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Institutional Access through a Culture of Accessibility: The role of Disability Services Providers as Institutional Change Agents

Établissements d'enseignement accessibles grâce à une culture de l'accessibilité : Le rôle des prestataires de services aux personnes handicapées en tant qu'agents de changement institutionnel

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Abstract

There has been a fundamental shift within the field of Disability Services from a medical model of disability to a social constructivist model of dis/ability. The medical model of disability suggests that disability is an individual problem or deficit that is addressed through reactive accommodations. In contrast, from the social constructivist point of view, dis/ability is an institutional issue made manifest through the interactions of an individual mind or body and environmental barriers that hinder full access and participation within sociopolitical, historic, relational, economic, and cultural contexts (Goodley, 2017; Shallish, 2017; Waldschmidt, 2017). Given this paradigm shift, it stands to reason that Disability Service Providers (DSPs) must focus beyond individual level accommodations and direct their attentions toward proactive accessibility. In doing so, they may yield a shift in institutional culture to a culture of accessibility to better address full participation of Disabled Students. DSPs and other university partners, whom we refer to as "stakeholder-allies", may serve as institutional change agents in this endeavor. This case study traces the relationships between and the activities of two DSPs and two stakeholder-allies at a small liberal arts college on the Western coast of the United States. We argue that the DSPs, in partnership with the two stakeholder-allies, leveraged their cultural capital as institutional change agents to establish culture of accessibility by: a) advancing proactive accessibility; b) thinking beyond physical structures; and c) shifting the narrative from compliance to humanity and care. Implications from this study inform DSP administrative efforts, including the creation of crucial campus partnerships, and areas of future research.

Résumé
Un changement profond a eu lieu dans le domaine des services aux personnes handicapées lorsque la prestation de service est passée d'un modèle médical du handicap à un modèle social constructiviste du handicap. Le modèle médical du handicap suggère que le handicap est un problème ou un déficit individuel qui est traité par des accommodements ultérieurs. En revanche, du point de vue constructiviste social, le handicap est un problème institutionnel qui se manifeste à travers les interactions d'un corps ou d'un esprit avec les barrières environnementales qui entravent son plein accès et sa participation dans des contextes sociopolitiques, historiques, relationnels, économiques et culturels (Goodley, 2017; Shallish, 2017; Waldschmidt, 2017). Face à ce changement de paradigme, il va de soi que les personnes qui fournissent des services aux personnes handicapées ont eu à élargir leur vision, concentrée jusque-là sur les accommodements individuels, pour diriger leur attention vers une vision proactive de l'accessibilité. Ce faisant, elles ont le potentiel d'opérer un changement au sein de la culture institutionnelle en faveur d'une culture de l'accessibilité pour mieux permettre la pleine participation des étudiantes et étudiants handicapés. Les personnes qui fournissent des services aux personnes handicapées ainsi que d'autres partenaires au sein de l'université, que nous appelons « parties prenantes alliées », peuvent servir d'agents de changement institutionnel dans cet effort. La présente étude de cas retrace les relations et les activités de deux personnes qui fournissent des services aux personnes handicapées ainsi que deux parties prenantes alliées dans un petit collège d'arts libéraux de la côte ouest des États-Unis. Nous soutenons que les personnes qui fournissent des services aux personnes handicapées, en partenariat avec les deux parties prenantes alliées, ont tiré parti de leur capital culturel en tant qu'agent·es de changement institutionnel pour établir une culture de l'accessibilité a) en faisant progresser une vision proactive de l'accessibilité, b) en pensant au-delà des structures physiques et c) en faisant passer le narratif axé sur le respect des règles à un narratif axé sur le « care ». Les retombées de cette étude permettent d'orienter les efforts administratifs des personnes qui fournissent des services aux personnes handicapées, y compris la création de partenariats cruciaux sur les campus, ainsi que les domaines de recherche future.

Keywords
Disability; Post-secondary Education; Disability Services; Institutional Change Agents; Accessibility

Introduction

> *Academic success can occur when equal access and full participation is provided to all students*
> (Virginia [pseudonym]).

This quote from Virginia, a Disability Services Provider (DSP) in our study, highlights two important components of equity and inclusion concerning minoritized students. Specifically, Virginia noted that there are two levels to college access for Disabled Students[1]. One level involves individual access, often through reactive accommodations. While the other suggests the need for institutional access through proactive accessibility that allows for and enhances full participation. Administrators, such as Virginia, play a crucial role as institutional change agents in efforts to improve institutional access through the lens of accessibility.

The two levels of access mirror a fundamental shift within the field of Disability Services from a medical model of disability to a social constructivist model of dis/ability[2]. The medical model of disability suggests that disability is an individual problem or deficit that is addressed through reactive accommodations. In contrast, from the social constructivist point of view, dis/ability is an institutional issue made manifest through the interactions of an individual mind or body and environmental barriers that hinder full access and participation within sociopolitical, historic, relational, economic, and cultural contexts (Goodley, 2017; Shallish, 2017;

[1] By replacing the frequently used term "Students with Disabilities" with "Disabled Students" and capitalizing the term, we use identity-first language and follow the lead of Tevis and Griffen (2014) who suggested that we treat Disabled Students, and related terms, like other proper pronouns used for social identities, such as racial/ethnic identities and group references (People of Color, Women of Color, and Students of Color). While we use the term "dis/ability" when writing about dis/ability phenomena, theory, or concepts, when writing about an individual or a specific group, we will use Disabled Students without the dash.

[2] We use "dis/ability" rather than "disability" to be more in line with critical dis/ability studies literature that incorporates social constructivist approaches. The coterminous use of dis/ability is a heuristic device derived from Goodley's Dis/ability Complex wherein we understand that disability/ability and disablism/ableism are inextricably bound–they can only be understood within the context of each other (2014, 2018).

Waldschmidt, 2017). Ableist social, historical, economic, and political structures within academia disproportionately marginalize Disabled Students (Dolmage, 2017). Removal and/or remediation of these institutional barriers allows greater access for such students and, therefore, provides more full participation. As a result, individual access through accommodations becomes a supplementary, rather than a primary, means of supporting Disabled Students.

Peña et al. (2016) noted that Disabled Students represent one of the "most dramatic changes" in a higher education landscape that has "become more diverse with the increased access and inclusion of historically marginalized groups" (p. 85). Illustrating this fact, 19% of the undergraduates and 12% of the postgraduate students surveyed by the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics (U.S. Department of Education, 2019) reported having a dis/ability. Unfortunately, despite increased enrollment of this student population, the National Longitudinal Transition Survey-2 (NLTS-2) found that completion rates of postsecondary Disabled Students were substantially lower than their non-Disabled peers eight years after high school (41% vs. 52%) with many of these students leaving within their first year (Fleming et al., 2017). Moreover, the NLTS-2 demonstrated that only 28% of such students self-disclosed to their institutions despite barriers such as physical access, campus climate, and instructional barriers (Newman et al., 2011; Scott, 2019). Therefore, while the Disability Services Office (DSO) can impact equitable access and participation for some Disabled Students on an individual level through accommodations and services, this individual-level access is insufficient to address the need for equitable access for *all* Disabled Students. In addition, individual access through reactive accommodations does not necessarily yield full participation, especially within the "broader cultural factors" that impact the student experience such as

attitudes of faculty and fellow students, stigmatization of dis/ability, and exclusionary administrative policies (Edwards et al., 2021).

To address this issue, higher education institutions must also focus on proactive accessibility to achieve equitable access and full participation for Disabled Students. DSPs and other university partners, whom we refer to as "stakeholder-allies", may serve as institutional change agents in this endeavor. Therefore, we asked: *How is a culture of accessibility established through the agency and role of disability services providers?* It is important to note, that during the time of this study, this office was led by two primary DSPs, who the second and third authors interviewed to understand how they supported Disabled Students in the current study. In speaking with these two DSPs, it became clear that their efforts went beyond compliance and relied on collaboration with stakeholder-allies. Based on the recommendation of the DSPs, we identified two stakeholder-allies to add to our understanding of institutional-level access. This partnership is a finding that will be highlighted later. The case study traces the relationships between and the activities of the DSPs and two stakeholder-allies who leveraged their cultural capital as institutional agents to shift toward what we view as more holistic, proactive, institutional-level access rather than a sole focus on individual-level accommodation. As such, this paper does not focus on the compliance-based, day-to-day functions of the Disability Services Office (DSO). Rather, our focus is about moving beyond compliance and establishing a campus culture of accessibility. Implications from this study inform DSP administrative efforts, including the creation of crucial campus partnerships, and areas of future research.

Scope of this Study

Our focus on DSPs is not intended to eschew the efforts of Disabled Students themselves. We acknowledge the substantial history of Disabled Students engaging in activism to yield institutional and political change. Examples include the efforts of Disabled Students at the University of California at Berkeley in the 1970's leading to the implementation of Section 504 and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (Dolmage, 2017) as well as institution-specific endeavors, such as the Deaf President Now at Gallaudet University in 1988 (Smith et al., 2020), the Beyond Compliance Coordinating Committee (BCCC) at Syracuse University in the early 2000's (Cory et al., 2010; Smith et al., 2020), and the Disability Action Group (DAG) at McMaster University (De Bie et al., 2021). Students who engage in identity-based activism and advocacy often do so as "a way to survive in their minoritized bodies" costing them emotional, physical, mental, and social labor that could be used to take full advantage of their educational experiences (Linder et al., p. 38). Yet, isn't it the job of faculty, student services, and administrators to provide rich educational experiences for *all* students? We insist that counterpart to the self-advocacy and activism of Disabled Students is the response by those with positional power to make changes that result in greater equity (i.e. DSPs and stakeholder-allies).

The current inquiry is part of a larger foundational case study that explored the successful transition of students with physical disabilities to and through college using an intersectionality lens (see Tevis & Griffen, 2014). We expanded the limited body of literature on this population's transition to college by highlighting their "two-dimensional transition process" (see Griffen & Tevis, 2017) and providing an understanding of the ways in which they develop the self-advocacy skills necessary to overcome institutional barriers. Across these studies, we found that DSPs were referenced as being instrumental in addressing these students' transitional and navigational challenges. However, the literature predominantly focuses on Disabled Students

and individual-level interventions rather than DSPs and their approach to promoting accessibility on an institutional level. DSO structures are varied, ir reso]]]]urces, which have the potential to create and/or perpetuate barriers. Taking this into account, along with the scarcity of research regarding as are th e DSPs, we explored how this group proactively addressed institutional-level access. In the shift from a medical model to a social constructivist model of dis/ability, DSPs focus their efforts beyond individual-level accommodations toward an institutional-level accessibility that allows the full participation of all Disabled Students. Within a social constructivist model of dis/ability, this study utilizes Stanton-Salazar's (1997; 2011) institutional agents framework to examine the ways in which DSPs took up the mantle of Disabled Students' advocacy efforts and served as institutional change agents to promote proactive accessibility within a liberal arts institution on the west coast. Findings suggest some specific ways administrators may use their position as institutional change agents to improve access for Disabled Students.

Literature Review

The current study was developed to explore how DSPs promote access for students with disabilities. This literature review will focus on the most relevant literature related to both access and accessibility and disability administrators, all of which are central to the success of Disabled Students.

Institutional Access through the Lens of Accessibility

College access is one of the most extensively explored topics in higher education and is often studied in the context of understanding disenfranchised students and their families. We are defining college access as an attempt to address systemic and institutional barriers that limit and/or prohibit entry into postsecondary institutions for all students. Though substantial gains

have been made, college access continues to have a complex relationship to both individual and institutional characteristics (Deil-Amen & Turley, 2007). In addition to gender, race, socioeconomic status, and other individual attributes, attention is also given to institutional factors such as prohibitive policies, programming, and institutional type. Despite the fact that college access for underserved students has received a considerable amount of attention (Deil-Amen & Turley, 2007; Perna, 2006; Vargas, 2004), Disabled Students garner less attention than other marginalized groups in this area of focus with some notable exceptions. For example, Madaus et al. (2014) explored barriers to college access for low income high school students with disabilities, especially those related to expectations for college attendance. Banks (2014), whose study included barriers experienced by Black students with disabilities, explored college transition noting the impact of deficit ideologies and accurate information prior to matriculation. While the barriers noted in these studies may be similar to the well-documented challenges to college access experienced by their underserved peers, they are compounded by issues of compliance, accommodation, and structure. These are the very elements that DSPs need to address in order to promote access for SWD in higher education.

Accessibility, baring the root word - access - ensures that students with different abilities are also afforded the opportunity to fully engage and benefit from the postsecondary environment independently (Tevis & Griffen, 2014), with some supports (i.e. ramps, larger stalls, modified textbooks), or through assistive technology (i.e. screen readers, braille embossers, transcriptionist) (Cooper, 2012). As a central focus of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and other access and ability focused organizations, physical, environmental, and procedural accessibility must be a central consideration for Disabled Students if they are to experience the same sense of freedom experienced by their peers. By shifting the focus to

institutional accessibility, and taking a proactive approach, postsecondary administrators have the potential to ensure Disabled Students' full participation on their college campus in a way that would, perhaps, yield the personal growth touted as part of the college experience in addition to academic success.

Disability Services Offices

The literature that informs the practice of DSOs in postsecondary education, largely within journals dedicated to dis/ability or practitioner journals, has undergone several shifts since the ADA was signed into law on July 26, 1990 (Kimball et al., 2016; Peña, 2014). Topics have broadly included dis/ability-specific interventions (Myers & Bastian, 2010; Orr & Hammig, 2009), barriers to the use of accommodations (Kranke et al., 2013; Marshak et al., 2010), student trajectories including transition and/or adaptation to postsecondary education (Morningstar et al., 2010), and Universal Design for Learning (UDL) (CAST, Inc., 2019). Most recent is the call for equity for Disabled Students, and a need for scholarship to explore dis/ability and provision of Disability Services through a social justice lens. Doing so directs research efforts towards dis/ability as a social identity and college student development (Peña et al., 2016; Spence & Peña, 2015). It also centers the importance of campus climate (Harbour & Greenberg, 2017; Fleming et al., 2017) and increased awareness of dis/ability as diversity (Leake & Stodden, 2018: Roth et al., 2018). The latter shift in research emphasis suggests that DSOs and the DSPs who lead them must focus their efforts, not only on reactive accommodations, but also on proactive institutional change.

Beyond Compliance

Mirroring the shift in research focus, practitioner-focused literature and professional conference presentations call for DSOs to go beyond compliance with the ADA and Section 504.

DSPs are asked to expand their role beyond provision of individual accommodations and become "ambassador[s] for disability culture" (Kraus, 2010, p. 28). The Association of Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD, 2021) adopted program standards for DSOs that include leadership and promotion of dis/ability "access and equity as an integral aspect of their institution's culture" (n.p.). Likewise the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS, 2013) included the DSO's role in fostering a culture that values dis/ability as an aspect of diversity. Recent AHEAD annual conference presentations have adopted a critical lens and social justice perspective (i.e. Griesmeyer Krentz, 2021, Hardison, 2022). Dugger and Harris (2017) argued that compliance is the minimum institutional requirement whereas "ethical compliance" includes a holistic approach to individual accommodations and leadership in community-driven efforts to improve equity. Kinast and Lewandowski (2022) insisted that academic accommodations alone are insufficient to provide equal access for Deaf students. They suggested that DSOs must go beyond compliance-driven accommodations and work toward achieving the systems transformation necessary to provide equitable access.

Role of Administrators in Institutional Change

Much of the research related to DSOs contributes to the knowledge that informs individual, student-level accommodations, and/or departmental programs that enhance services for Disabled Students (Breslow, 2016). These studies often reference social and environmental barriers; however, there is less focus on the specific role of DSPs in changing institutional factors beyond the DSO and their preparedness to do so. However, some recent scholarship has begun to focus on the core competencies and practices by which DSPs and other student affairs administrators can affect institutional change. For example, Lombardi and Lalor (2017) suggested the importance of dis/ability-related knowledge of faculty and administrators.

Likewise, Vaccaro and Kimball (2016) emphasized the need for administrators to develop competencies related to dis/ability as diversity that span multiple arenas. Breslow (2016) described how DSPs utilize various forms of capital in service provision and in overall institutional change. Breslow concluded that DSPs have value as "institutional agents" not just service providers (p. 136). While these studies demonstrate the need for further professional development of DSPs and other administrators on dis/ability, they do not adequately describe the mechanisms by which they can (and do) affect institutional change. The present study contributes to a gap in the literature around how DSPs and other administrators become institutional change agents to improve institutional accessibility and, therefore, the academic success of Disabled Students.

Conceptual Framework

To explore how DSPs promote access for Disabled Students, we utilized Stanton-Salazar's (1997; 2011) institutional agents framework, rooted in social capital theory. This lens of social capital theory connects well with the social constructivist approach to dis/ability, illuminating the structural conditions and barriers stakeholders must remove to specifically advance full participation for Disabled Students. Social capital theory examines networks and the social constraints influencing an individual's access to information (Portes, 1998). Stanton-Salazar (1997) posited networks connect individuals to information, and opportunities are amassed. DSPs fit the authors' conceptualization of institutional agents by being "non-kin agents who occupy relatively high positions in the multiple dimensional stratification system, and who are well positioned to provide key forms of social and institutional support" (Stanton-Salazar, 1997, p. 1074). When connections between students and institutional agents, in this instance, DSPs, are strong, they "function as lifelines to resources that permit low-status individuals to

overcome social structural barriers and to experience healthy human development, school achievement, and social mobility" (Stanton-Salazar, 1997, p. 5). Since DSPs are seemingly charged with fostering a learning environment that is both ADA compliant and academically inclusive, they become valuable institutional agents, championing both individual- and institutional-level access. Therefore, research is needed to establish an understanding of how these particular agents can promote full participation for this particular population.

The social constructivist approach to dis/ability suggests that disability is not due to individual impairments, rather it is due to barriers and exclusionary social structures. These are the elements that inhibit a student's full inclusion in academics and university life (Miskovic & Gabel, 2012). Similarly, theorists adopting a social justice framework suggest that individuals without disabilities are in a position of privilege and power and, as such, determine how the oppressed group, in this instance SWD, are treated at the institution. Yet, we must also acknowledge that individuals with dis/abilities may have challenges, created by their minds and bodies, that cannot be mitigated by the most inclusive environments (Evans, Broido, Brown, & Wilke, 2017). Thus, Stanton-Salazar's (1997; 2011) conceptualization of social capital foreshadows how DSPs and their stakeholders can address the experiences of this group of students. Again, these agents are often overlooked in prior research focused on both college access and dis/ability studies, but they were named by the Disabled Students in our previous study as salient in their transition to and full participation in college (Griffen & Tevis, 2017). By working beyond individual-level accommodations and working across institutional divisions and departments, these administrators are able to expand the network of stakeholder-allies necessary to facilitate access and success, and, more broadly, to rectify the social conditions that have the potential to further marginalize such students. Therefore, as access to postsecondary education

must involve both individual-level accommodations and institutional-level accessibility, DSPs are uniquely positioned to facilitate and advocate on both of these levels.

Method

Administrator attitudes and actions as well as college culture and environment can shape the definition of access for each student and can be a *vital ingredient* to their success (Fitchen et al., 1990). The current study is part of an Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved foundational, qualitative case analysis that explored the journey of academically successful Students with Physical Disabilities (See Tevis & Griffen, 2014).

Researcher Positionality

We would be remiss in not expressing who we are as researchers. We are middle-class women, one Black and two White, one with an invisible dis/ability and two able-bodied. We come from diverse backgrounds that may be dissimilar to students seeking services and, as such, may not share the same challenges or barriers. We recognize that this may cause some to criticize if we are *qualified* to conduct this work. Yet, as faculty and administrators who have or do work directly with this student population, we find it imperative that Disabled Students must be at the center of institutional policies and practices in order for them to have a holistic postsecondary experience. As scholars whose work is rooted in the teachings of Paulo Freire, we focus on illuminating the experiences of those individuals who are oppressed, marginalized, and/or excluded by systemic practices and policies. Doing this work has caused us to engage in a discourse of how each of us, because of our skin color, gender, socioeconomic status, age, and/or dis/ability, experience institutional bias. These experiences bring a deeper level of engagement when we are conducting research and analyzing data. Our shared and different world knowledge assists us in searching for who is missing from the proverbial table as social justice begins when

"those wanting to teach must be able to dare, that is, to have the predisposition to fight for justice" (Freire, 1997:2005, p. 4). Thus, we center this philosophy when we design studies, collect and analyze data, and present participants' narratives, even when we ostensibly investigate those in positions of power, such as DSPs.

The Case

The second and third authors originally chose to explore Disability Services at a liberal arts institution due to the universal liberal arts mission that includes, but is not limited to, empowering students, promoting civility and social responsibility, and providing a broader educational experience (Association of American Colleges and Universities [AACU], 2018). Interviewing students in the larger foundational study about their transition to and through college, and the meanings they made about the process created a foundation of understanding regarding dis/ability support and emphasized the vital role DSPs played in the success of the participants. Thus, the second and third authors were led to interview administrators from the institution's DSO. Critical to the foundational study were: 1) the student-centered institutional mission, and 2) interviews with two DSPs, Cy and Virginia (pseudonyms). As second and third authors engaged in dialogue with them, having already learned how they helped Disabled Students develop the self-advocacy skills necessary for overcoming institutional barriers (Griffen & Tevis, 2017), further inquiry emerged as they moved the conversation from how their office provides services to Disabled Students to the vital role of inclusivity in higher education policies and practices. We found that "making changes to physical buildings, creating inclusive policies, and altering faculty perceptions leave [administrators] feeling as if they are 'moving an iceberg through frozen waters' (Virginia, personal communication, August, 2013).

Institutional Context

The current study took place at a mid-size private institution situated in a metropolitan area on the West coast. The institution serves over 5,000 undergraduate and graduate students and faculty across three city campuses. The university's DSO serves both the primary student constituency, as well as the larger tri-campus community, by providing a variety of supports including: note-takers, classroom aids, braille embossing, faculty education and training, and other services. Faculty support spans the three campuses and offers instructional design services along with professional development on how to embed universal design in courses.

Participant Selection

In the foundational study, Cy and Virginia, two supervising DSPs, were interviewed to gain insight into how they addressed campus climate, culture, and the physical space needed to facilitate the academic success of Disabled Students. In the initial study, the participating students expressed that these two DSPs in the institution's DSO played a vital role in their academic success. Thus, the sole selection criteria for Cy and Virginia was that they were identified through other participants and, when asked, self-selected to participate in the study. Cy and Virginia each had more than 15-years' experience in the area of Disability Services and had deep connections within the field. As the second and third authors prepared to expand their inquiry and explore the issue of institutional access, they amended the original IRB approval to include the scope of the current study. Once the amended study was approved, protocols were developed that helped gain a better understanding of the strategies and practices required to facilitate individual-level accommodations with institutional-level accessibility in mind. To achieve the goal of gathering the most relevant and information-rich data, a combination of deliberative purposive sampling and the complementary strategy of snowball sampling methods

(Creswell & Poth, 2017; Yin, 2016) were employed. Snowball sampling was purposeful as Cy and Virginia were asked to provide us with contact information for other administrators and stakeholders, whom within the analysis of the current study, all three authors identified as "stakeholder-allies" who support their efforts. This strategy assisted us in exploring the ways in which DSOs advanced institutional accessibility through engagement with stakeholder-allies.

To understand how disability services providers and stakeholder-allies promoted institutional-level access for all Disabled Students, during the data collection process, the second and third authors probed their understanding of the relationship between access and accessibility. Specifically, participants were asked about their definition of access, as it provides a lens through which to understand their approach in shifting the campus culture beyond compliance. Table 1 outlines the respective roles of the four participants, including their job titles and their definition of access to get a snapshot of these individuals.

Table 1: Administrative Participants

Name (Pseudonym)	**Position**	**Definition of Access**
Karl	Administrative Faculty	"...Meeting people where they are..for Students with Disabilities my definition is the same they just need certain supports regardless of who they are. I don't define access differently. Students come in at one place and leave in a better place. As an administrator I need to set the tone - razor-focused on student needs".
Sophie	Instructional Designer/Faculty	"There are just so many facets of it...layers of access. That's kind of why I like...web content accessibility guideline standards because there's 'Can you actually get in? Can you actually get into that space, whether its physical or digital?' And then once you get into it, 'Can you actually interact with it?' And around all of that, 'Do you actually feel welcome within that space?'"

Name (Pseudonym)	**Position**	**Definition of Access**
Virginia	Disability Services Administrator	"whether it's how [Students with Disabilities] get into a buildings; or having access to upper floors in a building or in a classroom to interact with [their] professor, or their peers."
Cy	Disability Services Coordinator	"[A] faculty member being willing to make some modifications that don't compromise the integrity of the class, and in building rapport with the individual student in a way is also academic success in my opinion."

Cy offered an introduction to an administrative-faculty member, Karl (pseudonym), who was referenced by Cy as being a "strong advocate" for Disabled Students; and Sophie (pseudonym) a universal design and technology specialist. Cy provided an email introduction, after which the third author corresponded with Karl and Sophie via email. This group of highly qualified participants were appropriate for this study as they are part of the same institution, they have various administrative roles, and have more than 40 years of combined experience in higher education working with Disabled Students.

Data Collection

The second and third authors collaboratively mapped the semi-structured interview protocols and aligned them to the theoretical framework to explore how they moved beyond individual-level accommodations toward institutional-level access. As noted in Table 1, these authors prompted each participant to provide their definition of access for Disabled Students. They continued to probe their understanding of access and accessibility and how they facilitated institutional-level access. In order to understand the relationship between access and accessibility, the second and third authors aligned our interview protocols and analysis in the areas of climate, culture, and institutional structure.

Initial interviews with each participant were 60-90 minutes in length while follow-up interviews lasted 30-60 minutes. These multiple data collection methods yielded over 200 pages of transcribed data, notes, and reflections. The study participants signed an informed consent form and gave us permission to record the interview sessions. Additionally, the participants had the option of meeting with the last two authors face-to-face or via the WebEx platform. Two participants, Cy and Virginia, chose to be interviewed face-to-face while Sophie and Karl were interviewed via the WebEx platform. Prior to the initial interviews we emailed each participant the interview protocol and offered them the option of bringing typed responses to the interview and/or to submit them to the lead researcher via email. Two participants, Cy and Virginia, brought typed responses. Karl, who chose to be interviewed via WebEx, had formulated responses but expanded upon them during the interview. Sophie appreciated having the protocol in advance, but did not prepare written responses, preferring instead to respond directly during the initial WebEx interview.

The second and third authors identified and developed follow-up questions in order to delve deeper into the issue of institutional accessibility. We emailed the follow-up questions to Cy and Virginia and gave them the option of meeting face-to-face or responding via email. Cy submitted his follow-up responses by email, while Virginia chose to respond in a one-on-one meeting. We met again to develop follow-up questions that were sent via email to Sophie and Karl, which they preferred.

Data Analysis

The aim of qualitative research is to illuminate patterns, processes, or lessons found in data from a single case study or across cases (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018; Yin, 2016). The first author was added to the current study to further explicate this goal of qualitative research.

Careful consideration was paid to her personal and professional expertise, more specifically her direct administrative experience. The scope of our expertise together enriches the analysis of this project and advances recommendations to the field.

We kept the principles of trustworthiness and triangulation in mind during data analysis. All interviews were transcribed by a professional transcription service. Given that qualitative research is emergent in nature, all three authors coalesced and analyzed multiple sources of data - professional transcriptions, field notes, reflections, and peer debriefing notes. Individually and collectively, we noted words and phrases such as care, culture, equity, and inclusion that accentuated the points participants were making. These initial codes became headers in our shared codebook. After reviewing the transcripts and the other materials several times, we highlighted quotes that were most reflective of these initial codes. We continued to code individually and collaboratively to aggregate codes into emerging codes, accounting for how these DSPs and stakeholder-allies defined access and the relationship between access and accessibility. We then noted patterns. After multiple rounds of coding and meetings, cross-referencing the data with Stanton-Salazar's (1997; 2011) institutional agents framework, we identified the three overarching themes that make it plain how a culture of accessibility is established through the agency and role of DSPs.

Findings

In asking the question, *How is a culture of accessibility established through the agency and role of disability services providers?,* we found the participants worked past the need to advocate solely for individual-level accommodations, but championed institutional-level access. Specifically, they sought and valued partnerships, pushed beyond perfunctory attempts to facilitate accessibility, shifted the narrative that centered compliance and fear over care, and

thought beyond physical structures, all in an effort to establish a culture of accessibility, which we will elaborate on in the discussion section of this study.

Overcoming Institutional-Level Challenges

Developing Partnerships with Stakeholder-Allies. In overcoming institutional-level challenges, in other words, systemic barriers, partnerships between the DSOs and other key institutional offices and stakeholder-allies were paramount. Cy and Virginia felt that accommodations and support for Disabled Students was not just the sole responsibility of the DSO, but it was a shared, institutional responsibility. The sentiment was echoed by Karl and Sophie who also deemed it their job to help their campus become more accessible. Hence, why we refer to Karl and Sophie as stakeholder-allies. Their efforts, in partnership with the DSPs, demonstrate how practitioners, through collaboration, can take a proactive approach, making institutional-level access the foundation on which to promote individual-level access.

As previously mentioned, in our initial study focused on students with physical disabilities, they named DSPs as key to their successful transition to and through college. During multiple interviews with these key personnel, Cy and Virginia named partnerships that had been crucial to their efforts, including, but not limited to, the admissions office and institutional housing. In a follow up response, Cy explained "admissions works collaboratively with [the DSO] to ensure materials are available in accessible formats (Braille, electronic, etc.)...[and housing has] a process in place to support student accommodation requests", which for the latter relates to single-room requests and other essential accommodations for accessibility. As our conversation progressed, Cy and Virginia referred the last two authors to Karl and Sophie, key administrators with whom they collaborated, to gain more insight into how these relationships supported their efforts. At the time, Karl was working with Cy and staff at the Learning Center

(pseudonym) to address "accessibility challenges", as they referred to it. Their distinctive roles and experiences working with Disabled Students helped transcend beyond individual-level access. Collaboratively, they were intent on shifting the institution's ways of engaging and supporting Disabled Students holistically to make accessibility both cultural and missional. In talking about access and accessibility, Karl shared, "I think tapping into whatever's at the core of the institutional identity and institutional culture including accessibility and using the language of that institution to focus on making the university more accessible is really important". Karl's remarks allude to the stakeholder-ally's role in enfolding accessibility into the fabric of institutional culture.

Advancing Proactive Accessibility in Addition to Reactive Accommodation. Karl also pointed out, most crucially, that institutions are not always prepared to honor Disabled Students' needs and requests for support. In an example, Karl shared how a student needed specialized support for a disability (generalized for anonymity). Yet the technology adopted by the institution, which was said to be ADA compliant, was actually not. Karl described testing this software using the assistive technology necessary for one of our original study's participants. He stated, "I kept getting these error messages, I don't remember what it was saying, but this is crazy, and so it was this huge eye opener for me in terms of the challenges of navigating these systems through [assistive technology]". He went on to explain that staff across the institution were dismissive of the student's dis/ability, were blatantly disrespectful, and were not accommodating while the student was attempting to take care of matriculation logistics. These events caused the student to grow frustrated. The DSP, along with the stakeholder-ally, Karl, revisited software, policies, and technology procedures related to supporting accessibility on an institutional-level. Had this particular student remained unsupported, the institution's lack of

preparedness could have turned the student's physical, but navigable, dis/ability into an insurmountable barrier. Such examples drive home the point that, not only are individual-level access and institutional-level access linked, but both are warranted to address institutional barriers and combat the need for reactive support services when proactive efforts are lacking or insufficient.

Virginia shed light on a similar issue. In recalling her request for push buttons on doors for a particular student, she received this response: "Couldn't we just install a doorbell so the person could ring the bell when [the student] needed it and someone could come and open the door?" This question incited her forthright response:

> Would you like to ring a doorbell every time you wanted to access a building? There should be no hindrance or barrier for a student accessing a space. [Disabled Students] should be able to freely access a building; [such students] shouldn't have to rely on someone being there or answering the door when [they] need to access the building. [Disabled Students] should have equal access like everyone else. When I think about independence, I think about it literally. Like the ability to make choices that fit their life circumstance and on their terms without having to be reliant on someone else.

For Virginia, again, promoting access is more than a fleeting individualized remedy, but a systemic endeavor toward inclusivity. She explained that accommodations "are in place [for Disabled Students] to have equal access to the environment". However, they are often perceived as an inconvenience or a burden to the greater institutional community. Sophie attributed this idea of institutional unpreparedness to "a lack of knowledge about ADA and accessibility versus accommodations," which has the potential to lead to institutional complacency, or worse, negligence.

Shifting the Narrative from Compliance to Humanity and Care

Further promotion of access required these participants to shift the narrative from compliance - fear-based *buy-in* to care-based support. It is important to note that among our

participants, there was a perception that faculty are driven more by compliance than fostering relationships. Based on this perception, they identified the need to shift the institutional culture to one based on humanity and care, not compliance. While faculty fears may serve as a catalyst for providing reactionary, compliance-driven accommodations, they may not yield the desired institutional-level proactive change needed. Sophie explained "this [student] is a person"; which she infers should be in the minds of those offering services and support. She elaborated by highlighting the need for a "human-centered" approach when addressing concerns related to both Disabled Students and accessibility. "You want to be focused on this human being" rather than the dis/ability. Otherwise, she observed, faculty begin to "fear that they are reducing the rigor of their class for [Disabled Students];" or worse, as Karl explained, faculty fear legal action. Such fears have the potential to cause some to view supporting Disabled Students as taxing and burdensome.

Understanding the fears of faculty is salient to promoting access, specifically, institutional accessibility, as the faculty-student relationship is seen as one of the most critically necessary forms of engagement for all students (See Campbell & Campbell, 1997; Kuh & Hu 1991). According to Cy, he, Virginia, Sophie, more often than not, find themselves in positions of "initiating the conversation around accommodations and disability between students and faculty". Virginia shared, "I became a resource for faculty who needed education about what it meant to accommodate students, what was our legal obligation to do so, what were their rights and responsibilities in the accommodations process". Sophie found herself explaining to faculty how imperative it was to design their classroom, curriculum, and student interactions with accessibility in mind "not something to be tacked on later". Because access and accessibility are

so intertwined for these administrators, the two should come together to compel faculty to plan ahead, making accessibility part of the course design process. Sophie was emphatic:

> I want faculty to develop and create things that are truly welcoming to the students, not just something that they can interact with, but something that they can interact with and feel like they're included; that they're not just tacked on or allowed in the classroom but wanted in the classroom.

Her stance aligned with Karl's desire to shift the compliance narrative and thinking from that of a legal obligation to one that "taps into [faculty's] spirit of care". Again, acknowledging the institution has its challenges regarding ADA compliance, Karl shared that "we overcome it because people here do care, in my opinion". He further intimated there is a moral-imperative that faculty provide all students—especially disabled students—with an accessible learning experience simply because they are humans and that it is the right thing to do. By challenging faculty fears and framing compliance as a moral obligation, these participants not only promote access, but they helped to facilitate learning environments that, according to Karl "could potentially benefit everyone".

Thinking Beyond Physical Structures

Interacting with physical buildings, class materials through a learning management system (LMS), and student communities are critical components to the very concept of accessibility. For Virginia such ongoing engagement means students being able to access the entire college experience "whether it's how [Disabled Students] get into a buildings; or having access to upper floors in a building or in a classroom to interact with [their] professor, or their peers". Hence, institutional-level access to campus writ large leads to engagement beyond structures, enabling these collegiate peers to build networks and have enhanced college experiences. To make this possible, Cy and Virginia designed and facilitated workshops to help campus staff, faculty, and the student body understand how to fully integrate students with

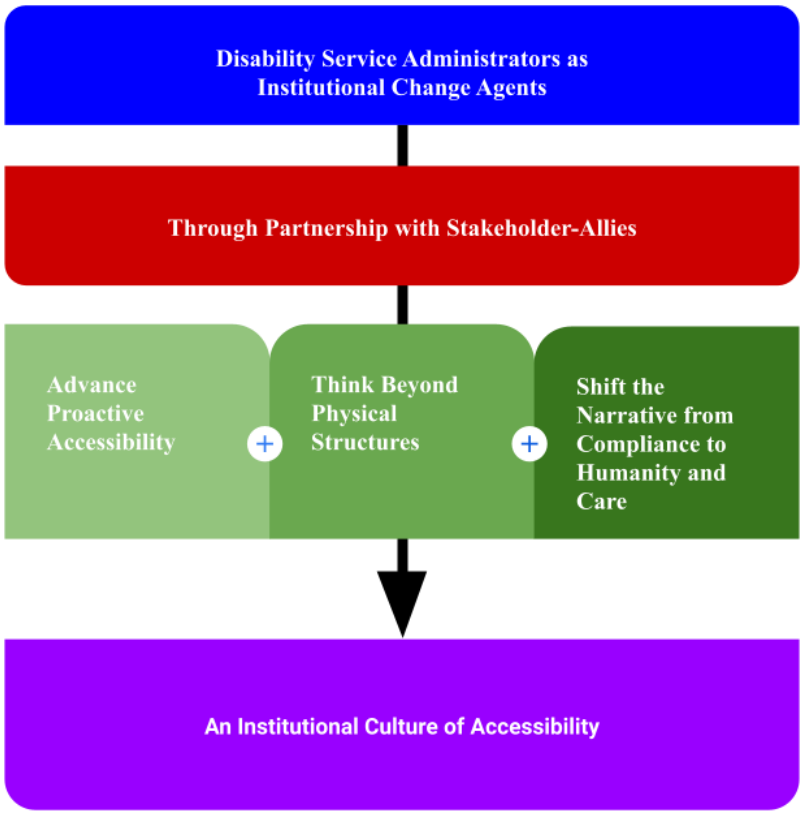
different abilities and provide equal access to the opportunities available to the entire college community. Karl goes a step further, to put together "little [confidential] videos of students actually experiencing accessibility challenges...to present to the stakeholders like the cabinet and maybe [board members] to help them to see the kind of things people are experiencing". Karl's goal is "empathy" and to illuminate some of these discrete, yet potentially detrimental, structural challenges Disabled Students face. While Sophie likened "getting people all on the same page and moving forward" to herding cats, she explained that she "kept bringing up the ADA thing [as part of an institutional diversity committee], looping in workshops and things – or webinars and just trying to make everyone aware of ADA compliance and accessibility issues and universal design". Sophie acknowledged that supplementing support with a "universal design faculty learning community" and programs within the LMS would help faculty "take ownership of the accessibility of their courses". To further move beyond structural access, these administrators talked about their collaborations, referencing each other by name and/or their work across departments to develop ADA support plans, look for ways to, expand on the institution's mission statement, and embed accessibility as an objective in divisional and departmental mission statements.

Discussion: Establishing a Culture of Accessibility

While college access is largely impacted by student characteristics and often inequitable institutional practices (Deil-Amen & Turley, 2007; Perna, 2006; Tierney & Hagedorn, 2002; Vargas, 2004), very few scholars have explored this concept by centering the barriers for Disabled Students. Stanton-Salazar's (1997, 2011) institutional agents framework served as the theoretical basis to explore how DSPs partnered with stakeholder-allies to overcome institutional challenges by thinking beyond physical barriers to access, advancing proactive accessibility in

addition to reactive accommodation, and shifting campus narratives from fear-based compliance to humanity and care (see Diagram 1). These tangible findings are missing from previous research and much of the academic discussions. By focusing on how these institutional agents take a proactive approach to institutional-level accessibility, we were further able to provide an understanding of an underexplored role DSPs play in providing inclusion for Disabled Students. Each participant in this study mentioned hindrances to access for Disabled Students that underscored the need for DSPs and stakeholder-allies, collectively or independently, to go beyond providing *reasonable accommodations*, push against fear-based compliance, provoke empathy, and make accessibility part of the institutional mission. These approaches keep the Disabled Students at the center and align with the social constructivist approach to dis/ability.

Diagram 1: How Disability Services Providers Create Institutional Access through a Culture of Accessibility



This diagram depicts how DSPs promote institutional access. This level of access does not negate individual accommodations, rather it describes the mechanism by which intra-institutional partnerships are mobilized to create a culture of accessibility. Prior research minimally explored the role administrators play in promoting access for the Disabled Students, as well as scantily acknowledged collaboration between stakeholders, which, by the findings of the current study, are key to supporting these particular students' transition to and navigation of postsecondary institutions. Attempts at promoting accessibility are more often than not viewed as punitive, distracting from their intent of inclusivity, and focus largely on the students who are

served by individual-level efforts. By turning attention to the DSPs' response to student needs, our findings contribute to the social justice framework (Peña et al., 2016; Spence & Peña, 2015), which is starting to take root, as well as campus climate research that centers Disabled Students (Harbour & Greenberg, 2017; Fleming et al., 2017). Additionally, our themes align with Breslow's (2016) work, specifically, the administrators we interviewed drew on their capital for the greater good of institutional change, while also laying the groundwork toward the necessary competencies needed to promote institutional accessibility (Vaccaro & Kimball, 2016).

The significance of this manuscript is to explain the ways in which postsecondary DSPs can be agents of change. In doing so, these intentional actions require scholars, educators, policymakers, and postsecondary administrators to act beyond individual accommodations to ensure full participation as well as the promise of accessibility for Disabled Students. There is an opportunity for key institutional support personnel and future research to remedy low institutional readiness to accommodate by shifting the narrative to explore the ever-present structural and systemic struggles that impede full participation in the college student experience for Disabled Students.

Implications

Implications for Practice

Institutional Mission/Vision. As institutions of higher education develop strategic plans, diversity initiatives, and recruitment efforts to support their mission/vision, it is imperative that they, first, recognize dis/ability as diversity; and second, present to the campus community how accessibility is aligned with the core identity of the institution**.** By engaging in such practices, accessibility is championed with other access, equity, and justice efforts; and compliance is no longer viewed as punitive but cultural**.**

Institutional Collaboration. Our study highlights both a willingness and an acknowledgement that DSPs may not be able to address every institutional barrier in a silo. Collaboration also supports understaffed DSOs making matters more manageable. Collaboration enables accountability, a wider-range of problem-solving, including institutional readiness, and a shared commitment to institutional equity initiatives.

Access Teams. Institutional collaboration ties to access teams. Diversity and equity efforts are championed by a *team*, a committee of institutional stakeholders whose aim is to work collaboratively to create opportunities for meaningful interaction and/or address concerns of bias. They are often charged with developing training protocols and/or facilitating events to engage the campus community. However, more often than not, Disabled Students are disregarded. Since the participants in this study made it clear that accessibility is just as much a moral obligation as it is a legal obligation, it is important institutions do more than solely lean on the DSO to reactively solve access barriers. *Access teams* need to be created in tandem with diversity committees, to keep Disabled Students at the forefront of diversity efforts; and to further move to an inclusive culture of accessibility. Furthermore, in the spirit of "nothing about us without us" the teams should include Disabled Students whose lived experiences of dis/ability would provide invaluable insights and push the institutional change agenda in relevant directions.

Accessibility Checklist. As campuses expand, both physically and technologically to keep pace with the needs of the 21st century, institutions should consider the varying abilities of the student populace by integrating a checklist when adopting new technology. Such efforts are not to be confused with checkboxes; but an accountability guide to embed accessibility as part of an institution's practice at every stage. Ignoring the needs of Disabled Students can in turn affect the realization of their educational, professional, and life goals. The quest for creating more

equitable higher educational outcomes for students from underserved communities cannot succeed without addressing the complex challenges for Disabled Students.

Implications for Future Research

Future research should continue this line of inquiry as well as expand on the current study by exploring how the placement of DSOs within an institutional structure impacts how they promote both individual- and institutional-level access for Disabled Students. Additional inquiry should assess the impact of this placement on the retention and academic success of these students. There is also a need to delve deeper into how *reasonable accommodations* are being interpreted by the larger higher education community. Are such reactive measures considered the default as they eschew proactive, institutional responsibility–or vice versa? Reasonable accommodations are a critical component of U.S. federal law; therefore, scholars should explore how institutional leaders ensure related policies and practices are aligned with efforts to combat ableism. Lastly, as the participants made references to institutional culture and care, both quantitative and qualitative studies are warranted to examine how a culture of care on behalf of Disabled Students is built and sustained. Collectively, these implications for future research emphasize the crucial relationship between access and accessibility.

Conclusion

Just as Disabled Students have been largely excluded from college access conversations, the administrators we interviewed explained that accessibility is also overlooked as a core tenet of institutional culture and practice, and is often excluded from *strategic plans* regarding diversity, access, and inclusion. Sophie indicated that having "the appropriate tools or accommodations in place to have equal access to the environment is so critical." Karl posited "student success is the responsibility of multiple parties at the institution." Thus, in addition to

how they promote institutional access, taking into consideration that DSO structures vary, as do their resources, the current study offered tangible findings and recommendations as incremental steps to further advance full participation for Disabled Students.

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