WHAT CHALLENGES CAN A DISABILITY/ACCESSIBILITY SERVICES OFFICE IN POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION FACE?

By

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Abstract

This study is a Qualitative Case Study on Disability/Accessibility Office in a BC post-secondary institution. The study has explored the Disability Access Services Office and the impressions of support provided through the eyes of the professors and the disability access services staff at the Campus. The methodology used is Qualitative case study and data has been collected through one on one unstructured interviews. Voice recording and short note taking went on during the interviews. Examples of some of the important study findings are: office staffing, an increase in the numbers of students in post-secondary education institution needing services from the disability access services office, departmental teamwork, communicating information and services, useful information and gaps with the intended audience and challenges of accommodating a student in class. In conclusion, access to post-secondary education is important to all individuals of all abilities, with different individual academic and professional goals. This office is important as it supports learners with a special need in education in post-secondary level. The office experiences both success and challenges which the study discusses. The Disability Access Services Office provides a clear example of both how an education institution can respond to increasing and identified students’ needs to facilitate success and new knowledge and learning that would benefit the broader university community in extending these services into classrooms.
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Epigraph

“Everyone is a genius. But if you judge a fish on its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing that it is stupid”

—Alberta Einstein
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Chapter One

Introduction

What is disability? This is a commonly used term, though its meaning might vary and the term has been researched and discussed. WHO (World Health Organization) defines disability as “an umbrella term, covering impairments, activity limitations, and participation restrictions. An impairment is a problem in body function or structure; an activity limitation is a difficulty encountered by an individual in executing a task or action; while a participation restriction is, a problem experienced by an individual in involvement in life situations” (“Disabilities”, n.d).

In Nairobi, Kenya, where I come from, people tend to believe a number of common myths regarding disabilities. For example, they believe that it is a curse, or a way of life paying one back for one’s sins. However, the types of disability and the causes for it, is a wide and varied topic that has been well researched and written about.

Some types of disability are simple differences, however, in some cases, it causes neurodiversity. Robinson (2013) explained neurodiversity as “the idea that neurological differences like autism and ADHD are the result of normal, natural variation in the human genome” (Robinson, 2013, para. 1). According to Robinson, this provides a new way of thinking and accepting conditions that have been over year pathologized by science but are caused by a combination of genetic predisposition and environmental interaction. The several areas of disabilities are categorized in the areas of: visual, physical, intellectual, hearing, and mental health disabilities. In addition, some disabilities are observable while others are not physically definable.

According to the Oxford Dictionary (2017), ability is the possession of the means or skills to do something, while disability is a physical or mental condition that limits a person’s
movements, senses, or activity. Barrier is a common term that the Oxford Dictionary describes as a circumstance or obstacle that keeps people or things apart and/or prevents communication or progress. “Factors in a person’s environment that, through their absence or presence limit functioning and create disability” (WHO, 2001, p. 302). With this in mind, the study will address the challenges that disability services offices in a post-secondary learning institution face with a goal towards making equal and fair education accessible to all.

The UNICEF world Report in 2011 shows that, growth and innovation in technology and as well as in medicine has led to better livelihoods for people with disabilities. This has enabled them to acquire an education, receive health services, gain employment, and access other services. In addition to acquiring the means to be a part of building their country’s economy through employment and personal enterprises such as establishing small business to support themselves, people with disabilities could now also be a source of employment for others.

Governments and non-governmental organizations advocating for the right of persons with disabilities has been on the increase globally and has led to changes and the adoption of different policies. The Salamanca Statement issued by UNESCO in June of 1994 declared that, regular schools with this inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society, and achieving education for all; moreover, they provide an effective education to the majority of children and improve the efficiency and ultimately the cost-effectiveness of the entire education system” (p. 3).

Based on the literature I have read, direct observation of my country, Kenya, and my experiences here in BC, I think that inclusion in education is now reflecting a global theory of practice in special needs education.
Background

Canada is a good example of a government that has adjusted its policies to advocate for inclusion. For example: “Every individual is equal before and under the law and has a right to equal protection and equal benefit of the law without discrimination and in particular, without discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin, color, religion, sex, age, or mental or physical disability” (Government of Canada, Justice Laws, 1982, para.15).

The provinces in Canada have a right to implement laws in education as long as they are within the constitutional acts of Canada. This has led to inclusion in other aspects apart from education, such as in the employment sector and in health services. In the case of post-secondary higher education institutions, inclusion is directly facilitated by disability offices and the Canadian Association of Disability Service Providers in Post-Secondary Education (CADSPPE), which advocates for students and supports individuals working in post-secondary educational institutions (CADSPPE, 2004).

Disability services can be defined as services offered to a person with a disability, with the intention of assisting the individual to reach their maximum individual potential on an objective and in life. These services should lead to an accessible environment that accommodates by providing accessibility options such as curb ramps, wider doors in rooms and elevators, availability of parking areas, leveled ground, accessible restrooms, and so on. Other services offered in higher institutions are special modifications tailored to the specific needs of an individual student such as adjusted fonts, or translations into Braille, counseling, and assistive technology, which include text to speech software, audio for reading, equipment to record lecturers, talking calculators, and more.
Justification of the Study

Previously, it may have seemed impossible for individuals with a disability to pursue higher education, however, now that policy and support has been established, this perception is changing. In planning for my research, I considered several areas of study. Since I have worked in the special education (also known as learning support) department in schools, I am familiar with the struggles at that education level. However, education being a hierarchical system, how do individuals with a special education need transition to a post-secondary education institution? What challenges does the office, the professionals and the professors in charge face as they work towards making education accessible to all is what the study strives to discuss.

Research by Galkin (2015) suggests that effective support reaches beyond the Disability Access Service Office into classes and other aspects of student life. It is important to understand how the entire institution perceives the needs of students and works in conjunction with the Disability Access Services Office to support students to achieve success. The research further found a decrease in the perceived value of disability services professionals, of establishing a teamwork spirit on campus, and of resources used to further the professional’s knowledge.

Based on the Canadian University Survey Consortium (2015), which records a general statistical overview of students with disabilities in higher learning institutions, 17% of graduating students self-identify as having a disability. The most common disabilities reported by students are mental health (8%), vision impairment (3%), and attention deficit (3%). Among those with a disability, 31% say their disability requires accommodation from their university, with those having a learning disability (62%) being most likely to say their disability requires accommodation. The least likely to claim for accommodation are those with a vision impairment (9%), perhaps indicating that students who require glasses may have indicated having a vision
impairment. Among those who require accommodation for their disability, 61% say the accommodation was adequate, while just 9% say it was not adequate” (p.19).

According to statistics from the Ministry of Training, Colleges, and Universities, (2015), college students with learning disabilities (excluding those in Apprenticeship programs) rose each year from 8,007 in 2008-09 to 10,971 in 2014-15. However, students with LDs comprised a decreasing percentage of the total number of students with disabilities served by the offices for students with disabilities (DSOs), from 33% in 2008-09 to 25% in 2014-15. Additionally, University students with learning disabilities rose each year from 5,620 in 2008-09 to 7,064 in 2014-15. This number as a percentage of the total number of students with disabilities served by DSOs declined from 42% in 2008-2009 to 36% in 2014-15(Learning Association Disability, 2015).

Despite available support, there remains a possibility of students with disability going through higher learning education without support, while others are likely to not be enrolled for higher learning. It is important to consider why. Could it be a difficulty in the transitioning process, a lack of self-efficacy/assertion skills, poor self-image, or lack of awareness that accessibility services exist in higher level of education? Student resistance could also play a part. Or perhaps the disability service office needs more input? Is there an area of improvement that the disability service office professionals and the professors need to work on? Are there underlying issues that the Ministry of Education and other education stakeholders need to improve on? With all the varying reasons assumed, the above-mentioned issues show a need to explore the challenges that disability offices in higher learning institutions face and a possible mitigation.
Personal Context

Special needs education is close to my heart not because it is my profession — having taken a Bachelor’s degree in Special Education Needs and Biology — but because I believe we are all special in our own individual ways, with varied abilities. I believe that some people may need more help than others to get to a certain point. I view education as an opportunity for a learning experience that every individual living should have and not be denied. Having worked in schools in Kenya and Rwanda and in a non-governmental organization in promotion of education, I know that good quality education makes a difference in an individual’s life. As I chose my research area, I thought, so we have supported this individual through elementary and high school, what about the support through university and other higher learning academic institutions? This individual still needs support, therefore the questions I must ask now is: what challenges are there for students with a disability in higher learning institution? The professionals working in the disability services office in higher learning institutions, and professors passing and building knowledge -- what difficulties are they facing? What can be done or what is being done to mitigate these difficulties?

Statement of Purpose and Research questions

In order to explore the challenges faced by Disability Access Service Offices in post-secondary education, the study is guided by the following research question: what challenges can a Disability Access Services Office in post-secondary education institution face? This cannot be discussed without the university professors input.

This case study will be carried out in a university in Vancouver Island, British Columbia, which will serve as the model. It will involve a disability services office, students, and lecturers in the University. This University in British Columbia, which was established in 1936, offers an array of learning fields with full-time and part-time learners. It has multiple campuses, with
local, aboriginal, and international students. It also offers diverse areas of learning, in fields such as business, nursing, and education. Because of the wide array of programs, this learning institution also houses diverse types of learners in order to foster inclusion and diversity. This makes the educational institution a suitable subject for my research, the goal of which is to look into adding value to the field of education by exploring the challenges and possible solutions faced by students and professionals working in disability services offices.

My research involved visiting and introducing myself to the Disability Access Services Office, identifying and approaching different professors on campus through the campus employee directory portal on the campus website. I sent a volunteer to participate email and set up dates for the interviews. I followed up where necessary, re-introduced myself and the topic, set up a date for the interview and signing of letter of consent, and follow-up as necessary. I took notes, recorded, and transcribed the interviews. Interpret and analyze data collected. The research methodology employed is qualitative case study method. Data collected was analyzed and interpreted to form an understanding and meaning by the use of themes, pattern matching explanation, reflection, and direct interpretation.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

Introduction
This chapter will review the research and literature that has been carried out in regards to disability services in higher learning institutions. The chapter will also look at different societies and organizations that have been formed to advocate for and offer transitional services to students and adults with special needs services in British Columbia and Canada at large. Furthermore, this chapter will go into details to discuss frameworks that act as a guide to form various policies in different post-secondary education institutions.

Forming Disability Policies and Disability Service Framework
The Disability Services Framework, guidelines for the accommodation of students with disabilities attending post-secondary education in British Columbia was created, by the Ministry of Advanced Education and the Post-Secondary Team. An example of the legislative legal documents that were used to form the disability policies across different levels is the Canadian human rights Act (1977) that stipulates:

All individuals should have an opportunity equal with other individuals to make for themselves the lives that they are able and wish to have and to have their needs accommodated, consistent with their duties and obligations as members of society, without being hindered in or prevented from doing so by discriminatory practices based on race, national or ethnic origin, color, religion, age, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, family status, disability or conviction for an offence for which a pardon has been granted.(2)

For a request for accommodation to be considered unreasonable… it must be established that accommodation of the needs of an individual or a class of individuals affected would impose undue hardship on the person who would have to accommodate those needs, considering health, safety and cost (15.2).
A person who proposes to implement a plan for adapting any services, facilities, premises, equipment or operations to meet the needs of persons arising from a disability may apply to the Canadian Human Rights Commission for approval of the plan (17.1) (The Disability Service Framework, 2011, p. 3).

Having looked at what human rights policy stipulates regarding special needs, an important example of a policy that supports the rights of an adult’s individual with special needs is the Disability Service Framework by the ministry of Advanced Education in British Columbia (2011). According to this policy, the Disability Service Framework (2009), is a policy framework manual that is built on recommendations from Adult Special Education and Services Grant Review Report, thus the information is first hand from individuals with special needs. This policy is clear that it is not set to override the institution’s policy but act as a voluntary framework, with the influence of federal systems established to advocate and articulate the needs and rights of persons with special needs.

The Ministry of Advanced Education in British Columbia Education also provides funding to institutions to assist in meeting access requirements services to students. The ministry expects report on the expenditure annually. Employability Program for Persons with Disability has a huge source of funding for services geared towards people with disability in British Columbia and has developed an accountability framework that includes federal-joint-provincial planning and information dissemination within BC, Canada.

This extract shows a part of the disability service framework or an outline for different stakeholders:

Many institutional policies have been developed to reflect common issues and themes emerging from the accommodation of students with disabilities in the post-secondary
education system. A list of common institutional policies and suggested institutional responsibilities is provided below.

Institutions typically have policies:

• addressing attitudinal barriers by expressing the institution’s commitment to taking all reasonable action to make the educational environment free of discrimination for students with disabilities;

• stating that the institution will take all reasonable measures to remove physical barriers for students with disabilities and provide an equal educational opportunity;

• stating that accommodation must not dilute curriculum or credentials, but will give the student an opportunity to demonstrate their skills and knowledge;

• defining a standard of acceptable documentation of a disability, such as information regarding the qualifications necessary for a professional to make a definitive medical diagnosis, and policies to ensure that documentation is recent, typically 3-5 years.

• stating the necessity for clear communication of all relevant policy and service information; and


Specific guidelines and terms include: assurance of confidentiality, specific definitions, a clear process of how to get the services, detailed specifications on what is acceptable and not,
and clauses that bind the services with the main aim of helping an individual student acquire an education on the same level as the other students within the institution, among others.

Students have a responsibility. Unlike in their previous academic institution, most immediately high school, students at this level are expected to be mature. Thus, students are expected to know what they want, be able to advocate for themselves, and be able to seek out help from the disability services. However, stigma is among the reasons that keep students at this academic level from acquiring help. Below is what the framework stipulates as expected from the students:

**Student**

Each institution approaches student roles differently, and the list below represents a synthesis of some institutional policies. These state that the student with a disability has an ongoing responsibility to:

- bring the request for accommodations or changes in accommodation needs to the attention of appropriate personnel in a timely manner in order to allow for reasonable arrangement of accommodations;
- present appropriate documentation to the institution prior to service delivery;
- bring documentation from certified and/or licensed professionals who have specific training, expertise and experience in the diagnosis of conditions for which accommodation is being requested;
- meet all pre-admission and academic standards;
- abide by the policies and procedures of the institutions that they attend (British Columbia Ministry of Advanced Education, June 2011).
A look at the following structure and framework shows a need for both institutions and students to meet their specific responsibilities in support for the access to education for students with disability.

**Disability Services Offices Development**

Disability access services are provided in offices within a post-secondary academic institution. These offices are set up to enable students with a special need in education to acquire education at and to the same level as any other student. According to the Disability Service Framework (2011), the offices’ mandate is to make education accessible to all; however, students have a particular standard to meet. For example, the student has to be willing to receive the help, be designated by a doctor or a registered psychologist and have to have the post-secondary academic requirements.

According to research by Weinkaufa (2002), the first disability office was established in Alberta, Canada, in 1987, by a local group of parents who realized that they had very few options for their children who were graduating. With the help of the Alberta Association for Community Living and other interested parties, the group of parents put together the first disability office, referred to as Inclusive Post-Secondary Education. The office was created in the University of Alberta, which became a model for the development of Disability or Accessibility Service Offices in universities across the region, Canada, and other parts of the world. Policies and frameworks to govern disability service offices developed gradually over the years into its present state.

The current international research studies conducted on issues regarding disability service offices in higher learning academic institutions show some growth in the practice as well as challenges faced. A study conducted by Harrison (2003), found that 32% of students with a disability in higher learning institutions have learning disabilities. He further discusses why not
all these students are documented or registered in their higher learning institution. This may be
due to the social stigma of being associated with the term disability, which might also affect their
employment chances later. Not all students are aware that they have a learning disability need.
Among Harrison’s (2003) recommendations for further study is investigating competency and
training for professionals working in disability service offices. Looking into confidence levels as
well as strategies used for increasing knowledge and increasing of accessibility in the classroom
was another suggestion. This study is an example of research that culminates to further research
in disability service offices in higher learning academic institutions.

Galkin (2015) was interested in the disability service professionals. He wanted to find out
about decision making experiences in these offices in regards to accommodation decisions and
the need for professional training to evaluate the documents and student’s assessment reports in
order to make decisions on the accommodations to give. Hill (2004) sought to understand the
perceptions of students with disabilities in Canadian higher learning academic institutions,
regarding the fairness of the institutional policies. Hill also wanted to explore the possibility of a
correlation between the numbers of students enrolled in a course to the quality and satisfaction of
the course. Monahan (2014) chose to explore how disability is defined in higher learning
academic institutions by the students who receive these services and how they view the
definitions held by the professionals working in disability service offices.

These researchers are interested in the experiences of the students in higher academic
learning institution who receive services at disability service office.

**Current Research**

Galkin (2015) sought to understand in depth the decision-making experiences of the
professionals working in these offices. The research also intended to explore documentation and
accommodation in making the decisions. The hypothesis was that people working at disability
offices need professional training courses to evaluate the documentation and students’ assessment reports in order to make appropriate recommendations for accommodation. The method used was a mixed method research approach, utilizing qualitative interviews and quantitative surveys on the north-east region of the United States of America. The research involved 1,000-10,000 students.

The research consisted of a 2-year initial survey and a 4-year private non-profit survey. It focused on samplings of Colleges and Universities within close proximity. The samples were made up of smaller institutions -- thus a low population. A typical disability office administrator in this kind of institution would juggle different types of responsibilities, thus enhancing the spirit of collaboration. However, a scenario like this might lead to reduced efficiency due to work overload.

With the limitations and problems identified, the research focused on survey participants, with few respondents agreeing to do a follow-up face to face interview. However, given the number of participants they received, the findings should be viable. While the research aimed at finding out if people in disability service offices were well trained, it did not give examples of areas of training. Another gap in the research is the lack of a professional’s input as well as the lack of discussion regarding the possible challenges that disability offices face. The researcher also intended to relate the level of knowledge maintained by professionals working in the disability service office, but it was not related well. However, the research is important in the field of education because it highlights the importance of proper training, interpersonal skills, and team work within the various professional levels in higher learning institutions.

Hill’s (2004) study was first conducted in British Columbia in 1995 and reviewed in 2004. The study’s purpose was to find out the perceptions of students with disabilities attending
universities in Canada regarding the fairness of the institutional policies of the campus that they attend. The research question asked was: is the degree of satisfaction affected by the size of the post-secondary institution in which the students are enrolled? Participants of the research were the student disability offices’ coordinators and students.

At the time the research was being conducted, Canada had 69 public degree providing institutions; 46 of these were invited to participate. Coordinators distributed the questionnaire to the students and provided a follow up reminder. Two hundred and sixty-four questionnaires were received out of 14 institutions from the 21 institutions. One hundred and forty-eight of the students were enrolled in small universities, while the remaining 116 were enrolled in larger universities.

The questionnaire was in four parts; the first part included the information about the respondent, the second part and the other parts included questions regarding the policies, specialized service, and the availability. The Mann-Whitney U test was used to interpret the results. The study found most students rated the services adequate. In terms of satisfaction to institutional policies students rated these between poor -good. The responses were further evaluated to ascertain whether the feedback given was influenced by school size.

Among the limitations that the study faced, the first is that students were not aware of the policies in effect, thus this limited the data obtained. The largest portion of students reported having a physical challenge, thus they were significantly overrepresented in the research data, with only a few reporting multiple disabilities and learning disabilities. Another limitation is that 60% of respondents were female. Ultimately, I feel that the researcher could have further improved the study and gained more insight by directly involving the coordinators on a personal capacity beyond simply working with them to get to the students.
The purpose of Monahan (2014) was to determine how individuals who received accommodations at a large Midwestern university define disability and how they view the definitions held by the campus disability service professionals. The research questions were: how do the students with disabilities who receive accommodations believe that faculty, administrators, and other teaching staff define disabilities? How do the students define disability, given their own personal experiences? The research design was phenomenology, the method used to collect data was qualitative survey, and the research itself was web based. Out of the 500 students, 16 participated. The findings were coded for analysis.

The findings showed that there was no one way of defining disability. The research also showed that there was no communication between students, teaching staff and administrators — participants did not know which model of disability is used to define disability, while the faculty definition of disability was subjective to individual bias, thus not clear.

The research experienced the following as limitations: the participants had little time to participate, the web based survey gave no room for clarification, and the researcher did not ask the student to reflect on the disability they were taking on. While these would have been, the researcher employing phenomenology, the researcher could have tailored his questions to give room to answer or not and to be contacted or not to, with a section to put in their contact information. With the limitations corrected, more volume of information might have been gathered.

While the studies I reviewed had their discussed shortcomings, they provided a wide array of information in regards to disability service office in higher academic institution and the student it serves, including, but not limited to, communication between students and the disability service office, student awareness of the existence of policies governing the disability
service office, and decision making in disability service offices. From these research studies, I see possible gaps that my research will look into filling. For example, the question: what challenges can a Disability Access Services Office in post-secondary education face?

While research conducted has involved the Disability Access Service Office, their views seem not to be heard through research, because the focus is on the students’ perception, on policies, and on disability issues. The disability service professionals have an office, possible students, and policies have been laid out, but research did not address the challenges the Disability Access Services Office faces. The studies also did not involve the professors who work with these students and the disability/access office. Disability service professionals do not give specific course lectures but they work with lecturers and other professionals in order to see that students with disabilities’ needs are met. For disability offices to be successful, there has to be teamwork between the disability access service professionals, students, professors, and other professionals working in higher learning institutions.

Monahan’s (2014) research has brought to my attention the issue of sensitivity in interview and survey questions. As I constructed my research questions for the interview, I took into account Monahan’s caution to be sensitive with my questions and body language. My research questions looked into exploring the issues that hinder the efficacy of the professionals working in the Disability Access Service Office and the possible solutions. I tailored the questions to be as participant friendly as possible. However, Monahan’s study did not engage the professors who might have an input on the study, since they would have discussed together how the perception is impacting learning negatively or positively, as well as other issues like possible stigma. Galkin (2015) explored the issue of professional development courses for professionals working in disability service offices, accommodation, and the relationship between self-
perception and work performance. I wondered how about the use of technology in higher learning institutions as well as Universal Design for Learning (UDL) for lecturers, so I sought to explore how effective and if assistive technology and universal design for learning are used to meet these challenges. Employing assistive technology and UDL will work best for the use of both the students and the university staff, specifically the disability service providers and professors.

Hill (2014) brought up the topic of the relationship between academic institution size and the quality of service. The findings showed that students attending small universities rated their institution level of satisfaction from the services slightly higher than those students in larger universities and many students were not aware of service available for students with disabilities. Many also did not know of the existence of policies to govern the service administration. This finding raised questions regarding the possible effects of the institution’s size on the disability service office, the availability of professional development courses for disability service professionals, and the financial support given to encourage professors to employ inclusive ways of teaching in higher learning.

The studies were eye opening, with more than a few lessons and questions developing from the studies discussed. Time given to participants is a big factor — thinking about what to expect and the ability to view the study and the questions from the participants point of view might allow the researcher to foresee a possible shortfall that might come about during the research.

**Post-Secondary Student Needs Advocacy and Support**

The National Education Association of Disabled Students in Canada (NEADS), is an example of an association formed by persons with special needs in education to advocate and help fellow special needs students during their post-secondary and graduate studies. While
NEADS was originally established in Ontario, BC, they also assist other students across Canada. This association has full authority to help students with special needs at the post-secondary and graduate level to access education and employment. Its mandate states that,

NEADS is a consumer-controlled, cross-disability charitable organization (corporation # 1007761975RR0001). We represent our constituents through specific projects, resources, research, publications and partnerships. NEADS is governed by a national Board of Directors representative of all of the provinces and territories.

Our work as an organization focuses on three core Strategic Program areas:

1. Student debt reduction
2. Student experience in class and on campus
3. Student and graduate employment

(National Educational Association of Disabled Students, 2007)

NEADS is an example of a formed organization that helps and advocates for student’s needs. Through NEADS, a student is able to get information on available scholarships, disability awards, and grants. They also guide and lead students to information on securing employment.

Further current research brings about an important factor:

Teaching Strategies and Transition & Retention

A good transition from high-school to a post-secondary education is important in order for an individual to be successful in their chosen post-secondary institution, in their professional training, and further on in employment. In most cases these students had an individual education plan in place to support his/her education in the previous education institutions. In other cases, the previous educators, possibly from kindergarten, to elementary, to high-school, knew their needs and thus planned for their success in education. An example of this is Cawthorne (2016), who used several indicators for her research: graduation rate for students with disabilities,
dropout rate for students with disabilities, and compliance of transition, post-school outcomes indicator.

According to Cawthorne’s (2016) research, graduation rate for students with disabilities was 20% lower compared to other students. The graduation rate had also remained 10% lower for the last three years in the Arizona state. While the dropout rate stagnated, dropout rate among students has serious negative consequences within a country and in an individual life because it has a likelihood of poverty and unemployment, among other consequences. The 2015 dropout rate for students with disabilities in Arizona was slightly higher (4.05%) than the rate for all students (3.46%). A national comparison was not available, according to Cawthorne, since there is no standardized definition of dropout rates for this population in all states. The research also shows that students who receive special needs support services all throughout has a better chance to be successful, with a possibility of earning income either through self-employment or regular employment. The research further suggested that there should be a compliance requirement for each student that would include, in their individual education plan, support for the transition process, assessments, services, and goals to set up the individual student for success in life. The research was carried out in the Arizona State in the United States, where every state is required to monitor the individual education plan.

Cawthorne (2016) concludes that the success of an individual at the post-secondary level is related to the success of the transition from secondary to post-secondary, and from post-secondary into the community. Furthermore, if the proper mechanism, the proper outlook, and good cooperation exists within the involved parties at post-secondary academic institutions, it is likely that the dropout rate will be reduced.
Orr and Hammig (2009) reviewed 38 articles in total. They found the articles from different search engines like GALE PowerSearch, Google Scholar, SAGE Journals Online, Education Abstracts, among others, using keywords like higher education, and post-secondary education. This article by Orr and Hamming, found that the numbers of students with special needs in post-secondary school are increasing. One out of every 11 post-secondary undergraduates report having a disability, and students with learning disabilities are the largest and fastest growing subgroup of this population (Orr and Hammig, 2009).

The article, Orr and Hammig then goes on to discuss the reason for the increase of students with special needs in post-secondary academic institutions. These reasons include:

- Better academic preparation as compared to before;
- Improved transition planning from different school stages;
- Provision of education funding and scholarships;
- And better model program;

These, among other reasons, have led to the increase in numbers of students admitted in post-secondary education systems. However, Orr and Hammig (2009) found out that, unfortunately, retention and degree completion among students with special needs in education is an issue. Many students are said to drop out within the first year of academic studies.

Some of the factors that contributed to increase in students are the same factors that contribute to failure in college which include: inadequate academic preparation for the next step, transition gaps from secondary school to post-secondary, inconsistency in special services provision, lack of knowledge within different faculty professionals, and lack of proper appropriate accommodations in the post-secondary institution.
Accommodations and Other Forms of Support

Common accommodation includes extended time on tests or modified assessment, note-taking services, and services requiring assistive technology devices such as screen readers or books on tape (Orr & Hammig, 2009; Hawke, 2004). These accommodations are of benefit to a particular student, but leave out other students in the class who may need help and have not gone forth to seek support. These kinds of support do little to implement the curriculum design, which, if looked into, may positively enrich the curriculum design to be a better structure.

Teaching Strategies

Orr and Hammig (2009), through a summary of research from other scholars, propose the use of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), as being among the key elements that will contribute positively to education and enable the students to be better supported in their post-secondary school journey. Orr and Hammig (2009) also report that UDL was first discussed in the 1980’s by Ronald Mace and was focused on removing difficulties in architecture for people with physical challenges. This has since been modified and taught in different educational institutions. Earlier on in my degree course, we discussed UDL extensively and I was impressed to know that UDL is a framework that has been in existence for decades. As an upcoming scholar, my personal opinion of UDL is that it is a framework that should be embraced at all levels of education.

According to Orr and Hammig (2009), Silver, Bourke, and Strehorn introduced the theory of universal design, referred to as Universal Design for Instruction (UDI). Over the years, UDI was further developed, however, the framework still operates under the same principle as UDL.

As discussed in Zeff (2007), UDL's central tenets to guide postsecondary instruction are as follows:
1. Multiple Means of Representation: course content should be expressed using a variety of methods to assist all students, including those with LD;

2. Multiple Means of Expression: expression of student understanding should be solicited using an array of modes;

3. Multiple Means of Engagement: faculty should be cognizant of differing backgrounds and motivations of students and provide means of interaction with course material that support diverse learners (Orr and Hammig, 2009, p.182-183).

Orr and Hammig (2009) further discuss other issues to support students with general disabilities and learning disabilities in post-secondary academic institutions. They discuss inclusive teaching, inclusive assessment, inclusive approachability and empathy, and specifically instructor approachability and empathy. These are important points that will better facilitate learning. In their conclusions, they call upon higher institutions to provide learning opportunities for faculty members, support course delivery enhancement, support the willingness and the need to self-assess for the purposes of course delivery adjustments by teachers, and support suggested further research in the area.

The importance of post-secondary education cannot be over-emphasized. Fichten et al (2003) stated that university and college graduate students with or without a disability have better employment outcomes than people without post-secondary education in Canada. While the statement holds true in most parts of the globe, a report by Human Resources Development Canada, shows that by 2004, more than 70% of all new jobs created in Canada will require some form of post-secondary education, while 25% will require a university degree. In contrast, only 6% of new jobs will require less than a high school education (Statistics Canada,2008). These
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statements show the weight and importance of higher education for individuals and for entire nations.

Since Canada has taken strides to become an inclusive society, the educational system is now more inclusive than before, supporting the need to work towards the success of individuals with special needs in post-secondary education. According to the Disability Access Newsletter, January 2017, with over 700 registered students, the disability access office has helped accommodate 1,650 exams in 2015/16 academic school year alone. This example shows how busy the office is and also shows the possible numbers of students that use the services from the office.

Gaps in the Literature

Through my research and work experience, I can see in the structure and policies set up for student success at various levels of education some evidence that the numbers of students with special needs are increasing in post-secondary education. My research through the literature reveals that accommodating the increasing numbers is an area that is still a work in progress.

Although a good number of researchers have looked into policies, educational frameworks that support inclusion and its effectiveness on professors and learners, my question stands: what challenges can a disability services office face in higher education, and what of the professors who are facilitating the learning? As an upcoming scholar, I see a need to study and discuss the challenges that professionals, such as the disability services professionals and the professors on campus, who work directly with special needs students at the post-secondary level face. By having this discussion, the issues will hopefully lead to positive development and possibly more research. Unless these stakeholders of education in a post-secondary education are heard, there will only be more of research into policies, structures and the types of needs, with a
large gap in the literature that might hinder the way forward for disability and accessibility services at the post-secondary level.

What is needed is a study on the possible methods for ensuring better communication with the professionals working within the post-secondary academic institution. What is also needed are solutions for self-empowerment with the knowledge of optimal frameworks for inclusion in post-secondary classrooms, solutions to strengthen student success in post-secondary academic institutions, and solutions to strengthen the disability service offices. My study, therefore, aims to fill these needs and mitigate the major gaps in the current literature.
Chapter Three: Methods

Research Question
Disability services are services available to persons with special needs, aimed at helping them get equal opportunities in general. Disability services in a post-secondary education institution is aimed at enabling students with disability to attain academic success. This study strives to answer the question: what challenges can a Disability Access Services office in a post-secondary education institution face? This is a qualitative case study in a higher learning institution in Vancouver Island, British Columbia, Canada.

Research Methodology
The research made use of qualitative case study methodology. Qualitative case study is an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a bounded phenomenon such as a program, an institution, a person, a process, or social unit (Merrian, 1998). This method enabled the study to closely and specifically examine the challenges that a Disability Access Service Office in a post-secondary education face on a day to day basis. A case study is used on a specific topic and is limited on a particular geographic area. This method can accommodate different disciplines as well as philosophies. It is a great method, especially in this study, because it is based on insight and discovery, while leaving room for understanding the perception of those being studied. This gives weight to the significance of the knowledge and information in the study. However, only a limited number of individuals could be involved as the method seeks to explore and investigate real-life phenomenon. In addition, the data collection and interpretation is limited by the ethical need for sensitivity in the research.

This study utilized a qualitative case study method of data collection within a case study design. The research was conducted in a post-secondary education institution in British Columbia. The case study method allows a researcher to “go beyond the quantitative statistical results and understand the behavioral conditions through the actor’s perspective” (Merrian, 1998)
Yin stated that a case is a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between a phenomenon and context are not clear and the researcher has little control over the phenomenon and context as quoted by Yazan (2015). Yazan also went on to discuss that a case study is also said to be an empirical inquiry that investigates the case conforming to the above-mentioned definition by addressing the “how” or “why” questions concerning the phenomenon of interest (Yazan, 2015; Yin, 2002). That said, this method of study was found to be most appropriate to this study.

Case study typically involves an in-depth or prolonged examination of one person or a small group of people (Heppner, et al., 2007). Although this case study is an example of just one of the many disability service offices within Canadian higher education institutions, it might provide insight about the experiences connected to disability offices as whole, contributing knowledge that might also be applicable to other disability service offices in higher learning institutions. The qualitative method of research gathers information through interviews, observations, and use information from direct participants who have direct experience of the phenomenon being studied. In this case, these participants were professionals working in the disability services and the professors at the post-secondary education institution.

The information was derived from words, behavior, or text from participants. Analyzing the information employed coding and the use of themes from the data that were collected throughout the research. Interpreting this data was straightforward because of the methods of data collection, which involved questions, and direct observation during the unstructured one-on-one interview. Qualitative research transforms the data collected throughout the research to form meanings and understanding in the area of research. The information gathered included behaviors, attitudes, causes, and effects. In this study, semi structured one on one interviews
were employed. This method uses themes, reflection, pattern matching, explanation building, and direct interpretation to analyze data collected into meaningful research.

**Participants**

The participants involved in the research were the disability access service professionals working in the office and the educators working as professors in the academic institution. This included one from the Disability Access Service Office staff, six of the professors from the Education faculty (graduate and undergraduate professors), two professors from the Information and Technology faculty, two of the staff from the Writing Center, and one professional from the Library. The recruitment method used was as follows: identify the professors, locate their email address on the campus employee directory, reach out to the different professors in the university via email and request them to volunteer as participants in the study, and follow up as necessary. Finally, set a date for the interview. Once a date is set, meet and sign the consent form then proceed to conduct the semi-structured interview. Visit and discuss with the Disability Access Services Office, find out the days better suited for them to participate in an interview, and follow up with emails and phone calls until the dates are set. Consent forms were then signed and the interview was conducted.

Participant privacy was discussed before the interviews commenced and participant’s names were withheld. The participants were not directly linked in the study to the information they give. The participants were identified through a direct confidential approach and their participation was voluntary. The professors and the other professionals who participated each had recorded to have more than seven years of experience as educators. They had also worked in the campus for more than five years and have been stable in their faculties. Each professor had had a student with a special need in her or his class.
Data Collection

Use of one-on-one unstructured interviews that included open ended questions were employed to collect data. Interviews took approximately 30 minutes each and were carried out on the University grounds. The proceedings were speech recorded and scribed; later on, they were transcribed into written data. Interviews enabled a face to face interaction, which involved questions on challenges faced by the disability access services professionals as they give their services to students, how policies in place impact this, student identification, assessment, and background impact on them. Among the questions discussed in the interview was the use of assistive technology and other teaching strategies, the amount and nature of communications between professors and the disability access office, and other subtopics.

Data was collected from a small group of campus professionals in various faculties. From the Library, the Disability Service Office, the Writing Center and department of Digital Media, and the department of Education.

Consent and Confidentiality

The letter of consent was prepared and sent to the volunteer participants ahead of the interviews through the participant’s email address. The consent letter was presented and signed before the onset of interviews. The participants will not be identified by their names.

Data Interpretation

Data was interpreted by forming themes, pattern matching with information provided by the participants. As well as direct interpretation was also used to analyze and interpret data. As data was transcribed, common codes began to emerge. These were collected into themes and topics, sometimes comparing intentions and perceptions between disability services and professors. In particular, attention was paid to the successes and challenges identified in supporting students with special education needs.
Study Limitation and Significance

The study involved few participants, focusing instead on the professionals working within a higher learning institution, who operate on a given time table. Thus, a well-organized schedule had to be formed that liaised with the participant’s availability. Getting appointments was a challenge as well, due to the busy schedule experienced by the professionals. The information gathered is personalized, as case studies collect direct information from participants.

The following quote speaks clearly to case study research, “A case study focuses intensively on a single case. Generally, the chosen case is regarded as emblematic of a larger population of cases, a case of something” (Elman, Gerring, Mahoney, 2016, p.375). Capitalizing on case study as the research method for this study will lead to information that will focus in detail on one office in a higher academic educational institution. The information collected might be of benefit to the disability access service office, the professors, and the students. It might also lead to more research on the topic and hopefully be reflective of the situation in other access offices in post-secondary educational institutions. Merrian (1998) discussed that the method of case study is appropriate when the aim or objective of the study is to come up with a better understanding of a given study, wholesomely, with information that is well detailed.

Applicability of Data Questions

The questions were well selected, with due consideration to the sensitivity of the topic. The questions varied for the participants, and the different participants came from different departments with different roles. These questions involved the participant’s professional work, the topic of the study, and the participant’s role within the post-secondary education institution. Since the data collection method involved semi-structured questions, some of the questions gave room for more information and new questions emerged within the discussion. The development of the office within the year influenced some of the questions.
Limitations of the Study

The study collected important information and it was a great learning experience for me as a researcher in an area I am passionate about. However, this does not come without some limitations. The limitations involved the timing of the data collection period, which was collected during exam preparation and marking, one of the busiest period within a post-secondary educational institution. The study’s results are more likely influenced by the faculty of Education as a majority of the participants’ professor belong to this department, this said, the professionals in this faculty are most likely knowledgeable and teaching about supporting students with special in public schools, thus may not need a lot of support from the Disability Access Services Office as compared to other faculties within the university. The researcher also observed that the study would have been more conclusive with the students who receive the services from the disability access taking part as voluntary participants, however, this was not possible within this research, but it could be an area of further research in the future.

Significance

Disability Access Services Offices in post-secondary institutions are of great significance in education. The world is fast becoming more accommodative of the needs of those with disabilities, with advancements in technology, and the development of inclusive policies, both of which support equal opportunity higher education. Education, in turn, plays a part in the advancements in technology and the development of inclusive policies. This case study identified goals, processes, and practices that contribute to both the success and challenges of a post-secondary education institution, disability access office, and professors that support the needs of students with exceptional needs. Thus, there is also a growing need to learn more about the disability access office, which looks into making education accessible to all by embracing and merging equity and equality in post-secondary education.
This study explored the Disability Access Services Office and the impressions of support it provides through the professors and the disability access services staff at the Campus. This study also aimed that the identified information might be informative to the professors, the Disability Access Services professionals, and other disability offices in similar institutions.
Chapter Four: Findings

The study investigated success and challenges a Disability Access Services office can face in a post-secondary academic institution. The research was conducted through the insights of the professors and the disability access staff in the campus. The study is a qualitative case study that has employed the use of unstructured interview as a method to collect data. This chapter will discuss the data findings which will be translated in different themes that were formed from patterns and from direct translation of the information collected from.

Organizing the Research findings

Data was collected through unstructured interviews. It was collected from the Disability Access Services Office staff, library and different professors in different faculties. The data was then interpreted by forming themes from patterns through the information provided by the participants. As themes emerged, part of the themes came out to be common among the group of participants, while other themes were group specific. The following codes were used to classify the data collected during the study and through the participant’s information themes were developed.

- Office Staffing
- An Increase in the numbers of students in post-secondary education institution needing services from the disability access office
- Need for Professional development in staff at the post-secondary education institution
- The Impact of the Age of students
- Students with English as a Second language taking academic course in Campus
- Lack of assessment or documentations limit potential support
- Departmental Teamwork
• Communicating Information and Services
• Useful Information and gaps with the Intended Audience
• Challenges of Accommodating a Student in Class
• Students with English as a Second language
• Common Reported areas of need
• Self-Identifying students
• The Transition to post-secondary academic institution
• Stigma as a Limitation

The Disability Access Services Office

The Disability Access Services Office is an office that provides information and supports students with a special education need in post-secondary educational institutions. The Disability Access Services Office in the post-secondary education institution provides information and support services to students and faculties within the campus. It is located in building 200 room second floor room 214. It has five specialists and an administrator who support students with special education needs in the campus. The office provides reasonable accommodation to students with a designation from a registered physician or a psychologist. The examples of accommodations the office provides students are; Extra Time in exams and Submission Of course Work, a Tutor, a Scribe or Professional Note Taker, Assistive Technology Software and Devices like Speech to Text or Text to Speech Assistive provisions Kurzweil the office has a site certification, Merlin Magnifier (Enhanced Vision, 2018) and Inspiration Mind Mapping Software(Inspiration software 2018) , and a HD camera for a person who may want visual help available for students upon booking, the staff assists the students to use these assistive provisions. These are available for students upon booking.
Office Staffing

Staffing is of high need as the office is fast growing. A participant commented about the location as, “is a bit challenging if one has to go on a barrier free route, the office uses an elevator to access the office, thus a breakdown of this makes it hard to access them for any person who needs a barrier free environment to navigate.”

The office however has accessibility station in the library with computers with Kurzweil, an assistive and technology software that assists in learning. Peer Accesses Coaches is also another establishment that the office started to help students reach out to new students and help them transition to campus. International day of disability is an annual day event in the campus that the disability access office hosts. The office maintains privacy of students and is available discuss issues in general. The departments or the disability access office does not share any student information, privacy and respect for students is highly observed.

An Increase in the numbers of students in post-secondary education institution needing services from the disability access office

From the findings from the disability access staff and also information from annual Newsletter spring 2016, the disability access service office comes out as a department that is fast growing as the number of students they serve is increasing as years pass by. The office has staff who have a background of several years in special education and counseling work experience and are also professionally trained in the areas of special needs and counseling. During the interview one of the participant adds that, “The needs that the students have are becoming more complex in mental health and also a majority have the ASD designation as time passes.” The participant goes on to explain that, “This was attributed to more people acknowledging, coming out and seeking help.” The same was also reported by some participants from other faculties. As the student numbers increase, the need to add more professionals within the area is becoming more pressing. For example, the disability access Office Newsletter January 2017, documented
that the office has over 700 students have registered with the disability access office and the office helped 1650 students with exam accommodation in 2015/16 school year.

Another participant suggested that, “The office also needs more room because, as the numbers increase the need of space has increased, as they have to accommodate all these students. This also leads to a need in the increase in staff to see to the need of the increasing numbers of students.” This theme shows an example of a challenge that faces the disability access office in a post-secondary level educational institution. This is a theme that may require policies to be tailored to empower the office to support more students.

**Need for Professional development in staff at the post-secondary education institution**

During the research, the study found out that some of the professionals are not sure where the accessibility service office is or what exactly they do. Some professionals also were also not sure what assistive technology or UDL (Universal Design for Learning) is. UDL and Assistive technology are technical words from the field of special education and so, while some professors may use strategies consistent of assistive technology, they may not be using that language. However, it is an area that might needs improvement as education and technology grows. This is a challenge that is a factor that may contribute to the challenges a disability access office faces in a post-secondary academic institution. Technology support and methods of teaching like UDL are used to best accommodate students with special education needs in modern classrooms. As found out, the Disability Access Services Office has the facilities to assist in Assistive Technology and they also have the information on their webpage and are willing to train other faculties members. That said, these professors are well aware of every student and their academic needs in class and accommodate them the best way possible. To increase the professor’s efficacy courses and trainings are necessary.
The Impact of the Age of students

According to the findings of this study students in undergraduate courses are more willing and quick to get help from the disability access office, unlike the mature students in other programs like Master’s degrees. The office reported that it has few students in graduate studies compared to the undergraduate levels. One faculty member also said, “Compared to undergraduate level students, the graduate level students are less likely to ask for help and few of them seem to have no sign of support from the disability access office.” This was attributed to cases of stigma or lack of awareness that they can get help. “The different age generation in undergraduates also came into play as the younger students have been brought up in the present self-awareness culture where they are more aware of themselves and have accepted self-compared to the more mature students in the higher level of studies.” one of the participants contributed. She also goes on to add, “Also, students in the higher-level courses tend to be less connected with the classmates and the campus as they are involved in starting up their families or busy with work as well.” To help with this, the office gives them a hand out called ‘Did you know?’ They also talk one on one with them and explain to them the challenges they are facing or likely to face. The research found this to be a factor, an example that is a challenge to the disability service office and the different faculties in the education institution.

Students with English as a Second language taking academic course in Campus

There are students whose first language is not English and they have to learn English as a course together with their chosen academic courses. The research found out that sometimes they come across as students with a special need. However, the campus has a Writing Center Department; this office has professionals who provide one on one or online services for students who need the extra help in writing. The services are available on an appointment booking process; language coaching is also available for students. The academic advising center is also
another department that guides students to excel in academics among other self-development skills. These are not the only departments that support students; Career Services, Counseling Services, Health and Wellness Center, Degree Advisors, International Education Peer Helper, the Student Union and Volunteering and Community Engagement Information are among the departments that help student achieve academic success and transition to the next stage in life.

**Lack of assessment or documentations limit potential support.**

Some international students come without documentation that shows their designated area of need. For these students, the disability access services office reports that; the health and wellness center helps with such situations the best way they can. However, a full psychoeducational assessment is not possible and for most of these students they cannot afford to pay for these tests. The office added that, for these students lacking documents who cannot afford an assessment, the office will do a screen for a learning disability. If they find a possible undiagnosed learning issue they then write a letter of consideration. “We do that term by term just to say that the students will benefit from the help and it is individually based, or; are working with the ministry of post-secondary education to try find funding,” adds the participant. The research found that funding is needed to help these kinds of students. This is among the challenges that the office experiences as well as the students who need the services the office offers.

**Departmental Teamwork**

The campus library is trained to work with students with special need in education. The library also works hand in hand with the disability access office as they share the assistive technology software and other resources in the accessibility workstation found in the library. The library also has height adjustable desks and a quiet room for study. The librarians are happy to help the students and their tutors. The library also conducts a detailed library orientation for new
students. The library helps students who self-identify to need help from the librarians within. The library conducts continuous classes on how to use the library and the resources available. A participant from the library commented that they also provide a personal support to faculties; this is called a liaison model. Each librarian has an assigned academic faculty they assist throughout the term. This is a good example of team work in order to help as many students in the campus with and without a special education need.

**Communicating information and Services**

This theme represents a major challenge that faces the disability access office and the professors in different facilities. Although staffing is limited, a participant from the office suggested, “The Disability Access Services Office would want the other departments within the campus to contact them more often.”

The Disability Access Services office, while working to support the students it serves informs, the students of their services through other faculties in organized sessions within a faculty. They are also willing to go to as many different faculties as often as requested. The office also conducts workshops annually and as the research was in process the office was planning a workshop for all new hired professionals. The participants from different faculties reported to have been aware of these annual workshops.

The office also has a webpage that is maintained by the office on the campus website; this webpage is updated and has information for both the students and the faculties. The information on the webpage is aimed in sharing knowledge with the different departments within the campus and students. The office also has new workshop for all new staff that is done annually. They will send email invitations to faculty professors for any other workshops. The office also put-up booths up during new student orientation and also during the Annual Disability Day.
Useful Information and gaps with the Intended Audience

The study found out that although the office and the faculty members are working together to best help the students achieve the most in education, there are gaps in communication. Different faculty participants do not visit the Disability Access Services office webpage on the campus website. Most cited the reason being lack of time and lacking a need. It is important to factor in that the study saw major changes in content and information on the webpage within a span of almost 5 months. To give an example, information on UDL, assistive technology and more information on various disabilities that the study found the professors expressed a need for, is available on the webpage. The study found that the information is not getting to the targeted audience.

The workshops conducted need attendance. If the other professionals in different faculties fail to turn out for the workshop, then they go without the information meant for them. This is attributed to the faculty not reading the e-mail invitation. This is a challenge that the office faces while it looks into serving the students who need the help. This is also a challenge that the professors face. However, who is responsible for taking initiative to improve communication? Through this research the participants recognize that, both the faculties and the office need to take initiative on the shared responsibilities, the participants also recommended that faculty members need to check the office webpage more often; they should also reach out and ask questions where they need to. The office could send an email prompting the faculties to check for information on their webpage. The faculties should plan on the schedules to attend a workshop or to invite the disability access service office as need arises.

A participant suggested that, “It will help if they talk to the students about the disability access office during the first day of the beginning of the academic semester.” There is room for shared communication and dialogue improvement from all education stakeholders to better
support the students. This will build on support and guidance for all parties. To support this, a faculty participant suggests that, “Other than workshops, an advisory council with representatives from different faculties and the Disability Access Services Office is a way that could likely build the rapport and enhance communication.”

The study also found that some professionals are not sure where the Disability Access Services Office is, and were also not sure of what it is that the office does. This finding held a lot of weight as the office strives to make its presence felt in various ways, for example, through workshops, and newsletter, they also have a webpage on the campus website. Given that the office is not a new establishment and it supports students across different faculties, this is further evidence that there is a miss in communication and information dissemination as a shared responsibility.

**Challenges of Accommodating a Student in Class**

The Disability Access Services Office sends a letter of accommodation with the student to the professors, in the beginning of an academic semester. The letter of accommodation will bring to awareness and guide the professors on a case by case type of accommodation needed by this student but does not reveal the area of special needs designation. It is upon a professor to know how best to support a student. The professors will go without knowing the particular area of designation a student has due to respect for students’ privacy unless the student decides to self-identify to let the professor know which may not be necessary or a requirement. However, from their professional understanding and knowledge, anxiety, emotional and other mental health difficulties were identified as common in the areas of unseen disability during this study. Most of the professors are well able to accommodate the needs of the students through providing slides while teaching and other visuals, providing print, encouraging use of cue cards, using of word to type notes other than taking notes, allowing extra time or submitting work in different
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format and posting notes on the campus website, a digital platform available for professors and students to discuss, post notes, submit work and be interactive as they learn. Other means of accommodation include providing and allowing body breaks, and building professor student relationship to know how best to support students in class as individuals. They also assess learning in different means. Flexibility is seen as key.

However, some of the faculty members felt the letter has less information than they feel they should know and feel that they struggle to provide support and meet their goals. They would like more information to support them support the student.

Common Reported areas of need
Although the areas of needs differ for every individual student, the Disability Access Services Office has services that are aimed at helping an individual student depending on their areas of need. After a student is registered and accepted to start an academic program in the post-secondary institution, a student is able to access these services after the student presents the documents showing their designation from a professional registered practitioner example a doctor, psychiatrist, audiologist and the letter is dated within the last 5 years. The individual student should also be willing to accept the help. The office advises a student to connect with them 6-8 weeks before term starts. The student then books an appointment with the professionals at the office, after which the student will get guidance from the office and guidance and documents to approach the professors.

Example given by a Disability Access Services Office participant as types of services the office offers to students are: computer programs such as Jaws, Electronic Scribes and Readers, Calculations for exams. General accommodation includes, Flexible deadlines, a Note Taker, use of Computers, Campus Orientations, Translation, Tutors, Grant and Financial Aid applications.
Self-Identifying students

Students can self-identify for lack of an assessment done for them or when they feel that it is their right not to disclose their area of disability; however, in British Columbia province unlike in Ontario province, policy does not allow the students to access help without the papers to support this. Thus, in this post-secondary education institution, the disability access office can only support students with the documentation showing their area of need. When a student leaves high-school, the documentation is left behind. It is upon the student with the help of the office to ask for this documentation as getting a new assessment done is expensive.

For students in up-grading without assessments, and without the Canadian study grants the office will do a screen for the student and should there be a need as assessed the office does a letter of consideration. This letter is on individual basis, and allows the student to get some minimal help. However, this is different for a student with the Canadian study grant as the grant can cater for the psycho-educational assessment. The office is working with the ministry of post-secondary education to get funding for students in this category. This is among the challenges that the office faces with different individual students as the office receives no extra funding.

Stigma as a Limitation

Generally, the student will approach the office and after the initial stages and documentation and need assessments are done the student will get a letter to take to the professor. A faculty participant felt that the letter was linked to stigma, although the student is ideally not expected to feel stigma and is supposed to find the best way to meet the professor and give the letter. According to some professors, the students may not want to be identified with the office or the letter. So, a question arose if there could be more discreet ways to communicate. The office will guide the student on how best to take the letter to the professors and they also have the information on their webpage on the campus website. The office also has a hand out
titled ‘Did you know?’ that has more information for the student to ease the feel of stigma. They are also available to walk through the issue with a student.

The Transition to post-secondary academic institution

Transition in education is important as it forms a bridge that links the individual in the next step/stage in education. A student can get a psychoeducational assessment done as early as 4 years of age, if this is done, ideally the child will be helped through elementary school to secondary school, for example by the creation of an Individualized Education Program; however, in post-secondary academic institutions the individual is an adult and therefore self-driven. A participant explained this to be among some of the reasons some of these individuals fall in the cracks thus leading to drop out rates. The post-secondary education institution Disability Access Services Office on the University’s webpage has laid out eight steps in order for an individual student to access help. The first step is considering a career plan, then the second is seeking an advisor at the post-secondary institution, the third is to apply the program of interest, with the fourth being to make an appointment with the disability access office 6-8 weeks before the beginning of the term. The rest are procedural. These initial stages explain the entry point of an individual with a special need in education who wants to get the support. A link between the previous secondary school and the post-secondary school an individual is looking into joining could be of importance to facilitate the individual student success in the post-secondary education and increase the number of students graduating in campus who have a special need in education.

Conclusion

The case study was conducted to answer the success and challenges the Disability Access Office faces in a post-secondary education institution. This study has explored the successes and challenges that a Disability Access Services Office faces through the eyes of the office staff and
the faculty professors. The research data had a majority of the professors’ participants come from the faculty of Education, the professionals in this department are mostly likely to have a background of teaching in other education levels as well as knowledge in the field of Education and actually teaching about supporting students with special needs in public schools. It therefore likely that they may not require much support from the Disability Access Services Office. The study identified the following important aspects of factors that influence success and challenges for the office as it serves the students who require the services: Office Staffing, An Increase in the numbers of students in post-secondary education institution needing services from the disability access office, The Impact of the Age of students, Lack of assessment or documentations limit potential support, Departmental Teamwork, Communicating information and Services, Useful Information and gaps with the Intended Audience, Challenges of Accommodating a Student in Class, Stigma as a Limitation, and the Transition to post-secondary academic institution.

Staffing of professionals in the office, the staff are 5 serving the students who need their service in the whole campus. The study by Orr and Hammig (2009) found that the numbers of students with special needs in post-secondary school are increasing. This echoes my study’s findings as different research participants spoke of seen increase in the number of students who need the services from Disability Access Services Office. The office would benefit from increase in staff.

While this study has sought to address areas of gaps on the literature that the study reviewed, the study conducted by Harrison (2003) is a good example that almost culminates the areas of gaps in literature review. Harrison (2003) found that 32% of students with a disability in higher learning institution have learning disabilities. While the findings of his research assimilate
with part of this study’s finding, the study has explored what Harrison (2003) found as gaps for further study and tied this to other gaps in previous literature as reviewed on literature review part of this study. This study found out that the Disability Access Services Office in this particular office are competent with several years of experience and have skills in their field of work but professional development is required to keep up with new development in the area of Education, Counseling and Special Education. Increase in accessibility or accommodation in classroom is an area that the research found to need improvement, through increased and improved communication among the different faculties and the Disability Access Service Office, collaboration, transfer and sharing of knowledge and personal development within a post-secondary education institution as areas that are suggested to need improvement.

Students in Master’s degree programs were found to be the least seeking help with the Disability Access Service Office thus falling within the cracks of academic struggles without support. This was also attributed to possible stigma within the students receiving the services and the age of the students. However, among the themes this study found, the Disability Access Services Office has achieved success example the lack of assessment or documentation does not hold the office back from supporting a student as the access specialist are able to professionally assess the student and assist the student access help through a letter of consideration. The office assists student to ease or cope with stigma through the peer coach program that helps students get in touch with each other and coach each other with the guidance of the office. The office also provides information on a hand out title “Did you know?” that guidance students and opens room for dialogue with the office specialists. The office also observes the International Day of Persons with Disabilities, the office invites different professionals who offer services to persons with
special needs, they each set booths at a designated space and students, staff and the community are welcomed to learn.
Chapter Five

Introduction
The purpose of this chapter is to bring out the significance of the study and discuss its value and further discuss the issues that could lead to further studies in the topic of Disability Access Services Office in a post-secondary education institution. The chapter also discusses the implications and conclusion of the study.

Implications
- **Funding:** An increase in funding is of need, as this will help the numbers of students who may need psychoeducational assessment done and need financial support. This will also help the disability access office hire more staff full time or part-time and increase in resources used at the office.

- **Staffing:** The study found out that increase in staffing for the Disability Access Services Office is essential. As the number of students grow, there is a need to increase staff also. The research also found the students’ needs are becoming more complex. Unbalanced staff student ratio leaves the staff more stretched and their calendars booked leaving them limited time to reach out to other facilities or engage in personal development.

- **Team spirit and Team work:** Faculties feel left out and would want more dialogue from the disability access office. It could help if more departments would reach out, checking for new information on the disability access office webpage on the campus website, going an extra mile to learn as an individual, reading emails sent and responding to them where necessary, making time to attend a workshop where possible, inviting the Disability Access Service Office to talk to the faculty in different departments and help the disability access office communicate their
presence in campus to the students. As all the education stakeholders strive to meet their individual goals in education within the busy academic term, it is important that they work hand in hand and support each other to meet the goals. This is not to say this lacks but it is to say that there is room for improvement as the study found out. Active engagement as colleagues, could include informing students, especially new students, of services available for them. This could be the first day of class, or the beginning of the semester. It is important that all faculties try be aware of the existence and development of other departments where possible by sparing time to attend a workshop, host a workshop, ask for help and learn more as an individual professional.

- Ease of accessing the support service from the Disability Access Services office was suggested to make it less daunting for students to access the help.

- The office could also find a way of letting the professors and other educationist within the campus know what is available for them as they develop, on a term by term or so basis. This will remind them of the office existences, build dialogue and serve as a way of making their service available to the students through the professors as the professors are directly connected to students.

**Significance of the study**

It is possible that the study is significant in the field of special education as it discusses successes and challenges that affect the Disability Access Services Office in Post-secondary academic institution. This is an office that facilitates transition and provides support services to individuals with special needs education in a post-secondary academic learning institution. The study has explored challenges that face Disability Access Services Office through the eyes of the professors and the disability access service professionals. Through direct information from the
volunteer participants the study was able to discuss various success and challenges that the
disability access service office. The study also has discussed possible way to mitigate these
issues and also have opened room for further study.

This study is significant because it discusses the successes and challenges faced in a post-
secondary disability access office. This office is important as it supports learners with a special
need in education in post-secondary level. Education is becoming inclusive with schools moving
away from the traditions of separate schools for students with a special need in education.
Students with a special need in education are now in general schools thus inclusive education.
Students with learning needs are reported to be on the increase as shown by research (Orr and
Hammig, 2009). This said the value and importance of post-secondary education cannot be over
emphasized as a report by Fichten et al (2003) stated that university and college graduate
students with or without a disability have better employment outcomes than people without post-
secondary education in Canada.

Value of the Study
This study is providing good research as it has directly gathered data from the significant
stakeholders. The study has explored the challenges faced by the Disability Access Services
Office through the eyes of the office staff and the professors in the campus. The study utilized
qualitative case study methodology to gather data by conducting data through unstructured
interviews and observation. This method is effective for the study as it gives room to gather
detailed data including spoken and unspoken information. This method of research gives room
for applicability of the findings to similar post-secondary education disability access offices. The
study findings are applicable to other Disability Access Services Office as the experiences and
challenges with are likely to be faced by other Disability Access Services Office in British
Columbia this may include staffing, funding to name a few.
Issues for further Investigations
Among the issues for further studies is finding out if there are challenges faced by the students who receive the services from the Disability Access Service Office. This study has researched challenges faced by the Disability Access Services Office through the office staff and the campus professors but did not include the student who receive the services. Another area that could require further study is a research in depth about the effective means of inclusive education in campus classes/lessons, and professors improving their teaching styles and incorporating technology in the classes. Retention and student success is a possible area for further study, this research found out that the students are increasing in numbers, however, how many are specifically graduating?

Conclusion
The Disability Access Services Office in a post-secondary education institution, is an important part of institution as well as other faculties. It serves students with a special education need in these post-secondary institutions. These offices work with students from different faculties thus acting as a bridge between students and the other faculties within the post-secondary education institutions. As research, has shown there is an increase in the number of students requiring these services in post-secondary level education thus emphasizing the need to have these offices in post-secondary education institution.

This study found the following themes that influence the functioning of Disability Access Services Office: Office Staffing, An Increase in the numbers of students in post-secondary education institution needing services from the disability access office, The Impact of the Age of students, Lack of assessment or documentations limit potential support, Departmental Teamwork, Communicating information and Services, Useful Information and gaps with the Intended Audience, Challenges of Accommodating a Student in Class, Stigma as a Limitation,
and the Transition to post-secondary academic institution. Some of these themes cut-across other post-secondary education institutions and these study is hopeful that the findings will be informative and applicable in other institutions other than this post-secondary education institution.

Since my initial interest in the disability office, I have noticed growth and changes on the webpage within the University’s website within a span of less than a year. This includes a change of name from Disability Services Office to Disability Access Services Office, the addition of information example outlined steps that would a guide a student seeking service from the office, financial aid information, and detailed information on a current studied teaching strategies, tips on how to support different students with different special education needs. These changes are evidence that the topic and office is an area in education that is a work in progress in growth and development.
References


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https://studentaidbc.ca/sites/all/files/school.../disability_services_framework.pdf


Vancouver Island University British Columbia Canada, https://services.viu.ca/disability-access-services


World Conference on Special Needs Education Access and Quality Salamanca Spain (1994) Salamanca statement and frame work for action. UNESCO.


Appendixes
The following are areas of discussion guide, with the Professors.

Both interviews will be unstructured

Interview Script and Schedule
I am a student in the Master of Education in Special Education program at Vancouver Island University (VIU). My research, titled “Challenges Faced by a Disability Services Office and the Students It Serves in Post-Secondary Learning Institution”. The goal of this case study is to explore the goals, successes and challenges faced by professionals working in disability services office and the student it serves.

I thank you for consenting to be part of this study. Do you have any questions before we begin?

For the professors
For the time, you have worked as a professor, have there been changes in students with special needs? If so, please describe those changes.

What types of needs have you come across, for the period you have taught at post-secondary education institution?

What types of accessibility services do you provide to the students so as they access education?

What assistive technology are you familiar with? Do you use any of these in class? Why or why not?

Please describe your experience about the communication between you and the disability services office?

What would you do if you suspected a student has a need of the disability services office?

In what ways is the institution’s disability services successful? Do you feel as though there are gaps that need to be addressed in order to enable students with special needs in higher learning institution access education?

Have you noticed any changes on the disability access service office webpage on the post-secondary education institution website?

For the Disability Services Office

Which policies govern the functions of the office and are the policies accessible to the students?
How are students identified to access the services offered by the disability services office, do students self-identify, do you get professorial review or get the students records from their previous academic institution?

For the years, you have worked at the disability services office, what would you say about the volume of students accessing the service?

What areas of need are most common?

Are there cases of stigma in students who receive services in your office? Please describe and explain how you mitigate this.

Please describe the types of services the office provides to enable students with a need to enable them to perform to their best in higher education?

Have there been cases of students who self-identify to have a need but will not disclose the need through documents like assessment forms? If yes, how was the case handled?

How does the office make its presence felt in the campus?

Please explain if the office receives any extra funding or training to enable the office to run?

What (if any) are the challenges the office faces as it works to make education accessible to students?

What can you say about the geographic structure of the school or the location of the office?

What initiatives is the office most proud of and feels they have done well in and what are the next plans or new initiatives moving forward?

Thank you for your time and being part of this study.
Consent Form

WHAT CHALLENGES CAN A DISABILITY SERVICES OFFICE IN HIGHER EDUCATION AND STUDENTS IT SERVES FACE (Consent Form)

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I am a student in the Master of Education in Special Education program at Vancouver Island University (VIU). My research, entitled “What challenges can a disability services office in higher education and the students it serves face?” The goal of this case study is to explore the goals, successes and challenges faced by professionals working in disability service office and the student it serves. It hopes to provide a source of solutions in how to mitigate some if not all the issues.

As a participant are asked to take a face-to-face research interview. If you agree, you will be asked questions concerning your personal experiences at the post-secondary education institution, with emphasis on the experience while working with the disability service office. With your permission, the interview would be audio reported. Your participation would require approximately 30 minutes of your time. You have the option of being identified by name or participating anonymously by using a pseudonym.

The information collected during the interview poses only a very small risk of harm to participants. Depending on the information you provide, and whether you choose to participate anonymously, there is a possibility that the information you provide might cause loss of social status and/or embarrassment.

If you choose to participate without being identified, all records of your participation would be confidential. Only my supervisor and I will have access to information in which you are identified. With your permission, the interview would be audio recorded and later transcribed into writing. At your request, you will be provided a copy of the transcript and invited to make changes to the transcript as you wish (e.g. if you would like withdraw a particular statement you made during an interview). Electronic data will be stored on a password-protected computer. Signed consent forms and paper copies of interview transcripts will be stored in a locked file cabinet in my home. Data will be deleted and shredded at the end of the project, approximately Aug 4th, 2019.
The results of this study will be published in my Master of Education in Special Education thesis, and may also be used for conference publications, presentations, and published in peer-reviewed journals.

Your participation is completely voluntary. You may withdraw from the study at any time where practicable, for any reason, and without explanation. If you would like to review and potentially make changes to the transcript of the interview, you may withdraw up to two weeks from the time of being provided a copy of the transcript. If you decline to review the transcript, you may withdraw up to two weeks from the date of our interview. If you choose to withdraw from the study, all information you provided during the interview would be withdrawn from the study and destroyed.

I have read and understand the information provided above, and hereby consent to participate in this research under the following conditions:

I consent to the interview being audio recorded.  
☐ Yes  ☐ No

I consent to having my personal identity disclosed in the products of the research.  
☐ Yes  ☐ No

I consent to being quoted in the products of the research.  
☐ Yes  ☐ No

Participant Name ________________________ Participant Signature ________________________

I, Catherine Wachu, promise to adhere to the procedures described in this consent form.

Principal Investigator Signature ________________________ Date _______________

If you have any concerns about your treatment as a research participant in this study, please contact the VIU Research Ethics Board by telephone at 250-740-6631 or by email at reb@viu.ca.

Participants will be provided a copy of the signed consent form.