

Comparing the Post-Secondary Education of the Physically Disabled in the U.S. and England

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GLOCER Conference 2019

Research Question

- How do disability services offered to students with physical disabilities attending higher educational institutions in the United States (U.S.) differ from those services offered to the same segment of students in England?

Significance of Research

- To discover the differences in services provided to the physically disabled in the U.S. and England.
- The deficiencies in each country can be used as lessons to improve facilities and services offered to the physical disabled.

Methodology

- Services for students pursuing postsecondary education while balancing the challenges that come with having a physical disability do not seem to be uniform across the U.S. or England.
- Comparing the differences in the range of services provided to these individuals is important in highlighting areas that need to be improved upon to put forth the globalization of services for this group.

Educational Systems

- The U.S. and England are two of the oldest and most developed nations in the world. As a result, their educational systems have had more time to develop.
- The differences in the educational systems of the U.S. and England and the impact on the services provided to college students with disabilities result from differences in the history of education in these two countries.

Educational Systems (cont.)

- UNITED STATES

- States and individual school districts were responsible for education, its financing, and its curriculum without much interference from the federal government.
- Schools were primarily associated with the state rather than religious organizations.
- Social welfare programs were not implemented until after the Great Depression.

- England

- The national government maintained control over all financial, curricular, and religious aspects at every school.
- Schools were associated with both the state and religious organizations.
- Social welfare programs have been fostered through parish resources since ancient times.

Humanitarian Approach to Education

- United States
 - Women and slaves were not excluded, even early on (Brock, 2011, p. 7)
- England
 - The impoverished were included, even if they did not have a religious affiliation (Gillard, 2011)
- Global
 - Inclusive of all minorities including those who wish to attain higher education despite a physical disability.
 - Enacted on a global scale allowing equal access to education worldwide.

Disability Law: United States

- The “Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Section 504” ensured that no one was denied admittance or financial support because of their impairment.
- The “Americans with Disabilities Act” broadened the definition of disability by modifying the language of the definition, specifically recognizing how impairment can affect all aspects of an individual’s life. (U.S. Department of Labor, 2009).

Disability Law: United States (cont.)

- During postsecondary education it is the student's responsibility to disclose their impairment and request services.
- Self-advocacy is necessary in higher education because an individual is considered an adult at the age of eighteen and should be able to communicate what accommodations they need.

Disability Law: England

- In 1970, preliminary legislation laid the groundwork for the anti-discrimination legislation of 1995.
- Prior to 1981, those with disabilities were kept in asylums in England and the education of these individuals was considered to be unimportant (Historic England, 2017).

Disability Law: England (cont.)

- In 2001, the “Special Educational Needs and Disability Act” was passed. It was the first piece of legislation in the United Kingdom that outlawed the discrimination of persons with disabilities in education (Parliament of the United Kingdom, 2001).
- This piece of legislation changed how disability is defined. Under the “the Equality Act of 2010” the definition of disabled states “you’re disabled if you have a physical or mental impairment that has a ‘substantial’ and ‘long-term’ negative effect on your ability to do normal daily activities.” (U.K. Department of Education and Learning, 2010).

Comparisons

- The four academic institutions to be compared are two private universities (Harvard and Cambridge) versus two religiously affiliated universities (Notre Dame and Saint Mary's), one of each set in the U.S. and one in England.

Comparisons:

- Harvard
 - Three residence halls are fully accessible for those students who use a wheelchair as a result of a physical impairment.
 - Buildings built prior to 1992 are retrofitted; while newer buildings are built in compliance with regulations put forth by the Americans with Disabilities Act (Harvard, 2017a; 2017c).
- Cambridge
 - Cambridge University has four libraries which are wheelchair accessible to varying degrees.
 - All students live on campus for all four years at Cambridge, so over 12,000 residential are required, of which 1,925 must house students who are physically disabled (University of Cambridge, 2017d).

Comparisons:

- **Notre Dame**
 - From the start, the majority of students at Notre Dame have always resided on campus (University of Notre Dame, 2017a).
 - Fourteen out of 28 residence halls are accessible to the physically disabled
- **Saint Mary's**
 - From the start, the majority of students at St Mary's University have always resided on campus (St Mary's University, 2017c).
 - Eight residence halls are available at this university (St Mary's University, 2017a). Most have ramps and some accessibility.
 - Lady Frances Court was built specifically to house students with physical impairments.

Limitations of Study

- Sample size
- Lack of reported data at each university
- Variations between the information available on university websites
- Comparison between universities was flawed due to inconsistent availability of information.

Conclusions

- In the U.S., laws to address the needs of the physically disabled were coupled with the Civil Rights movement.
- England lagged behind in implementing similar legislation until the mid-1990s. This lag time led to fewer accommodations being made on college campuses in England.

Conclusions (cont.)

- United States
 - Students are responsible for disclosing their disability to the designated authorities at the university in order to receive accommodations. Students typically do this upon acceptance to a postsecondary institution.

- England
 - Students who are physically disabled can request services at anytime during their academic endeavor.
 - Financial assistance and help in seeking a personal aide, if needed, is provided to students if they choose to reside on campus. No such service is provided by postsecondary educational institution in the U.S.

Conclusions (cont.)

- Surprisingly, the universities' approaches to the education of students who are physically disabled was not defined by the religious association of the universities.
- Despite the vast differences in overall accessibility for students with physical impairments that attended Harvard, Cambridge, Notre Dame and St Mary's, the numerical estimates of students with physical disabilities were approximately the same for all four universities.
- If more universities had been analyzed, or if more information was available regarding the physical accessibility of each campus, the number of students attending could vary significantly from college to college.

Final Thoughts

- Globalization of the services available to college students who are physically disabled is hindered in part as a result of the broad parameters used in defining what is considered a “reasonable accommodation”.
- Additional limitations to globalization include disparities such as funding, terrain, attitude, locale, structures and available resources. However, efforts must be made for the sake of consistency of equal access to postsecondary education for students who are physically disabled regardless of the obstacles that may arise.

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Acknowledgments

This paper was originally written for the course Introduction to International and Comparative Education, taught by Dr. McBrien at University of South Florida Sarasota-Manatee. I would like to thank Dr. McBrien for introducing me to the field of Comparative Education.