

Reasonable Adjustment for Students with Disabilities - Opportunities and Limits in Social Work Education

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Abstract : Objectives: The adoption of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities has the effect that higher education institutions in Switzerland are called upon to promote inclusive university education. In this context, our School of Social Work aims to provide fair participation and the removal of barriers in our study programmes at bachelor's and master's levels. In 2015 we developed a concept of reasonable adjustments for students with disabilities and chronic illness as an instrument to provide equal opportunities for those students. We reviewed the implementation of this concept as part of our quality management process. Using a qualitative research design, we explored how affected students and lecturers experience the processes and measures taken and which barriers they still perceive. Methods: We captured subjective perspectives and experience of measures by conducting 15 problem-centred interviews with affected students and three experimental focus groups with lecturers. The data was processed using structured qualitative content analysis and summarised as key categories. Results: All respondents evaluated the concept of reasonable adjustment very positively and emphasised its importance for equal opportunities. Our analysis revealed differences in the usage and perception of both groups and showed that the students interviewed were a heterogeneous group with different needs. Overall, the students described the adjustments, in particular in relation to examinations and other assignments, as a great relief. The lecturers expressed high standards for their own teaching and supervision of students and, at the same time, wished for more support from the university. However, despite the positive evaluation by the lecturers, the limits of reasonable adjustment became evident. It is necessary to consider the limits of reasonable adjustments in terms of professional skills. Conclusion: Reasonable adjustments should, therefore, be seen as an element of an inclusive university culture that must be complemented by further measures. Taking this into account, we have planned further research as a basis for the development of a diversity and inclusion policy.

Keywords : opportunities and limits, reasonable adjustment, social work education, students with disabilities

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