

----- **FOCUS TOPICS** -----

Organization of the Focus Topics

The guidelines for this year's report prescribe the following two focus topics for discussion: Workforce Preparation and Placement for Students with Disabilities and Improving Representation in Teacher Education.

Workforce Preparation and Placement for Students with Disabilities

Since 1948, the Division of Rehabilitation-Education Services has helped nearly 2000 students with disabilities pursue and earn undergraduate, graduate and professional degrees from the University of Illinois. Among the graduates of the program with severe physical disabilities are United States senators, state legislators, state and federal government administrators, physicists, engineers, computer scientists, accountants, lawyers, agriculturalists, economists, physicians, biologists, chemists, social workers, performing artists, educators, geologists, architects, corporate executives, kinesiologists, physical educators, recreation administrators, and coaches. Indeed, students with disabilities have graduated from every degree granting department at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and the overwhelming majority have gone on to realize successful professional careers. In a recent study of U of I graduates between 1952 and 1992, researchers from the UIUC Department of Community Health and the Institute of Labor and Industrial Relations found the salary gap between University of Illinois graduates with disabilities and their able-bodied cohorts when matched by age, gender and major, and when health status effects were controlled, to be a statistically insignificant 2 percent. Typically, this value is around 10 percent when health status effects are controlled.

Most often problems in which difficulty has been encountered in gaining entrance to programs by persons with disabilities are experienced in professional curricula with specified or unspecified technical performance standards and/or clinical training components, and math, engineering and science fields which are rich in technical jargon which is often difficult to communicate in accessible formats to students with disabilities.

As can be seen in the table below, the proportion of UIUC students with disabilities within each college is relatively consistent with the overall proportional distribution of undergraduate and graduate students by college. It is noteworthy that although the percent of undergraduates with disabilities enrolled in engineering was roughly equivalent, the percent of graduate students with disabilities enrolled in graduate engineering curricula was 17.4% lower than the campus standard. In contrast, the percent of graduate students with disabilities enrolled in law school was about 11.8% higher than the overall campus percent. The College of Applied Life Studies (i.e., Community Health, Kinesiology, Leisure Studies, and Speech & Hearing) had the highest representation of students with disabilities at the graduate level and overall.

Spring 99 DRES Enrollment x College and Class Compared to Overall Enrollment by College and Class					
College	Overall n	Overall % by College & Class	DRES n	DRES % by College & Class	Difference in % by College & Class
Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences					
Undergrad	2,073	8.0%	24	8.5%	0.5%
Grad	485	5.8%	2	2.5%	-3.3%
Total	2,558	7.4%	26	7.1%	-0.3%
Commerce and Business Administration					
Undergrad	3,121	12.0%	25	8.8%	-3.2%
Grad	889	10.5%	4	4.9%	-5.6%
Total	4,010	11.7%	29	8.0%	-3.7%
Education					
Undergrad	518	2.0%	7	2.5%	0.5%
Grad	656	7.8%	8	9.9%	2.1%
Total	1,174	3.4%	15	4.1%	0.7%
Engineering					
Undergrad	4,404	17.0%	47	16.6%	-0.4%
Grad	1,885	22.3%	4	4.9%	-17.4%
Total	6,289	18.3%	51	14.0%	-4.3%
Fine and Applied Arts					
Undergrad	1,928	7.4%	25	8.8%	1.4%
Grad	664	7.9%	2	2.5%	-5.4%
Total	2,592	7.5%	27	7.4%	-0.1%
Communications					
Undergrad	489	1.9%	3	1.1%	-0.8%
Grad	88	1.0%	1	1.3%	0.2%
Total	577	1.7%	4	1.1%	-0.6%
Law	570	6.8%	15	18.5%	11.8%
Liberal Arts and Sciences					
Undergrad	12,192	47.0%	135	47.5%	0.5%
Grad	1,996	23.6%	15	18.5%	-5.1%
Total	14,188	41.3%	150	41.1%	-0.20%
Applied Life Studies					
Undergrad	1,029	4.0%	17	6.0%	2.0%
Grad	199	2.4%	19	23.5%	21.1%
Total	1,228	3.6%	36	9.9%	6.3%

Veterinary Medicine	441	5.2%	3	3.7%	-1.5%
Aviation					
Undergrad	164	0.6%	1	0.4%	-0.3%
Labor & Industrial Relations	91	1.1%	0	0.0%	-1.1%
Social Work	253	3.0%	4	4.9%	1.9%
Library and Information Science	224	2.7%	4	4.9%	2.3%
Total UG	25,918		284		
Total Grad	8,441		81		
Grand Total	34,359		365		

Students with disabilities still encounter many obstacles in pursuing programs and entering careers. Those obstacles that have been difficult to address include:

Limited Access to Information. The inaccessibility of print and electronic course materials poses a substantial obstacle in all curricula, but especially in math, engineering and science fields. Textbooks are often identified too late to accommodate their timely conversion to an accessible format (e.g., audio tape, Braille, electronic, tactile graphics, etc.), and it is extremely difficult to obtain electronic versions of textual materials from publishers which can be readily converted to such accessible formats. Additionally, academic information presented on the World Wide Web is frequently inaccessible to students with disabilities using screen readers and other adaptive information technologies (e.g., graphical information doesn't have text link descriptors and conversely, audio information lacks text descriptors.).

Legislation, which would require that publishers selling books to Illinois institutions of higher education provide electronic copies of their textbooks and course materials for expedient access by students with disabilities, would greatly enhance educational access at all Illinois institutions. It might also reduce the institutional cost of converting text-based course content to alternative formats. (Note: California is presently considering such legislation).

Inadequately Prepared for Work and Independent Living. Persons with severe physical disabilities typically arrive with little or no work experience prior to enrollment at college, and this is compounded by the fact that they often lack the knowledge and experience necessary to independently manage their daily living needs, especially the recruitment, training and management of personal assistants. The combination of these problems makes it very difficult to coordinate their placement at remote internship sites.

Inadequate Information Technology Knowledge and Skills. Students with disabilities are too often accommodated in secondary schools via surrogates rather than by introducing them to the adaptive technologies necessary for them to independently utilize information technologies. Thus, when they arrive on campus they are totally unprepared for

immersion in a technologically sophisticated educational environment. In attempting to address this concern, DRES has hired an adaptive information technology specialist to develop and implement individualized training modules for students with disabilities. Additionally, DRES is addressing the problem strategically by offering summer technology camps for high school students with disabilities.

Limited Access to Interpreters and Real Time Captioners. It is becoming increasingly difficult to provide effective interpreter services in highly technical fields of study. Additionally, although real time captioning is highly effective for deaf students who are not proficient in signed-English or American Sign Language (e.g., recently acquired deafness, or foreign national who is not proficient in ASL), it is extremely difficult to find stenographers willing to provide this service, and when such individuals are identified, the service is very expensive. Universities within the State of Illinois would be well served by the ability to utilize high speed Internet service to access interpreters and captionist from outside of their locale to accommodate both of the aforementioned problems.

Special programs, activities or practices that have proven especially effective in improving the workforce preparation include:

Transitional Residential Programming for Students with Severe Physical Disabilities. Students with the most severe physical disabilities, who require assistance in the performance of activities of daily living, continue to be underrepresented on most campuses. Whereas other universities rarely have even 5 such students living in University residence halls, 15-20 students with such disabilities reside in Beckwith Hall alone, and another 5-10 reside in other private or University housing. Students with such disabilities are often ill-prepared at the time of high school graduation to deal with the rigor academic life of college, while concurrently acquiring the knowledge, skills and experience necessary to successfully live independently (including hiring, training, scheduling, and managing personal attendants without assistance). At Beckwith Hall, students needing assistance in the performance of activities of daily living are afforded the opportunity to participate in training to improve independent living, and are empowered by the responsibility which they share with Beckwith management for hiring, training, scheduling, managing, and evaluating Beckwith's personal attendant staff. A disability management team comprised of the student, a physical therapist, an equipment specialist and Beckwith management work collaboratively to determine a plan for improving each student's personal empowerment in the management of his/her disability. The Beckwith goal continues to be to help residents acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to successfully transition to mainstream University or private housing prior to graduation.

Summer Internship Program in Chicago. Working in collaboration with the State of Illinois Office of Rehabilitation Services the Division has successfully cultivated internship opportunities with Motorola in Chicago for UIUC students with severe disabilities who require assistance in the performance of activities of daily living.

Summer Information Technology Camps. Also working in sponsorship with the State of

Illinois Office of Rehabilitation Services, the Division established a summer information technology camp program for high school students with severe upper extremity disabilities and those with those who are blind. The goal of the program is to improve the knowledge and skills of these students in the use of adaptive information technologies so that they are independently competent users of technology by the time they enter college.

Adapted Sports, Recreation and Fitness Programs. The Division continues to offer very sophisticated programming in adapted sports, recreation and exercise for students with physical disabilities. Often students with severe physical disabilities arrive at the University with very limited functional capacities, and heavily dependent upon others for assistance in the performance of many of their activities of daily living. However, through participation in the adapted sports, recreation and exercise programs sponsored by the Division, it is not uncommon for their health, wellness and functional capacity to be dramatically enhanced. Indeed, the fitness and strength of the aforementioned students often improves to such a degree through participation in the Division's adapted sports and recreation program, that they are able to utilize a manual wheelchair for mobility instead of the more limiting motorized equipment with which they arrived. Further, their ability to perform their activities of daily living independent of any assistance is often remarkably enhanced. As a result of these changes, their immediate access to employment is enhanced, as is their long-term employability.

Regarding the latter factor of long term employability, regular participation in physical activity has regularly been demonstrated to be a significantly correlated to lifelong health, fitness and wellness within the general population, and that relationship is no less likely to be valid for persons with disabilities. Over the last 50 years, nearly half of the students with severe locomotor disabilities who have been served by the Division of Rehabilitation-Education Services have actively participated in the Division's adapted sports and recreation programming. Research performed with U of I graduates with disabilities between 1952 and 1992, found that the single strongest predictor of physical activity following graduation from the U of I was the level of participation in adapted sports and recreation during their collegiate years. Assuming that those who were more active latter in life were healthier and more capable of continuing long term employment, then athletic programs during the collegiate career provide a positive benefit.

Academic Aides provided for 1st Year Students. In collaboration with the Department of Community Health in the College of Applied Life Studies, the Division established a student aide program wherein graduate students in rehabilitation counseling were matched with new students with disability-related decrements in executive functioning (e.g., traumatic brain injury, attention deficit disorder and psychiatric disabilities). The aides assist the latter mentioned students in planning and organizing their academic schedules and tasks.

Improving Representation in Teacher Education

The primary difficulty of increasing the rate of minority representation in teacher education is competition from other more highly paid and more prestigious careers. With all the professional and career opportunities available, minority students are often reluctant to pursue a profession that is relatively low paying and suffers from a poor public image.

From August 1996 to August 1999, the College of Education at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC) was the recipient of a grant from the U.S. Department of Education. The grant, titled “Teachers for the 21st Century: Recruiting, Mentoring, and Placing Culturally Diverse Teachers” provided funding for several initiatives in the College to recruit, support, and place culturally diverse teachers.

First, the College of Education has become more active in recruiting underrepresented minority students into its teacher education programs by: 1) joining campus Admissions personnel in their visits to recruit in high schools and community colleges, 2) aggressively recruiting among students who have not declared majors at the University of Illinois, and 3) developing recruiting materials (brochures and posters) that target underrepresented minorities in both high school and college settings.

Second, with regard to supporting minority students enrolled in various education programs, the College of Education has committed several “Teachers for the 21st Century” competitive scholarships to minority students enrolled in teacher education programs. A mentoring program for minority students was also initiated. Teacher education candidates were paired with volunteer faculty to establish informal one-on-one mentoring relationships. Receptions were held to acknowledge and encourage these relationships. The College also has a student teacher education organization initiated and run by minority students—the Minority Association of Future Educators.

Finally, the College, through its Student Placement Office, is very active in placing minority graduates of its teacher education programs in schools. By maintaining placement files, advertising available positions, and conducting Job Fairs, the Student Placement Office enjoys a high placement rate of its graduates. Minority graduates are in high demand as teachers; graduates of the program are virtually guaranteed a teaching job upon receiving their credentials.

Overall, the College of Education’s efforts have helped to establish a positive image of the department and the field of education among minority students. Financial support is a critical factor and the ability to offer several scholarships to students complements the department’s recruitment efforts.

-----Unit Review-----

The IBHE guidelines also prescribe a review of formally organized support units involved in the recruitment and retention of underrepresented groups. This year's review highlights units which serve female students and staff (Women's Studies Program); units that work to improve faculty and staff representation (Office of Affirmative Action); and units concerned with the recruitment of undergraduate students from underrepresented groups (Minority Engineering Program).

Unit Serving Female Students and Staff

Women's Studies Program

Women's Studies is an academic program, offering courses and an undergraduate and graduate minor. In the 1998-99 academic year, the number of students enrolled in courses has increased nearly 10% due in part to increased course offerings. The curriculum and the minor programs are the primary way Women's Studies serves female students. Additionally, women faculty and staff also benefit through the various events sponsored by Women's Studies.

Women's Studies sponsors programming on feminist scholarship, women artists, and political and social issues of concern to women:

Exploration of Feminist Scholarship: This lecture series, instituted in 1996, has been very popular. The series brings artists and scholars that are often of special interest to women students, faculty, and staff. The theme varies each year. In 1998-99, "Engendering the Spoken Word" brought poets whose work engaged issues of gender and identity. For 1999-2000 a series on Feminism and the Visual Arts is planned.

Feminist Scholarship Series: This series offers students and faculty at UIUC an opportunity to share their research with other members of the campus community. This series has been in place since the beginning of the program, and remains a very popular forum for discussing current issues in feminist scholarship.

Women in the Director's Chair: Women's Studies, with sponsorship from other units like Cinema Studies, hosts this film festival of independent women artists every fall. The festival attracts students from a variety of fields, and features issues like race, ethnicity, sexuality, and class in relation to women and gender.

Women's History Month: Women's Studies coordinates events sponsored by other units related to women's history and initiates the month-long celebration with a reception.

Other programming varies from year to year. In 1998-99 Women's Studies celebrated the 20th anniversary of the program with a day-long celebration that included a luncheon, feminist fair, performances by local entertainers, and a "homecoming" dance. Numerous other social occasions offer opportunities for women students and staff to meet in a communal atmosphere. The annual fall reception and the end-of-the year picnic are regular events in the program calendar. This year, in cooperation with the Department of