

Library Support for the Intellectually Disabled: Book Clubs and Universal Design

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Abstract : This study examines the role of academic libraries in support of the intellectually disabled (ID) in post-secondary education. With the growing public awareness of the ID, there has been recognition of their need for post-secondary educational opportunities. This was an unforeseen result for a population that has been associated with elementary levels of education, yet the reasons are compelling. After aging out of the school system, the ID need and deserve educational and social support as much as anyone. Moreover, the commitment to diversity in higher education rings hollow if this group is excluded. Yet, challenges remain to integrating the ID into a college curriculum. This presentation focuses on the role of academic libraries. Neglecting this vital resource for the support of the ID is not to be thought of, yet the library's contribution is not clear. Library collections presume reading ability and libraries already struggle to meet their traditional goals with the resources available. This presentation examines how academic libraries can support post-secondary ID. For context, the presentation first examines the state of post-secondary education for the ID with an analysis of data on the United States compiled by the ThinkCollege! Project. Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and statistical analysis will show regional and methodological trends in post-secondary support of the ID which currently lack any significant involvement by college libraries. Then, the presentation analyzes a case study of a book club at the Florida Atlantic University (FAU) libraries which has run for several years. Issues such as the selection of books, effective pedagogies, and evaluation procedures will be examined. The study has found that the instruction pedagogies used by libraries can be extended through concepts of Universal Learning Design (ULD) to effectively engage the ID. In particular, student-centered, participatory methodologies that accommodate different learning styles have proven to be especially useful. The choice of text is complex and determined not only by reading ability but familiarity of subject and features of the ID's developmental trajectory. The selection of text is not only a necessity but also promises to give insight into the ID. Assessment remains a complex and unresolved subject, but the voluntary, sustained, and enthusiastic attendance of the ID is an undeniable indicator. The study finds that, through the traditional library vehicle of the book club, academic libraries can support ID students through training in both reading and socialization, two major goals of their post-secondary education.

Keywords : academic libraries, intellectual disability, literacy, post-secondary education

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