

“From Where I Sit”

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Background

This video series is based on the principle that “stories change attitudes”. We receive an imprint in our memory when we hear another person’s story. We are forever changed by that experience and later, when we are engaged with someone we automatically draw from our experience and apply it to new situations, decisions, and attitudes. Everyone has a story and these students bravely shared their experience by answering five questions: (1) What is your disability? (2) What are you doing in college? (3) What is it like in the classroom? (4) What do you have to do to keep up with the class? (5) What suggestions can you offer to faculty that will make their classroom more accessible?

Each video represents one story and one person’s experience. Even though two people may have the same category of disability, the impact and the experience of that disability may be very different, and consequently the needs will be different as well. This does not mean, however, that you won’t see commonalities of needs and experiences expressed by these students.

The common suggestions articulated by students in these videos point to instructional practices that may be helpful to all students. Universal design, mirroring the universal design movement in architecture and product development, is the method by which products and services are made usable to the greatest number of people, including individuals with disabilities. Universal design in instruction addresses the need to create flexible goals, methods, materials, and assessments that accommodate learner differences. As we incorporate these instructional practices, we help all students succeed while transparently providing the required accommodation for students with disabilities.

For more information about universal design in learning, see CAST at www.cast.org. For resources at the CSU, contact the EnACT program at <http://enact.sonoma.edu>.

Organization of the Video

The eight stories presented on the DVD and website are approximately 6-8 minutes in length. After viewing a story, the faculty responses (5 minutes) can be viewed. Our faculty advisors for this project discuss the issues raised after they watched the stories. Transcripts of the suggestions made by the students are available on the DVD to print out and use with the discussions.

Accessibility

The videos display synchronized captions. Transcripts are available on a separate track. These videos and additional resources are also available from the Accessible Technology Initiative website: www.calstate.edu/accessibility.

How to Use These Stories

This video series can be viewed in numerous ways.

1. **Individually:** You can view them at your own leisure, starting with one student's story and then moving on to the faculty responses. Even though each video is no more than 6 minutes long, we don't recommend viewing more than one or two stories per sitting so you will have time to reflect upon what you saw and heard. It will be natural to want to discuss what you have seen and find answers and resources for your needs.
2. **Group:** The faculty advisory group for this project highly recommends that these stories be viewed in small groups where a guided discussion can be facilitated with explanations of particular disabilities, how to make materials accessible, and provide needed resources.

Three Suggested Scenarios for Using this Resource

Scenario One:

A faculty development director may set up a series of workshops on helping faculty make their courses and course materials more accessible. The video story becomes a springboard for discussion. A suggested lesson plan, attached below, is available to assist facilitators in leading the discussion.

Scenario Two:

A department wants to raise the awareness of faculty regarding assisting students with disabilities and uses half an hour of the departmental meeting time for this purpose. The department chair contacts the disability services director to lead the training. The disability services staff uses one of these videos as a springboard for discussion about student needs and the importance of faculty partnership.

Scenario Three:

The disability service office wants to help students with disabilities develop their advocacy skills. These videos can be used as part of the training to help students learn the importance of self-advocacy and to learn the "language" and skills for talking to their instructors about their specific learning styles and needs.

Extending This Project

There are many more stories which should be told and need to be told. We hope that this video series will inspire campuses to capture the stories of their own students and use the storytelling format to begin conversations that could potentially transform attitudes and behaviors. Information about how we created this video series will be up on the ATI website, www.calstate.edu/accessibility, for those who wish to extend this project on their own campuses.

Lesson Plan for Use in a Faculty Development Setting

Resource Description

What do students most commonly ask their instructors to do to make their courses and course materials more accessible? Suggestions from students with disabilities are captured in story format in the video series “From Where I Sit”. These students present a powerful and heartwarming presentation and offer suggestions for making the classroom experience better for everyone.

Objectives

After this workshop, faculty and administrators will be able to:

1. describe challenges faced by students with sight impairments
2. list strategies for working with students who have such disabilities
3. describe how some of the suggested strategies may benefit other students
4. share one or two strategies that they may wish to adopt in their particular setting

Time and Materials

Approximately 45-60 minutes.

Handout A: Ten Most Common Student Suggestions

“From Where I Sit” DVD

DVD player, projector, speakers

Context

Although the number of individuals with disabilities seeking postsecondary education has increased significantly in recent years, they are still underrepresented in many academic and career areas. Federal legislation mandates that, when needed, academic accommodations be made to ensure that otherwise qualified students with disabilities have educational opportunities equal to those of their non-disabled peers.

Studies show that faculty members, staff, and students who have had interactions with students with disabilities generally have more positive attitudes about working with these students. Further, those who are familiar with accommodation strategies are better prepared to make arrangements which will ensure that students with disabilities have an equal opportunity to participate in their programs.

Presentation Outline

1. Distribute handouts
2. Introductions
3. Begin presentation
4. Introduce and play one chapter from ATI DVD
5. Hold discussion
6. Discuss department/campus issues and campus resources
7. Distribute and collect completed evaluation instruments

The Activity

The student in this film describes some of the problems and solutions that surfaced in their academic experiences. The handout lists some common solutions suggested by the students. Discuss possible

classroom strategies that may ensure that students with disabilities have an equal opportunity to participate. How can these practices benefit all students? Discuss particular campus issues and resources. How might solutions for issues be found? How might campus resources be made known to those in need?

Extending the Activity

1. Ask presentation participants to try one or more of the classroom strategies listed on the handout and describe their experiences on the Merlot site (www.merlot.org).
2. Ask presentation participants to add a question to standard end-of-course student evaluations: “In what ways did the instructor use teaching techniques that made it easier for you to learn?”
3. Make a list of particular department or campus issues that surfaced during the discussion. Consider possible solutions.
4. Make a list of campus resources related to equal academic opportunities. Consider possible publication and distribution of this information.

Feedback and Evaluation (see page 6 of this packet)

Handout A

10 Most Common Student Suggestions: To Ensure Equal Academic Opportunities

1. Make textbook decisions early, certainly by the required campus book adoption date.
2. Allow students to choose their seats and change seats if necessary.
3. Advanced preparation and distribution of instructional materials and lecture outlines prior to the class can facilitate learning, especially when these materials are posted online in an accessible format.
4. Show only videos that have been closed captioned.
5. Ensure inclusiveness in the classroom and discourage stereotypical behavior.
6. Explain the goals and objectives at the beginning of class.
7. Use multiple ways to represent your material such as visual aids to accompany lectures.
8. Provide alternate ways to demonstrate knowledge of content.
9. Be open to communicating with students about their learning styles.
10. Remove physical barriers where possible.

It is essential that all students be held to the same academic standards.

Feedback and Evaluation Form

Please take some time to answer the following questions thoughtfully and honestly. From your responses, we hope to discover what specific aspects of the presentation are most effective and what aspects should be improved. Your written comments are especially welcome because they help us interpret your ratings. Please use the space provided under each item to clarify and justify your ratings.

1. Today's presentation had a positive impact on my opinion about equal educational opportunities.

Strongly agree Agree Disagree Strongly disagree

2. As a result of today's presentation, I plan to change my teaching practices.

Strongly agree Agree Disagree Strongly disagree

3. What specific changes might you make in your teaching practices? _____

4. What impact (if any) do you expect the change to have on student learning? _____

5. What were the *best* features of this presentation and the manner in which it was conducted? _____

6. What changes would you make to this presentation or the manner in which it was conducted? _____

Thank you!

Glossary

The following definition of terms is provided to clarify how each of the listed terms may be used in this workshop setting.

Academic and Information technology services as used in this context means a centralized department that provides the technology infrastructure for the university.

Accessibility as used in this context means that programs and activities are usable by students with learning disabilities. In many cases programs and activities may be made accessible through “slight modifications and adjustments in procedures, practices and policies” (Campbell, 2002, p.10).

Accommodation, as cited by Murphy (2003), is “an adaptation to a program that allows the person with a disability to participate in that program” (p. 4).

Americans with Disabilities Act 1990 (ADA) is a law that protects individuals with disabilities against discrimination in employment and public services.

Assistive Technology is “any technology that enables an individual with learning disabilities to compensate for specific deficits” (Raskind & Higgins, 1998, p.27).

Compliance for the purpose of this series is meeting the minimum requirements of federal and local laws governing provisions for students with disabilities.

Disabled Student Service Centers are campus-wide centers where students can participate in accommodation strategies and assistance services. DSS professionals can also provide information and assistance to faculty in relation to serving students. Centers have different names on each campus.

Equal Opportunity is defined in Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. It is the achievement of accessibility and the provision of accommodations that render an opportunity to

be equally effective for students with disabilities as for students without disabilities.

Faculty Development Centers are “campus-wide centers where faculty developers can work with instructors to gather feedback from students, identify resources, and offer suggested practices to meet the changing demographics and different learning needs of students on campus” (Ouellett, 2004, p.136). Centers have different names on each campus.

Inclusion is a term that describes a set of strategies that enables all students of varying levels of capabilities to participate in the same learning opportunities.

Learning Disability is “a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, which may manifest itself in imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell or do mathematical calculations” (Walters, 2000, p.xx).

Reasonable Accommodations are defined under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act as certain adjustments institutions must make to programs and activities to accommodate students with disabilities unless it can be demonstrated that the accommodation would impose an undue hardship on the institution.

Rehabilitation Act of 1973 prohibits federal entities from discriminating against individuals based on disability.

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, 29 U.S.C. §794, is a “federal statute that guarantees the rights of disabled people to equal opportunity in all programs and activities which receive federal financial assistance” (Walters, 2000, p.xxii).

Universal Design refers to a teaching strategies framework that emphasizes flexibility and custom responses to individual learner differences (CAST, 2005).

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