

FACULTY PERSPECTIVES ON INCLUSIVE COURSES: FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM A QUALITATIVE STUDY

Faculty play a key role in providing inclusive learning experiences to postsecondary students with intellectual disability. Findings and recommendations from a qualitative interview study with faculty teaching inclusive courses are summarized.

Benefits of inclusive courses from the perspectives of faculty:

- **Improves Learning:** Faculty said that TPSID students often bring up “really thoughtful questions” that typical students “just wouldn’t think to ask,” whereas many typical students are “reluctant to ask questions” even if they don’t understand. This benefited the learning experiences of all students.
- **Improves Teaching:** Faculty said that having TPSID students in their classes challenges them to get better at breaking down concepts to make the material more universally accessible. One faculty participant said that this made them a “better teacher.”
- **Improves Class Environment:** Faculty participants said TPSID students often bring a greater level of “enthusiasm” and a “positive attitude” into the classroom that can be “contagious” and improves the environment for everyone.

So my daytime classes are inclusive, and then in the evenings, they’re not. So it’s very obvious that the classes that are inclusive are...more dynamic, more engaged.

RECRUITMENT

Findings

- Faculty in the study were generally happy to participate when asked.
- Faculty were often nervous at first and wanted more information about the program up front.
- Even if they were hesitant, faculty did not see refusing a student as an option.
- Faculty appreciated when courses were chosen thoughtfully to match the interests and skills of the students.

When I was asked if I would allow a student in, I thought that it was really very nice that they would even consider having a student in my class for this program. I didn’t know anything about it. But...I was really pleased that they had asked me.

Recommendations

- Match students carefully with courses and consider expanding beyond a pre-determined list.
- Contact faculty as early as possible so they have time to prepare.
- Communicate more about the program at the beginning so faculty can make an informed decision.
- Enlist experienced faculty as ambassadors to share their experiences and the benefits of inclusive courses.

The faculty do need to think, “Is my course suitable? Is my course able to be adapted?” Not to just blanketly think, “Oh, well, I teach American politics and this isn’t going to be accessible,” where it very well may be. It’s just to be open to it, but realistic.

ORIENTATION

Findings

- Faculty want and need guidance on how best to integrate TPSID students into their classes.
- Faculty said programs did not set expectations or offer advice.

It wasn’t until the end of that first semester that I really started to understand, okay, I get what this program is trying to do now. But there’s a pretty big learning curve there that first semester or two.

Recommendations

- Provide a comprehensive orientation to help faculty prepare for teaching inclusive courses and to shorten the “learning curve.” This orientation can take a variety of forms – in-person or remote meeting, recorded presentation, and/or written materials.

Consider including the following topics:

- “Intellectual Disability 101”
- Program overview, goals and procedures
- Expectations for students and for faculty
- Teaching tips, including principles and practices of Universal Design for Learning
- Guidelines on modifying syllabi, including assignments, assessments, and grading

Faculty wanted information about individual students. Consider working with the students to share things like:

- Interests and goals
- Why this class?
- Accommodations needs
- Ideas on customizing the syllabus

SUPPORT

Findings

Faculty want support. They want to give all students a good experience and balance everyone's needs, but they face some challenges with:

- Classroom Management
- Teaching complex material
- Assignments and assessments
- Communication with the TPSID
- Understanding the role of the peer mentor

Recommendations

- Check in periodically
- Remind faculty what support is available
- Share resources, teaching tips, templates, etc.
- Facilitate communication among faculty so they can support each other and share suggestions
- Make sure peer mentors are well trained and have support

ASSIGNMENTS AND ASSESSMENTS

Faculty wanted to know how to modify syllabi so TPSID students get the most out of their classes without being overwhelmed. They had questions about:

Assignments and Syllabi:

- Should the syllabus be modified?
- How best to adjust assignments?

Assessments and Grading:

- What kinds of feedback are best?
- What should assessments be based on?
- Does the student require a grade?

Over time, more experienced faculty have come up with creative ways of modifying their syllabi. Some had one modified syllabus for all TPSID students and others worked with individual students and their peer mentors to customize it.

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