Examining funding, accessibility, and awareness for

students with disabilities at the University of California, Irvine

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My intention is that this research contributes to the ongoing efforts to address the challenges faced by students with disabilities, the need to provide more funding for the UC disability service centers and promote a more inclusive educational environment.

I dedicate this research paper to all students with disabilities. May you always remember that you have rights and are worthy of expressing your needs to obtain the resources necessary for your academic success.

ABSTRACT

In recent years, there has been an unprecedented increase in the number of students registering for disability services at the University of California system. Although funding mechanisms have provided improved access and quality of higher education, less is known about how the rise of students with disabilities has impacted the practices, services, and resources in proportion to the budget of the UC Disabled Student Services. This research study uses a mixed-method approach to examine financial resources availability, accessibility, and awareness for students with disabilities from 2018-present at UC Irvine's Disability Service Center. The findings show that the average amount allocated per student decreased during the last five years, making it insufficient to accommodate students' needs. In addition, data from surveys, interviews, UC advocacy groups, and UC reports reveal inadequate access to physical and digital services and poor mental health support. In addition, data shows a lack of awareness among staff and faculty to support and respect students with disabilities. Therefore, it is recommended that UC Irvine increase the disability service budget to allow more services and resources for students with disabilities. Also, it is suggested that all staff, faculty, and students receive disability sensitivity training to create a more inclusive environment.

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INTRODUCTION

The University of California system has experienced an unprecedented surge in student enrollment for disability services in recent years. Although funding mechanisms have provided improved access and quality of higher education, less is known about how the rise in students with disabilities has impacted the practices, services, and resources in proportion to the budget of the UC Disabled Student Services Offices. Since the enactment of three major pieces of legislation, namely Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) in 1990, and the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act (ADAA) in 2008, there has been an upsurge in the number of students with disabilities pursuing higher education. Consequently, the University of California Office of the President has reported that the number of students registering for disability services at the University of California system has increased at an unprecedented rate ("Supporting students with disabilities at the University of California," 2020). The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) states that approximately 19% of undergraduate students and 12% of graduate students in the United States reported having a disability ("Students with disabilities," n.d.; Welding, 2023).

However, research shows that the true numbers are higher because some students do not reveal their disabilities to their higher education institutions. Therefore, these numbers do not include the students reluctant to disclose their disabilities ("A majority of college students with disabilities do not inform the school, new NCES data show," 2022). Approximately 63% of students never report their disability to their college (Welding, 2023). With more students with disabilities accessing higher education, the need for equity and inclusion becomes even more essential. Initially, many higher education disability service centers were not created to promote inclusion. Rather, they responded to the new legislation. To comply with these laws, colleges,

and universities began providing reasonable accommodations and support services for disabled students.

Nevertheless, simply following legal requirements is insufficient to promote inclusion. Disability service centers must also acknowledge and proactively and creatively address the unique needs and obstacles that disabled students face. Forming a culture of inclusion means going beyond compliance and doing what is essential to create an inclusive culture for every student, including those with disabilities. For instance, an institution meets the standard of accessibility by providing a ramp entrance to a building. Nonetheless, it is not fully inclusive when that ramp requires disabled individuals to take a roundabout route to find it (Hill et al., 2020). As a result, some of the disability services centers tend to provide only the bare minimum of what is required by law.

Students with disabilities must receive accommodation as mandated by the ADA and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Accommodations are modifications or alterations of university aids to give disabled students an equal opportunity to gain from those benefits despite the limitations experienced by the impairments of their disabilities. One must be a disabled person to be protected by the ADA. Therefore, a disabled person can be defined as one with a record of impairment with a physical or mental condition that remarkedly limits one or more life activities. ("Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, as amended," n.d.). However, inclusion means more than adherence to legal rules. It means empowerment and involvement in which the intrinsic worth and dignity of everyone are recognized. An inclusive college ensures a sense of belonging while respecting its members' abilities, backgrounds, beliefs, and ways of living. Belonging is feeling valued, appreciated, and empowered in academic, professional, and personal endeavors ("Diversity and inclusion definitions," 2023).

To promote inclusion, the disability service centers need to provide additional support and resources for disabled students that allow them to fully engage in every aspect of college life. By ensuring that disabled students have access to more services, academic programs and resources, and campus facilities, the center can promote a sense of community and belonging for disabled students.

Research shows that when students feel like they are excluded and do not belong, there is an increased risk of dropping out. Particularly, disabled students attending college for the first time have a 25 percent dropout rate at the end of the first year and a 35 percent dropout rate by the second year. Therefore, shaping the culture of higher education by promoting inclusion is critical to ensure these students have the same opportunities as non-disabled students (Shaewitz & Crandall, 2020).

UCI Disabled Student Center

The goal of all UC DSCs is to support students with disabilities so they can engage fully in campus programs and activities ("Students with disabilities," n.d.). Students with disabilities meet and register with the disability services office to determine their needs, obtain documentation to receive services, resources, and access necessary accommodations. Once the disabled student registers, the student's faculty and lecturers receive notification of the disability status and necessary accommodations ("Supporting students with disabilities at the University of California," 2020).

Students with documented permanent and temporary disabilities are entitled to services and accommodations from UCI DSC. These entail reasonable accommodations, individualized support services, and auxiliary aids. Accommodations and services are determined based on disability documentation, functional limitations, and a collective assessment of needs. The type

of a student's disability determines the services and resources offered to them ("Supporting students with disabilities at the University of California," 2020).

Some of the services and accommodations offered by UCI DSC include priority registration for classes, testing accommodations: (e.g., extended time, separate location, reduced distraction environment), assistive technology (e.g., note-taking tools, text-to-speech software, etc.), course notes (note taking assistance), readers, scribes, sign language interpreters, assistive listening devices, limited transportation services (e.g., wheelchair, scooter, knee walker, Ring Road Rides), housing accommodations (recommendations), and disability management counseling [1] ("List of accommodations," n.d.).

While mandated accommodations have traditionally fostered accessibility for students in higher education, they are also a stark example of ableism ("Ableism," n.d.) because they focus on how students with disabilities are deficient rather than how to encourage success for all students. When a person or institution is ableist, they hold a set of beliefs or practices that marginalize and discriminate against those with intellectual, physical, or mental disabilities. The notion of ableism assumes that certain people need to be 'fixed' (Smith, n.d.). Furthermore, requiring medical proof before providing accommodation fosters the belief that disability is an unwelcome or unwanted attribute that must be eliminated instead of accepted. As such, UC's approach encourages ableism because it does not provide students with an equitable university experience in comparison to their non-disabled peers, nor does it frame accommodations as a matter of inclusion and equity (Shifrer & Frederick, 2019).

Alternative approaches, such as Universal Design, are designed specifically to create an environment that can be accessed, acknowledged, and used to a maximum extent by everyone,

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[1] See appendix for the full list of UCI DSC accommodations.

regardless of size, age, ability, or disability. The design of every building or service in an environment should meet the needs of all people who wish to utilize it. Designing an accessible, welcoming, and inclusive building that benefits everyone is an essential component of good design. Considering the diverse needs and abilities of everybody throughout the design process, Universal Design makes products, services, and environments that serve people's needs. Essentially, a universal design is a great design (What is universal design, 2020).

Although the University of California Office of the President (UCOP) claims that it promotes inclusiveness across the UC, some disabled students have voiced their concerns that they are not receiving the services and resources they need to succeed academically from the disability service centers. Additionally, students with disabilities feel unwelcome in higher education. Students are asking UCOP to adopt Universal Design to safeguard the highest quality of services for everyone, especially disabled students. (Cano, 2017; Lynch, 2020).

As a result, my expectation is that UCI students and faculty lack awareness regarding how to best accommodate students with disabilities. Furthermore, I expect that the DSC lacks the resources and the funding to meet the needs of students with disabilities, negatively impacting their ability to succeed academically. In the next section, I discuss my data which includes official UC reports, original survey data, and interviews conducted with both staff and students. I also evaluate official records from the University of California generally and the UCI DSC specifically. In line with my expectations, my data makes clear that the student body and faculty on UCI's campus are unaware of the special challenges faced by students with disabilities. The lack of awareness contributes to disabled students' feelings of isolation, lack of belonging, and negative self-worth. I also find that contrary to the DSC's stated missions, they are unable to secure an inclusive campus due to an insufficient budget and lack of resources which further

marginalizes students with disabilities. In the Discussion and Conclusion, I summarize my findings, discuss the limitations I faced, and offer recommendations on how to best achieve true inclusivity for disabled students.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In reply to the growing need to protect students with disabilities, many policies and laws have been created. This literature review studies the policies and laws at the federal and state level as well as the University of California's (UC) regulations, to guarantee equal access and opportunities for UC students with disabilities.

Federal and State Laws:

The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 provide colleges with the structure they need for students with disabilities to succeed academically. These Acts lay out the minimum requirements necessary to ensure that college campuses meet federal and state guidelines regarding accessibility. For example, the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 prohibits discrimination based on disability in activities or programs that accept federal financial assistance from the DOE through Section 504. This section requires all colleges and universities to provide reasonable accommodations and modifications to policies and practices to ensure equal access to students with disabilities. ("Discrimination on the basis of disability," 2023). In 1990, through the ADA, the federal government offers further support for those with disabilities by extending Section 504's prohibition on discrimination to include state and local governments, irrespective of whether these entities accept federal financial assistance. ("State and local governments," n.d.). This means that it is illegal for any level of government to discriminate against people with disabilities. The ADA also prohibits discrimination based on disability by public entities, including colleges. It grants civil rights protections to individuals

with disabilities like those provided to individuals based on race, color, sex, national origin, age, and religion. It requires institutions to provide reasonable accommodations and equal access to programs, services, and activities. ("Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, as amended," n.d.). For example, federal agencies, including schools, are obliged to make electronic and information technology equally accessible to people with disabilities (MacDonald, n.d.).

California Laws:

Federal requirements are often given extra support within individual states. California, for example, enforces its own laws and regulations to protect students with disabilities. The California Fair Employment and Housing Act (FEHA) bans discrimination based on disability in employment, housing, and other specified areas. It applies to both public and private colleges and universities in California. California Education Code Section 67302 requires postsecondary educational institutions, including the University of California, to provide equal access and opportunity for students with disabilities, including reasonable accommodations and academic adjustments. In addition, these laws mandate that the UC must provide an electronic format of printed instructional materials at no additional cost to the student and provide them in a timely manner (ibid.). California Government Code Section 11135 prohibits discrimination based on disability by any program or activity that receives financial assistance from the state. It applies to public colleges and universities in California (ibid.). Lastly, the California Education Code Section 67310 law requires all public colleges and universities in California to provide students with disabilities equal access to educational opportunities, including access to academic programs, reasonable accommodations, and the right to file complaints regarding disability discrimination. ("FindLaw," 2019).

University of California Policies

Building on the state and federal laws, UC has policies to protect students with disabilities by providing equal access to educational opportunities. These policies are often intended to comply with state and federal laws pertaining to disability rights. UC policies play a crucial role in protecting the rights of students with disabilities by fostering a campus culture that values diversity and accessibility for all students.

For example, the Information Technology Accessibility policy supports and encourages accessible IT at the University of California campuses, making sure that a broad and diverse population can access and receive benefits from electronic services and programs "Information Technology Accessibility," 2017). Furthermore, the Emotional Support Animals in Housing Policy recognizes the need for emotional support animals to assist students with psychological conditions to help alleviate stress and anxiety ("UC Irvine administrative policies and procedures," 2023). Finally, The University of California Policy PACAOS-140 prohibits discrimination against students with a mental or physical disability or a medical condition. The UC policy forbids retaliation for filing a complaint of discrimination or harassment. ("Guidelines applying to nondiscrimination on the basis of disability," 2020). Together, with state and federal guidelines, the UC works to create an inclusive environment that respects the human rights of students with disabilities.

Yet, colleges are not obligated to provide certain accommodations if they would incur costs that would be an administrative or financial burden ("Students with disabilities preparing for postsecondary education: Know your rights and responsibilities," 2020). However, if the college is able to opt-out of providing some services because it would be administratively or financially burdensome, then students with disabilities are left without the tools they need to

succeed academically. Ultimately, this means many students with disabilities face greater financial hardship than students without disabilities.

Financial Challenges for College Students with Disabilities:

College students with disabilities face significant barriers to accessing financial assistance because of conflicting eligibility requirements of different funding sources. Students receiving funding from vocational rehabilitation or social security agencies may have difficulty obtaining financial aid from their schools or participating in student internships. Also, students often must cover their own costs for accessible housing and medical needs not covered by existing agencies. Therefore, low-income and minority students in higher education institutions (HEIs) especially experience financial hardship. These students receive poor service, especially those students who are deaf, as some institutions do not fund human support, such as sign-language interpreters and note-takers ("Funding and inclusion in higher education institutions for students with disabilities," 2019). The lack of awareness of increased student financial assistance based on self-paid disability-related expenses further exacerbates the financial burden on students (Moore, 2003).

While the number of higher education opportunities for students with disabilities, particularly those with intellectual disabilities, continues to grow, the financial implications of accessing these opportunities are not explicitly addressed (Shpigelman et al., 2021). The cost of higher education is a significant barrier to students with disabilities, who may need additional support and housing. The creation of programs such as the Transition and Postsecondary Program for Students with Intellectual Disabilities (TPSID) provides opportunities for inclusion but does not address the financial resources these students need to fully engage in higher education (Shpigelman et al., 2021). Tuition, housing costs, transportation costs, and support

services can create financial challenges that prevent people with disabilities from pursuing higher education. A common theme across sources is the lack of funding for disability services. Around the world, there is insufficient funding for disability services at institutions of higher education, resulting in long waiting lists, limited professional support, and understaffing (Cronin & Bourke, 2017).

As a result of DS Offices facing limited financial resources and lack of institutional support and the means, it is difficult for them to create an environment of inclusivity. Most schools do not give enough funding to DS Offices in proportion to the increasing number of students with disabilities registering for services. (Loewen and Pollard 2010). The scarcity of financial resources hinders the provision of necessary housing, assistive technologies, and inclusive infrastructure, thus impeding equal access and opportunities for people with disabilities. In addition, limited funding restricts extensive training of professionals and research and development in disability services.

Addressing the lack of financial resources for disability services is crucial for governments, organizations, and communities to prioritize and allocate sufficient resources. This includes reassessing budget allocations, exploring alternative sources of funding, and targeting resources to areas of greatest need (Cronin & Bourke, 2017). Higher education institutions can seek external funding, apply for grants or partnerships, and advocate for increased budget allocation to support disability services and housing (Bryan & Myers, 2006). Partnering with disability advocacy groups or charitable foundations can help secure additional funding for inclusive initiatives (ibid.). By investing in these resources, universities can ensure that students with disabilities have access to the necessary assistive technology and housing to thrive (Bakken et al., 2019).

The lack of funding for disability services poses significant challenges in ensuring that accessibility is a critical aspect of the full participation of people with disabilities in society. Other factors, such as reduced course loads, lengthened semesters, and difficulties in taking tests and writing scholarship essays, also hinder students' access to financial aid and educational opportunities. Discrimination against graduate school assistants with disabilities further exacerbates the problem and creates financial constraints for students with disabilities (Moore, 2003).

Ensuring Accessibility

Accessibility is crucial for the full participation of people with disabilities in society. Disability-related factors such as reduced course load, lengthened semesters, difficulties taking exams and writing scholarship essays, and the inability to participate in dual majors make it difficult for students to access financial assistance. Discrimination against graduate school assistants with disabilities further limits their ability to access financial aid, creating further financial constraints for students with disabilities (ibid.). Accessibility barriers can prevent students with disabilities from fully participating in and benefiting from campus educational offerings and resources. Universities must prioritize accessibility and remove the obstacles for students with disabilities. Therefore, implementing universal design principles in developing intelligent classrooms, laboratories, libraries, and campuses ensures that all students, regardless of their disabilities, can use these environments effectively. Higher education institutions should incorporate accessibility features such as wheelchair ramps, Braille signage, closed captioning or transcription services, and adaptive technology to promote equal access for all students (Bryan & Myers, 2006).

In many settings, including public spaces, transportation systems, and buildings, inefficient accessibility features make navigation and full participation difficult for people of different abilities. Inadequate ramps, elevators, accessible parking, tactile guidance, and other essential facilities exclude those with mobility, sensory, or cognitive impairments. This lack of accessibility limits social inclusion, independence, and equal participation in different aspects of life. Addressing this issue requires comprehensive accessibility regulations, standards, and guidelines that ensure that universal design principles are incorporated into all aspects of the built environment (Shpigelman et al., 2021). Additionally, raising awareness of accessibility and advocating inclusive practices can foster a more inclusive society. Chiang indicates that despite efforts to establish inclusive one-stop shops, the understanding of inclusivity among the DSCs studied is limited. Inclusivity is closely related to accessibility, which remains a major challenge as there are still physical and architectural barriers in the academic environment. The lack of accessibility prevents students with disabilities from fully participating in academic activities and detracts from their educational experience (ibid.).

A lack of awareness and accommodation among faculty, staff, and students about disability-related issues can hinder the creation of an inclusive environment. It is important to educate and raise awareness about disabilities, accessibility, and the rights of people with disabilities. Campuswide training programs, workshops, and awareness campaigns can help address this issue. By fostering understanding and empathy, campuses can develop a supportive culture that embraces diversity and inclusivity (Bryan & Myers, 2006). Scholars argue that the development of a Disability Cultural Center can serve as a hub for raising awareness of disability, disability culture, and the experiences of people with disabilities. (Chiang, 2019). Through its programs, the center can educate the campus community and promote a

better understanding of disability-related issues. Events organized by the center, such as lecture series, workshops, and cultural celebrations, can encourage dialogue, challenge stereotypes, and create opportunities for learning and empathy. By collaborating with student organizations, academic departments, and campus offices, the center can engage a wide range of individuals and foster a more inclusive campus culture (ibid.).

Data Collection and Standardization

Insufficient and non-standardized data collection in the disability services space is a major challenge. Without standardized methods and metrics, comparing data across different providers or regions becomes challenging and makes trend identification and performance benchmarking difficult. The lack of standardized outcome data makes assessing the value and effectiveness of disability services difficult. Inadequate data collection hampers evidence-based decision-making and makes it difficult to effectively allocate resources and plan for future needs. Without reliable data, it becomes difficult to understand the specific needs of students with disabilities, measure the effectiveness of housing, and allocate resources appropriately. Improving data collection requires standardized tools, shared metrics, and electronic health records to collect and analyze information (Cronin & Bourke, 2017).

Campuses should prioritize the development of a robust data collection system that captures information about disability types, housing requests, usage patterns, and outcomes (Shpigelman et al., 2021). Collaboration between service providers, policymakers, and researchers is critical to the development and implementation of standardized data collection methodologies, data sharing, ensuring privacy, and promoting a data-driven decision-making culture. Improved data collection provides better insight into the effectiveness and efficiency of

disability services and informs policy development and resource allocation for better outcomes (Cronin & Bourke, 2017).

METHODOLOGY

The central question of my thesis is how has the increase in the number of students with disabilities affected the practices, services, and resources in proportion to the budget of the University of California, Irvine Disability Service Center? To answer this question, I examine budget data from the previous five years and compare it to the number of students. In addition, for a greater in-depth understanding of the challenges facing students with disabilities today, I also examined the statistical data from budget reports, the University of California reports, Regent meetings, the UCES survey, the Campus Climate survey, UC Access Now report, and UC Student Association report. The study has also scrutinized disability legislation related to students with disabilities to understand how these laws impact the provision of disability services.

While some of the aforementioned documents were available online, many were obtained through a public records request, including the UCI DSC budget and the DSC student data, which lists the disabled student population. Although I submitted many public records requests to the UCI Public Records Request Department, many of my requests received no response. This type of response usually means that such records do not exist.

In addition to using official documentation, I conducted an interview with the Director of UCI DSC to gain insight into the staff's priorities when accommodating students with disabilities. My interview with the DSC Director provided valuable insight into the human choices behind the statistics listed in the reports. Since each line item in the above reports has real-world implications for students with disabilities, understanding how the DSC staff makes

difficult decisions was essential. As a counterbalance to the institutional perspective, I also conducted an interview with the founder of UC Access Now to gain insight into how the DSC's procedures impact students with disabilities. I also conducted interviews with four disabled students from UCI to gain their perspectives on the effectiveness of the DSC's practices, services, and resources.

Finally, I created and distributed an original survey via Qualtrics, a software program developed specifically for collecting and analyzing data. The survey examined key issues gauging whether students can achieve academically with the resources and services provided by UCI DSC. The number of participants in this survey was 33 students with registered disabilities. I was unable to create a more comprehensive dataset due to students with disabilities being unwilling to participate. Additionally, some students expressed concern about retaliation from UCI, which inhibited them from participating in the study. To overcome some of the student's concerns and guarantee a sufficient student sample, I used my personal networks through online platforms, including Discord, email lists, and Signal. In addition, a physical flyer to promote the survey was also created and distributed at key locations such as UCI DSC. Furthermore, I prompted respondents to take the survey by offering them an opportunity to enter a drawing for a chance to win a gift card. The student interviewees received gift cards as compensation for their time.

In the following section, I use both quantitative and qualitative data to assess the present situation of disability services within the UC system. Through mixed methods, I explore the resources and services offered to students with disabilities to determine whether these resources are sufficiently assisting them in learning, developing, and producing in the highly competitive contemporary academic environment. The study also examines disabled students' perceptions of

how much they can succeed on campus. Lastly, the study identifies opportunities for improvement in the delivery of services for students with disabilities, which is explained thoroughly in the policy brief. Recommendations include more financial resources and sensitivity training for staff/faculty and non-disabled students.

RESULTS

Lack of Awareness

On the University of California, Irvine's (UCI) Disability Services Center (DSC) website, it states that the Center's purpose is to "empower students to maximize their abilities" and to help them "thrive" in the "global community." The website lists the Center's "Core Competencies," which include creating "a culture of inclusion and access" to UCI's programs, "design[ing] and implement[ing] an inclusive, equitable, and accessible" environment, to "promote increased awareness of disability as diversity" on campus, and to "provide reasonable accommodations ("Mission and core competencies," n.d.).

According to the data, the DSC is falling short in its aims to meet all these goals. One consequence of this is that students with disabilities are unaware of the services available, which means they struggle to feel like they belong on campus and have their needs met. According to Hurtado (2012), students with disabilities feel included in campus life, they are more likely to succeed academically. Typically, students who feel a sense of belonging tend to excel academically (Hurtado et al., 2012).

However, my data shows that many UCI students with disabilities do not feel like they belong to the campus community. For example, one student said they experience challenges integrating into campus life because their disabilities make "it difficult to communicate with other people." Another student stated that because their disabilities are not visible, they "worry"

that their "professors or friends" will think they are making up their symptoms. The feelings expressed by these two students are reflected in trends from my survey, which shows that over 32% of students either disagree or strongly disagree with the statement, "Students with a disability or condition like mine are respected on this campus." The data indicates that students on UCI's campus do not feel like they belong to the broader campus community. This contradicts the DSC's core competency which aims to create an environment where disabled students feel accepted by including them in "all UCI programs, services, activities, events, and facilities" ("Mission and core competencies," n.d.).

One way to promote inclusion on campus is for DSC and other campus entities to alert students with disabilities of opportunities available to them offered by UCI programs and departments. For example, the UCI Student Wellness and Health Promotion office often host workshops and training dedicated to improving the mental health of students on campus. According to data I received through a UCI public records request, UCI indicates that 60.5% of students registered with the DSC have a psychological disability (UCI public records, email communication, March 5, 2023). Furthermore, students with mental health-related disabilities are especially vulnerable to feeling like outsiders since their illnesses are rarely visible. One student said that they were "made to feel" that they were "exaggerating" their condition "or that it was not a big deal." As such, access to the workshops and training offered by UCI Student Wellness and Health Promotion office can assist these students in not only feeling like they belong but also help them to manage their symptoms. The DSC, which has access to the email addresses of all registered disabled students, can make good use of that information to promote these opportunities and potentially help students.

Moreover, many students must realize that the DSC offers its own services to help students succeed academically. A student advocacy group called the University of California Student Association (Cano, 2017) reports that one of the most significant problems on UC's campus is that students "lack awareness" of where "disability centers are." For example, a student mentioned in the report that they "didn't even know" where the disability center was until their second year (Cano, 2017). Furthermore, my survey shows that over 25% of students are not "aware of the services provided by the DSC" (See figure 1). Even though 75% of students do know about the DSC, the campus cannot truly be inclusive if a quarter of its population does not know that there are additional resources that will help them succeed.

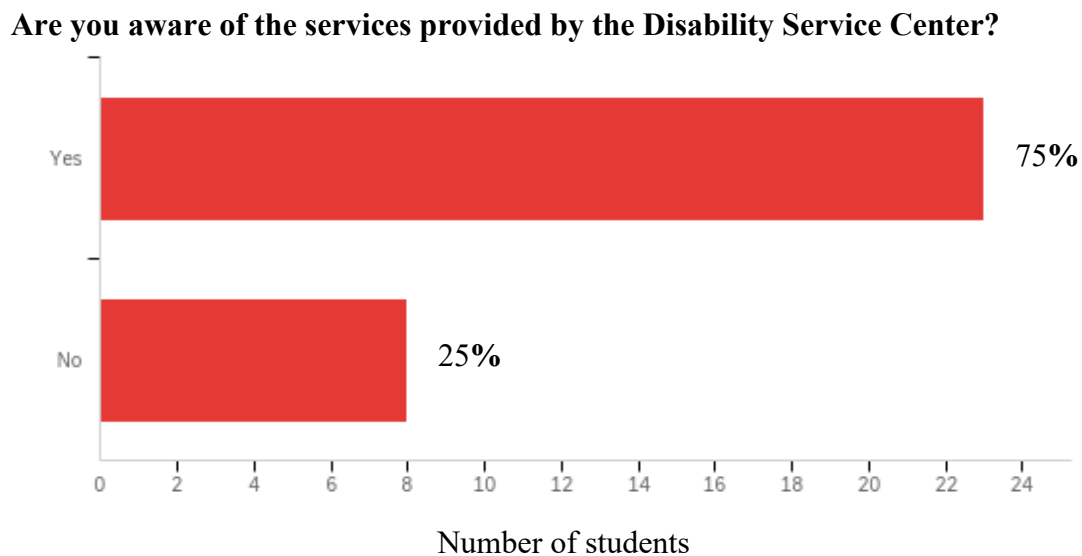**Are you aware of the services provided by the Disability Service Center?**

Figure 1. Number of students aware of DSC services.

While many people may know that disability centers are common on college campuses, UCI's student population is 60% first-generation ("About us," 2023). These students are the first in their families to attend college and therefore do not have access to the institutional knowledge that other families have. As a result, they are most likely unaware of the services available to them on campus.

Furthermore, students can benefit from the DSC teaching them about other campus offices that are available to them. For example, when a student does know about the DSC's services but is denied accommodation, they can appeal the decision with the Office of the Ombudsman. The Ombudsman is "an alternate channel for confidential, neutral, and informal resolution services." The office can help mediate between students, professors, and the DSC when the DSC is unable to secure the students' needed accommodations. However, many students with disabilities do not know that this office exists and is available for them to use.

UCI's DSC director echoed these concerns in an interview I conducted in March 2023. When asked what his greatest concerns regarding disabled students were, Adam Kasarda stated that "It's always inclusion, right?" He noted that on some campuses if there "wasn't a legal obligation" to provide services to students with disabilities, "those offices probably wouldn't exist." While Adam said that UCI strives to "create a culture of inclusion and access to all UCI" programming, when asked what the DSC is doing to accomplish this, he mentioned Zot Ability disability training. Zot Ability training is meant to create a more inclusive environment by asking participants to "challenge personal biases, provide awareness, and promote diversity" ("Zot ability ally," n.d.). However, when looking at the website for Zot Ability training, it shows no upcoming workshop dates.

These examples demonstrate how a lack of awareness of the needs of students with disabilities creates significant obstacles to their participation and ability to achieve their goals. Lack of awareness or understanding of students with disabilities makes it difficult for students with disabilities to feel included and supported in the campus community. Also, it contributes to negative attitudes and misconceptions toward students with disabilities, which creates an unwelcoming environment. According to a UCUES report, "60% of students with disabilities do

not feel respected on their campus" and experience challenges due to the stigma and discrimination created by ignorance ("UCUES 2018 survey administration report," 2019). The UCI Campus Climate survey states that 27 percent of undergraduate students with disabilities had seriously considered leaving UC, compared with 15 percent of undergraduate students without disabilities. In addition, 30 percent of graduate and professional students with disabilities considered leaving UC, compared with 19 percent of graduate/professional students without disabilities ("Campus climate project final report," 2014). As evidenced by the report, respondents with a disability generally were less comfortable with the environment on campus compared to respondents without disabilities.

The DSC can raise awareness by emailing all students at the beginning of each quarter detailing their services and location. Additionally, these emails could include programs, workshops, and services offered by other UCI programs and departments that may benefit the disabled student population. Although these opportunities may be announced on the UCI website or through other listservs, asking disabled students to hunt down these resources places an additional burden on an already burdened population. As a result, if the DSC compiled this information on its website and sent a link to the location each quarter, it would go a long way to raising awareness and promoting the inclusion of students with disabilities on campus.

Furthermore, professors are often unaware of how to best accommodate students with disabilities. While the DSC sends out accommodation notices, professors do not receive compulsory disability sensitivity training, which teaches them about different disabilities and how to make their courses more inclusive to all. For example, during an interview, one student with a psychological disability contacted their professor for accommodation. The professor "laughed at her" and "did not believe the student had a 'real' disability." The professors' reaction

caused the student to "spiral into a deep depression," which ultimately led to them "dropping out of the graduate program altogether." Unfortunately, this student's experience may not be too uncommon since professors are not required to take disability sensitivity training.

In some courses, a student's interaction with their professor is minimal because the Teaching Assistant (TA) handles most discussion sections. TAs are responsible for grading students' work and acting as students' primary point of contact. As such, students ask the TA to adjust deadlines if a student needs more time to complete the assignment. However, like professors, graduate students do not receive disability awareness or sensitivity training. Nevertheless, graduate student TAs and professors must take yearly courses on sexual harassment, safety protocols, cyber security, and ergonomics. Adding additional disability training would ensure that all campus employees are aware of the unique challenges faced by the disabled student population and how to assist students with disabilities.

According to UCSA, one of the most common themes among students with disabilities is the lack of support from professors. Students in their report expressed a feeling of "invalidation" stemming from the "attitudes and behaviors" of professors towards students with disabilities. Often, students with disabilities will react to a professor's behavior with "loss of concentration, interest withdrawal" and by "internalizing negative thoughts about oneself (i.e., self-victimization)," which further impacts their academic achievement. Ultimately, the professor's lack of awareness "creates confusion" as they "may not fully understand the legal requirements and ethical responsibility" they have towards students with a disability.

Students with disabilities also face significant challenges when integrating into campus life because non-disabled students lack awareness of the special challenges disabled students face. For example, according to the UCSA data, many disabled students experience microinsults

regularly. Microinsults, or "subtle snubs," reveal "hidden negative messages" to students with disabilities. These actions, which non-disabled students commit unconsciously, contribute to disabled students' negative feelings about themselves and their ability to integrate into campus life.

Furthermore, when the general student body lacks awareness about the needs of students with disabilities, the latter group must adjust their life to ensure they receive the proper accommodations. In the same report, one disabled student noticed that non-disabled "are not very clear about keeping disabled seats in class open." The non-disabled students may take the seats because they "want the extra space or want to be in the front of the class" (Cano, 2017), which makes life more difficult for students that need those seats due to a disability. Overall, the lack of awareness of the DSC's services by students with disabilities leads to their unmet needs. Similarly, a lack of awareness by professors and non-disabled students creates an environment where disabled students experience a general feeling of mistrust and lack of inclusion. Since DSC must make students with disabilities feel included on campus, they should be more proactive in ensuring all campus community members understand how to treat these students. In addition, DSC must educate professors on the importance of being more aware and sensitive to the needs of their disabled students. Ultimately, a lack of awareness, especially from faculty discriminating against students with disabilities, means some students experience denied accommodations.

Lack of Accessibility

The UCI campus and the other UC campuses pose significant accessibility challenges for students with disabilities, which can affect their ability to access resources to engage fully on campus and succeed academically. UCOP says this is "largely because of the lack of

consideration for this population in curriculum development and campus infrastructure design."

Lack of accessibility includes "a lack of wheelchair-accessible furniture, including desks in

lecture halls, exam tables in medical exam rooms, and tables in dining commons and event

halls" (UCOP, 2020).[2]

The ADA mandates that in a room with 65 seats, approximately 6% should be wheelchair

accessible. An unpublished paper by two UCI graduate students states that UCI has about 3,911

rooms open to students out of 27,262 rooms in 542 buildings across five campus areas. Within

each room were five types of seating arrangements (e.g., stadium seating) and five types of seats

(e.g., office chairs or traditional desks). The graduate students' survey found that, on average,

UCI did comply with ADA requirements by providing accessible seating (Muehlmann & Canty,

2022). However, on other campuses, like UC Davis, many rooms are not accessible to those with

physical disabilities. For example, in one building on UC Davis' campus, the only accessible

seating is at the back of the room. The *AGGIE*, the Davis school newspaper, correctly argues that

"this is unacceptable" because "all students should have the opportunity to talk with instructors

after class, turn in assignments and sit near the front of the classroom if they so choose" (the

Aggie, 2022).

One of my survey respondents illustrates an example of an accessibility issue by stating,

"I am in a wheelchair, and when I can't have a friend or family member wheel me around and

open doors for me, press elevator buttons, etc., it's difficult to ask strangers to do so as I do not

wish to burden them." Students who use wheelchairs should not have to ask for help to complete

basic tasks at UCI. Essentially, if a non-disabled student can do it, then disabled students should

be able to do so just as easily. In an article about UC Davis' accessibility, a member of the

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[2] UCOP report references UC Access Now, an advocacy group for students with disabilities.

Autism and Neurodiversity Community stated, "It's really telling when, say, you have the wheelchair-accessible entrance out in the back of a building along with the trash and the freight." (The Aggie, 2022). Placing a wheelchair-accessible entrance near the trash and the freight demonstrates a lack of regard and respect for disabled people in wheelchairs.

Indeed, some of UCI's infrastructure is inaccessible to students with disabilities. For example, many students at UCI report that repairs to broken elevators can take weeks and months to complete. Additionally, some public furniture is not wheelchair-friendly, either because it does not have an accessible surface or because seats are mounted to the floor. Finally, UCI's use of Starships (Starship Food Delivery App, n.d.), also known as Zot Bots, to deliver food and beverages to students across campus, disregards those with physical disabilities. Even though the Zot Bots are programmed to avoid collisions, they often come close to hitting people. Although this may be mildly annoying to someone who can see, it poses a significant safety risk to someone with low vision or who is completely blind, especially since these robots make little noise as they move around campus.

Furthermore, although UCI states that it "takes proactive measures" to ensure the campus is accessible, buildings constructed before the ADA may not be compliant. Instead, people with disabilities must alert UCI that a course, event, or meeting space is not compliant ahead of time so that the UC can move it to an accessible location. Therefore, the student, already burdened, bears the responsibility to remember which buildings and sites are accessible, to contact the organizers and the school then, and hope that moving the site to a more suitable location is possible (*Accessible Buildings // Accessibility // UCI*, n.d.). Ultimately, ADA compliance does not equate with accessibility as many "accessible" options, including entrances and elevators, are in "inconvenient" areas or "require traversing uneven pathways" (the Aggie, 2022).

Physical accessibility is only one hindrance disabled students face when going to school. The UC system also fails to meet digital or course accessibility expectations. UCOP argues that instead of striving for accessibility, campuses should aim for "Universal Design providing assistive technologies" that students with and without disabilities can use (UCOP, 2020). Universal Design also includes "developing and delivering [an accessible] curriculum" (UCOP, 2020). In doing so, the University would promote an "environment [that] is accessible, usable, convenient and a pleasure to use" that benefits everyone (UCOP, 2020).

According to UCOP, many disability service centers across the UC "have faced challenges in ensuring that faculty make their curricula accessible for students with disabilities in a timely manner." Most professors do not create their courses with accessibility in mind. UCOP states that "typically, a faculty member learns how to make their lectures or curricula accessible only in response to an accommodation request" (UCOP, 2020). As a result, both the physical design and many course curricula treat disabled students as an afterthought, further adding to their feelings of inferiority and invisibility.

One UCI professor, Dr. Stacy Branham, emphasizes the importance of teaching professors to make their classrooms fully accessible for students with disabilities. She states, "I want to create technologies that help us all by empowering people with disabilities to design them" (Alumna Stacy Branham Aims to Make the Digital Space Accessible to All, n.d.). By placing accessibility at the forefront, Universal Design promotes an equitable campus for all. Dr. Branham also teaches UCI professors and staff how to make their classes accessible. However, these initiatives are not yet campuswide. As a result, some students with disabilities do not receive equal access to resources to succeed.

However, even when professors do know about a student's disability and therefore are willing to accommodate their needs, the bureaucracy surrounding accommodation requests prevents timely service. For example, a deaf student contacted a professor who told them the DSC would contact the professor to arrange a sign-language interpreter for the course. Several days later, the student contacted the professor again to ask when the interpreter would be available. The professor felt surprised because DSC did not contact him. The professor expressed frustration and stated, "Sometimes it doesn't feel like the left hand knows what the right hand is doing." This incident highlights the difficulties students face when the DSC fails to communicate with the student about their professor regarding the student's accommodations.

One survey respondent stated that the structure of some classes exacerbates their disability, mainly when the course includes multiple midterms. The student said that "it would be nice if [students] could see the course syllabus" when registering so that they can better plan their quarter. Even though many professors do not finalize their syllabi until the quarter starts, this adjustment to course planning would help students with disabilities make better decisions about their quarters. Currently, a student must sign up for a course and hope the professor posts the syllabus before the drop deadline.

Denied Accommodations as Inaccessible Accommodations

Accommodations are intended to remove barriers and guarantee access to programs for all students with permanent or temporary disabilities. However, my findings show that some professors deny accommodations to students with disabilities in violation of federal law under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. For example, in Figure 2, 24% of students reported being denied accommodations by their professors. Although most respondents were not denied, the ADA is meant to ensure that all

students receive services. As such, it is concerning that nearly a quarter of students do not receive the accommodations guaranteed under the ADA.

While some professors denied accommodations to students, others pressured students not to utilize their accommodations. For example, one survey respondent reported that their professor "essentially guilted [them] into not taking extended test time in front of the class, saying that it was unfair to other students." As a result of this experience, this student no longer uses their testing accommodations. Furthermore, students denied accommodations or pressured not to take them often feel marginalized and discounted.

Has your professor ever denied you approved disability accommodations?
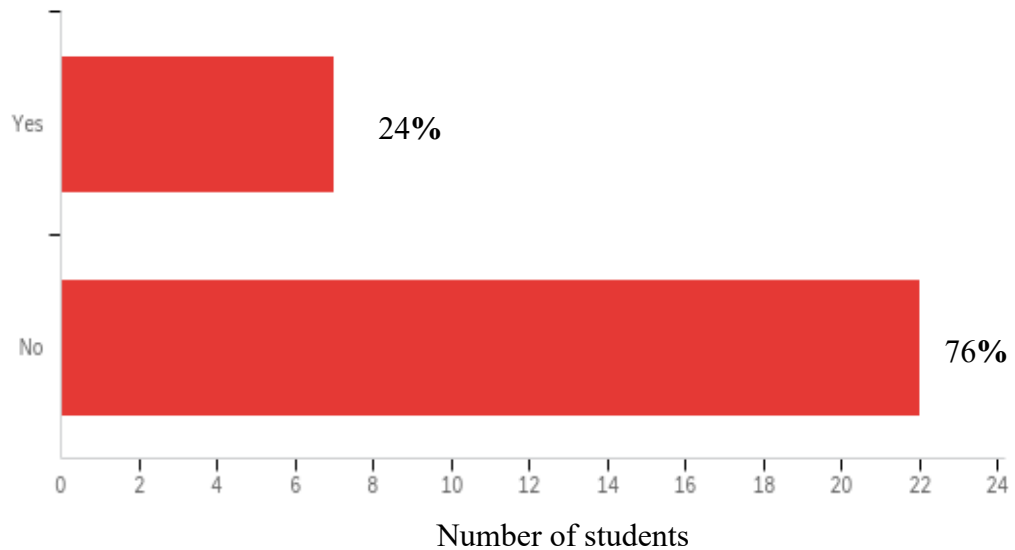

Figure 2. Number of students denied accommodations

In another example, a student's disability prevented them from attending every class. Although the professor approved these absences in advance, the professor still lowered the student's grade from A to C for not fulfilling the attendance requirements. Finally, in my survey and during interviews, multiple students stated they were denied additional time for assignments and testing accommodations.

One student was granted accommodations for an extended time to take a test in a distraction-reduced environment. During the first test, the student tried to take the test in the privacy of their own home, but the noise outside made it difficult to concentrate. Upon contacting the professor, they blamed the student and said, "You should have picked a quieter place to take the exam." When the student reached out to DSC about the professor's response, they sided with the professor and told the student to take the next exam at the disability center. However, on the day of the next exam, while walking to the DSC, the student noticed loud construction outside the DSC building, making it an unsuitable environment. Even though this student followed the professor's and the DSC's advice, they did not receive a distraction reduced environment as guaranteed under their accommodations.

Furthermore, in my survey, one of the students who identified as having ADHD shared they were denied accommodations by their professor to record lectures. The student experiences many challenges with memory, attention, and information processing; thus, not allowing the student to record lectures makes it challenging for them to absorb and retain information in class. Consequently, not having the recording tool caused the student to feel stress and anxiety, exacerbating their ADHD.

During an interview with the Director of UCI DSC, Adam Kasarda, on March 6, 2023, I asked about the procedure for a student denied accommodations by their professor. He stated that each situation is unique and therefore taken on a case-by-case basis. Adam also said that if a professor refuses to accommodate a student, the DSC will sometimes bring in the professor's department chair to help remedy the situation. However, in one instance where a student asked the DSC to advocate on their behalf, the professor still denied the student's accommodation

request even when confronted by the DSC. The student was left without accommodation as the DSC did not take any further action against the professor.

Students denied accommodations not only occurs at UCI but also at other UC campuses. In a survey conducted in 2017 by a student advocacy group called UCSA, UC students anonymously described their experiences interacting with their professors. They reported that professors denied accommodations to students with disabilities. A participating student in the UCSA survey said that some professors erroneously believe that students who ask for help or accommodations want to be treated or graded easier than non-disabled students. Another student stated that professors deny accommodations for students with psychological issues except when a student is suicidal. As mentioned in the previous section, lack of awareness contributes to problems with accommodations, and faculty denying these accommodations is a form of discrimination.

UCI must provide students with disabilities accessibility, so they have the academic and other resources to engage fully at their campus. Failure to provide accessibility significantly impacts the student's ability to succeed academically. In addition, by advocating for accessibility and universal design, UCI and the other campuses are modeling an inclusive and equitable environment for all students.

Renovating old buildings and making them ADA-compliant would require changes to the UCI budget. Also, constructing new buildings to make them universally assessable requires additional research and funding. Moreover, creating accessible course design requires training people and students in best practices, which takes time and money. Providing more financial resources for UCI DSC and the campus will enable more services and resources for students with disabilities.

Lack of Financial Resources

  After examining the data, it is evident that there is a lack of financial resources for the University of California, Irvine Disability Service Center (DSC), and students with disabilities. Data will show that UCI DSC does not receive sufficient funding through the state, extramural gifts, grants, and student services fees ("Supporting students with disabilities at the University of California," 2020). All the DSC funding comes from external sources, except for the student service fee called the Anteater Express Fee, a mandatory fee for all undergraduate students. One of the many purposes of the Anteater Express Fee is to supplement funding for disability services ("Description of tuition and fees," n.d.).

  A detailed accounting of the kinds of disabilities and their associated costs is unavailable. Therefore, the analysis below is limited to the total budget and the number of students registered, which the UCI Public Records Department provided through a public records request.

University of California, Irvine Disability Service Center budget in proportion to the total numbers of students with disabilities

Year	Total Actual Budget[3]	Total Number of Students	Average Cost per Student
2018	$1,374,657.90	1,851	$742.66
2019	$1,476,116.92	2,031	$726.79
2020	$1,648,886.27	2,121	$777.41
2021	$1,404,340.57	2,407	$583.44
2022	$1,760,382.65	2,714	$648.63

Table 1: Source KFS Organizational Ledger Summary; Disability Services Center Student Data

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[3] The amount actual spent and not amount proposed.

Table 1 provides an overview of the budget for the DSC and the average cost per student in the last five years, from 2018-2022. In 2018, the UCI DSC budget was $1,374,657.90, and the total number of registered students with disabilities was 1,851. By using the actual budget and the total number of students registered in 2018, the data show that, on average, the DSC allocated $742.66 per student. By 2022, there was a significant increase in registered students with disabilities, from 1,851 to 2,714. During this time, the DSC's budget increased to approximately $400,000. While the total budget for students with disabilities has increased annually except for 2021, Table 1 illustrates a $94.03 decrease in the amount allocated on average per student from 2018 to 2022.

It is possible that the students who registered between 2018 to 2022 have less costly needs. For example, during the pandemic, students had to engage in distance learning, and their home lives may not have been conducive to completing course requirements. Therefore, they may have registered with the DSC for accommodations (e.g., longer test times) but no other accommodations, which did not significantly increase the DSC cost per student. However, this explanation is unlikely because, as shown in the table above and according to a 2020 report by the UC Office of the President called "Supporting Students with Disabilities at the University of California," the budget was insufficient to accommodate the needs of students with disabilities, given unpredictable and extraordinary accommodation requests ("Supporting students with disabilities at the University of California," 2020). Moreover, even if students received less costly services such as accommodations for extended testing, these requests still incur a cost because the DSC test coordinator must process them.

According to the UCOP report, some campuses state that thousands of students request yearly test accommodations. As a result, these increased requests pose logistical and financial

challenges in coordinating test proctors. The UC report indicates that even the directors of the disability service centers echo the challenge of providing services in a timely manner. For instance, the centers report issues with providing note-takers because of the lack of availability, quality of the notes, and compensation. Consequently, as mentioned in the UC report, disability service centers throughout the UC are financially burdened because of the growing number of requests for accommodations. The directors of the UC disability service centers have expressed concerns about their inability to meet the needs of the disabled student population ("Supporting students with disabilities at the University of California," 2020).

Furthermore, students from all UC campuses have expressed similar concerns that the UC disability service centers need more funding. For example, on Thursday, April 6, 2023, students from all UC campuses spoke at the UC Regents meeting to voice their concerns about how their DSC's insufficient budget negatively impacts students with disabilities. For example, a member of the University of California Student Association (UCSA) said the organization collected testimonials from many students receiving accommodations and found many were experiencing long wait times, up to several months, due to understaffed DSCs. Another student echoed similar concerns about understaffing, stating that disability center specialists have an average caseload of 400 to 500 students, sometimes as many as 1,000. Moreover, the consensus among the students at the Regent's meeting is that understaffing has catastrophic consequences for students with disabilities because they are not receiving the support they need to succeed academically (University of California Board of Regents, 2023, 9:35; 16:38; respectively).

According to the UCI Public Records data, in 2022, there were 2,714 registered students with disabilities. However, there are only five UCI senior disability specialists. Therefore, each disability specialist has an average caseload of 543 students. Yet, according to data collected

from my survey via Qualtrics, almost 20% of students reported never going into the UCI DSC. Surprisingly, 0% reported going to the UCI DSC at least once a week. No student reported going to UCI DSC more than once a week. The survey suggests that although there is a heavy caseload for every senior disability specialist, over 20% of disabled students never contact UCI DSC (see Figure 3). Even after accounting for students who never contact the disability service center, the caseload per specialist is still high at approximately 435 students per specialist. As a result, students experience long wait times due to understaffing without getting the necessary services and resources.

Adam Kasarda, the UCI DSC Director confirmed that the center is experiencing understaffing issues. Adam said, "We're two counselors down right now, so we don't have a lot of bandwidth, unfortunately." In light of this information, it confirms UCI DSC is understaffed, reflecting the fact that the services they have been providing students with disabilities have not met their full potential. As a result, students with disabilities struggle and are not provided equal educational opportunities, violating disability laws, and setting the ground for further investigation into how to remedy this situation.

In March 2023, a student felt frustrated and anxious when told that due to understaffing, they would not be able to see a disability specialist until spring 2023. The student was having medical issues and wanted the counselor's support to speak on their behalf to their professor. The student had no choice but to communicate directly with the professor about their medical issues and advocate for themselves, which caused the student to experience unnecessary stress and anxiety. This student and other students in similar situations at the University of California (UC) feel discouraged, anxious, and marginalized when they have long wait times to see a disability specialist. Students must have timely access to disability services to achieve academic success.

Also, long wait times worsen existing mental health conditions. Some students may feel their

needs are unimportant and think UCI DSC is not prioritizing their well-being.

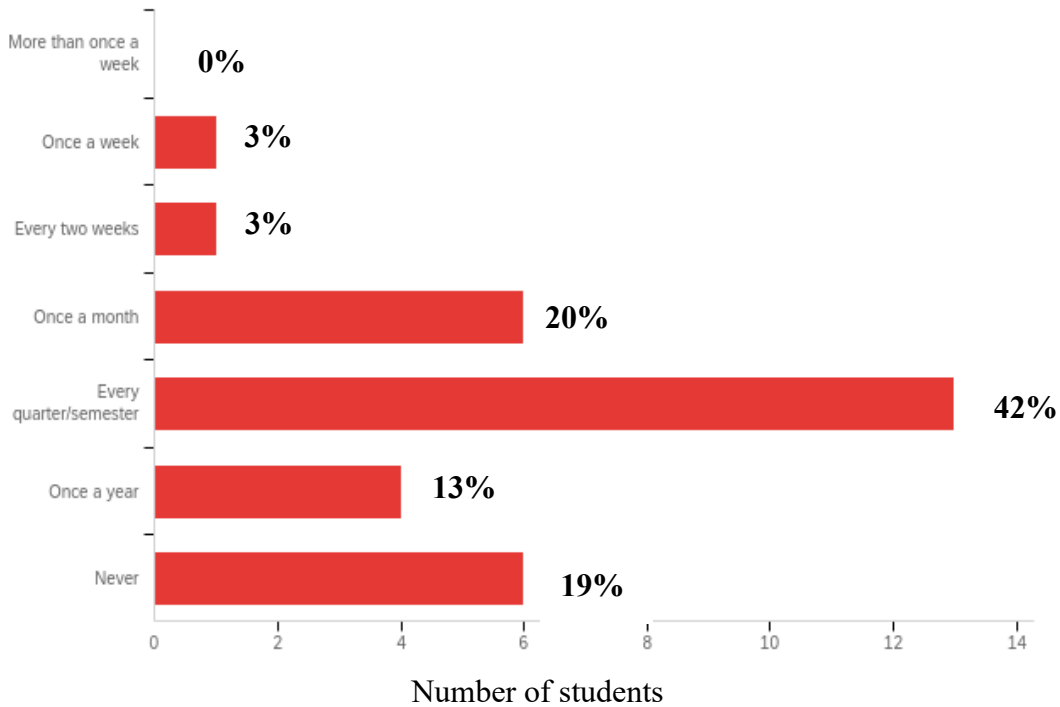**How frequently are you in contact with the Disability Service Center?**

Figure 3. Frequency in contact with DSC

      In addition to the lack of financial resources at the UCI DSC, some students with

disabilities also face a significant financial burden. According to my survey, 45% of students

responded "yes" when asked if they incur additional expenses because of their disability. Figure

4 shows that the most common expense incurred among students with disabilities is medical

related. However, disabled students also face additional costs related to food and housing

expenses and additional costs related to academics, like assistive technology and tutoring.

Although DSC does provide support with assistive technology, my survey suggests it does not

meet the needs of some students. As a result, about 10% of students incur additional assistive

technology expenses. Consequently, students with disabilities who are already under financial burden must bear further costs to continue their academics.

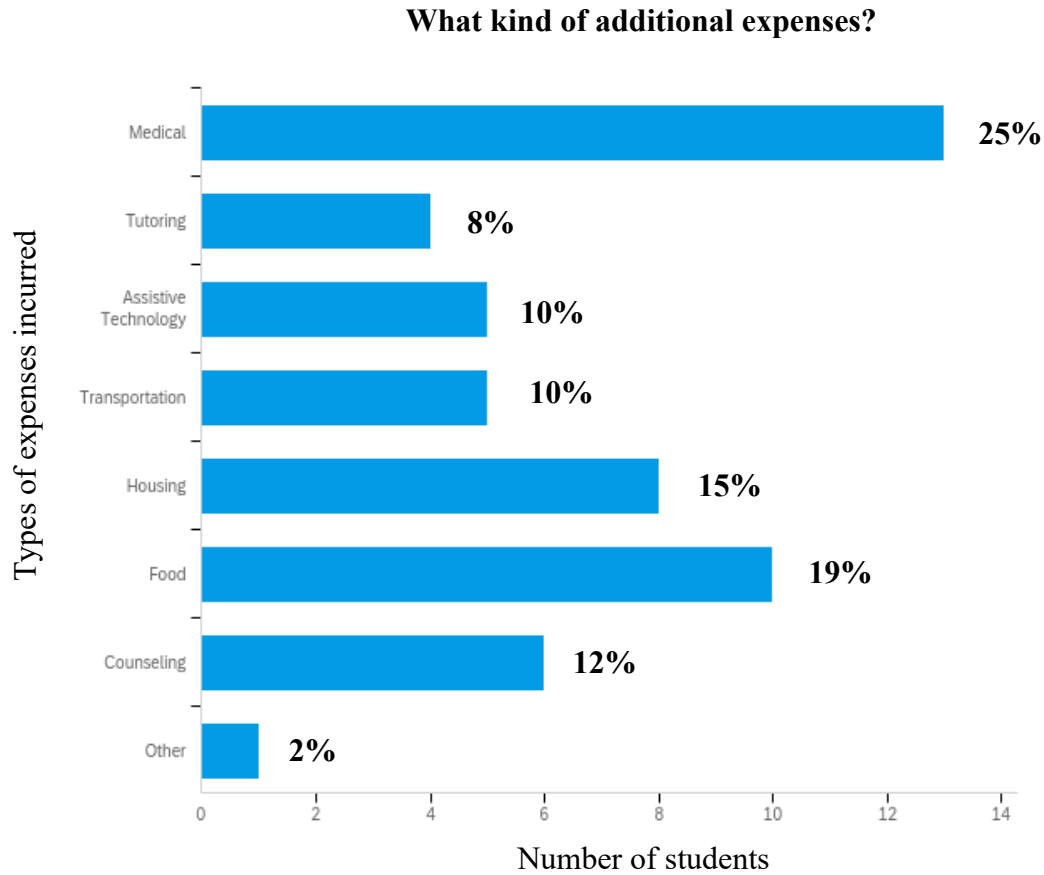**What kind of additional expenses?**

Figure 4. Additional expenses incurred

     Figure 4 shows about 69% of respondents said they experience great or some financial hardship due to their disability. Low-income disabled students, in particular, experience financial hardship. Given the financial burden for some students with disabilities, it is not surprising that, according to my survey, the most common resource that students would like more of is additional grants and scholarships. If the DSC or the campus broadly provided more scholarships and grants, it would help alleviate some of the financial burden that some students with disabilities face. The deficiency of financial resources for these students can cause significant

challenges to their academic success and general well-being since they experience additional stress.

Are you experiencing financial hardship from additional expenses incurred due to your disability?
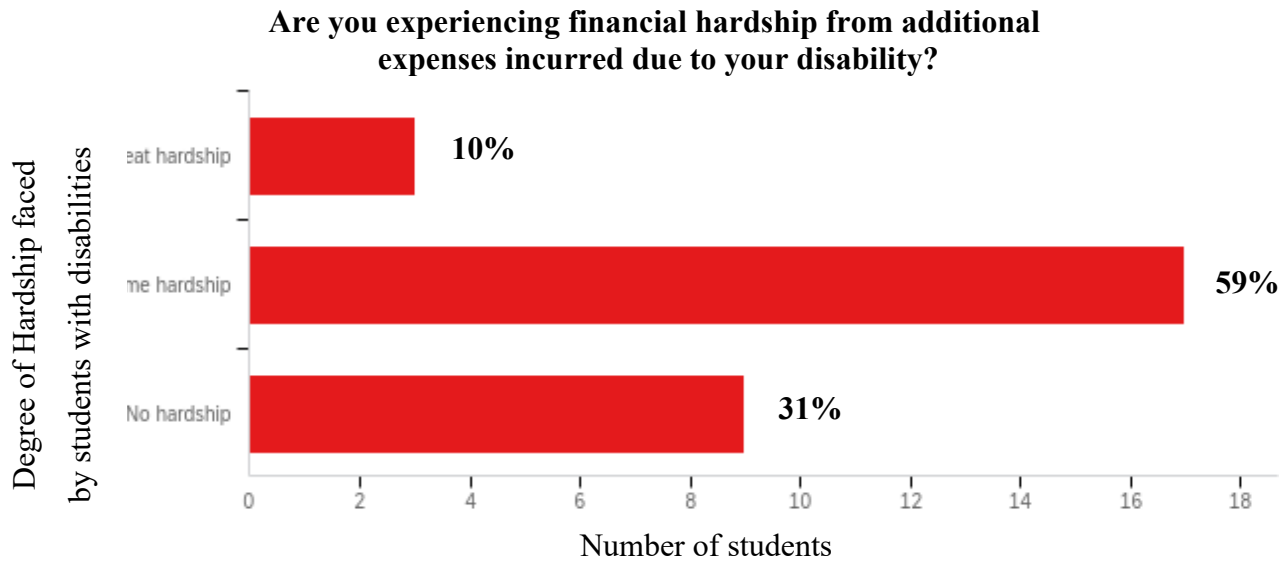

Figure 5. Financial hardship incurred

Furthermore, UCI DSC only reports a student's primary disability. According to Adam Kasarda, Director of UCI DSC, a student's primary disability is the one that has the greatest impact on the student's life. For example, if a student is on the autism spectrum but also has co-disabilities like ADHD and anxiety, the DSC would most likely list autism as the primary disability. DSC reports refer to additional disabilities, such as secondary and tertiary disabilities. Adam says that the level of disability, whether primary, secondary, or tertiary, does not matter because the accommodations typically remain the same. He said most of the time, the accommodations given for one disability remove the barriers presented by the other disabilities. For instance, students on the autism spectrum often need extra testing time to focus, which also helps the student manage their ADHD and anxiety.

My research shows that, on average, 79% of students have two or more disabilities. Furthermore, my findings suggest that the more disabilities a student has, the more accommodations they may need. For example, a student with ADHD, anxiety, and a learning disability may receive additional accommodations aside from extra testing time to focus. The student may also require assistive technologies and real-time captioning services, which incur extra costs for DSC. Because UCI DSC and UCOP only publicly report one disability (the primary), they may not be providing the fullest picture of all the student's disabilities, meaning the true average cost per student is unknown.

Due to the DSC's "limited student" data, the public and UC lack the information required to determine whether the DSC is properly funded ("Supporting students with disabilities at the University of California," 2020). For example, data collected through a public records request shows that the DSC separates all disabilities into nine categories, with "other" being the second highest (behind psychological), including 20-24% of the disabled student population between 2018-2023. When asked, the UCI DSC director stated the "Other" category includes everything from upper limb amputation to autoimmune disorders like lupus.[4]

Moreover, the UC Office of the President does not state in their reports the number of students with more than one disability and the types of disabilities. The UCOP report states that "systemwide data" about students with disabilities "is currently limited due to a lack of centralized data collection." UCI specifically, and the UC generally, are not accurately representing the diversity of the disabled student body by only listing a student's primary disability. Since my data shows that students with multiple disabilities incur additional personal

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[4] The DSC's chart can be found in the appendix along with data I collected via survey which shows the variety of disabilities students have that are not listed in the DSC report.

expenses, it is also likely that UC incurs additional expenses, which should be reflected in their budget.

Percentage of students with one disability vs. multiple disabilities
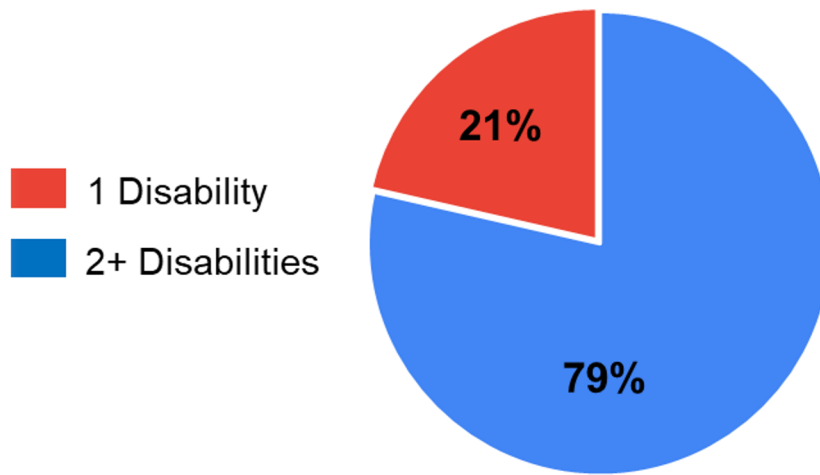
21%

1 Disability
2+ Disabilities

79%

Figure 6. One disability vs. multiple disabilities

It is evident from the data received from the 2020 UCOP report, as well as the survey results, public records requests, and the Regent's meeting testimonials, that the UCI DSC are grossly underfunded and unable to optimally accommodate the needs of students with disabilities. Consequently, the quality and quantity of services UCI DSC provides are insufficient to support students with disabilities, causing them to suffer academically and financially.

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

Overall, the extraordinary increase in students with disabilities has significantly affected the practices, services, and resources of the University of California, Irvine (UCI) Disability Service Center (DSC). One of UCI DSC's core competencies is creating an inclusive campus

where all students have equal opportunity to achieve academic success. In addition, supportive sentiments conveyed by the University of California Office of the President state that students with disabilities are "key contributing members of the campus [community]" ("Supporting students with disabilities at the University of California," 2020).

However, to accomplish this goal, the unique perspectives and lived experiences of students with disabilities must be respected and considered, not just in words on paper but in action. Like financial aid helps those with limited financial means, the UCI DSC must assist students with disabilities by providing appropriate services and resources to "maximize their abilities to thrive in today's global community" ("Mission and core competencies," n.d.). The DSC currently lacks sufficient funding, proper resources, and staffing to effectively support students with disabilities and provide them with the needed services and accommodations.

The first step to addressing the inequities among students on campus is to raise awareness regarding the unique challenges faced by students with disabilities. My research shows a substantial misunderstanding about the purpose and benefit of student accommodations. As mentioned above, many professors believe that student accommodations are excuses or strategies students use to cheat or avoid fulfilling the course requirements.

To better serve the disabled student population, the DSC must first teach all faculty and students that disability accommodations exist so that disabled students have equal opportunities like non-disabled students. Instead, accommodations exist so that disabled students have the same opportunities as students without disabilities. The stereotypes and portrayal of disabled students as conniving, sneaky, or lazy prevent these students from feeling like they truly belong on campus and in higher education. As such, to create the inclusive environment that the DSC and UCI strive for, UCI DSC must better educate the campus community about the disabled

student population.

Furthermore, some faculty members' harmful attitudes often translate into discrimination because professors can deny accommodations with impunity. The DSC needs more money and counselors to follow up when accommodations are denied, meaning some students do not receive the necessary tools to succeed. As such, UCI DSC must collaborate more with campus departments to establish an inclusive environment that promotes accessibility, awareness, and equity for all students with disabilities.

Additionally, the UCI DSC cannot handle the rising demand for services due to understaffing. Although the DSC automatic system handles many accommodations, disability service coordinators must conduct intake interviews, review medical documentation, and assist students with other accommodation needs. Thus far, the UCI DSC has not increased the number of full-time staff members in proportion to the increase in students requesting accommodation. In other words, UCI DSC cannot provide guaranteed adequate resources, including assistive technologies, accessible materials, and disability sensitivity training. In addition, DSC struggles to create an enriching educational experience that results in academic success for students with disabilities. Therefore, DSC must adjust its practices to guarantee timely and equitable support and services.

As it stands now, the demand for services exceeds the available resources, adversely affecting the ability of students with disabilities to succeed academically. The findings show that the average amount allocated per student decreased over five years, indicating it may be insufficient to accommodate the student's needs. In addition, the data reveals inadequate access to physical and digital services and mental health support. These DSC challenges are not a UCI disability center issue. It is a systemwide issue. Whereas the UCI DSC is responsible for

providing the services, if UCI DSC is not receiving sufficient funds to provide adequate services and resources, it is the responsibility of California to provide sufficient funding for all the DSC campuses.

One limitation of this research stems from the UC's lack of data regarding students with disabilities. UCI needs to keep detailed records about the budget distribution to understand better where the money goes. Although I do not have direct evidence that the increase in the number of students requesting accommodations means that the DSC struggles to provide requested accommodations, it is clear from multiple reports (from UCI and the UC Office of the President) that the DSC struggles to keep up with the demand. The preponderance of evidence indicates that the most likely explanation for the current state of disability services on UCI's campus is that the DSC cannot accommodate students' requests because it lacks proper funding.

Conducting further research is crucial to determine how underfunded the DSC is and how this impacts the disabled student population. My research uncovered the need for UCI and the UC campus to comprehensively analyze the urgent need for more funding to expand its resources to meet the growing needs of the disabled student population. Failure to thoroughly research and fund the needs of the disabled student population sends the message that these students are disposable and unimportant, which contributes to the student's feelings of inadequacy.

Additionally, this exacerbates their current disabilities and fails to secure the inclusive campus environment the UC claims to provide. Ultimately, the lack of funding, access, and accommodation is a disservice, as disabled students are not provided the same opportunities for success as non-disabled students. UCI students with disabilities deserve the same accessible, inclusive, and safe campus that non-disabled students enjoy.

In addition, my findings indicate that the DSC needs to develop and implement better tracking of students, especially students with multiple disabilities and associated costs. This data can provide a means to track how well the DSC is serving the disabled student population. The DSC needs to become actively involved with the disabled student population rather than as passive coordinators for accommodations. The DSC can facilitate meetings with students with disabilities to understand better what services are needed and how to best meet these students' needs. The DSC's current practice appears to rely on legal requirements to determine accommodation rather than lived experience, which limits their ability to accommodate some students when legal recourse is unavailable.

Ultimately, the implications of the current research are clear. The UCI DSC cannot provide the essential services and accommodations legally guaranteed under the Americans with Disabilities Act. Moreover, to move beyond the minimum legal requirements to create a truly inclusive campus, UCI must increase the disability service budget to allow more services and resources for students with disabilities. Additionally, implementing Universal Design is essential. Not only are students asking UCOP to adopt Universal Design to ensure the highest quality of services for everyone, especially for disabled students, but their UCOP 2020 report also encourages UC to adopt a Universal Design approach by providing assistive technology that benefits everyone.

Considering the stark truths uncovered in this report, there is a dire need for continued advocacy and additional financial resources to guarantee that students with disabilities receive the support and resources needed to succeed academically and socially. By knowing the significance of inclusive practices and allocating adequate resources, including creating a disability cultural center, UCI can promote an environment where students with disabilities can

fully participate and feel a sense of belonging on campus. However, for disabled students to fully embrace and participate in a disability cultural center, UCI must provide disability sensitivity training, adequate resources, and accommodations to ensure disabled students feel a sense of belonging in the classrooms, respect, and dignity from everyone to succeed academically.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: List of Accommodations

DSC provides services and accommodations to students with documented permanent and temporary disabilities. These include reasonable accommodations, auxiliary aids, and individualized support services. Services and accommodations are based on your disability documentation, functional limitations, and a collaborative assessment of needs. Below are lists of some of the general services and accommodations offered by DSC.

Please note that it is your responsibility to arrange for services outside the scope of the Disability Services Center. These services include attendant care, mobility training, and sources of financial aid.

General Services

- Disability management counseling.
- Liaison to faculty.
- Individual or group orientation to campus.
- Advice on classroom accommodations.
- Assistance to faculty and staff to work effectively with students with disabilities.
- Information on the California Department of Rehabilitation.
- Use of the adaptive technology stations located in the UCI Libraries.

Accommodations

- Priority registration for classes.
- Testing accommodations: (e.g., extended time, separate location, reduced distraction environment).
- Assistive technology (e.g., note-taking tools, text-to-speech software, etc.).
- Course Notes (Note taking assistance).
- Readers.
- Scribes.
- Sign language interpreters.
- Assistive listening devices.
- Real-time captioning services.
- Limited transportation services (e.g., wheelchair, scooter, knee walker, Ring Road Rides).
- Reserved seating in class.
- Assistance in receiving books and course material in alternate formats.
- Document conversion: books and other course materials in alternate formats (e.g., enlarged, Braille, computer disk, and other audio formats.)
- Housing Accommodations (Recommendations).
- Modification of academic requirements (e.g., part-time enrollment, reduced course load, extended time for completion of degree. requirements). Some modifications may require approval by an academic dean or equivalent. Requirements determined to be essential by the Academic Senate or are related to licensing requirements are not regarded as

discriminatory. Modification or accommodations that would fundamentally alter the instructional program are not regarded as discriminatory.

- Accessible classroom furniture.