

## **Analysis of the Barriers and Aids That Lecturers Offer to Students with Disabilities**

**Authors :** Anabel Moriña

**Abstract :** In recent years, advances have been made in disability policy at Spanish universities, especially in terms of creating more inclusive learning environments. Nevertheless, while efforts to foster inclusion at the tertiary level -and the growing number of students with disabilities at university- are clear signs of progress, serious barriers to full participation in learning still exist. The research shows that university responses to diversity tend to be reactive, not proactive; as a result, higher education (HE) environments can be especially disabling. It has been demonstrated that the performance of students with disabilities is closely linked to the good will of university faculty and staff. Lecturers are key players when it comes to helping or hindering students throughout the teaching/learning process. This paper presents an analysis of how lecturers respond to students with disabilities, the initial question being: do lecturers aid or hinder students? The general aim is to analyse-by listen to the students themselves-lecturers barriers and support identified as affecting academic performance and overall perception of the higher education (HE) experience. Biographical-narrative methodology was employed. This research analysed the results differentiating by fields of knowledge. The research was conducted in two phases: discussion groups along with individual oral/written interviews were set up with 44 students with disabilities and mini life histories were completed for 16 students who participated in the first stage. The study group consisted of students with disabilities enrolled during three academic years. The results of this paper noted that participating students identified many more barriers than bridges when speaking about the role lecturers play in their learning experience. Findings are grouped into several categories: Faculty attitudes when "dealing with" students with disabilities, teaching methodologies, curricular adaptations, and faculty training in working with students. Faculty does not always display appropriate attitudes towards students with disabilities. Study participants speak of them turning their backs on their problems-or behaving in an awkward manner. In many cases, it seems lecturers feel that curricular adaptations of any kind are a form of favouritism. Positive attitudes, however, often depend almost entirely on the good will of faculty and-although well received by students-are hard to come by. As the participants themselves suggest, this study confirms that good teaching practices not only benefit students with disabilities but the student body as a whole. In this sense, inclusive curricula provide new opportunities for all students. A general coincidence has been the lack of training on behalf of lecturers to adequately attend disabled students, and the need to cover this shortage. This can become a primary barrier and is more often due to deficient faculty training than to inappropriate attitudes on the part of lecturers. In conclusion, based on this research we can conclude that more barriers than bridges exist. That said, students do report receiving a good deal of support from their lecturers-although almost exclusively in a spirit of good will; when lecturers do help, however, it tends to have a very positive impact on students' academic performance.

**Keywords :** barriers, disability, higher education, lecturers

**Conference Title :** ICELD 2017 : International Conference on Education, Learning and Development

**Conference Location :** Lisbon, Portugal

**Conference Dates :** April 16-17, 2017