

Teamwork creates best assistive technology plans

Kathy Weise / ECOMP 5007 / October 1, 2007

The video titled "Building the Team: Faculty, Staff, and Students Working Together" focused on the necessity of teachers, students, and student services staff working together as a team to provide the best accommodations for the student's success. Students have a personal responsibility to express their own needs. They must contact the disabled student services office (often called DSS) and notify them that they are requesting services. They need to provide documentation that substantiates their eligibility and start with what they think are needed accommodations. This may be accommodations that have worked for them in the past. This may sound like a familiar process for anyone who has gone through a screening and IEP development process for special education in the K-12 environment, but many college students are unaware of the process and do not have the self-advocacy skills. Often a parent or other adult worked with the special education department to meet and develop the IEP. Some colleges provide self-advocacy skill training. The important thing is that students need to understand that it is their responsibility to request services and to communicate and work with teachers themselves. (Univ. of Wash. video)

The steps required in a college program are not that different that in the K-12 schools. Preassessment, collaborative problem-solving, effective implementation, and systemic evaluation are the steps necessary for a successful assistive technology program. Once the team is brought together they need to ask "How is assistive technology going to help this student participate and make progress toward his or her goals?" The disabled student services coordinator can assist by overseeing the documentation, implementation and assessment of the accommodations to ensure the student is receiving the best plans for their success. (Marino, 2006)

The student and teacher may need training in using the assistive technology and particularly if there are many configurable options. In a 2001 Learning & Leading with Technology article, Seegers noted that some users were impressed with the newer versions of software's capabilities to create flexible environments that enabled students to create individualized tools. This requires a certain amount of expertise and training to be successful. I think we have seen the complexity of software grow which highlights the need for knowledgeable resources to assist in fine-tuning implementations. It is not just a matter of installing the software and turning it on.

Under ADA, students have rights to accommodations and equal access, but they do not have rights to additional access beyond what a non-disabled student would have. The video gave several examples of reasonable accommodations for students with specific disabilities. This is definitely a good starting point for suggestions and discussion with the team. The disabled student services coordinator acts as a facilitator for the three-way team. Usually once students initiate the discussion with teachers about what accommodations they need, they can continue to work directly with them. If teachers do not have a lot of experience with accommodations they may need assistance in determining how to provide additional assistance and to gain an understanding that they do not lower the class content, quality or standards in providing any accommodations. It is important for teachers to understand that they "do not need to compromise their standards for a rigorous curriculum." (Univ. of Wash. video) The alterations made for some, in an effort to enable all students to achieve high academic standards, may impact everyone in the class, "either directly as a personal user of assistive technology, or

indirectly, as a means of helping someone we know." (Murray, 2005)

Professors cannot directly address a disability that has not been identified. They can open the door with suggestions for assistance and provide that information on the course syllabus. (Univ. of Wash. video)

In addition to equal access there are benefits of a student's self-esteem if provided the appropriate resources to learn. It allows a student to feel they have control over their education and this becomes very important as they progress into higher education. (O'Donnell, 2005)

I plan to contact the high school special education director and the 504 coordinator and share these video resources and talk to them about teaching students self-advocacy skills and about how the disabled student services offices operate on a college campus. Whether a student is college-bound or not, self-advocacy skills will be a benefit their entire life. Even if a student does not transition to college immediately, an understanding that disability accommodations need to be clearly stated is a life skill that could benefit any adult with a disability.

This video highlights the importance of students learning how to request accommodations and services for equal access to education. It also highlights the benefits of a team approach involving the student, the teachers, and the disabled student services coordinator to develop and monitor the optimum plan to ensure student learning.

References

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