideration (Patton et al., 2016). In fact, I believe this theory can tell us more, as these seven vectors may be extra challenging to go through while a student with disabilities which is why I find this relevant to my concern for accessibility to students with disabilities. An example would be when a student with disabilities works to develop competence. Without accessibility for students with disabilities how are these students supposed to be able to complete things successfully and efficiently?

**Intersectionality.** In regards to accessibility for students with disabilities it is essential to

fully be able to reach a student and understand they have more than one identity (Patton et al., 2016). The lens of Intersectionality have my philosophy of higher education and student affairs through the need to meet student's individual multiple dimensions of identity (Patton et al., 2016). Often times an individual with a disability is seen only for their disability and not much else. The whole student needs to be seen when you are interacting with students with disabilities as a student affairs professional, as a faculty member, or as a peer. An example of this would be a student in a wheelchair only being seen as a student with a disability when in fact they are the leader of the campus LGBTQIA organization. No one had stopped to consider the student's sexual orientation or what proper pronouns to use when interacting with the student, which can leave a negative or harmful impact on the student.

**Universal Design.** Universal Design is an important framework that plays a role in my philosophy of higher education. My thesis is based on accessibility for students with disabilities and Universal Design creates that accessibility for those students with disabilities in higher education. Universal Design is the design of buildings or products that makes them accessible to all people regardless of disability or other factors (Edyburn, 2010). Things to keep in mind when using Universal Design is it should have a simple and equitable use, and require low physical effort (Edyburn, 2010). The use of Universal Design is not a foreign concept to the disability community (Edyburn, 2010) and has been advocated for decades.

I believe that places of higher education should have more advanced and more frequently seen uses of Universal Design around campus. For example, it is possible to build a basic standardized ramp for all buildings. But Universal Design is about more than providing basic accessibility; it is also about providing a more inclusive social environment. For example, can you build a ramp that is not an embarrassment to use? I have seen ramps that are so long they are

exhausting just to gaze at. I have seen ramps that stick out like sore thumbs and single out the users when others are able to mirror the much sleeker designed stairs that match the building and do not look like an after thought add on. I imagine that those who really depend upon those ramps to mobilize themselves feel like a second thought to their institution if they didn't feel like they were take into consideration when the building or structure was created to start with. At least that is how I would feel in those shoes. Why can't there be a creation where there are not stairs, but just a simple Universal Design that is used by everyone. There are even designs that exist that are sustainability friendly and created to add beauty to a structure turning it into a fine work of art.

Another way to create a more accessible higher education for students with disabilities would be to use Universal Instructional Design (Edyburn, 2010). Universal Instructional Design or Universal Design for Learning is built on the same concept as Universal Design, but applied in the classroom setting (Edyburn, 2010). This was created not specifically for those with disabilities, but has become a great barrier remover and asset for this population and others (Edyburn, 2010). I believe that this style of education would momentously benefit students with disabilities in higher education.

Universal Instructional Design can be used in higher education colleges and universities to teach or interact with all students. One example would be that professors could post their PowerPoint's online for students' ease of access. A second example would be diversifying assignment options. Give students in the classroom the choice of writing a paper, presenting their topic, or creating a model. As long as the student can display the learned concept does it really matter how they show it? I do not think so. A third example would be flexible workspaces. After living through this current crisis that is COVID – 19 pandemic, I have seen how higher education

can be completed in person, but also from online. Courses that were never originally allowed to go digital now have. I say that educators should embrace this positive growth. Especially since this may be the new normal for a while. I believe that in the future, lecture halls and classrooms should have both the physical setting but also the possibility to Zoom into the classroom from your residence hall, apartment, or elsewhere. I believe this would greatly benefit students with disabilities who may have mental health issues. If a student with disability struggles with anxiety, having the ability to learn remotely on occasions may be a stress relief. Think of it as taking a mental health day from home, but without hindering the student's learning. I believe that this would significantly benefit students with disabilities who are on the autism spectrum. If the student were already having a rough day this would be a compassionate way to prevent a sensory overload through having a more distraction free environment that they can control. Not to mention, it is a great way to prevent illness if you are to sick to physically attend class, but are still well enough to watch and participate online so this not only benefits students with disabilities, but all students really. I have come to these assumptions after working in a student disability office and interacting with our students after the university suddenly had to go all digital after COVID-19.

**Letters of Accommodation.** I would like to build my intervention so that Letters of Accommodation would no longer be needed for students to attain. These letters would eventually become obsolete. No longer having to go to your medical provider to display evidence of your disability to the campus disability office. No longer having to wait for an appointment with the disability office. No longer would students have to out themselves to professors as disabled and the negative stigma that frequently follows that word. I believe that in a university if this intervention could be truly completed over a series of years it would put the disability office out

of a job through its success.

Accommodation is an immense factor that plays a role in the influence of my philosophy of higher education. My thesis concern centers on inaccessibility experienced by students with disabilities and accommodation letters bridge that accessibility for students with disabilities in higher education. Accommodations for students with disability services are more than seeking and obtaining the assistance and aid offered to every student. Students with disabilities have needs that require more than just the tutors, academic advisors, counselors, and any other support offered to student populations generally. Although these supports are critical for students with disabilities trying to navigate through higher education, the accommodations are pivotal in allowing students with disabilities to fully access the same education as their fellow peers in the classroom.

Letters of accommodations for students with disabilities in higher education are given usually after a student meets with professional staff from the disabilities office of their college or university. There are many things that are taken into consideration when students with disabilities accommodations are being built. First and foremost, the type of disability is considered when crafting a letter of accommodation. A student with wheelchair will have different needs than a student with a learning disability.

There are different forms of accommodation that a student with disabilities can be given depending upon the student's circumstances. One type of accommodation frequently given to students is extended time for exams, projects, and papers. Often a student who has a learning disability may be given time and a half on an exam so that they have that extra time to process the material. Another type of accommodation that students with disabilities are given would be the proctoring center for exams. The proctoring center is a distraction free environment for

students to take their exams in instead of the traditional classroom environment with their classmates. Not receiving these crucial accommodations may actually decrease students from receiving the same education as their peers.

*Analysis of Philosophy of Higher Education*

I believe as a higher education professional that higher education should be accessible to everyone, this thought regarding my philosophy of higher education was informed by theorist Williams (2006 & 2012). Education is supposed to be a right and not a privilege. Higher education has become an unnecessary challenge to all student populations, but especially so to those students with disabilities. Students with disabilities in higher education colleges and universities should not have to come out and disclose to every professor that they have a disability. It is of no business to anyone outside of the student to be aware of their disabilities. Students with disabilities should not have to be worried about their student debt when many have collected debt from medical needs during their time in higher education setting. The system of higher education needs to be completely reinvented for a Universal Design and lower cost to all students. In his work, Williams speaks on the impact of debt on student life (2006 & 2012). Williams also speaks about how the university should be reinvented (2006 & 2012).

The amount of students with disabilities in higher education colleges and universities is getting larger with each passing academic year (Burgstahler, & Moore, 2009). Yet there seems to little being done for this growing population on campuses nationwide (Burgstahler, & Moore, 2009). In my personal experience, the office for disability services I worked in were being funded the same as they have been for years, while the demands from students has more than doubled. The lack of things being done for students with disabilities is a chronic problem for Higher Education in the United States. Not only is to little being done for students with

disabilities in these colleges and universities, but no one sees that as a problem which I believe is an even more immense issue at hand.

Informed by theorist Schlossberg regarding my philosophy of higher education, I believe that students with disabilities need to have their voices heard so that they feel that they matter (Patton et al., 2016). That students with disabilities are not given a chance to speak for themselves. I think that choices are made for students with disabilities because that's what individuals in charge and in power in higher education think is optimum for the students with disabilities, but mostly for the higher education institution. Higher education institutions make choices that they feel will reflect well without asking how the actual students with disabilities feel about it. Students with disabilities need better representation in higher education. I believe that students with disabilities should be given multiple ways to access higher education environment through representation in policy decisions, through construction of and the use of Universal Design, through a classroom model with assistive technology, and much more.

Informed by theorist Chickering regarding my philosophy of higher education, students with disabilities are more than a statistic of a population of the higher education community (Patton et. al., 2016). Students with disabilities are members of the higher education community, which means that they are students who will go through development during the college years just as any student and that should certainly be taken consideration (Patton et al., 2016). I imagine that students with disabilities are future higher education alumni. I believe that students with disabilities in higher education are future citizens. I believe that students with disabilities are future leaders of society. I deem that higher education is doing a disservice to the future society by not creating a more accessible experience for students with disabilities and limiting possible future alumni, citizens, and leaders.

I believe that students with disabilities in higher education need thought, action, and affirmative transformation now. Affirmative transformation is a positive change or growth. Students with disabilities in higher education need thought through considerations of accessibility. I think that students with disabilities in higher education need action through creation of accessibility. Students with disabilities in higher education need affirmative transformation through change that involves them and their voices. I plan to give students with disabilities in higher education the thought, action, and affirmative transformation now through my intervention.

I am passionate that higher education should be accessible to everyone. Higher education should be accessible for students with disabilities. I believe that intersectionality plays a vast role in higher education, which is why I believe higher education should be accessible to everyone, this thought regarding my philosophy of higher education was informed by Patton et al. (2016). Everyone should have a chance to grow knowledge and educational experiences. I believe that higher education creates a better citizen and a better society for the future. I believe that accessible higher education is what the world needs now.

**Historical Context**

*History of Disability Services in Higher Education*

Students with disabilities have a history of advocating for their rights within higher education, but this progress did not come without much effort given by those in the disabilities communities in and out of higher education. Historically the news and events going on outside of higher education in broader society often bring about the environmental setting that occurs inside of higher education. Thus, students with disabilities within higher education have evolved over the 20th century.

In the 20th century higher education had seen much change and advancement. In this century you found veterans returning to the United States. Some of these veterans looked towards higher education as their American Dream. Many of these veterans came back with various forms of disabilities. This continues with student veterans with disabilities to the present day. These disabled veteran-students required accommodations to be set up for success, much of which was spearheaded by Dr. Nugent, discussed below.

In addition to the Federal policy establishing Section 504, university personnel have also played a role in developing disability services in higher education. As documented by the Division of Disability Resources & Educational Services (2016), the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign recently awarded an Honorary degree to Dr. Timothy Nugent who "founded and was the first director of the Division of Disability Resources and Educational Services at Illinois," but more importantly, "the first post-secondary academic and personal support program for people with disabilities" (para. 1). Dr. Nugent was a veteran of the World War II and his career goal was to make educational benefits available to all veterans with disabilities (Division of Disability Resources & Educational Services, 2016). Not only did Dr. Nugent create the first program for disability services in higher education, but also for a number of years it was the only program for disability services in higher education (Division of Disability Resources & Educational Services, 2016).

As noted by the Division of Disability Resources & Educational Services (2016), "his was an uphill battle, but by refusing to abandon his vision for veterans with disabilities, Dr. Nugent made the University of Illinois an institution of firsts: the first curb cuts, the first buses equipped with wheelchair lifts, and research that developed architectural accessibility standards that were later adopted nationally" (para. 3). Dr. Nugent also started the National Wheelchair

Basketball Association and the first rehabilitation service fraternity called Delta Sigma Omicron (Division of Disability Resources & Educational Services, 2016). He was able to change everyday perceptions of these students with disabilities and created a more inclusive environment for them in higher education.

The creation of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 have changed higher education across the United States. Without these federal guidelines, rules, and regulations many students would be unable to attend an institution of higher education today.

The Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 is passed. As stated by the United States Department of Labor, Section 504, Rehabilitation Act of 1973 under "promulgation of rules and regulations" one can read as follows:

> No otherwise qualified individual with a disability in the United States, … shall, solely by reason of his or her disability, be excluded from the participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance …

This applies to most higher education institutions both private and public as most have some form of federal assistance (Section 504, Rehabilitation Act of 1973, 1973). The passing of the act was a victory for students with disabilities. Students at higher education institutions can no longer be outright discriminated over by their disabilities (Section 504, Rehabilitation Act of 1973, 1973). This gives these students with disabilities a legal protection to leverage with while struggling with historic forces of power in higher education (Section 504, Rehabilitation Act of 1973, 1973).

The creation of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 came about due to the

efforts of those with disabilities (Section 504, Rehabilitation Act of 1973, 1973). The

demonstrators organized sit ins, marches, and protest to demand change (Section 504,

Rehabilitation Act of 1973, 1973). The act was created to bar discrimination to those with

disabilities and in any kind of program that obtained federal funding (Section 504, Rehabilitation

Act of 1973, 1973). This act would later be the grounds on which the Americans with

Disabilities Act of 1990 would be birthed (Section 504, Rehabilitation Act of 1973, 1973). Those

involved were mostly those with disabilities themselves, but also in hand with their families,

friends, and other allies (Section 504, Rehabilitation Act of 1973, 1973). This was not an easy

task as there was a lack of support services and transit for these individuals (Section 504,

Rehabilitation Act of 1973, 1973). Not to mention the fact that there was not the same

communication options that are available today such as social media. For higher education this

means that students with disabilities could no longer be denied services (Section 504,

Rehabilitation Act of 1973, 1973). Places of higher education were federally obligated to give

support services to these students (Section 504, Rehabilitation Act of 1973, 1973).

Following that development the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 was soon

passed into existence. As stated by the United States Department of Justice Civil Rights Division

and Information and Technical Assistance on the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, the

act is a civil rights feat that federally bars discrimination and gives those with disabilities the

same prospects as those without disabilities. The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 was,

"modeled after the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibits discrimination on the basis of race,

color, religion, sex, or national origin – and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 -- the

ADA is an 'equal opportunity' law for people with disabilities." The Act required that "to be

protected by the ADA, one must have a disability, which is defined by the ADA as a physical or

mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, a person who has a history or record of such an impairment, or a person who is perceived by others as having such an impairment" (Information and Technical Assistance on the Americans with Disabilities Act, 1990).

This now applies to all higher education institutions in the United States as a federal mandate. The passing of this act is yet another victory for students with disabilities in higher education. These students with disabilities can no longer be outright discriminated over by their disabilities at any United States higher education institution. This gives students with disabilities a legal protection to leverage with while struggling with historic forces of power in higher education.

The creation of Americans with Disabilities of 1990 came about following the creation of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Section 504, Rehabilitation Act of 1973, 1973). It was created to bar discrimination in areas of telecommunication, transportation, employment, public services, and public accommodations (Information and Technical Assistance on the Americans with Disabilities Act, 1990). Those involved were again those with disabilities (Information and Technical Assistance on the Americans with Disabilities Act, 1990). Although this time there was an even larger push specifically from the parents of children who had disabilities (Information and Technical Assistance on the Americans with Disabilities Act, 1990). For higher education this means that places of higher education were federally held to higher standards and increased services to students with disabilities. Especially not so that this was applied to both public and private spaces. (Information and Technical Assistance on the Americans with Disabilities Act, 1990). With that being said, there is still a substantial deal more to be done to make higher education a reality for students with disabilities.

Finally, Universal Design and Universal Instructional Design also referred to as Universal Design for Learning close out the century. The basis of Universal Design formed originally from architecture (Edyburn, 2010). Universal Design is used to create so that all people can use (Edyburn, 2010). A simple example would be a ramp instead of stairs so that all people can move forward with no barriers. Universal Instructional Design or Universal Design for Learning is to do the same concept, but to do so in the classroom setting. This was created not specifically for those with disabilities, but has become a great barrier remover and asset for this population and others.

Analyzing history, higher education has historically been a site of struggle for power on behalf of students with disabilities. My recommendations for future student success to higher education student affairs professionals working with students with disabilities is having a resource office and using Universal Design in and out of the classroom. I recommend that sites of higher education have a resource office or space specifically for students with disabilities because they are often an overlooked and under represented population. This will show support for students with disabilities from higher education student affairs professionals by showing them where they can find their campus resources and other students who identify as they do. This allows for higher education student affairs professionals to know what their students with disabilities need in and out of the classroom. I recommend that sites of higher education use Universal Design and Universal Instructional Design for students with disabilities because it causes no known problems and has been proven to benefit many student populations (Edyburn, 2010). This will then benefit the entire student body.

Students with disabilities relate to the history of higher education in the United States as a historically underserved, but existing student population (Edyburn, 2010). Author Keeanga-

Yamahtta Taylor (2017) argued "if you could free the most oppressed people in society, then you would have to free everyone" (p.5). The future of higher education must be as an institution that would benefit all students. Or, for now, as author Sara Ahmed (2012) contends, we can take up diversity work, which Ahmed describes as "a way of attending to what gets passed over as route or as an ordinary feature of intuitional life" (p.23). Students with disabilities, student affairs professionals, educators, policymakers, and others have made historic progress in higher education towards inclusion of students with disabilities. To keep progress moving in a forward fashion student affairs professionals need to keep calling attention to the daily missions of higher education and be mindful of who is or is not included.

**Current State**

Burgstahler and Moore (2009) studied thirteen focus groups of fifty-three students with disabilities and fourteen focus groups of seventy-two workers from higher education campuses. These focus groups recognized problems of access for students with disabilities in "student services offices" (Burgstahler, & Moore, 2009). One problem recognized was the lack of "staff knowledge and skills regarding disabilities" (Burgstahler, & Moore, 2009). These focus groups also recognized solutions to access for students with disabilities (Burgstahler, & Moore, 2009). The students in these groups shared personal experiences in which the college personnel did not know how to work with the student causing the student to feel disrespected (Burgstahler, & Moore, 2009). In one case a student with disabilities reported, "I feel that if you have a hidden disability that is not very apparent and if you have more than one that kind of compounds the first disability, um, people are very skeptical with you and will not give you patience" (Burgstahler, & Moore, 2009).

The focus groups recognized a need to increase "staff comfort level in working with

students who have disabilities as well as to increase staff knowledge and skills regarding disabilities, especially 'invisible' disabilities that are not disclosed by service users" (Burgstahler, & Moore, 2009). They recognized a need to increase "communication and accommodation strategies" (Burgstahler, & Moore, 2009). Focus groups additionally recognized a need to increase "rights and responsibilities" (Burgstahler, & Moore, 2009). Lastly, recognized by focus groups was a need to increase "campus resources" (Burgstahler, & Moore, 2009). The authors, Sheryl Burgstahler and Elizabeth Moore (2009), give their own solutions to these recognized problems starting with accommodations and Universal Design. This article gives examples of how to measure the support of faculty to use Universal Design in higher education.

Many authors have studied the new direction for the next decade of Universal Design for Learning and how it can lead students to success. These authors mention how Universal Design for Learning is fascinating to many educators and policy makers. This tells us that the current state of students with disabilities is not as accessible as it could be, but has great potential for the future. One reason according to the author, Dave Edyburn (2010), is because of the reauthorization of the Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008 that requires higher education institutions that receive federal funding to report on the outcomes of Universal Design for Learning.

Yet as some authors note the importance of Universal Design for Learning, Edyburn (2010) shares concerns of translating Universal Design for Learning into practice. Edyburn (2010) is someone who has been a large part of aiding educators, schools, and even states into translating Universal Design for Learning into practice. A sizable part of this concern is the attempt to move Universal Design for Learning into a construct by the educational profession

when it is so broadly defined (Edyburn, 2010). To continue to help move Universal Design for Learning forward Edyburn (2010) created ten propositions:

1.  Universal Design in education is fundamentally different from Universal Design in the built environment.

2.  Universal Design for Learning is fundamentally about proactively valuing diversity.

3.  Universal Design for Learning is ultimately about design.

4.  Universal Design for Learning is not just good teaching.

5.  Universal Design for Learning does not occur naturally.

6.  Technology is essential for implementing Universal Design for Learning.

7.  Universal Design for Learning is not assistive technology.

8.  It is necessary to measure the primary and secondary impact of Universal Design for Learning.

9.  Claims of Universal Design for Learning must be evaluated on the basis of enhanced student performance.

10. Universal Design for Learning is much more complex than we originally thought.

By following these propositions, Edyburn (2010) argues that student retention rates could be increased for those with disabilities attending a higher education.

Retention rates have always been a concern for the overall student populations in higher education (Belch, 2004). Historically efforts have been given to aid students in the transition to college life (Belch, 2004). However, concerns began to grow in the 1980s when students began leaving higher education without a degree in higher numbers (Belch, 2004). Even though students with disabilities are attending higher education more and more, the degree completion

rate for these students has not gone up (Belch, 2004). According to Belch, Universal Design could help increase retention rates through usability for all students in and out of the classroom in higher education (Belch, 2004).

Authors Scott, McGuire, and Foley (2003) likewise encourage the use of Universal Design for Learning to support accessibility for students with disabilities. The current process for students with disabilities to find help on campus consists of getting a letter of accommodation from their college disability office (Scott, McGuire, & Foley, 2003). To earn these accommodations students needed to show documented proof to the correct professionals on campus (Scott, McGuire, & Foley, 2003). Once having these accommodations the students then have to "out themselves" to their professors as having a disability to use their accommodations in the classroom (Scott, McGuire, & Foley, 2003). Following that course of action, the students then have to wait for their professor to make any needed adjustments to the classroom environment (Scott, McGuire, & Foley, 2003). Instead of having to go through this process, Scott, McGuire, and Foley (2003) bring Universal Design into the picture. This would allow students with disabilities more accessibility to learn in the classroom setting with less changes having to be made last minute by professors and university staff because accommodations would already be in place for all students through Universal Design for Learning (Scott, McGuire, & Foley, 2003). This would then increase student retention for students with disabilities. This process is often referred to as mainstreaming (Higbee, Katz, & Schultz, 2010).

Mainstreaming is a term used to describe bringing students with disabilities into the same environment as other students (Higbee, Katz, & Schultz, 2010). According to Higbee, Katz, and Schultz (2010) roughly one in five individuals in the United States have a disability. According to Higbee, Katz, and Schultz (2010) one in ten individuals have a severe disability. These

statistics are significant to higher education as more and more students with disabilities are attending higher education (Higbee, Katz, & Schultz, 2010). It was found that students with less visibly seen disabilities, referred to as hidden disabilities, often found others doubted them to have a disability (Higbee, Katz, & Schultz, 2010). Furthermore, students with disabilities are excluded throughout their college experiences because of their disability (Higbee, Katz, & Schultz, 2010). At this point Universal Design is a solution for students to become successfully mainstreamed into the higher education environment without having to go through the accommodation letter process because Universal Design will be user friendly to all students (Higbee, Katz, & Schultz, 2010).

These authors support my intervention by showing how Universal Design for Learning can be used for student success. These article give examples of how to implement Universal Design for Learning in higher education. This Universal Design for Learning concept described by the various authors advance my intervention argument by stating statistic data of students with disabilities and the research behind it. With this data I will be able to back up claims of how Universal Design for Learning is beneficial to students with and without disabilities (Black, Weinberg, & Brodwin, 2015).

**Relevant Factors for Students with Disabilities**

Students with disabilities are often not in a position of power. Students as a whole are often not in a position of power as they start their college degree. They come to an institution of higher education, a new and unfamiliar place to meet new and unfamiliar people. They follow the well known to them conduct of a well-behaved and trained student who attends their classes and co-curricular activities. They follow the framework of ideology in education for students to obediently absorb information from those who are in power over them such as professors or

other employees of the university. In this section I will explore how various forms of power influence the experiences of students with disabilities in higher education.

### *Power of Tradition*

Tradition based forces shape the university through repeated history. Few forces are resilient enough to change such long-standing traditions. Students come to campus excited to start a new chapter in their lives. They attend classes, co-curricular activities and continue the same process of learning the way they have been taught through years of early grade school education. But now this educational process has changed for students with disabilities. No longer do they have their Individual Education Program (IEP) plans from their early grade school education. They must venture forth to the campus disability services office and seek educational accommodations. Even then, students with disabilities find higher education hardly accessible or inaccessible to them.

Many educators ask why we should change for students with disabilities now when the norms have worked for other students in the past? The system of higher education operates the same way it has for over a hundred years. For the most part the same degrees are being offered, the same lecture based teaching style is being used, and the same assessments are being made. Thus power is reproduced again and again through each continuing graduating class of majority non-disabled students while majority of students with disabilities continue to struggle. This barrier to higher education creates a power struggle, a class struggle, and an ethics struggle for students with disabilities. This seems to be the point though. Why change the system of higher education when it is keeping those in power unchecked to continue their upper hand.

### *Internal Forces of the University*

Three internal forces shape the higher education system: policy, practice and norms.

These three forces are key to understanding barriers to change for students with disabilities in higher education. Policy of higher education is usually not created nor changed swiftly. These policies tend to be lengthy thought out rules, missions, and courses of action the university intends to follow. Once policies are created these often become tradition at a university. When students with disabilities try to change inaccessible policies in higher education they can be met with resistance of this force instead of support. This can occur because change does often not happen lightly and will take time to be rewritten. As supported by Foucault (1972-1977), policies are a type of knowledge and knowledge produces power, and power must be acknowledged as power. Students with disabilities may not even realize that these policies are a form of power against them as they attempt to change them.

Practice of higher education frequently involves funding. Like most things, funding is a moving force of practice in higher education. Without income there is no way to pay university employees, fund research or even maintain existing buildings. Changing practices can cost money, which in higher education often means that funding will need to be pulled from other resources or budgets.

Norms of higher education can include standard behavior, expected range of functioning, and achievement levels. Students with disabilities may not have the same standard behavior as those of their peers. For example, a student with ADHD may have a challenging time focusing on a lecture. Students with disabilities may not have the same range of functioning as those of their peers. For example, a student on the Autism spectrum may not grasp all social cues. Students with disabilities may not have the same achievement levels, at first, as those of their peers. For example, a student may have a processing delay due to their disability, which causes them to learn at slower pace than their peers. Many of these challenges, however, can be

alleviated with normative adjustments. Often, however, critiques of the norms of higher education are met with resistance. Power only wants it's version of the truth according to Foucault (1972-1977). This can occur because students with disabilities can be perceived as slow, lazy, unmotivated and so forth by those in the university, instead of in need of norms to be adjusted.

### *Power Reproduced*

Power is reproduced in higher education. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics U.S. Department of Labor in 2019, even if a student with disabilities overcomes barriers to education and graduates with the highest of honors, people with disabilities have a lower employment rate outlook compared to non-disabled people. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics U.S. Department of Labor in 2019, only "19.1 percent among those with a disability" were employed in the year 2018. Students with disabilities can additionally become overwhelmed during the higher education process and drop out with no completed degree and with student loan debt.

To stop power from being reproduced, students with disabilities must have support. Students with disabilities should be encouraged to seek out and use all the support resources available to them. Students with disabilities should be informed by the higher education institution how to seek out the disabilities office and any needed accommodations. The higher education institution needs to be physically accessible on campus. The higher education institution needs to be academically accessible as well. For example, using Universal Instructional Design in the classroom lectures.

To completely understand the power and privilege of where students with disabilities in higher education are today, student affairs professionals need to acknowledge the imbalance of

power this population of students faced in the past and through to the current present day.

This is how power and privilege play an immersive part in modern universities today and more importantly why student affairs professionals need to have a critical understanding that power is an enormous factor in higher education for students with disabilities before researching further the history of students with disabilities. Students with disabilities are often found not in a position of power. Support from Althusser states why this production of power happens (2014):

> that is the proof that this is not really the way it is, but that that is the way it has to be, so
> that the reproduction of the relations of production is ensured, every day, every second, in
> the 'consciousness', that is, the material behavior of the individuals holding the post that
> the social and technical division of labor assigns them in production. (p. 196)

Why change for students with disabilities now when history of higher education has worked for other students in the past? Thus power for non-disabled students are reproduced again and again through each continuing graduating class of majority non-disabled students while majority of students with disabilities continue to struggle.

### *Root of Power in Higher Education*

The key root of power in colleges and universities comes from capitalism and tradition. Understanding that capitalism and tradition are root sources of power is critical to understanding the struggle of students with disabilities in higher education. The university as we know it today is a business. The university is run by first by capitalism. The university is funded by tuition dollars of students along with government and some private funding. When students with disabilities try to change where funding of higher education goes they can be met with resistance instead of support.

Universities are similarly run second by tradition. As stated earlier, tradition based force

shapes the university through repeated history. Few forces are resilient enough to change such long-standing traditions in higher education. The traditional ideology of education is for students to obediently absorb information from those in power such as professors or other employees of the university. They follow the well known to them conduct of a well-behaved and trained student who attends their classes and co-curricular activities. They follow the ideology of education for students to obediently absorb information from those who are in power over them such as professors or other employees of the university. When students with disabilities try to change these set traditions of higher education they can be met with resistance instead of support.

The university has this power of capitalism and tradition because the dominant, or majority, ruling class, runs it. The university is run by the government, by the various board members above the university president, and by the donations of wealthy alumni among others. The university functions by its set ideologies. It establishes its own long-standing rituals, or traditions. This university domain is private, even if it is a public university, because it keeps to itself and runs itself. This cycle of capitalism and tradition keeps repeating itself continuously leaving students with disabilities in an endless cycle.

### *External Force of the University*

Capitalism is the single external force that shapes the university. Capitalism is both an external force and a key root of power in the university setting. It is the key root of power because it is the necessary need to keep the university afloat, but also directs the mission of the university externally. Capitalism is how the government controls the university by deciding how much funding it will get based off government reviews. Capitalism is how donors to the university decide that the university could only have funding if the university will do what the donor wants. So when students with disabilities try to change where funding of higher education

goes they can be met with resistance instead of support. The university system already has to appease the government, donors, and majority of the students, which happen to be able bodied.

**Internship Experience**

During my time in my higher education policy and student affairs master's program I worked a two-year graduate assistantship and two 250-hour internships in Pennsylvania. I completed my first internship and my two-year graduate assistantship out of a large traditional public, four-year higher education institution in an office that aims to support students with disabilities. My second internship was one semester spent at a much smaller traditional public, two-year community college that aimed to support student activities. I considered all of my learning experiences at these two higher education institutions positive. I learned from my two internships and graduate assistantship about my concern for accessibility for students with disabilities. I thoroughly enjoyed experiencing the different communities of each of the higher education institutions had to offer.

*Graduate Assistantship*

In my graduate assistantship in the office of services for students with disabilities I learned that the mission of our office was to aid students with disabilities in advocating for themselves. The office of services for students with disabilities falls under student support services. My site supervisor was the assistant director of the office of services for students with disabilities. There is a number of staff in the office of services for students with disabilities. At the top you have the director, then the assistant director, then the administrative assistant, the technology specialist, two tutors, and five graduate assistants including myself.

My site supervisor uses the skills of advising and supporting in her work by meeting one on one with our students to help create letters of accommodation to construct a successful setting

for students to learn. My site supervisors makes decisions on what kind of programs and services to offer students by what they ask for and show interest in. The office offers anything that would be legally required by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) laws for the university to provide for its students. The current services of the office of services for students with disabilities are: letters of accommodation, priority registration, use of the proctoring center, alternative testing formats, a reader/scribe for the proctoring center, extended testing time, weekly tutor sessions, weekly academic coaching sessions, weekly mindfulness sessions, cart captioning for classrooms, student ambassador program, special summer orientation program, technology equipment loan outs, and assistive technology usage. By providing these services we support our mission to help students advocate for themselves in the classroom.

According to my site supervisor, retention, graduation, and employment are the three key signs of success for the office of services for students with disabilities. We have one of the largest populations on campus that struggle to both graduate and also become employed. The office of services for students with disabilities is not a confidential resource. Depending upon any crisis that may occur, the director will deal with the issue at hand, and/or students may be walked over to the counseling center, and/or public safety may be called.

The budget is an enormous challenge for the office of services for students with disabilities. Our office is funded in multiple, but very limited, ways. For example, our director and administrative assistant are the only staff funded by the university itself. Somehow that is supposed to be enough wages to support the large student population of the university. Thankfully we also receive a Trio grant that pay for our assistant director, our tutors, and the multiple graduate assistants of our office.

Working as a graduate assistant in the office of services for students with disabilities

gives an opportunity to meet a diverse and underserved population that I feel many do not consider when they speak about higher education. I feel that by having been exposed to this office was an opportunity to learn so many new competencies from assistive technology, to ADA law and policy, and so much more! It was correspondingly very rewarding to work one on one with students and watch them succeed.

### *Internships*

I spent over 500 hours interning and analyzing accessibility for students with disabilities in higher education. In this time I saw that students with disabilities still need physical environmental changes to maneuver comfortably around campus. I became aware of how challenging it can be learn without assistive technology supports. There was certainly a lack of awareness as well on information both about disabilities and the available support resources. I want to fill this gap with my intervention *Universal University*.

## Chapter Four: Program Proposal and Implementation

**Introduction**

      As I stated earlier in the previous chapter, the number of students with disabilities enrolled in colleges and universities is getting larger with each passing academic year (Burgstahler & Moore, 2009). Yet there seems to be little being done for this growing population on campuses nationwide. In my experience, the office for disability services I worked in was being funded the same as they have been for years, while the demand from students has certainly increased. Similar experiences were shared with me by the testimony of other disability office workers in in surrounding areas. The little being done for students with disabilities is a problem for higher education in the United States.

      Not enough is being done for students with disabilities in colleges and universities. I believe that so few who see that as a problem is an even more immense issue. Although I also believe that there are certainly individuals that are striving for positive change in higher education. I believe that accessibility for students with disabilities can become so much more than it is today. Students with disabilities need to have their voices heard. Students with disabilities are more than a statistic. These students need thought, action, and affirmative transformation now. Higher education should be accessible to everyone. This is why I would like to introduce my intervention called *Universal University* that aims to increase accessibility for students with disabilities on college and university campuses.

***Proposed Solution***

      *Universal University* is a two-part program that is targeted towards increasing accessibility for students with disabilities. Part One of the intervention consists of a workshop open to student affairs professionals, faculty, and students. This workshop will include a pre-

assessment and post-assessment of learning. I would like a later follow-up survey which will assess the impact of the workshop on that individual's life. This workshop will better explain how to be an ally to students with disabilities through education on topics such as Universal Design, Universal Instructional Design, assistive technology, and more.

Part Two of the intervention consists of a model classroom that is created with Universal Design and Universal Instructional Design in mind. I have created this intervention to address the lack of accessibility for students with disabilities in higher education. My intervention is a multiple level answer to address the issue. I believe intensely that if you are not fixing the solution then you are part of the problem. I believe that students, faculty, and student affairs professionals need to come together to make a more accessible campus community.

The *Universal University* program aims to support students with disabilities in higher education through education and implementation of Universal Design and Universal Instructional Design practice and educational workshops. *Universal University* campuses would have spaces available on campus to model education in a universal format. Campus disability services would work together with other student affairs professionals, faculty, and students to implement workshops on topics of Universal Design.

**Theoretical Frameworks**

Students with disabilities are not able to succeed well in the current higher education environment and are therefore underrepresented in our colleges and universities. I intend to address access to higher education for students with disabilities. In order to address this concern, I will reference works aimed at higher education by the author Jeffery Williams (2006, 2012), Schlossberg's Theory of Mattering and Marginality (Patton et al., 2016), Chickering's Seven Vectors (Patton et al., 2016), and Intersectionality (Patton et al., 2016). My overarching thesis

addresses the importance of providing accessible instruction and engagement opportunities for students with disabilities. Making higher education accessible to students with disabilities would benefit the higher education system and community and the student!

How do we accommodate the swelling number of students with disabilities in higher education colleges and universities today? I believe that accommodation happens when it is acknowledged that there is a problem with the system of higher education in the United States. I believe that accommodation happens when the problem is spoken into existence and it is acknowledged as more than a statistic of a specific student population in higher education. It is supported that accommodation happens in higher education when there is thought, action, and affirmative transformation (Burgstahler & Moore, 2009). My philosophy of higher education as student affairs professional is that higher education should be accessible to everyone.

### *Jeffery Williams on Education as a Right*

Higher education should be a value that is attainable and accessible for every student that wants it. Higher education has proven to have benefits for the entire community, not just the individual who attends a college or university (Williams, 2012). According to Williams (2012), higher education needs to be "a national right and value for the larger public good" (p. 167). The lens of Jeffery Williams influenced my intervention *Universal University* through his belief that higher education is a "national right." It is my framework and belief that higher education should be accessible to everyone, including students with disabilities. I believe that students with disabilities have a right to a further accessible higher education. Students with disabilities do have legal rights to support their cause as mentioned in my earlier chapters, although I believe that this is not enough to support students with disabilities. This is why I created my intervention *Universal University,* to support all students in accessing their right to higher education.

### Schlossberg's Theory of Mattering and Marginality

The lens of Schlossberg's Theory of Mattering and Marginality has informed the intervention through the need for students with disabilities who have unique lived experiences to exhibit a sense of integrity and inclusion with peers of diverse abilities, not just tolerance or passive acceptance among their peers (Patton et al., 2016). An example of this would be a student with disabilities wanting to matter to somebody (Patton et al., 2016). They want to feel important to somebody just as much as any other student would. My program will center students with disabilities, raising awareness of this population of students on campus as well as their needs. This will communicate to the campus community that students with disabilities matter.

### Chickering's Seven Vectors

The lens of Chickering's Seven Vectors has informed the intervention through the same needs of all higher education students: developing competence, managing emotions, moving through autonomy towards interdependence, developing mature interpersonal relationships, establishing identity, developing purpose, and developing integrity (Patton et al., 2016). Students with disabilities are students who will still go through development during the college years just as any student and that should certainly be taken consideration of (Patton et al., 2016). In fact, seven vectors may be extra challenging to go through while a student with disabilities, which is why an intervention of Universal Design is critical to students with disabilities. An example of this hardship would be when a student with disabilities works to establish a positive identity of self, but struggles to do so because they feel embarrassed due to their disability. This program will center students with disabilities, raising awareness of their needs on campus, and thus, seek to alleviate embarrassment or marginal feelings that could hinder them from moving through

these stages of development.

*Intersectionality*

The lens of Intersectionality has informed the intervention through the need to meet student's individual multiple dimensions of identity (Patton et al., 2016). To fully be able to reach a student is it essential to understand they have more than one identity (Patton et al., 2016). The whole student needs to be seen when you are interacting with students with disabilities. An example of this would be a student in a wheelchair only being seen as a student with a disability when in fact they are the leader of the campus LGBTQIA organization. When interacting with students with disabilities it is important to understand that they have intersecting identities, but it is easy, as with a visible disability, to only see the disability. Many other factors play a role in these students with disabilities lives such as race, gender, religion, socioeconomic status, etc.

**Universal University Intervention**

*Goals and Objectives*

The goal of my proposed intervention, *Universal University* is broad. Ideally, the implementation of this intervention is to address and provide a solution aimed at improving, accessibility for students with disabilities. In order to accomplish this goal, I am proposing the following objectives:

- To create a model Universal Design classroom for faculty and staff to practice using technology to create accessible learning both in and out of the classroom setting.
- To accompany the use of the model classroom with a workshop that will assist faculty and staff in learning more about University Design.
- To create a faculty/staff resource group who will mentor new faculty and staff interested in learning about University Design and implementing accessible solutions.

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*Intervention Components*

As stated earlier in this chapter, the *Universal University* program aims to support students with disabilities in higher education through education and implementation of Universal Design and Universal Instructional Design practice and educational workshops.

*Universal University Model Classroom*

Through *Universal University* higher education institutions would have spaces available on campus to model educating in a universal and accessible format for students. These spaces will manifest as model classrooms wherein Universal Design creates the physical construction of the room, and the instructional tools. I foresee it being outside the starting budget, since the budget would be a greater cost, but I would very much like to see model residence halls and other locations on campus likewise created in the same fashion. Campus disability services would work together with other student affairs professionals, faculty, and students to implement workshops on topics of Universal Design and assistive technology.

The purpose of this model classroom is to have a space on campus available to practice using Universal Design and assistive technologies tools that create accessible learning. Technology is a barrier remover to students with disabilities (Scott et al., 2003). An example of assistive software that would be in the model classroom and would be loaded to computers is Kurzweil 3000 **©**. This software allows the users to have speech-to-text, text-to-speech, change speech speeds, highlight digital text, zoom text, and more.

Another educational tool that the model classroom should have available for testing would be Smart Pens **©**. This computer in a pen allows the user to record notes both the traditional manual way into a notebook and records into an audio file.

I would have the professor test a microphone. Professors would be able to practice with

PowerPoint. Professors would be able to test the possibility of students being able to Zoom **©**

into the classroom. Other resources in the room professors could test would be the use of tablets.

These tablets could hold the class readings, assistive application, etc.

*Faculty and Staff University Design Workshop*

To accompany the work in the Model Classroom, I am proposing the development and

implementation of an introductory workshop on University Design for faculty and staff. Ideally,

faculty and staff would attend the workshop in the Model Classroom. They would be introduced

to concepts of University Design and be able to then have a "hands-on" experience in the

classroom. In the future, additional, more specific and in-depth workshops could be offered.

The workshop would be planned for two hours. Participants will be given information in

print and electronically, keeping with the mission of accessibility. In order to signal to students

and others that they have participated in the workshop and have some skills to teach using

accessible technology, participants will be given a sticker with a logo to be placed on their door

and an electronic logo to place in their email signature. Please see Appendix A.

The workshop will have handouts for common information and use by all participates. Upon

completion of the workshop individuals should receive an attachment logo that can be added to

their university email accounts and a physical logo to place in their location of work for

university employees.

*Universal University Workshop*

The initial workshop will be an introduction to Universal Design and accessible

technologies. Table 1 provides an abbreviated agenda for the two-hour workshop. See Appendix

B for a more detailed description of the workshop components

Table 1. Abbreviated Agenda

| Topic | Time Allocated |
|---|---|
| Welcome | 5 minutes |
| Overview of Learning Outcomes\n\nSee below | 5 minutes |
| What is accessibility? | 3 minutes |
| What is Universal Design? | 15 minutes |
| What is Universal Instructional Design? | 37 minutes |
| What is assistive technology? | 40 minutes |
| Closing | 5 minutes |

As a result of participating in the workshop, learners will be able to:

- Explain how to use various assistive technology with students

- Articulate how assistive technology can help all students

- Understand the importance of universal design and how it can create equity.

*Faculty/Staff Resource "Mentors"*

The *Universal University* intervention will recruit a small group of faculty and staff to participate in the first offering of the workshop. They will be asked to serve as resource "mentor" leaders to the next group of faculty and staff participating in the workshop. These mentors will show their mentees how to use assistive technology tools in the model classroom.

The mentors and mentees would be in contact on a weekly basis. With funds from *Universal University* intervention these mentors and mentees could attend future conferences on topics of accessibility to bring back and share with the campus in future workshops. Ideally, as word spreads about the program, more and more faculty and staff will take part in the workshop

and the training in the Model Classroom, creating a cultural shift on campus.

**Implementation**

As stated earlier in this chapter, the *Universal University* program aims to support students with disabilities in higher education through education and implementation of Universal Design and Universal Instructional Design practice and educational workshops. Through *Universal University* colleges and universities would have spaces available on campus to model educating in a universal format for students. Campus disability services would work together with student affairs professionals, faculty, and students to create and implement workshops on topics of Universal Design and assistive technology usage.

The intervention model *Universal University* was created to open accessibility in higher education for students with disabilities. This intervention model *Universal University* was created to bring together student affairs professionals, faculty members, and students to support students with disabilities. As shown earlier in chapter two, the intervention model *Universal University* meets with ACPA professional competencies.

*Recruitment*

How will I recruit for *Universal University*? I will recruit through marketing the intervention through networked connections I will have created in my time at the college or university. I plan to market the intervention by targeting common goals I share with the audience I am marketing towards. I believe that accessibility for students with disabilities will benefit everyone involved. This intervention will benefit faculty because students will ideally earn better retention and grades when they are better able to access learning content and materials. The intervention will benefit student affairs professionals because it will lead to increased student success and involvement on campus outside the classroom allowing students with disabilities to

develop more skills. This intervention indirectly benefits the student body in two ways. It benefits the students with disabilities through increased accessibility to learning in and out of the classroom setting. It benefits the peers of students with disabilities because many of these practices are intersectional and will benefit all students. I find that one of the best ways to bring about positive lasting change is create universal solutions that help everyone, not just a specific group of people. Curb cutouts, automatic doors, and assistive technology can help everyone, not just people who need them on a day-to-day basis. So, although my concern is to increase accessibility for students with disabilities, I encourage this intervention because it will help the entire campus; I believe this intervention can create long-term change.

### *Funding and Budget*

The implementation of *Universal University* requires a funding and budget plan. It would be important to find funding for this project in a variety of areas. One way funding could be obtained is through alumni and corporate donations. Alumni may be very interested in this intervention that would help contribute to student success. An example of a fundraising letter can be view in Appendix C. Additional, many of the companies that provide assistive technology may be able to and even interested in providing in-kind donations of the technology. It would be important to engage these companies in the planning and development of the model classroom.

There would be some on-going expenses for the *Universal University* including personnel and operating costs. Ideally, the facilitator of the *Universal University* would be an employee in the disabilities office. Some of their time would be dedicated to developing and implementing this intervention. The operating and programmatic expenses would include: mailings, conferences, travel, software, computers, furniture, maintenance repairs, paper, and other minor supplies. An example of expenses can be viewed in Appendix D.

*Timeline*

The timeline for *Universal University* begins before the intervention would even start. One academic year is necessary to access the campus environment, policies, and concerns. This year would be used to network and connect with different communities and stakeholders both on and off campus. Constituencies on-campus that would be important to include are student affairs, faculty, facilities, information technology and the student body. It will be important to help the campus community understand more about students with disabilities and the challenges they face. It would be important to build enough support and evidence for the need to incorporate universal design elements into the university community.

As stated earlier in this chapter, there will be recruitment of faculty and staff. This would take place one semester before the intervention begins to allow these recruits time to begin the onboarding process and familiarize them with the content. The model classrooms would be opened up after the first workshop experience. This would make sure that everyone would be properly trained on the uses of the equipment in the model classroom. Additionally, this would be a wonderful place and timing to hold a ceremony ribbon-cutting opening and invite those who have donated to funding to help them feel more connected to the cause.

*Potential Challenges*

A potential challenge I foresee in starting *Universal University* would begin before I would even approach proposing this intervention. It is important to help people understand why Universal Design is essential for creating a campus community that creates equity for students with disabilities. Some people may resist the requests for doing more for students with disabilities since there are protective laws already in place.

I plan to address this potential challenge by first building a network of connections

throughout the college or university I would be located in. This needs to be a building block to stand on later when it comes time to bring people together from different aspects of the campus. Next I would like to point out concerns around campus regarding accessibility for students with disabilities. Finally, when I believe I have created the right opportunity, I would pitch my intervention, *Universal University,* as a solution to the concern. I would make sure to give supporting research that would show how this intervention would make an impactful positive change.

A further challenge would be having this meaningful intervention approved for funding. Colleges and universities have limited funding to begin with. To gain funding for this would mean having to move funding from a difference campus priority. This comes at a time when colleges and universities may be even more limited in their financial resources after the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic.

Which brings up another possible barrier. As colleges and universities think about their plans for fall amidst the COVID-19 crisis, concerns about students with disabilities may not take precedence. As expressed earlier, there are possibilities of supporting students with disabilities that support all students. One such example is using Zoom © as an assistive technology instead of recorded lectures. This intervention is important as we work to support all students. In the next chapter, I will discuss effective leadership and assessment measures.

**Chapter Five: Leadership and Assessment**

**Effective Leadership**

I believe that characteristics of effective leadership in higher education policy and student affairs should follow the ACPA/NASPA Professional Competencies Leadership Outcomes (2015). See Appendix E for ACPA/NASPA Professional Competency Leadership Outcomes. A leader should be someone who can confidently express the future goals of their work. They should be able to understand campus cultures and apply that to their work. This leader will need to be able to hold collaborative relationships throughout campus and not just in their department or area of expertise. A leader should know and reflect frequently upon their own history, beliefs, and values that form their perspectives. To be a remarkable leader you do not need to hold a seat of authority, but be a role model for others to follow.

I believe that a leader should be able to think both creatively and critically. They need to be able to see future opportunities that have not been taken yet. They need to likewise be able to see future obstacles and resistance. A leader needs to be able to believe in the ability of their people to work together to make transformative action happen. But the leader should still inspire and support others to see themselves as able to make meaningful impact. A leader should be a promoter of change to rid barriers to the success of others. They should make sure to include the perspectives of underrepresented groups in the process of making decisions. They should recognize traditions and structures that influence the campus. A leader should use technology as a tool to share information accessibly.

Characteristics of transformative leadership in higher education policy and student affairs involve a questioning of base values and beliefs, both in one's personal life and in the community. I believe that effective leadership and transformative leadership in higher education

policy and student affairs both develop positive results. I find that transformative leadership in higher education policy and student affairs is different because it takes it a step further in addition to the effective leadership skills. I believe that transformative leadership in higher education policy and student affairs helps to build leadership skillsets that are not blinded by personal values and beliefs.

Roles of the characteristics of effective leadership play a part in the implementation of my proposed intervention. Effective leadership skills are the building blocks every leader needs regardless if they are an authority figure or not. I believe that effective leadership starts with leading change. An effective leader should listen to others and not just their own beliefs. And an effective leader should be accountable. Roles of the characteristics of transformative leadership play in the implementation of my proposed intervention in higher education are going beyond the basics of effective leadership. Once you have ascended from effective leadership, you need to think more diversely and more creatively about how you lead. I believe wholeheartedly that my intervention benefit from transformative leadership to fully address the concern.

The characteristics of transformative leadership start with being a role model for others. I believe that a transformative leadership should inspire others. It is my belief that a leader with transformative leadership will genuinely care about others. And not only will a transformative leader care about others, but they will challenge them in ways that will make them grow positively in life.

**Leadership and *Universal University***

*Leadership Influence*

The role leadership will play in the implementation of this intervention will be guided by the ACPA/NASPA (2015) Leadership Competencies. The ACPA/NASPA Leadership

Competencies influence my leadership approach by giving me a basis to use as building blocks to start my leadership journey as a student affair professional in higher education. The elements of leadership that most center my decision making on student social, interpersonal, developmental, and academic success would be the ACPA/NASPA Leadership Outcomes (2015). The outcome from the ACPA/NASPA Professional Leadership Competency Table (2015) that I found most relevant to my intervention was, "advocate for change that would remove barriers to student and staff success," (p. 28). The goal of my intervention is to remove barriers to students with disabilities through accessibility. Another outcome from the ACPA/NASPA Professional Leadership Competency Table (2015) that I found significant to my intervention was, "ensure that decision making processes include the perspectives of various groups on campus, particularly those who are underrepresented or marginalized, or who may experience an unintended negative consequence of the proposed change." (p. 28). I want to increase awareness for the underrepresented students with disabilities population through this intervention and by doing so I hope to include the perspectives of this group to prevent negative outcomes of any future changes made on campus.

### *Leadership Styles*

Specific styles of leadership have informed and shaped my thematic concern are: Kotter's Eight – Stage Model (1996), Lewin's Change Management Model (Hussain et al., 2018.), Social Change Model of Leadership (Astin et al., 1996), Servant Leadership Theory (Northouse, 2005), Adaptive Leadership Theory (Northouse, 2005), Assigned Leadership Theory (Northouse, 2005), and Emergent Leadership Theory (Northouse, 2005). Although, the theoretical model I perceive as being the most useful in my intervention would be the Social Change Model of Leadership.

**Kotter's Eight-Stage Model.** Kotter's Model (1996) consists of eight stages. These

stages are: (1) establishing a sense of urgency; (2) creating the guiding coalition; (3) developing a vision and strategy; (4) communicating the change vision; (5) empowering broad based action; (6) generating short-term wins; (7) consolidating gains and producing more change; and (8) anchoring new approaches in the culture (Kotter, 1996). An example of how I could use this model in my intervention would be to first identify the problem of accessibility for students with disabilities. I would need to create a team of individuals who want change. I would work together with the team to create a strategy. I would have the team communicate new ways to work with students using Universal Design. The team and I would look into getting rid of outdated policies and systems that would be against a Universal Design mindset for students. I would make sure to recognize the people who made changes with our work. Then our team could use our positive change to keep moving in a forward motion of change. This will then create a regular succession of leadership in my intervention. One connection I have with Kotter's Model is that it recognizes the positive changes and rewards those people which I believe leads to positive changes lasting (Kotter, 1996).

       **Lewin's Change Management Model.** Lewin's Model consists of three stages (Hussain et al., 2018). These three stages are: (1) unfreeze, (2) change, and (3) refreeze (Hussain et al., 2018). An example of how I could use this model in my intervention would be to first challenge the standard way of functioning and state my case as to why this is no longer the greatest way to assist students. Then I would go to stage two and show individuals how to better support students through my intervention. Finally, for stage three individuals will have embraced the different ways to support students as shown through my positive intervention results and more professionals will start using Universal Design to support students with disabilities in higher education. One connection I have with Lewin's Model is the ability to recognize issues and the

ability for anyone to make positive changes (Hussain et al., 2018). You do not necessarily have to be in a high position of leadership to make impactful changes.

**Social Change Model of Leadership.** According to Astin and Astin (1996), the Social Change Model of Leadership has three levels: individual, group, and community. The individual level focuses on the student's personal virtues of the student leadership development (Astin & Astin, 1996). The group level focuses on the collaboration skills of the student leadership development (Astin & Astin, 1996). The community level focuses on positive social change of the student leadership development. According to Astin and Astin (1996), the Social Change Model also consists of seven values: Collaboration, Consciousness of Self, Commitment, Congruence, Common Purpose, Controversy with Civility, and Citizenship. These seven values fall into one of the three levels of the Social Change Model (Astin & Astin, 1996). An example of how I could use the Social Change Model in my intervention would be to create Universal Design based projects with the students in the classroom to build community and collaborative skills.

**Servant Leadership Theory.** Servant Leadership Theory is based on the value that the leader is serving others (Northouse, 2005, p. 1-17). This replaces the traditional thought of others serving the leader. I could use the Servant Leadership Theory would be to serve students in my intervention by finding the resources that they need to succeed. I greatly connect with Servant Leadership Theory because I believe that higher education professionals exist to serve students. It is their profession to make students exceed, grow, make connects and thrive in their college community and as future citizens.

**Adaptive Leadership Theory.** Adaptive Leadership Theory is based on adapting leadership by challenging and solving problems (Northouse, 2005, p. 1-17). I could use Adaptive

Leadership Theory in my intervention through the use of Universal Design and Universal Instruction. This would identify and challenge the problem of lack of access for students. My intervention would adapt the classroom into a Universal Design, which would be created to better suit diverse student learning possibilities. One connection that I hold about Adaptive Leadership Theory is that this is the exact goal of my intervention, to better adapt learning access for students with disabilities. It perfectly aligns with how I would like to improve the college experience for students with disabilities. One disconnection that I hold with this theory is that I feel that many individuals may not wish to change how things are run at higher education institutions and that this model does not give support on how to argue against any resistance you may face as a higher education professional pushing for change.

**Assigned Leadership Theory.** In Assigned Leadership Theory a leader is a leader because of the authority of their formal title or position (Northouse, 2005, p. 1-17). An example of Assigned Leadership Theory in my intervention would be a professor teaching in one of the model classrooms. One connection that I hold with Assigned Leadership Theory is that it is straightforward who is in charge. One disconnection I hold with Assigned Leadership Theory is that it leaves no room for others to have leadership opportunities when one individual is placed in charge over others.

**Emergent Leadership Theory.** In Emergent Leadership Theory the leader is chosen not because they are the assigned leader, but because of how other respond to them (Northouse, 2005, p. 1-17). An example of Emergent Leadership Theory that could be used in my intervention would be faculty working together and choosing a mentor leader. One connection that I hold with Emergent Leadership Theory is that choosing an emergent leader is a group process. One disconnection that I hold with Emergent Leadership Theory is that this could lead

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to bias choice of leadership in the group.

**Post-Graduation**

I would lead this intervention from the position I take on post-graduation by reaching out at the higher education institution I was employed at and find out what, if any, changes or challenges have arisen around the topic of accessibility for students with disabilities. If there have been any positive changes I would see if there was an opportunity to keep the movement growing, possibly introducing my intervention. If there had been any recent issues or challenges surrounding the issue then I would research them further and seek to resolve those beforehand. It would not do well to try and propose an intervention amongst a "hotbed" of any unresolved issues. It would just lead to extra obstacles or failure of the intervention. If there had not been any changes in this area recently, I would then inquire with the disability services and administration on campus to see if they would be interested in backing my proposed intervention.

**Assessment, Evaluation, and *Universal University***

I will assess how well the intervention workshop contributes to its purpose by looking at the learning of the faculty and staff. There is a survey to assess the learning outcomes of the workshop. Please see Appendix F. Another assessment would be observation of individuals in the model classroom. There will be a model classroom checklist to make sure the assistive technology is understood. Please see Appendix G. There will be a focus group with faculty and staff. Finally, I will keep track of how many people participate and place *Universal University* logo stickers on their door.

**Limitations and Looking Ahead**

Leadership challenges I expect to face as I attempt to explore my thematic concern and

implementation of my intervention revolve around resistance to change. I imagine I would experience resistance to change, to funding, and to acknowledging accessibility concerns for students with disabilities.

There are aspects that I did not yet explore. I would like to explore more about historic movements and activism by those with disabilities outside of higher education, as I believe that there is a link from higher education to what transpires in the history of the world. I look to hear more stories and research on cognitive and invisible disabilities and how that impacts students' higher education experience. I look to complete more research on veterans with disabilities and how that impacts their higher education experience. I look forward to seeing what other college and universities are doing in the area of providing accommodations and accessible learning opportunities for students with disabilities too. I look to further understand how services are used based on demographics such as race, gender, etc. To finish, I look forward to researching funding sources from other grant sources as well as the possibility of funding from assistive technology corporations.

Looking ahead I plan to collaborate with faculty or staff to implement my intervention. I plan to submit a conference proposal after the launch of *Universal University*. I may even write a newsletter or journal article on the topic of accessibility for students with disabilities. I believe that there are endless opportunities for improving accessibility in higher education. I plan to continue my research and attend conferences on accessibility and services for students with disabilities.

**Conclusion**

Accessibility for students with disabilities on university campuses is important to our field as student affairs professionals because students with disabilities are a growing population

of the student body on university and college campuses (Burgstahler, & Moore, 2009). I believe that it takes someone who passionately cares to make a difference in the higher education community. I believe that all people deserve a chance to earn a college degree regardless of their background, socioeconomic status, and ability levels. I believe a chance at higher education is not only growth for an individual, but an opportunity for a better tomorrow and a better community through educated citizenship. It is for these reasons why I created the intervention *Universal University;* to address accessibility for students with disabilities through the use of Universal Design and Universal Instructional Design to give opportunity for students to succeed and contribute to society. Experiences throughout my entire higher education career have shaped my perception of this concern for accessibility of students with disabilities in higher education.

In conclusion, I thank you for taking your time to read this critical action research proposal on accessibility for students with disabilities. My hope is that this work will open minds and hearts. It is important to find ways to better support students with disabilities in higher education. These students, in fact all students deserve to be in an environment where they are seen, heard and given the tools to succeed.

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Appendix A

Sample *Universal University* Logo

Appendix B

Detailed Workshop Presentation

- *Slide 1 for 5 minutes. Presenter will state learning outcomes.*

  o Workshop Learning Outcomes:

    ▪ Explain how to use various assistive technologies with students.

    ▪ Articulate how assistive technology can help all students.

    ▪ Understand the importance of Universal Design and how it can create

    equity.

- *Slide 2 for 5 minutes. Presenter will state guidelines for discussion.*

  o Guidelines for discussion:

    ▪ Respect difference experiences, beliefs, and opinions of others.

    ▪ Do not use disrespectful or degrading language.

    ▪ Do not interrupt others when speaking.

    ▪ Have an open mindset.

    ▪ Participation is key.

    ▪ You have a right to leave the workshop at any time.

- *Slide 3 for 3 minutes.*

  o What is accessibility?

  o Accessibility is being easy to use and understand.

- *Slide 4 for 5 minutes.*

  o What is Universal Design?

  o The basis of Universal Design formed originally from architecture (Edyburn,

  2010).

- o Universal Design is used to create so that all people can use (Edyburn, 2010).

- o A simple example would be a ramp instead of stairs so that all people can move forward with no barriers.

- *Slide 5 for 10 minutes.*

    - o How can you incorporate Universal Design into your college?

        - ▪ *Open discussion.*

- *Slide 6 for 10 minutes.*

    - o What is Universal Instructional Design?

    - o Universal Instructional Design or Universal Design for Learning is to do the same concept as Universal Design, but to do so in the classroom setting (Edyburn, 2010).

    - o This was created not specifically for those with disabilities, but has become a great barrier remover and asset for this population and others (Edyburn, 2010).

    - o Edyburn (2010) shares concerns of translating Universal Design for Learning into practice.

    - o Edyburn (2010) is someone who has been a large part of aiding educators, schools, and even states into translating Universal Design for Learning into practice.

- *Slide 7 for 17 minutes.*

    - o A sizable part of this concern is the attempt to move Universal Design for Learning into a construct by the educational profession when it is so broadly defined (Edyburn, 2010).

    - o To continue to help move Universal Design for Learning forward Edyburn (2010)

created ten propositions:

1. Universal Design in education is fundamentally different from Universal Design in the built environment.

2. Universal Design for Learning is fundamentally about proactively valuing diversity.

3. Universal Design for Learning is ultimately about design.

4. Universal Design for Learning is not just good teaching.

5. Universal Design for Learning does not occur naturally.

6. Technology is essential for implementing Universal Design for Learning.

7. Universal Design for Learning is not assistive technology.

8. It is necessary to measure the primary and secondary impact of Universal Design for Learning.

9. Claims of Universal Design for Learning must be evaluated on the basis of enhanced student performance.

10. Universal Design for Learning is much more complex than we originally thought. (Universal Design for Learning Table)

- By following these propositions student retention rates could be increased for those with disabilities attending a higher education (Edyburn, 2010).

- *Slide 8 for 10 minutes.*
  - How can you incorporate Universal Instructional Design into your college?
    - *Open discussion.*
- *Slide 9 for 20 minutes.*

- What is assistive technology?

- Assistive technology is equipment that aids people with disabilities to work overcome barriers.

- Assistive technology examples:

  - Smart Pens **©**. *Play demo video.*

  - Kurzweil 3000 **©**. *Play demo video.*

- *Pauses presentation. A presenter hands out Smart Pens for participates to demo for 10 minutes.*

- *Slide 10 for 10 minutes.*

  - How can you incorporate assistive technology into your college?

    - *Open discussion.*

- *Slide 11 for 10 minutes. Presenter hands out post-survey handout.*

  - Questions or comments?

    Thank you for attending today's workshop!

Appendix C

Sample Fundraising Letter

Dear Alumni,

As you read this letter I hope you fondly recall your college days. Be it those bygone days filled of band practice, sports practice, or hours of time spent involved in student government and other co – curricular learning experiences.

I am sure that you similarly recall those long days in the library cramming for upcoming exams, group projects, and countless hours of lectures.

What if you could help fund a better way to learn? Well we plan to do just that! The university plans to run a brand new program called *Universal University* with several classrooms inspired by Universal Design for Learning. This program aims to create a higher standard of accessibility to all students, but especially those with disabilities.

We ask that you kindly consider donating today what you can afford and help sponsor our program to touch the lives of future generations to come.

Appendix D

Budget Spreadsheet For *Universal University* Operations

| *Universal University* **Workshop and Model Classroom Budget** |  |
|---|---|

| **Revenues** |  |
|---|---|
| Student Fees | $0 |
| Interest Income (investment from donors) | $300,000 |
| Sales and Services | $0 |
| Misc Revenue | $0 |
| Transd In-Other | $0 |
| **Total Revenue** | $300,000 |

| **Expenditures** **Personnel** |  |
|---|---|
| Salary | $80,000 |
| Benefits | $20,000 |
| GA's | $0 |
| Student Wages | $0 |
| **Total Personnel** **Operating** | $100,000 |
| Mailings (20,000 letters to alumni/ community donors) | $13,000 |
| Advertising | $0 |
| Memberships/Dues | $0 |
| Conferences ($1,000 per professor) | $10,000 |
| Professional Services | $0 |
| General Travel ($500 per professor) | $5,000 |
| Copiers/Paper | $8,000 |
| Software/Networking (Kurzweil 3000 software $4,000 for school wide use) | $4,000 |
| Office Equipment | $0 |
| Office Supplies | $0 |
| EDP Equip-NonCap | $0 |
| Other Supplies ($300 per student desktop computers, 2 smartboards) | $21,000 |
| Procurment Card | $0 |
| NonCap Equipment | $0 |
| Furniture ($100 per student desk) | $6,000 |
| Wearing Apparel | $0 |
| Other Food Services | $0 |
| Maintenance Repairs | $3,000 |
| Cable/Telephone | $0 |

|  | Other | $0 |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Total Operating** | | $70,000 |
| **Total Expenditures** | | $170,000 |
| | | |
| **Net Revenue/Expenses** | | $130,000 |

Appendix E

ACPA/ NASPA Leadership Outcomes (ACPA/NASPA, 2015)

Foundational ACPA/NASPA Leadership Outcomes:

- Articulate the vision and mission of the primary work unit, the division, and the institution.

- Identify one's strengths and weaknesses as a leader and seek opportunities to develop one's leadership skills.

- Identify and understand individual – level constructs of 'leader' and 'leadership'.

- Explain the values and processes that lead to organizational improvement.

- Explain the advantages and disadvantages of different types of decision-making processes.

- Use technology to support the leadership process.

- Understand campus cultures and collaborative relationships, applying that understanding to one's work.

- Describe and apply the basic principles of community building.

- Describe how one's personal values, beliefs, histories and perspectives inform one's view of oneself as an effective leader with and without roles of authority.

- Identify institutional traditions, mores, and organizational structures and how they influence others to act in the organization.

- Build mutually supportive relationships with colleagues and students across similarities and differences.

- Think critically and creatively, and imagine possibilities for that do not currently exist or are not apparent.

- Identify and then effectively consult with key stakeholders and individuals with differing perspectives to make informed decisions.

- Lead others to contribute toward the effectiveness and success of the organization.

- Articulate the logic and the impact of decisions on groups of people, institutional structures, and implications for practice.

- Exhibit informed confidence in the capacity of ordinary people to pull together and take practical action to transform their communities and world.

Intermediate ACPA/NASPA Leadership Outcomes:

- Identify and understand systemic and organized constructs of 'leader' and 'leadership'.

- Compare and contrast appropriate leadership models to create organizational improvement.

- Identify potential obstacles or points of resistance when designing a change process.

- Seek out training and feedback opportunities to enhance one's leader and leadership knowledge and skill.

- Encourage colleagues and students to engage in team and community building activities.

- Create environments that encourage others to view themselves as having the potential to make meaningful contributions to their communities and be civically engaged in their communities.

- Give appropriate feedback to colleagues and students on skills they may seek to become more effective leaders.

- Serve as a mentor or role model for others.

- Use reflection to constantly evolve and incorporate one's authentic self into one's identity as a leader.

- Recognize the interdependence of members within organizational units and throughout the institution.

- Advocate for change that would remove barriers to student and staff success.

- Share data used to inform key decisions in transparent and accessible ways while using appropriate technology.

- Seek entrepreneurial and innovative perspectives when planning for change.

- Facilitate consensus processes where wide support is needed.

- Ensure that decision making processes include the perspectives of various groups on campus, particularly those who are underrepresented or marginalized, or who may experience an unintended negative consequence of the proposed change.

- Convince appropriate personal to identify and act on solutions to potential issues.

- Inform other units about issues that may impact/influence their work.

- Willingly engage in campus governance in a manner that exemplifies responsible campus citizenry.

- Within one's department and areas of interest, lead others to contribute toward the effectiveness and success of the organization.

Appendix F

Sample Workshop Pre-Survey and Post-Survey

*The workshop surveys are the same to compare for knowledge growth.*

1. When working with students, I explain how to use various assistive technologies.

| Never | Occasionally | Neutral | Sometimes | Always |
|---|---|---|---|---|
|  |  |  |  |  |

2. I articulate the importance of assistive technology when working with students.

| Never | Occasionally | Neutral | Sometimes | Always |
|---|---|---|---|---|
|  |  |  |  |  |

3. I utilize Universal Design concepts when working with students.

| Never | Occasionally | Neutral | Sometimes | Always |
|---|---|---|---|---|
|  |  |  |  |  |

Appendix G

Sample Model Classroom Checklist

1. Can you use a Smart Pens ©?

| Yes | No |
|---|---|
|  |  |

2. Can you use Kurzweil 3000 ©?

| Yes | No |
|---|---|
|  |  |

3. Give an example of Universal Design.