Exploring access to teacher education through distance for students with disabilities

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Purpose of Study

To interrogate the nature of institutional resources & forms of support available to DE students with learning disabilities
Gaps in Literature

• There is a dearth of research in relation to DE students (Moisey, 2004)
• Lack of information whether DE is reaching disabled students (Kim-Rupnow, Dowrick & Burke, 2001)

Introduction

• History of basic education
• Basic education & separate streams (mainstream & special education
• HE- mainstraming
LEGISLATION & DISABILITY

• 1992 Lawyers for Human Rights launched Disability Rights Charter of South Africa
• Underpinning disability rights are the following legislations

LEGISLATION AND DISABILITY

HISTORY OF UP

• Has six campuses, nine faculties and one business school
• It has about 63,500 students (44,000 contact, 20,000 distance & ± 3000 international)
• One of the institutions that has endorsed the White Paper 6 on inclusive education

FACULTY OF EDUCATION

• The faculty has ± 23,000 students (3,800 contact and 19,395 distance education)
• DE trains ±16,000 practicing teachers (70% women, 60% over 35 years and most from rural areas)
Unit for distance education (UDE)

- UDE was established in 2000
- Programmes in UDE
  - B.Ed (Honours) Education Management
  - ACE Education Management
  - ACE Special Needs Education
- Other distance qual. PhD and M.Ed

STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS @ UP

- Department of Student Affairs
- It is divided into:
  1. Office of Dean of students
  2. Student Development (Student governance)
  3. Student Support
- Student Support has three divisions
DEPARTMENT OF STUDENT AFFAIRS

Centralised services (Main Campus)
1. Student Health Services (primary health care)
2. Counselling Unit (psychotherapy and crisis intervention)
3. Disability Unit/ Unit for Students with Special Needs (services to all disabled students)

UNIT FOR STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

– Became specialised unit in 2003
– Has 3 staff members
– 2008- it reported to have 350 disabled students, currently 370 students
– Majority of students visually impaired
– Currently records reflect 370 disabled students –
– Distance education students- not specified
### STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disability</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Auditory</td>
<td>Deaf (complete)</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hard of hearing</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other hearing impairments</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visual</td>
<td>Blind (legal blindness)</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Visual impairments e.g. cataracts</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neurological</td>
<td>processing information/ communication</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Speech impairments [Augmentative device (AAC)]</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical / mobility restriction</td>
<td>Quadriplegic (other wheelchair ridden problems)</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning</td>
<td>e.g. Dyslexia</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Not specified</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total students accessed by UDE ADMIN STAFF</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>269</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### UNIT FOR STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

Services offered by disability unit
- Provide study material in accessible format e.g. braille printing and large prints
- Liaise with departments and faculties for tests/ exam papers
- Develop strategies for marketing services of the unit campus wide
- Conduct assessment for prospective applicants to the university
UNIT FOR STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

- Arrange special placement in wheelchair-friendly residents
- Organise awareness weeks as part of advocacy
- Provide letters for extra-time, test venues & recommend proper medical assessment
- Distance education students - where do they feature?

FORMS OF SUPPORT PROVIDED

IT Support for visually impaired learners
- OCR Scanning software (fine reader- edit documents)
- WYNN reader (reading)
- Electronic books (media files)
- Infrastructure: Providing access (wheelchair ramps; lifts)
- Education Campus in the process...
Findings

- The Unit for Students with Special Needs is under staffed
- No proper records exist to indicate the actual number of DE students with disabilities
- Only one student with visual disability has graduated in 2009
- Facilities to assist DE students are only situated on the main campus
- If DE has been recognized as a means of reaching out to the disadvantaged in SA, then HEIs involved in DE should reach out to more disabled students in their marketing

THANK YOU!

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