

Higher Education Faculty Knowledge and Preparedness of ADA Compliance and Student Success

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Abstract

Higher education instructional faculty have a multitude of job responsibilities beyond than classroom instruction. One of those responsibilities is the implementation of accommodations for students with disclosed disabilities. This study sought to determine if a relationship exists between faculty members' knowledge and preparedness with ADA compliance and student success. Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1990 (IDEA) emphasizes preparing a transition plan for special education students in grades P-12, therefore generating research on how instructional faculty can assist students with disabilities meet their educational goals post high school. This study conducted a non-experimental survey to gather data from higher education faculty members on their knowledge regarding the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act and their preparedness to implement accommodations. Pearson' Correlation was conducted to show if faculty knowledge and preparedness in ADA compliance can be associated with student success. Based on the information gathered, data-informed recommendations are made on the needs of faculty members in servicing all students. Although the results of this study found no statistically significant correlation between higher education instructional faculty

members' knowledge and preparedness to implement services to students with disabilities and success rates, survey participant responses reveal a call to action and deeper analysis of faculty preparation. Results thus assist higher education faculty and administration with recommendations to positively influence success of students with disabilities enrolled in postsecondary education.

Keywords: disabilities in higher education, accommodations, compliance

In the preschool through 12th grade (P-12) school system, one primary focus for students with disabilities is the transition to post-school activities, such as post-secondary or higher education. Thus, transition becomes the focal point of a student's Individual Educational Plan (IEP). In the P-12 school system, support and training for teachers of special education students is available pertinent to the implementation of accommodations for students with disabilities and related requirements mandated by federal law, including transition. It is unclear whether the same support and training opportunities are afforded to higher education faculty members.

Colleges and universities are not required to identify, evaluate, nor provide services unless a student request them (Dragoo & Cole, 2019). This can create the unintended consequence of an inequitable educational experience if a college student chooses not to reveal the need for accommodations. The lack of appropriate accommodations has been cited as a reason for which students with disabilities leave their post-secondary education (Toutain, 2019). Research must focus on faculty members' attitudes towards students with disabilities, the need for training and the use of universal design for learning (Moriña, 2017). This study sought to determine if there is a relationship between faculty members' knowledge and preparedness with ADA compliance and student success.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study was Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory. Ecological systems theory involves four components theorized to significantly impact human development. They are proximal processes, person, context and time (PPCT) model (Francis et al., 2020; Patterson, 2019). This human development framework explores a person's development across their entire lifespan. Students in higher education rely on the support of family and institutional resources to be successful which falls in the component of the proximal process. Families are highly influential contributors to the future of college students (Garrison-Wade & Lehman, 2009). As the relationship between teachers and students may not exist prior to the students' enrollment, and since new college students lack self-advocacy skills it is up to the professor to establish the dynamics (Garrison-Wade & Lehmann). Educators at a college or universities are seen as leaders that are able to make changes within the learning environment. It is important to understand the influence that relationships have on a students' post-secondary experience.

Literature Review

According to a study conducted among college service coordinators, secondary schools fail at providing transition plans that are appropriate for students seeking to enroll in higher

education (Janiga & Costenbader, 2002). As opposed to the P-12 setting, postsecondary institutions are not responsible for evaluating if a student has a disability nor to seek out students with disabilities. One of the most notable changes from secondary education to post-secondary education is that students must self-disclose their disability and advocate for themselves (Becker & Palladino, 2016; Dyer, 2018; Fleming et al., 2017; Wadlington et al., 2017). When doing so, students must provide reasonable documentation that notes their disability and the need for services, adaptations or accommodations (Dragoo & Cole, 2019). Since the responsibility of disclosure and their right to seek services shifts from the school (in P-12) to the student (in higher education), many new students with disabilities have difficulty navigating the process (Charran et al., 2019; Gould & Harris, 2019; Sassu, 2018). Self-advocacy was reported as a major concern for service coordinators among students with disabilities (Janiga & Costenbader, 2002).

In order to comply with section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the American with Disability Act (ADA) of 1990, and to act as a resource to students with disabilities, most higher education institutions have an office of Disability Services (De Los Santos et al., 2019; Sassu, 2018). Disability Services can seek guidance from the Association on Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD) for professional standards and performance indicators to better serve students with disabilities (Littlepage & Clemson, 2018). Responsibilities of the disability office can include assisting students in advocating for themselves and to ensure that the higher education institution is providing the appropriate services to students with disabilities (Wessel et al., 2009). Accommodations might include taking less college credit hours, receiving extra time on exams, taking tests in a different location or alternate format and the use of services and auxiliary aids. Post-secondary institutions are required to provide these accommodations only if the institution doesn't acquire an undue financial or administrative burden and the accommodations do not fundamentally change the required standards of the course (US Code of Federal Regulations, Title 34, Section 104.44 (a); Sassu, 2018).

Communication between faculty and students is crucial for the implementation of accommodations to occur (Wright & Meyer, 2017). Since students are not able to articulate what needed in order to be successful, they do not receive as many accommodations as they should (Littlepage & Clemson, 2018). Little to no training however is offered to faculty members on how to effectively serve students with disabilities (De Los Santos et al., 2019; West et al., 2016) and thus do not feel prepared or knowledgeable enough to implement inclusive models into their classroom or lack knowledge on legal issues (West et al.). Faculty members may also have a difficult time understanding the exact needs of students with disabilities due to the vagueness of the accommodation letter developed at the disability office (De Los Santos et al.). Research has also shown that overall, instructors at the collegiate level lack self-efficacy in providing accommodations to students (Wright & Meyer, 2017). Faculty members are eager to learn more about accommodations (Joyce, 2018) and agree that such training enhances willingness to provide accommodations to students (West et al.).

According to the Center for the Analysis of Postsecondary Readiness (CAPR), two thirds of students enrolled in community colleges and 40% of students at the university level enrolled in at least one remedial course (Mazzariello et al., 2018). There is very limited research on the effects remedial courses have on academically low-performing students (Mazzariello et al.), and the knowledge or preparedness of faculty teaching developmental courses which could determine the success of students with disabilities in post-secondary education.

Method

The purpose of this study was to determine if a relationship existed between faculty members' knowledge and preparedness with ADA compliance and student success. Using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation, the relationship between faculty members knowledgeable of the requirements set by ADA and their preparedness to implement accommodations and student success of students with disabilities in higher education was explored.

Undergraduate faculty members that taught a developmental/remedial course at IHEs (IHE) in the southern region of Texas were contacted via email and invited to participate in a survey administered through SurveyMonkey (<https://www.surveymonkey.com>). In addition to preliminary demographic data, knowledge on ADA and faculty preparedness to implement ADA requirements were collected.

Separately, the researchers worked to acquire deidentified summary student success data from IHEs pertinent only to those students which reported a disability and were serviced by the appropriate disability services center. Students with disabilities include those with apparent disabilities including physical disabilities, mobility, hearing, or visual impairments, as well as those individuals with non-apparent disabilities such as cognitive or learning disabilities (i.e. attention deficit disorder) psychological disabilities, or chronic health disabilities (Wessel et al., 2009). For purposes of this study, "students with disabilities" serves as an all-encompassing term accounting for the de-identified, summary nature of the data requested. The researchers' request for data did not include a request for information as to the type(s) of disability(ies) reported for students nor any other type of student demographic information (gender, age, race, ethnicity, etc.). Student success data was derived only from developmental and/or remedial courses in which those students with disabilities were enrolled and completed at the IHE. Data was collected for the academic year starting Fall 2018 through the Fall of 2019.

Data Collection Methods

This study used the ADA Faculty Questionnaire (ADAFQ) developed by three professors at Keystone College, Pennsylvania. The Questionnaire is divided into three sections. Section I asks questions in regard to demographics, such as, gender, age, employment status, years of experience, degree held, and type of faculty status. Section II asks five questions regarding the participant's familiarity with ADA, section 504, legal obligations and providing accommodations. Section III of the questionnaire contains 10 statements that require the participant to select from dichotomous responses of agree or disagree.

The range of scores provided the highest and lowest possible score for each variable. For ADA awareness a high score represents that the faculty members perceive that they are very familiar and knowledgeable about ADA regulations and compliance. Therefore, a low score indicated no knowledge in ADA. When interpreting the scores for faculty members' preparedness from their answers on the preparedness questions, scores in the high range indicated that faculty members agree that they are prepared to provide accommodations. A low score therefore indicated that they do not feel prepared to provide accommodations to students. These scores were combined to represent the knowledge and preparedness of faculty members with ADA compliance.

According to the Center for the Analysis of Postsecondary Readiness (CAPR), two thirds of students enrolled in community colleges and 40 percent of students at the university level

enrolled in at least one remedial course (Mazzariello et al., 2018). Accordingly, the dependent variable in this study was the success of students with disabilities in developmental/remedial courses. De-identified summary student performance data (pass/fail) was requested from the studied IHEs via the respective disability services office. Specifically, summary data was requested only for those students receiving disability services and enrolled in developmental/remedial courses during the Fall 2018, Spring 2019, and Fall 2019 academic terms.

Setting

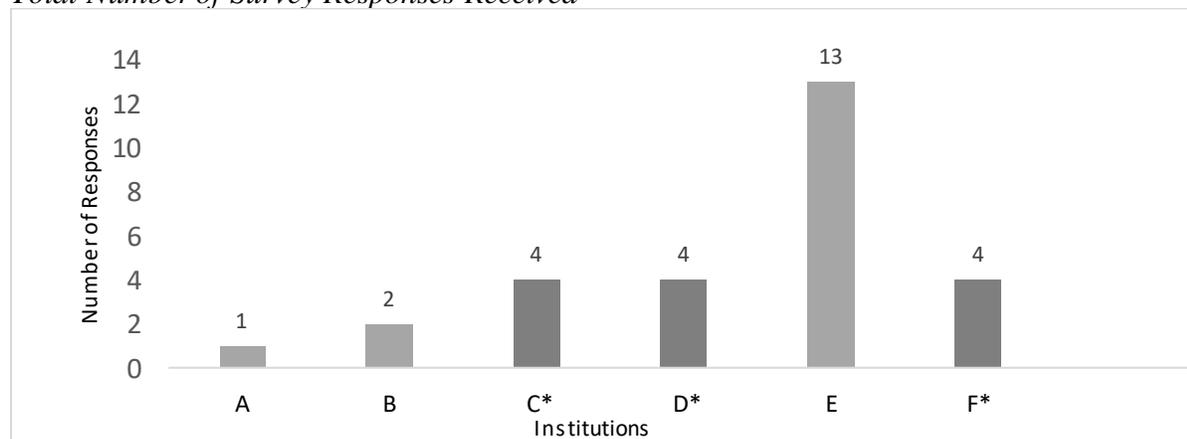
This study was conducted as an analysis of IHEs located in South Texas. According to the Texas Association of Community Colleges (TACC) website, there are eight (8) community colleges in the southern region of Texas and three (3) three four-year, bachelor's degree-granting universities.

Results

Of the eleven (11) IHEs in regional South Texas, only six (6) responded to the researchers' request for faculty email addresses to facilitate distribution of the ADA Faculty Questionnaire. The survey invitation was distributed to 127 faculty members teaching developmental/ remedial courses at those six IHEs. At the conclusion of the study period, a total of 28 surveys were returned. Two of those returned surveys were incomplete and therefore eliminated from the study data. Figure 1 shows a description of the IHEs coded by letters, to achieve confidentiality, and the total number of questionnaire respondents at each IHE.

Figure 1

Total Number of Survey Responses Received



* Denotes institutions that did not return student success data and were eliminated from the analysis.

Of those six responding institutions, only three (3) institutions also provided deidentified summary student success data of students with disabilities enrolled in development and/or remedial courses. One institution (Institution C as shown in Figure 1) indicated that it does not track the success rate of students with disabilities. Institution D offered no response to the request for summary success data, and Institution F declined the request for student data.

Descriptive Statistics: Institutional and Survey Response Data

The descriptive statistics of the survey respondents is illustrated in Table 1. A majority of the respondents were female ($n=11$), over 40 years of age ($n=15$), employed full time ($n=13$), and held a master's degree or higher ($n=14$).

Table 1

Demographics of a Sample of 16 Respondents

Characteristic	<i>n</i>	%
Gender		
Male	5	31.25
Female	11	68.75
Age		
21-30	0	0
31-40	1	6.25
41-50	4	25
51-60	5	31.25
>61	6	37.5
Employment		
Full Time	13	81.25
Senior Part Time	0	0
Adjunct	3	18.75
Years of Experience		
0-5	5	31.25
6-10	1	6.25
11-15	2	12.5
16-20	2	12.5
>20	6	37.5
Degree		
Bachelor	2	12.5
Master	10	62.5
Doctorate	4	25
Faculty Status		
Professor	4	25
Associate	4	25
Professor		
Assistant Professor	1	6.25
Instructor	4	25
Adjunct	2	12.5
Other	1	6.25

Institution A is a four-year college categorized medium in size due to its student population. The ADA Faculty Questionnaire was emailed to 11 faculty members. Only one faculty member completed the survey. Institution B is a two-year college categorized as medium in size. The ADA Faculty Questionnaire was emailed to 10 faculty members. Two faculty

members completed the survey. The ADA Faculty Questionnaire was emailed to 53 faculty members at Institution E, a two-year college categorized very large in size. Thirteen faculty members completed the survey.

Sections II of the ADA Faculty Questionnaire contains questions about participants' ADA awareness. Questions in this section of the survey ask "How familiar are you with your responsibilities as a faculty member for providing 504/ADA accommodations for Students with Disabilities at our institution?" and "How familiar are you with the process of providing testing accommodations to students with disabilities?" In Section II, the answers are scored as follows: 2 = very familiar; 1 = somewhat familiar; and 0 = not familiar at all. The sum of the scores for questions 10-14 is used as the representation of the respondent's ADA awareness. The highest possible score per participant in this section is ten (10). Institution A (4-year medium) reported an average score =3. The low score indicates that the single respondent is not knowledgeable about ADA compliance requirements. Institution E (very large institution) had a high average score of ADA awareness (Average Score = 8.11), implying that its 13 respondents are very knowledgeable about ADA compliance. Institution B (2-year medium) scored 6.5 for ADA Awareness.

Section III of the ADA Faculty Questionnaire contains questions about participants' ADA preparedness. Respondents are asked to rate their agreement with various statements such as "Faculty in higher education are required to provide accommodations to a student with a disability even if the student does not request it" with either 1 = agree; 0 = disagree. One prompt which states "Faculty may discuss students' progress with faculty/staff/classroom assistants without the student present," uses reverse scoring of 1 = disagree; 0 = agree. The sum of the scores on questions 15-25 is used as the representation of the participant's ADA preparedness. The highest possible score per participants in this section is eleven (11). The average score for section III, ADA preparedness, is a 6.3. Higher than average scores would reflect that participants are highly prepared to accommodate for students with disabilities and scores below the average score reveal that participants are not prepared to accommodate for students with disabilities.

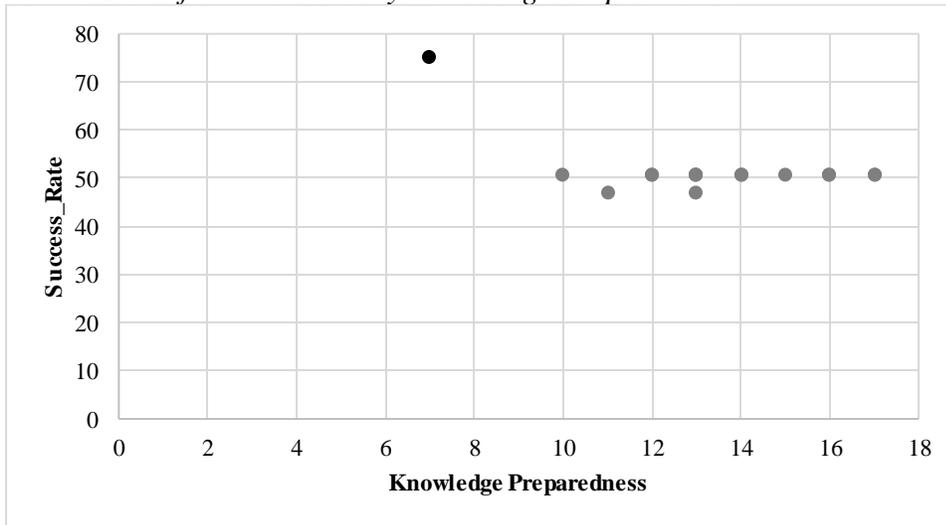
Institution A (4-year medium) scored a 4 demonstrating lack of preparedness in accommodating to students with disabilities. Institution B (Average Score = 5.5) and Institution E (Average Score = 6) reported slightly higher averages indicating adequate preparedness to assist students with disabilities.

Statistical Analysis Results

Survey responses from 16 participants and student success data from three institutions were transmitted into the IBM SPSS statistic software. Success rate was provided for a total of 802 students with disabilities in developmental/remedial courses at three institutions between the Fall of 2018 and the Fall of 2019. It was reported that only half (408) of those students passed the courses they were enrolled in resulting in a 51% success rate. A scatterplot was assembled to determine a linear between the two variables of knowledge and preparedness and student success. A linear relationship does exist as displayed on Figure 2.

Figure 2

Scatter Plot of Success Rate by Knowledge Preparedness



Note: Reprinted from IBM SPSS Version 28.

After inspecting the scatterplot for linearity, an outlier was detected. The outlier point (black dot as shown in Figure 2) is the representation of the single response from Institution A. The data shows that the faculty member that responded to the survey had low knowledge of ADA compliance and was not well prepared to accommodate to students with disabilities. However, the institution as a whole reported a passing rate of 75% for students with disabilities in developmental/ remedial courses in comparison to the other institutions. In order to generalize the finding of this study to higher education faculty members it is important to have information from more than one participant at one institution. Therefore, the researchers decided to remove the outlier from the analysis. When testing for normality, the SPSS software ran the Shapiro Wilk to determine the significant levels of the two variables. The results are displayed in Table 2.

Table 2

Tests of Normality

	<i>Kolmogorov-Smirnov^a</i>			<i>Shapiro-Wilk</i>		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Knowledge Preparedness	.169	15	.00*	.952	15	.556
Success Rate	.514	15	<.001	.413	15	<.001

*This is a lower bound of the true significance.

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

The Pearson correlation coefficient, (*r*), is .33 (as shown in Table 3) which indicates a moderate positive correlation between knowledge and preparedness of faculty members regarding ADA compliance and student success. The coefficient of determination (*r*²) indicates that the knowledge and preparedness faculty members obtain regarding ADA compliance

statistically explained 11% of the variability in success rate. However, there is no statistically significant correlation between knowledge and preparedness of faculty members and success rate of students with disabilities, $r(13) = 0.33, p > .227$. Therefore, the researchers failed to reject the null hypothesis.

Table 3

		<i>Knowledge Preparedness</i>	<i>Success Rate</i>
Knowledge Preparedness	Pearson Correlation	1	.332
	Sig (2-tailed)		.227
	N	15	15
Success Rate	Pearson Correlation	.332	1
	Sig (2-tailed)	.227	
	N	15	15

Discussion

A Pearson's product-moment correlation was run to determine if a relationship existed between higher education instructional faculty members' knowledge and preparedness in regard to ADA compliance with students with disabilities and student success. Results found no statistically significant correlation between knowledge and preparedness of faculty members and success rate of students with disabilities, $r(13) = 0.33, p > .227$, with the knowledge and preparedness of faculty members explaining 11% of the variation in student success rate.

When faculty members in this study were asked where they learned information in regard to working with students with disabilities, only 25% stated that they received information from the department of disabilities services at their institution. Another 25 % of the faculty members stated that they received information on how to work students with disabilities through the coursework they took while seeking their degrees. This confirms the findings from Stevens et al. (2018) which reports that higher education faculty members hold terminal degrees in a specific field of study and generally with little or no training in teaching or working with students with disabilities.

Additionally, the literature review found that faculty lack knowledge on appropriate instructional strategies to use in the classroom to best serve students with disabilities (Becker & Palladino, 2016). Of the respondents, 31% percent reported that changing their pedagogical practices is most challenging part of working with students with disabilities. Most participants reported that workshops would be most beneficial to them especially if geared to topics such as how to work with students that have behavioral and learning difficulties and how to use technology in order to assist students. In order to appropriately provide services to students with disabilities, appropriate training must be held for faculty members in their area of critical need in order to appropriately provide documented accommodations and services to students with disabilities.

Recommendations

The success rate in this study indicated that only half of students with disabilities enrolled

in developmental/remedial courses at IHEs in South Texas passed those classes. Thus, if no statistically significant correlation was found with faculty knowledge and preparedness in regard to ADA compliance, the results encourage research to understand what obstacles then are preventing higher rates of success. At-risk students, such as students with disabilities, make up a large portion of the overall student population in higher education. Therefore, more research should be conducted regarding influential causes that impede student success.

The researchers acquired deidentified, summary data from cooperating disability services offices at the IHEs studied. No other specific information as to the type(s) of disability(ies) reported for students nor any other type of student demographic information (gender, age, race, ethnicity, etc.) was requested or factored into the analysis. Most importantly, because the term disability encompasses a diverse group of individuals (Taylor, 2011) future research may seek to conduct similar analysis making specific considerations for the differences between disability type and diagnoses (Madaus et al., 2020) as well as other demographic factors including degree progression.

When analyzing the scores of knowledge and preparedness on ADA compliance from all faculty members in this study, the score was in the average range, indicating that faculty members are adequately informed and prepared to instruct students with disabilities. Summary data collected from survey responses however also indicated that faculty members would welcome and benefit from more specific training and professional development dedicated to addressing the needs of students with disabilities enrolled in their courses. Faculty express the need for pedagogical training in higher education institutions to best serve all students enrolled in their courses. Disability services offices at IHEs should provide mandatory and routine workshops for faculty members that will be educating the students they service. In order to appropriately provide services to students with disabilities, appropriate training must be held for faculty members in their area of critical need in order to appropriately provide documented accommodations and services to students with disabilities. A qualitative study design would provide insight on the areas of need, strengths, and weaknesses higher education faculty members encounter. Themes may arise that would enrich the study of student success.

Internal collaboration of departments within an institution would be of great value and support to new and experienced educators. Disability services offices at IHEs must place greater emphasis on supporting faculty members' needs and making their presence known and promoting services they render to the entire faculty.

Future research is also recommended to consider the retention and completion rate of students with disabilities enrolled in higher education. Once students with disabilities pass developmental/remedial courses, they then enroll in courses toward their degree. Additional research on the success of students with disabilities in upper level courses and persistence toward degree completion would also be beneficial to educators and decision makers.

The generalization of this study is a concern due to the limited number of regional institutions located in South Texas. The small sample size could have had an effect on the significance of the correlation between the two variables in this study. The researchers thus recommend future research to duplicate this study with a larger sample size. Future, large scale studies may seek to include more institutions, varying in size in order to analyze a wider spectrum of students and faculty.

Implications

The results of this study implied that, although statistically *insignificant*, there is a linear correlation between faculty members' knowledge and preparedness on ADA compliance and student success. Students with disabilities are enrolling in higher education institutions more than ever. Therefore, educators and educational leaders have a responsibility to create an inclusive environment conducive for the success of all students.

Descriptive statistics from faculty participants in this study demonstrate that 50% have over 16 years of experience in higher education. Such longevity may imply a certain level of expertise in classroom practice which positions faculty well to mentor novice colleagues. Mentoring from veteran educators can provide first hand experiences and knowledge of different resources on the campus that can assist their colleagues in providing appropriate accommodations to students with disabilities. Internal collaboration of departments within an institution would be of great value and support to new and experienced educators.

Higher education institutions need to incorporate an electronic tracking system for students with disabilities. One of the biggest difficulties for the researchers during this process was to obtain the success rate of students with disabilities. One of the three institutions that did not return data for this study reported that they did not track the grades of students with disabilities at all. Another four-year institution that did participate in the study had a difficult time collecting the pass or failure data of students with disabilities due to a lack of an electronic tracking program or system. At this institution, it was revealed that information on students serviced by the disabilities resource office is kept on handwritten forms and filed in the office at the end of every semester, and kept only for three years. Staff in that office admitted concern regarding the request for student success data primarily because there was no process in place for a review of student performance. The issues that arise with disability service offices is that they are typically not well funded (Grossman & Smith, 2015), and as more students are entering college, the likelihood that staff that are not knowledgeable about how to assist students with diverse disabilities increases (Thomas, 2020). Student data should be collected and analyzed by all campuses in order to make systematic educational decisions, change in procedures/policies, monitor student progress, and target areas of need such as instructional aids, materials, or updating technology.

Conclusion

Students with disabilities are becoming more involved in their transitional plans. Many are choosing to enroll in post-secondary education in order to meet their career goals. This study conducted a non-experimental survey to gather data from higher education faculty members on their knowledge regarding the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act and their preparedness to implement accommodations. The results of this study revealed that there is no statistically significant correlation between higher education instructional faculty members' knowledge and preparedness to implement services to students with disabilities and success rates. Summary data however reveals a need for continued research to ensure that higher education institutions and instructors are well equipped with appropriate data that will help them assist students with disabilities.

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