

1984

The role of the counselor in working with disabled students in post-secondary educational institutions

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The role of the counselor in working with disabled students in post-secondary educational institutions

Abstract

Despite improvement in treatment of disabled students in the post-secondary education programs, there remain many problem areas (Katz, 1981). Disabled students still encounter such obstacles as: (a) faculty misconceptions of disabled students' capabilities, (b) intrapersonal problems of the disabled students concerning their internal adjustment to the disability, (c) interpersonal problems with other students or faculty, and (d) environmental barriers such as building inaccessibility.

THE ROLE OF THE COUNSELOR IN WORKING WITH
DISABLED STUDENTS IN POST-SECONDARY
EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

A Research Paper
Presented to
The Department of Educational Administration
and Counseling
University of Northern Iowa

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
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Table of Contents

	Page
Chapter One.	1
INTRODUCTION.	1
Chapter Two.	3
REVIEW OF LITERATURE.	3
Intrapersonal Characteristics of Disabled Students.	3
Interpersonal Characteristics of Disabled Students.	5
Environmental Barriers.	6
Legislative Policies.	8
Chapter Three.	10
REPORTING DATA.	10
Intrapersonal Characteristics Data.	10
Interpersonal Characteristics Data.	12
Environmental Barriers Data	13
Chapter Four	14
COUNSELOR'S ROLE.	14
Chapter Five	17
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION.	17
References	20
Appendixes	23

Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

Despite improvement in treatment of disabled students in the post-secondary education programs, there remain many problem areas (Katz, 1981). Disabled students still encounter such obstacles as: (a) faculty misconceptions of disabled students' capabilities, (b) intrapersonal problems of the disabled students concerning their internal adjustment to the disability, (c) interpersonal problems with other students or faculty, and (d) environmental barriers such as building inaccessibility.

According to Kirk and Gallagher (1983), disabled students are those individuals who deviate from the average or normal individual. Kirk and Gallagher define the most common deviations as:

- (a) Mental Disorders
Slow learning ability
- (b) Sensory Disorders
Auditory/visual impairments
- (c) Communication Disorders
Learning disabilities/speech and language impairments
- (d) Behavior Disorders
Emotional disturbances/social maladjustment
- (e) Multiple Disabled and Severe Disorders
Combination of disorders and severe physical disabilities

According to Williams and Corin (1981), education is important to disabled students because it enables them to become more self-sufficient. Disabled students enroll in post-secondary levels of education to learn job skills, with the goal of eventually becoming economically independent. LeBlanc, Fredman and Quinby (1982) concur, stating that disabled students are attempting to attain an identity and searching for independence. "A reduction in family dependency takes place as the individual learns to develop greater reliance on self" (p. 116).

Kirk and Gallagher (1983) postulate that in the past, disabled students: (1) did not have the right to equal education and counseling assistance, (2) were neglected, mistreated, overprotected and pitied, and (3) were relegated to separate, segregated institutions established to provide them an education.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this paper is to examine psychological, interpersonal and physical barriers encountered by disabled students on college and university campuses. Examination of these barriers includes a review of the literature and a survey of disabled students attending the University of Northern Iowa.

A secondary purpose is to discuss the role of the counselor in regard to the disabled student, with specific reference to the implications generated by the survey of University of Northern Iowa disabled students.

Chapter Two

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Intrapersonal Characteristics of Disabled Students

Most disabled students react to the realization of their disability by partially or completely denying the existence of their disability (Stubbin, 1977). Disabled students may feel unsure about their future and continue daily activities in college life with no regard for the varied limitations imposed by their disability. Others will continue to deny the limitations to their life style, which are established by medical professionals.

Kerr (1977) asserts that conflict within one's self is a major problem for many disabled students. Perhaps one of the greatest conflicts involves denial. Denial serves as a function in postponing work that has to be done. Many disabled students expect miracles and are not interested in being realistic (Travis, 1976). Many disabled individuals may recognize the seriousness of their disability while in a bitter state, but cling to the belief that their disability will soon end and they will become nondisabled (Schontz, 1975). Kerr (1977) indicates many disabled students gamble their future on the belief that they can overcome their disability by will-power or a miracle. On the other hand, according to Schontz (1975), disabled individuals may view their disability as punishment for past sins, thus the disabled student assumes the disability may lessen guilt and provide a new possibility in life. Disabled students assume they have the same capabilities as nondisabled and strive for the same

goal in the same manner as they did prior to becoming disabled. The image disabled students have of themselves and their disability would account for their unrealistic behavior (Kerr, 1977). Another factor contributing to this inappropriate behavior is the ability or inability of the disabled individual to cope effectively with the mourning process. Schontz (1975) states that the impact of mourning is a common condition for disabled individuals. When disabled individuals test reality and find they can no longer function as they did previously, they create a barrier by cutting themselves off from everything that they consider worthwhile in life. They may believe they are worthless and inadequate.

Schontz (1975) notes that disabled individuals feel helpless and angry. Many disabled students "reported that the only thing that prevented them from committing suicide was physical inability to do so" (p. 169). Kerr (1977) states that it is common for disabled students to mourn over unachieved goals that they had set as a non-disabled individual. The fact that they lost their pride or ability to cope with the loss of their autonomy becomes a problem. Kerr indicates that prior to becoming disabled, the image disabled students have of themselves and their disability would account for their unrealistic behavior. Kerr states disabled students may reach normal goals such as adjustment to "cooking from a wheelchair" (p. 321).

Still other barriers exist for the disabled students. Schontz (1975) indicates that disabled individuals may begin to accept their disability by believing that once they become ambulatory their struggles will cease. According to Schontz, disabled individuals are

caught between two identities: one that they desire but cannot possess and one that is available but unacceptable. "In illness and disability marginality occurs because identity as a normal person is positively valued, whereas identity as a helper, invalid or cripple is repulsive" (p. 169).

Interpersonal Characteristics of Disabled Students

Social and attitudinal barriers toward disabled students present another problem. The disabled students are affected by interpersonal conflicts and needs. They are affected by the way non-disabled individuals treat them and react to their presence (Katz, 1981). Katz notes that disabled students are confronted with biased opinions formed by non-disabled individuals. Although much has been written about improvements of conditions and services for disabled students, attitudinal barriers in post-secondary levels of education still exist. Non-disabled individuals feel disabled individuals cannot cook, marry, have sex or raise children. According to Jarrows (1980), it is the fears, frustration, rejection, and deprivation which can result from attitudes of persons in one's environment that perpetuate problems for disabled individuals. In essence, societal myths are emotionally detrimental to disabled students and complicate their active role in society.

The stereotypes expressed by non-disabled individuals are felt by disabled students. LeBlanc, Fredman and Quinby (1982) state that non-disabled students cease friendships or intimate relationships, partly on advice of family and friends or partly because they fear the

unknown. In addition, LeBlanc, et al., indicated that another problem is created when non-disabled students try to spare the disabled students' feelings. LeBlanc, et al., states that there are attitudes that non-disabled students have when interacting with disabled students, such as: "It's such a shame that 'so-and-so' has this illness. I guess I will really have to take care of her" (p. 116).

Compounding the attitudinal problem is the lack of socialization skills of the disabled individual (Williams and Corin, 1981). College is a major setting for developmental tasks of late adolescence, specifically, the separation from one's parents. However, the young disabled student may have been hampered by his/her social isolation and over-protective parents. As a result, disabled students seem unable to form lasting friendships and intimate sexual relationships. Since disabled students have little previous experience in developing social skills they find difficulties initiating relationships. For the disabled students who may have already developed socialization skills based on not being disabled, a disability may necessitate the development of more polished social skills than were previously needed.

Environmental Barriers

In addition to many problems experienced by disabled students, environmental barriers produce an overwhelming effect on disabled students. According to Newman (1976), some of the problems disabled students fall within is the realm of the usual individual problems, such as: lack of parking facilities, lack of money, or crowded living quarters. However, there are problems that exist only for the disabled

such as: lack of curb cuts, cumbersome doors, and inaccessible buildings and facilities. Individuals in wheelchairs have revealed that it was impossible for them to use the restrooms in most campus buildings.

Jeffrey (1977) states, "One out of ten persons has some disability that prevents him from using building and facilities designed for only the physically fit" (p. 581).

Kliment (1978) indicates that disabled students should be able to participate in everyday activities without assistance; for example, "... no good to have a barrier free toilet stall on the second floor if the only way to reach it is a flight of stairs," or "parking spaces too narrow to permit transfer to a wheelchair or crutches" (p.111). Kliment states that disabled students have many environmental barriers on college campuses such as: (a) lecture halls and auditoriums with no accommodations for wheelchairs, (b) laboratories with no level workbenches provided, (c) physical education with lockers inaccessible, and (d) campuses with steps and steep ramps entering buildings, making the buildings inaccessible for disabled students. Robinson (1982) supports these conclusions in his findings that disabled students are faced with no railing or rest stops on extreme slopes, and that it is impossible for disabled students to go from one level of a building to the next level, because of lack of elevators. In addition, Robinson finds it is difficult for disabled students to serve themselves at high counter areas in the college cafeterias. Sellitti (1978) states that environmental barriers on college campuses limit disabled students. Examples of barriers include: (a) steep ramps with no rest

areas, (b) parking spaces too narrow for disabled students to transfer to their wheelchairs, and (c) mirrors, drinking fountains and public phones being too high for accessibility.

Legislative Policies

During the twentieth century the injuries of World War I, II and the Vietnam conflict resulted in permanent disability for many veterans. The physical screening of veterans contributed to greater understanding and acceptance of disabling conditions. Before this screening was implemented the disabled were more or less ignored. The Congress of the United States was interested in the needs of disabled individuals, which led to vocational programs. These programs offered limited services for the physically disabled, though the disabled were qualified for vocational counseling and placement services. Congress also initiated medical, surgical and physical services for the disabled. At this time, Congress also provided services for the mentally ill and mentally retarded individuals, and implemented separate programs to serve the blind.

Presently, legislation has resulted in more favorable treatment for the disabled. According to Johns (1982), Congress continued to provide services by passing the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, section 504. This Act was to ensure that no disabled individual would be discriminated against by any agency receiving financial assistance from the federal government. The government regulated the service, asserting it covered institution, organization and post-secondary institutions whether they be public, state, or private. The

legislation protects the quality of educational opportunity for disabled students and exemplifies the movement toward acceptance and protection of all humans. Additionally, the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 provides that college programs must be accessible to disabled individuals; for example, section 504 provides for: (a) program accessibility which would include that there should not be obstructing policy barriers, (b) disabled students ability to participate in social activities should not be discriminated against, (c) college campuses serving the non-disabled students with financial aid, housing or transportation must provide the same for disabled students (Johns 1982). Burgdorf (1980) states, although present legislation has helped the disabled individuals, it has not been enough to ensure freedom from emotional, social and attitudinal barriers.

Chapter Three

REPORTING DATA

A survey of disabled students at the University of Northern Iowa was conducted in order to further substantiate the literature review concerning characteristics of the disabled and to gain insight into more specific needs on this campus. Seventeen disabled students were selected with assistance of the Office of Handicapped Student Services and disabled students.

The results of the survey support the characteristics found in the review of literature considered important by the disabled students.

Disabled students feel that many barriers exist on post-secondary campuses, not only at the University of Northern Iowa. In September of 1984 a survey was conducted on the University of Northern Iowa campus. The survey employed the use of a questionnaire in which seventeen disabled students indicated their opinions individually. Each disabled student was interviewed in private.

A questionnaire was constructed with nineteen items (see Appendix A for questionnaire). Three questions asked disabled students gave demographic information about themselves. Four questions were about the disabled students' types of disabilities, length of disabilities, equipment used for disabilities, and causes of disabilities. One question on how long the disabled students had been in college was asked. Seven questions were asked concerning disabled students: experiencing discrimination; stereotypes/attitudes; environment,

academic, recreational, and social barriers on a college campus. One question was on disabled students experiencing problems making friends or having intimate relationships. One question dealt with myths and misconceptions of disabled students. The last question was concerning services available for the disabled students on the University of Northern Iowa campus.

Intrapersonal Characteristics Data

Fourteen disabled students feel there are some difficulties in establishing lasting friendships and/or intimate relationships with disabled or nondisabled peers. Ten disabled students, for a long period of time, felt that their friendships and intimate relationships would have never occurred because they felt inadequate. Fifteen disabled students fear nondisabled students will pity them and therefore in most cases, they do not form friendships with nondisabled students. Five disabled students encounter intimate relationships only to prove their masculinity/femininity, without caring for the individual. Five disabled students can have friendships, but not an intimate relationship because they feel sexually inadequate. Six feel that friendships and intimate relationships make nondisabled students nervous when they are in their presence. Five disabled students feel that nondisabled individuals do not wish for them to inflict themselves upon them. There were two disabled students who express feelings of hostility toward nondisabled individuals. Three disabled students feel that nondisabled do not understand their disability so they do not seek friendship and intimate relationships.

Interpersonal Characteristics Data

Disabled students feel that many barriers exist on post-secondary campuses, not only at the University of Northern Iowa. Fifteen disabled students suggest that faculty members are not sure how to handle the situation if instructing disabled students. According to fifteen disabled students, some faculty members treat the disabled students: (a) special, (b) make nasty comments, (c) avoid talking with the disabled students, and (d) call upon disabled students because they think that disabled students are experts of all disabilities. The disabled students continue to state that faculty members have told them they do not have to attend class, nor do they have to complete assignments.

According to the UNI survey, disabled students feel that there are those nondisabled students who have negative attitudes toward them. The nondisabled student: (a) gives negative looks at disabled students, (b) pities them, (c) ignores them, (d) treats them as subordinates, such as answering questions for them and treating them as if they were less intelligent, (e) fears the disabled students to the point that they think that they will catch the disability, (f) avoids the disabled students by taking a different route and looking in the opposite direction when the disabled students are around, (g) inquires about the disabled student's disability, expressing curiosity as to how the disabled student became that way and ask him/her how does it feel, and (h) helps the disabled (compulsively) by always asking if they can help and seem hurt when they are told no.

Environmental Barriers Data

Disabled students report that doors in most buildings are barriers. Door knobs may be too difficult to use, there are no kick plates on glass doors, or doors are too heavy to open. The bathroom stalls are too small so that while disabled students are to use the stool, they find it difficult to exit. Also, the accessible bathrooms were not on every floor of a building. Elevator controls are not reachable for wheelchair students and in some elevators there are no labels for the blind.

Parking of vehicles on sidewalks made it difficult to get by. Piling snow at the cut curbs was a problem. Most importantly, faculty and nondisabled students do not know what to do for disabled students in case of a fire when the elevators are not working.

The disabled face other barriers such as: (a) lab desk/tables being higher than their wheelchairs, (b) films being shown in class when the students are blind, and (c) instructors not facing the deaf students (allowing them to read their lips).

Chapter Four

COUNSELOR'S ROLE

Disabled students need counselors to help alleviate the many problems that confront them on college and university campuses. Sometimes the problems have external causes which can be alleviated by changing the external environment. When the environment is successfully altered it renders adequate resources and opportunities for solving problems. Sometimes problems are internal in origin (such as physical or emotional) and the solution cannot be found in the external environment. The counselor has to be available to work on these issues one-to-one with the disabled individual.

Basically, the disabled students need the counselor to help with problems between his/her faculty, with mental health issues, with decision making, independence, and responsibility.

According to Foster (1979), counselors can assist by being involved with disabled students and faculty in finding solutions for problems that may obstruct learning. Counselors are needed to ensure disabled students a less complicated way of learning. Additionally, the counselor could assist with mental health capacities. According to Lewis and Lewis (1981), initial treatment in mental health focuses on reducing obstacles of emotional difficulty and elevating positive mental health with individuals not identified as having any special difficulty. Its aim is early prevention and quick treatment of difficulties. It is an attempt to lower long-term effects of disabilities.

Foster (1979) declares that decision-making skills are important for disabled students to learn. Counselors should encourage disabled students to demonstrate those skills in order to determine how severe their disability is. Disabled students should be encouraged to reason and work things out for themselves and accept responsibility for their decisions.

Linkowski (1978) indicates that it is necessary to assist disabled college students in asserting themselves to other individuals. That assertiveness training can be valuable support for disabled students' rights without violating the rights of other individuals. According to Foster (1979), the process of video taping samples of client behavior is useful in demonstrating the effectiveness of counseling by presenting disabled students with realistic feedback about recent client behaviors. Video counseling can be employed in areas of improving performance, development of individual social skills, and assisting with attitude changes.

Concerning attitudinal barriers in colleges and universities, faculty are silenced by possible lawsuits or disciplinary actions resulting from negative attitudes. Some faculty members are cautious when making statements about and to disabled individuals. Their refusal to communicate their true feelings toward disabled students shield them; however, this shield also serves as a barrier between disabled students and faculty members. Some faculty members have preconceived notions that disabled students are not capable of achieving.

Goldstein (1981) has been trying to develop a way of sensitizing

college faculty to the needs of the disabled students. According to Goldstein, the best result was conducting inservice training, usually in a mixed group, and not by departments. There should be several sessions which would have to be held throughout the school year. Faculty members would sign up to attend training sessions. By signing up, it would be known that each member of the group was participating on a voluntary basis.

Faculty members may be having difficulty adjusting to classroom adaptations and appropriate curriculum for the disabled individuals. The counselor (consultant) would be of assistance to faculty members by consulting with them.

Disabled students are normal individuals who have (exceptionalities) or deviations only in some characteristics. Counselors should not have to treat disabled students differently from any other client.

According to Goldenson (1978):

The counselor's major task is to identify the special needs of a particular disabled individual to help the person understand why specific types of assistance are needed and to coordinate the various services into a well-planned program aimed at helping one overcome the disability, making the most of capacities and opportunities, and in general lead a more satisfying life (p. 729).

Goldenson also believes that counselors may assist the disabled student's capacity for self-improvement and self-development, as well as the disability to communicate with other disabled students who may lack verbal skills or the ability to relate to all kinds of people. The counselor has to perceive the needs of the disabled student's strengths and weaknesses.

LeBlanc, et al., (1982) believes counselors should not approach disabled students with rigid plans of action. Helping disabled students to cope with their situation in an academic environment involves an attempt to gain insight into many areas being affected by their disability.

SUMMARY

The post-secondary disabled students face intrapersonal, interpersonal, and environmental barriers. Disabled students have many concerns with their feelings and attitudes. Nondisabled individuals attach stigmas to disabled individuals, contributing to their problems.

The findings suggest that social acceptance of disabled students may be influenced by intrapersonal, interpersonal, and environmental barriers. One of the interesting findings was that most disabled students' disability (70 percent) were caused by accidents. This suggests that disabled students have learned or are learning to cope with their disability since they were disabled. The findings also indicated that 70 percent of disabilities are highly visible to the nondisabled individual. Seventy-six percent of the disabled students are pitied by nondisabled individuals on the University of Northern Iowa campus. Most disabled individuals state that on the University of Northern Iowa campus nondisabled individuals are expecting disabled students to be helpless. This was the consensus of 82 percent of the students questioned.

The most important factor was that 100 percent of the disabled students felt there were environmental barriers, 53 percent academic

barriers, 65 percent recreational barriers, 53 percent social barriers on the University of Northern Iowa campus. This would suggest that disabled students have been given little attention, and this would have an effect on acceptance of disabled students.

CONCLUSION

As already stated, the purpose of this paper is to highlight some of the concerns and characteristics of the disabled student and to identify the role of the counselor at the post-secondary level in relation to disabled students in dealing with such problems as: (a) attitudinal barriers that the post-secondary community implements in lives of disabled students; (b) social barriers that are instilled into disabled students by myths and misconceptions; and (c) physical barriers that are caused by environment; for example, weather and architecture.

The review of literature indicates historical maltreatment of the disabled individuals in society. On the other hand, there is legislation indicating the onward move of acceptance of disabled individuals. Recently federal legislation has enabled disabled students to be educated with nondisabled students. Like nondisabled students, disabled students should be allowed a variety of services, such as counseling. It is a relatively new task for counselors to counsel disabled students in post-secondary education. Tasks include assisting in academic, social and personal adjustment. Disabled students may have a few problems or many problems. When problems exist, it is necessary for the counselor to assist students in

overcoming those problems.

Also, counselors seem to be direct providers who will assist in creating or advocating academic, personal and social growth. Based on the needs of disabled students and the degree of the disability, the counselors will assist the faculty, thus preparing them to deal with disabled students as well as nondisabled students. Additionally, counselors must realize that disabled students have the ability to think and live their own lives. They are unique individuals and have the same rights as nondisabled individuals. By using such tools as encouragement, hope and help, counselors can help disabled students to be honest with themselves, others and their conditions.

Although disabled individuals have gained a place in post-secondary education, there is still much to be done in order to make life less difficult for disabled students.

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APPENDIXES

DISABILITY AWARENESS QUESTIONNAIRE

(APPENDIX A)

1. Age _____
2. Sex _____
3. Race (check): Spanish American _____ Black _____
White _____ Other _____
4. What is your disability? _____

5. Do you use any special equipment (e.g., wheelchair, cane, hearing aid and other aids)? Yes _____ No _____
If yes, please specify. _____

6. How old were you when you became disabled? _____
7. What caused your disability (e.g., accident, type of illness, born with it? Please explain. _____

8. How long have you been in college? Please explain. _____

9. Have you ever taken a course and were told you were not able to work in that area because of your disability? Please explain. _____

10. What stereotypes or attitudes from non-disabled have you experienced? Please explain. _____

11. What environmental barriers have you experienced at UNI? Please explain. _____

12. What barriers have you experienced in academic work, recreational and/or social activities? Please explain. _____

13. Have you experienced the following from other people on campus?

	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>
a. Pity	_____	_____
b. Being ignored	_____	_____
c. Treated as a subordinate	_____	_____
d. Fearful of you	_____	_____
e. Avoidance of you	_____	_____
f. Curious about you	_____	_____
g. Compulsive helpfulness	_____	_____
h. Other _____		

Please explain. _____

14. Do you experience peers or instructors expecting you to be helpless? Please explain. _____

15. Have you experienced any difficulties with your attempts for a lasting friendship and/or intimate relationship? Please explain.

16. Do you feel that your parent(s), friends and/or instructors protect you as a result of your disability? Please explain.

17. Would you say that instructors are sensitive to your needs as a disabled student? Please explain. _____

18. Would you say that there are myths and misconceptions about disabled students, i.e., can't drink, can't marry? Please explain.

19. Do you have any comments concerning services available at UNI which may impact on your disability? _____

Table 1
DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF SURVEY

Age: Range: Low - 18 High - 44 $\bar{X} = 26.1$ N = 17

Under 20 - 11%

20 - 29 - 71%

30 - 39 - 17%

40 and over - 1%

Sex: Males - 70%

Females - 30%

Race: White - 95%

Black - 0%

Spanish American - 0%

Others - 5%

Table 2
DISABILITY PROFILE OF SURVEY

Mental - 0%

Sensory (Hearing/Vision) - 18%

Communication - 0%

Behavioral - 0%

Multiple/Physical - 82%

Length of Time of Disability: Low - 2 High - 27 \bar{X} = 12.9

2 years or less - 12%

3-5 years - 29%

6-10 years - 12%

11-15 years - 6%

16-20 years - 29%

21 years of more - 12%

Disability Equipment: Yes - 88% No - 12%

Disability Cause: Accident - 70% Illness - 12% Birth - 18%

Table 3
COLLEGE DATA OF SURVEY

Length of College: 1 year - 6% 2 years - 41% 3 years - 18%

Told Not to Take a Course Due to Disability: Yes - 18% No - 82%

Stereotypes/Attitudes in College: Yes - 100% No - 0%

Environmental Barriers: Yes - 100% No - 0%

Other Barriers: Academic - 53%

Recreational - 65%

Social - 53%

Experience from People in College:

Pity - 76%

Being Ignored - 12%

Treated as Subordinate - 41%

Fearful of You - 18%

Avoidance - 64%

Curious - 88%

Cumulative Helpfulness - 47%

Others - 76%

Table 3 (Cont'd)

Expecting Disabled to be Helpless:	Yes - 82%	No 18%
Friendships:	Yes - 59%	No - 41%
Intimate Relationship:	Yes - 41%	No - 59%
Protected: Parent(s):	Yes - 65%	No - 35%
Friends:	Yes - 29%	No - 71%
	Yes - 18%	No - 82%
Sensitive Instructor:	Yes - 82%	No - 18%
Myths and Misconceptions About Disabilities:	Yes - 100%	No - 0%