
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign 2003 Underrepresented Groups Report

Public Act 85-283 and subsequent legislation direct public institutions of higher education in Illinois to develop plans and strategies to increase the participation and achievement of minorities, women, and individuals with disabilities who traditionally have been underrepresented in higher education. Institutions are to report annually to the Illinois Board of Higher Education on efforts to implement these plans and strategies. The Board, in turn, is to report annually to the Governor and General Assembly on the effectiveness of institutional methods and strategies for increasing representation and the success of underrepresented students at public institutions.

Fall 2003: Serving Students with Disabilities

This inquiry was prompted by a request from Mr. James Kaplan, Chairman of the Illinois Board of Higher Education. Mr. Kaplan is concerned that not all eligible students at public colleges and universities may be receiving needed services. To address this issue, institutions are being asked to provide information to a set of questions that follows:

1. Are our public universities and community colleges providing a range of services sufficient to meet the needs of students with disabilities?

The response to this question is divided into three sections. The first section describes the academic and nonacademic disability support services available at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC). The second identifies areas of postsecondary disability support service in which UIUC has played a leadership role, and, finally, objective measures of support service quality are addressed.

Access Services Overview

The Division of Rehabilitation-Education Services (DRES) provides an extensive range of academic and nonacademic support services for students with disabilities. In terms of *academic services*, the Division performs disability verification, serves as the campus repository for disability records of students requesting accommodations, coordinates priority registration, provides disability management counseling and executive skills coaching, coordinates accommodation planning and implementation, coordinates the resolution of environmental access difficulties, makes recommendations to colleges/departments as to when substitutions and extensions are warranted, coordinates testing under non-standard conditions, coordinates the conversion of inaccessible academic content to alternative

accessible formats, provides access to assistive communication and information technology resources and training, coordinates notetaking assistance services, coordinates interpreter and computer-assisted real-time captioning services, coordinates the introduction of augmentative listening systems, provides neuropsychological assessment for “at risk” students suspected of having undiagnosed disabilities, and provides disability education and training for the faculty and staff.

In terms of *nonacademic services*, the Division provides campus-wide bus transportation service and parking service consultation, campus orientation, housing and personal assistant (PA) support for students with severe physical disabilities, consultation on residence hall access needs, co-curricular and cultural program access, volunteer support services, employment transition support, wheelchair and equipment repair support, adapted varsity sports programming in men’s and women’s wheelchair basketball and track & field, and physical therapy and functional training services. The Division also consults with Student Affairs units (e.g., Study Abroad, McKinley Health Services, Campus Recreation, Housing, Financial Aid, etcetera) in the management of individual access difficulties and in proactively enhancing the accessibility of their services.

Access Services Leadership

Leadership in dedicated scholarship funding. In 2002-03, the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign allocated and distributed over \$185,128 in scholarships, tuition waivers, and/or awards expressly to support the educational costs of 82 students with disabilities.

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Information and assistive technology leadership. In 1996, UIUC hired Dr. Jon Gunderson, a nationally recognized assistive information technology expert, to coordinate Information Technology (IT) services for UIUC students, and to promote the ubiquitous application of universal design throughout the UIUC IT systems and resources. As a result, DRES was able to design and implement (with ample campus funding) a multi-tiered, decentralized IT model in which accessible computer workstations are available in all departmental computer labs, as well as in both the undergraduate and graduate libraries. Compared to many campuses where students must go to a specific laboratory to access assistive technologies, Dr. Gunderson’s model makes it possible for UIUC students to access most assistive technologies in all labs. In addition, the model includes four strategically-placed campus computer laboratories with very sophisticated reading systems that include scanners, optical character recognition software, screen readers, speech output and real-time Braille displays. All totaled, this represents a 700 percent increase in the number of accessible computer labs on the UIUC campus over the past six years.

To accommodate student use of assistive technology on a 24/7 basis, DRES developed a library of “just in time” instructional resources to help students problem-solve and learn to more efficiently and effectively use these technologies. The resources are located online at <http://www.rehab.uiuc.edu/infotechaccess/training/index.html>.

Additionally, DRES is endeavoring to enhance website developers' knowledge regarding access by students with disabilities. DRES addresses the needs of students and offers solutions to those needs through two courses on this subject. REHAB 711 is offered online, and is designed to teach web content developers about the disability access issues in using the Internet, and how web-based resources can be designed to improve accessibility. Library and Information Science 305, titled *Designing Universally Accessible WWW Resources*, is taught on-campus. The latter course introduces students to the concepts and practices of designing accessible web-based resources. Students from all disciplines interested in accessible design are encouraged to participate in the course. The primary requirement for participation is merely experience in developing and publishing web materials. Information about both courses may be found online at <http://cita.rehab.uiuc.edu/courses/>.

Leadership in the provision of accessible course materials. Prior to 1999, UIUC students (like those on most campuses) whose disabilities impaired their ability to read print were accommodated by readers and/or books on tape. However, this was extraordinarily inefficient and it relegated students to an access by surrogacy paradigm that many of their prospective future employers would not deem reasonable. Indeed, an employer is much more likely to hire the otherwise qualified graduate who is blind and uses scanning, screen reading, and voice output technologies to access documents than one who requires an aide to access print material.

Therefore, to ensure that students with disabilities resulting in print processing impairments were not accommodated in a manner that would diminish their viability in the employment market following graduation, DRES developed the first totally electronic text conversion system at a higher education institution in Illinois. To achieve this end, the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign invested in the purchase of high-speed scanners and a host of specialized software systems. With these technologies, textbooks and other print materials are converted to electronic files that can be accessed through a secure web server from anywhere and reproduced in any desirable format (e.g., voice output, large print, Braille, etcetera). In this manner, UIUC graduates with disabilities are assured of having very sophisticated knowledge in the use of state-of-the-art assistive technologies that empower them in seeking and obtaining employment after graduation.

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Not only was this text service offered to students with print impairments due to vision or learning disabilities, but it was also extended to the University's rather large population of students with severe upper extremity locomotor impairments as well. Although the latter students can typically read print, they require considerable manual assistance to physically retrieve, set up, and manipulate books, manuscripts, articles, etcetera. By scanning their textbooks, such students can utilize computers equipped with voice input software to access

the material online, so that they can independently read, manipulate, study, and archive the same information that was otherwise difficult to access or inaccessible to them.

DRES has also provided training for personnel from Southern Illinois University, Illinois State University, the University of Illinois at Chicago, the University of Illinois at Springfield, Indiana State University and Indiana University in how to design, develop and operate this electronic text conversion support service.

Leadership in residential support services for students with severe physical disabilities. UIUC is *one of three* institutions in the nation to provide extensive transitional residential support for students with disabilities who necessitate assistance in the performance of activities of daily living (ADL). (The other two institutions are the University of California at Berkeley and St. Andrews Presbyterian College in Laurinburg, North Carolina.) Beckwith Hall was created in 1981 to accommodate UIUC students with severe disabilities. In contrast to other institutions whose count of students with such conditions includes no more than one or two students with such severe disabilities, Beckwith is designed to accommodate 20 residents needing ADL assistance.

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The significance of this programmatic offering cannot be overstated. Students with such disabilities are rarely, if ever, prepared at the time of high school graduation to deal with the rigorous academic life of college while concurrently acquiring the knowledge, skills and experience necessary to successfully live independently, including hiring, training, scheduling, and managing personal assistant (PA) personnel. Beckwith was created to serve as a bridge for these students. As such, the most immediate objective of Beckwith programs and services is to help students successfully transition to mainstream University or private housing prior to graduation. The students learn to live as independently, enjoyably, and productively as possible with their disabilities after earning their degrees. While aiding students in the management of their activities of daily living (e.g., transferring in and out of wheelchairs, dressing, grooming, bathing, etcetera), Beckwith concurrently seeks to provide students the opportunity to improve their knowledge and skills in disability management, and to facilitate their transition to mainstream community housing whenever possible. Ultimately, Beckwith is intended to aid students in achieving sufficient acumen and ability in the management of their personal disability needs and to go wherever their life and career aspirations take them, confident that they can manage their own needs.

The importance of Beckwith Hall's transitional service becomes self-evident when one considers the bleak employment projections for citizens with disabilities. According to a 1998 Harris/NOD survey, with unemployment in the United States at an all-time low, nearly 70 percent of our nation's population of persons with disabilities were classified as unemployed (1998 NOD/Harris Survey of Americans with Disabilities). Furthermore, persons with severe disabilities are at much greater risk of being undereducated and chronically unemployed/underemployed than their able-bodied or lesser disabled peers.

However, through Beckwith Hall's programs and services, the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign accommodates 20 students with severe disabilities whose peers are seldom present on other campuses, and the dividends of that effort are apparent. Of the 37 former Beckwith residents with severe physical disabilities who have graduated since 1994, 21 (57%) have obtained professional employment, 12 (32%) have enrolled in graduate or professional school, and only four (11%) are unemployed. This is in contrast to the frequently cited 70 percent unemployment rate among U.S. citizens with disabilities.

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Leadership in serving students with cognitive and psychological disabilities. To accommodate the needs of the rapidly growing subpopulation of students with cognitive and psychological disabilities, the UIUC has established a cognitive and psychological disability support team comprised of a clinical psychologist who is also a certified rehabilitation counselor and a learning disability specialist. The psychologist allows DRES to better coordinate services between other mental health agencies on and off campus, to better identify and serve students with comorbid conditions, and to better coordinate academic accommodations for students with psychiatric disabilities. To highlight the latter function, the Division's psychologist has instituted an intensive support service program for five current students with Asperger's Syndrome/Autism. Without those services, these students would find it very difficult to succeed at the UIUC; however, with them, each is making excellent progress toward graduation.

In addition to coordinating the academic accommodations for students with learning disabilities (LD), the learning disability specialist provides individualized training to help students better understand their disabilities and to learn compensatory strategies to more effectively manage the functional impact of their LD.

The DRES psychologist is also collaborating with University of Michigan faculty on a research project to identify best practices in retaining and graduating students with psychiatric disabilities. This effort focuses upon the systemic reduction of stigma and the provision of continuous monitoring and follow-up with at-risk students.

While most students with cognitive disabilities receive diagnoses and accommodations early in their academic careers, this is not the case for a number of UIUC students with cognitive and/or psychological disabilities. Students who are accepted to Illinois through a disability "blind" admissions process are typically high functioning individuals with above average intelligence. Throughout their elementary and secondary school education, their cognitive strengths were more than sufficient to compensate for their weaknesses within the less rigorous setting. However, once these students begin coursework at UIUC, problems start to arise. The courses are more intense and information is disseminated at a higher rate of speed. There is a high level of competitiveness among students to keep up with coursework and to excel academically, and the students with whom they are competing for grades are on the whole considerably

brighter than their secondary school peers. At this point, their compensatory skills and cognitive strengths are no longer sufficient to compensate for their disabling weaknesses, and a downward spiral of failure ensues. When this process is allowed to go unabated, difficulties such as academic probation or withdrawal from the University invariably result.

The problematic nature of this scenario is further exacerbated by two factors. The first is that there is a dearth of neuropsychological service providers in Champaign-Urbana and, thus, it is not uncommon for it to take as long as six months for these students to obtain a neuropsychological exam. Given that students seeking such services are typically in academic peril by the time they initiate an inquiry, the aforementioned time lag in getting testing performed exacerbates their risk of having to withdraw or being dropped from school. Secondly, the cost of such testing is often deemed by students to be prohibitive. Standard neuropsychological testing in this region of the country costs between \$1,500 and \$1,800, and it is typically not covered under student insurance.

In response to this concern, DRES developed a pilot program in collaboration with the Counseling Center and McKinley Mental Health Services to offer neuropsychological testing services for students without prior diagnoses, but who were deemed, on the basis of preliminary screening by the Counseling Center or McKinley, to likely have a substantially limiting cognitive impairment. When positive diagnoses are obtained, accommodation plans are developed and implemented. Students found to have severely impaired executive skill functioning attributable to their cognitive impairments are enrolled in a weekly academic coaching support service developed by the Division's psychologist.

Leadership in the delivery of accessible transportation services. In 1952, the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign developed the first accessible bus service for persons with disabilities and continues in collaboration with the Champaign-Urbana Mass Transit District to offer campus transportation service of unsurpassed quality for students with disabilities. Currently, the system uses three, forty-foot buses capable of serving 20 students in wheelchairs, and a mini-bus capable of serving up to six riders when their travel needs do not coincide with the fixed route bus schedules.

Leadership in health and wellness programming. Each year, the State of Illinois invests millions of dollars in programs to facilitate the re-entry of persons with disabilities to the workforce, while only negligibly working to encourage their adoption of physically active lifestyles that help to promote health and wellness and, thus, long-term employability. According to the U.S. Surgeon General, in spite of the fact that persons with disabilities can experience many of the same benefits of physical activity as their nondisabled peers, persons with disabilities are overwhelmingly inclined to adopt physically inactive lifestyles. As a result, the employment longevity of college alumni with disabilities is frequently compromised.

Since 1949, UIUC has recognized the importance of making opportunities for co-curricular program participation and, in particular, participation in physical activity an

integral facet of its programming and services for students with disabilities. By offering opportunities for students with disabilities to participate in varsity sports, adapted recreational programs, and physical therapy and functional training services, UIUC seeks to improve the health and wellness of its students. Additionally, such programming affords students with disabilities an unparalleled opportunity to acquire the knowledge, experience, and skills necessary to successfully pursue a myriad of physically active sport and recreation activities for a lifetime.

The adapted sports and recreation program for University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign students with disabilities is widely heralded nationally and internationally as a leader in disability sports, and was recently recognized by the 92nd Illinois General Assembly which passed a resolution commending the UIUC leadership for its pioneering vision in adapted sports, health, and wellness programming for persons with disabilities.

Support Service Quality

Student satisfaction. In Spring 2000, the Division surveyed all registered students (n=449). The responding sample of 65 students was comprised of 20 students with mobility disabilities, five students who were blind/low vision, three students who were deaf/hard of hearing, 28 students who had cognitive or psychological disabilities and nine students with systemic disabilities. Although the response rate was quite low (14.5%), the distribution of respondents by disability category was representative of the distribution by category within the population. (Note: The survey has not been replicated due to turnover of DRES staff responsible for its management, and the concomitant need to reconfigure the instrument and survey methods to facilitate a higher response rate.)

In Spring 2000, when asked how satisfied they were with their overall decision to attend UIUC, over 91 percent responded that they were either “extremely satisfied” or “satisfied.” One-hundred percent of student respondents who were blind/low vision or deaf/hard of hearing were satisfied with their overall decision to attend UIUC. Eighty-nine percent of students with mobility impairments and 100 percent of students with systemic disabilities were satisfied, and 88 percent of students with cognitive and/or psychological disabilities reported that they were satisfied with their selection of UIUC.

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Employment outcomes. In terms of employment success, Hendricks, Schiro-Geist, and Broadbent (1997) found that when matched by major, year of graduation, and gender, and when health status was controlled, the salaries of alumni with disabilities graduating between 1952 and 1992 were not significantly different from those of their matched cohort.

With regard to the post-graduate outcomes experienced by Illinois students with severe physical disabilities, as noted above, close to 90 percent of former Beckwith Hall residents with severe physical disabilities who have graduated have attained employment or have continued their educations.

In a 2003 study of 140 UIUC alumni with spinal cord injuries or diseases and who graduated between 1978 and 2002, 91.5 percent of the 94 respondents reported that they had worked for pay in the past five years. Over 73 percent stated that they were currently working for pay. Over 15% reported personal incomes in excess of \$75,000, 28% had personal incomes between \$50,000 and \$74,999 and 30% had personal incomes between \$35,000 and \$49,999. Whereas national statistics project 70 percent of our nation's citizenry with disabilities to be unemployed, 73 percent of UIUC graduates with severe spinal cord injuries or diseases annually earn \$35,000 or more in personal income.

Multiple opportunities for access feedback are provided. In addition to the aforementioned access survey, students with disabilities are informed in every accommodation letter written by DRES that they may seek immediate help from DRES if they experience any difficulty getting an approved accommodation implemented. Further, students, faculty, staff, and guests with disabilities are given the opportunity to provide anonymous feedback regarding their UIUC experiences via the DRES website at: <http://www.rehab.uiuc.edu/guestbook/gbook.html>. The concerns of persons with disabilities are also given voice at the highest level through the Chancellors' Campuswide Committee on Access and Accommodation (CCAA). These communication practices and resources serve to enhance the awareness of persons with disabilities that the University wants to identify and address any difficulties that they are experiencing in accessing or using University facilities, resources, and/or services.

- 2. Are our public universities and community colleges providing outreach services so that students with disabilities in high school know that if they go to college, the services they need will be available?**

Publications

In outreach, the Division annually disseminates approximately 1,500 copies of the *Beckwith Hall Newsletter* and 2,000 copies of the *Delta Sigma Omicron Sigma/Media Guide*. DRES also maintains an extensive informational website describing its disability support services, policies, and procedures. Additionally, DRES staff members annually participate in college day recruiting events at selected high schools and they annually review the recruitment and admissions documents of the Office of Admissions & Records (OAR) to ensure that the materials are accessible and have readily identifiable disability resource information. DRES and OAR also collaborated in the development of an *Illinois Admissions FAQ for Students with Disabilities* for use by recruitment counselors attending high schools, fairs, etcetera. The *FAQ* is slated for deployment on the OAR and DRES websites this fall. DRES staff members also routinely meet with high school and community college counselors to discuss resources and services for students admitted to UIUC.

Transitional Outreach Programs

Since 1986, the Division has hosted summer wheelchair sports camps for youth with severe physical disabilities. Last year, the Division served 200 young people with disabilities through this program. As a result of this effort, the division has worked to improve the

health, wellness, and general quality of life of thousands of young people with disabilities. Additionally, counseling sessions are incorporated into the camp curriculum wherein academic counselors from UIUC meet with participants to help the students prepare for university or college enrollment, as well as to discuss admissions criteria and concerns.

Building upon its sports camp programs, the Division, in collaboration with the Illinois High School Association (IHSA), is also working to establish a scholastic sports program for Illinois high school youth with disabilities that can serve as a prototype for other states. Approximately 200 youth participated in the inaugural state championship in wheelchair basketball held in conjunction with the IHSA Basketball Championships held in Peoria in March, 2002. One of the points of emphasis in this program is reinforcing the importance of student athletes maintaining good academic records in high school. Subsequent enrollment at a postsecondary institution will offer them the opportunity to continue to develop their athletic talents while earning their degrees.

Similarly, for three of the previous four years, the Division hosted Summer Technology Camps for high school students with severe physical or visual disabilities who were at risk of not matriculating to postsecondary educational institutions due to their very limited exposure to essential assistive information technologies. Dr. Jon Gunderson developed the highly specialized curricula for both camp programs, negotiated sponsorship for the camp from the Illinois Office of Rehabilitation Services and the Illinois Bureau for Blind Services, and directed several senior engineering students in projects designed to develop technologies for use in the camp curricula. This residential summer program has instructed nearly 60 high school youth with severe disabilities, four of whom have gone on to successfully enroll at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

In 2002, the Division was awarded a three-year grant from Proctor & Gamble to underwrite a summer transition program for incoming students with disabilities. Although the program will be limited in the beginning to incoming UIUC freshmen and transfer students with disabilities, it is hoped that it could be opened up to any high school student with a disability accepted to a postsecondary institution. The pilot transition program will be held in June 2004.

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- 3. Are our public universities and community colleges providing a climate or context so that student with disabilities know that, if they do seek services, they will be supported and their needs responded to in a prompt and timely manner?**

Town Meeting

The student access survey noted earlier clearly indicates that the Urbana-Champaign campus is providing a welcoming and accommodating climate/context for students with disabilities.

In addition, the Urbana-Champaign campus hosted a Town Meeting on Disability Issues in April 1998. This unprecedented UIUC event, organized by the CCAA, offered a forum for interested individuals to share and listen to concerns regarding campus accessibility. Participants offered new ideas on how to create a campus community that is an inviting and supportive place for all persons to live, work, teach, and learn. The purpose of the Town Meeting event was to raise campus community awareness of campus accessibility concerns of persons with disabilities, and to initiate a campus dialogue on these issues that would prompt members of the UIUC community to make accessibility a necessary component of planning for all UIUC programs, facilities, academic resources, and public events.

From 11:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m., an "open-microphone" was available for individuals to share their ideas. Several computers (all complete with Universal Access software and hardware) were available. With this technology, individuals were able to register their viewpoints electronically and anonymously at the Town Meeting. Additionally, persons unable to attend the Town Meeting at the Illini Union were invited to share their thoughts with the CCAA via email.

The CCAA combined the notes taken at the Town Meeting (keeping the identity of all speakers confidential) and email messages received into a single document that summarizes the key concerns and suggestions offered by the campus community throughout this event. This document is available by request to the Committee (access@uiuc.edu) or can be viewed online.

Serving All Students

Institutions of higher education have a need to address the inadequacy of the method used to count students with disabilities. Currently a student must self-identify as needing accommodation to be included in the number of students served. Yet, some students do not need to request services because their needs are met without additional accommodation. That is, the institution has made available the accommodations some students require thus students do not need to self-identify to receive them. The better that institutions serve students, the fewer students who self-identify. In this situation it will appear that the institution serves fewer students.

To better track the number of students with disabilities on campus, the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and Western Illinois University collaborated to author a web-based survey of *all* students enrolled. It is an anonymous survey so students do not need to disclose their identities unless they chose to do so. This survey asks students to report whether they have a disability and, if so, whether they contacted the office that would have authorized an accommodation. If a student has a disability but did not contact the office, and, thus, did not self-identify as a student with disabilities, he or she is asked to explain the reasons. By collecting these data, the staff will better know how many students with disabilities do not self-identify and the reasons they do not ask for services. The survey is set to be transmitted to students at the end of the Fall 2003 semester.