Universal Design in Student Affairs

Nancy Evans
Iowa State University
November 18, 2015
Goals

• Increase awareness of issues faced by students with disabilities in college
• Familiarize participants with concepts and definitions related to disability
• Introduce participants to concepts of Universal Design in college settings
• Explore ways to work effectively with students with disabilities
Definitions

- Impairment – The functional limitation within the individual caused by physical, mental, or sensory impairment.
- Disability – The loss or limitation of opportunities to take part in the normal life of the community on an equal level with others due to physical and social barriers.

(Disabled People’s International, 1982, as cited in Barnes & Mercer, 2003, p. 66)
Functional Limitations Model

• Locates the “problem” of disability within the person.

• Disability viewed as requiring individual adaptation.

• Persons with impairments must find ways to adjust.

• Extensive evaluation to determine person’s inabilities.

• Attempts made to accommodate the individual.

(Evans & Herriott, 2009)
Social Justice Perspective

- Dominant group plays a role in oppression of individuals with disabilities
- Goal is elimination of “ableism”
- Redefines and expands what is considered normal
- Considers interaction of impairment with other social identities
- Considers environmental contexts

(Evans & Herriott, 2009)
Types of Impairments

- **Visible** – Impairments that are evident to others, such as mobility impairments or some sensory impairments

- **Invisible** – Impairments that are not evident to others, such as learning impairments, traumatic brain injuries, ADHD, psychiatric disorders

(Evans & Herriott, 2009)
Universal Design

The design of products and environments to be usable by all people to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design (Center for Universal Design at North Carolina State University, 1997).

Examples:
- Curb cuts
- Automatic doors
Goal of Universal Design

Applied to higher education, the primary goal of Universal Design is to create inclusive, flexible, customizable products, courses, programs, activities, and environments.

(Center for Universal Design at North Carolina State University, 1997)
Accommodating individuals one at a time  

Universal Design: Barrier-free, fewer individual accommodations needed
Universal Design in Student Services

• Create welcoming spaces

• Develop, implement, and evaluate pathways for communication among students, staff, and faculty

• Ensure that each student and staff member has an equal opportunity to learn and grow

• Communicate clear expectations using multiple formats
Universal Design in Student Services cont.

• Use methods and strategies that consider diverse learning styles and abilities

• Provide supports

• Ensure confidentiality

• Define service quality; regularly evaluate services

(Higbee, 2008)
Creating Inclusive Environments

Structural

• Encourage universal design
• Ensure that facilities are accessible rather than “compliant”
• When designing facilities, consult with people with disabilities
• Make accommodations inclusive, instead of “easy”
• Ensure that transportation is accessible
• Ensure that policies are accommodating
Programmatic

- Be proactive in providing accommodations
- Advertise accessibility of event
- Consider whether everyone can participate in planned activities
- Provide involvement and leadership opportunities
Behavioral

• Actively encourage students with disabilities to attend events
• Allow students to discover or express their limitations
• Educate your community
• Use inclusive language
• Interact with individuals as individuals
Attitudinal

• Make disability “visible” by openly discussing differences
• Recognize that some individuals identify as a person with a disability and some don’t
• Respect individual agency
• Be aware that disability in only one aspect of identity and more or less salient
• Recognize that multiple systems of oppression may affect persons with disabilities
Creating Universal Access

Within your work setting, what will you do to create universal access for all students?