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ABSTRACT

The degree to which Kentucky's public and private colleges and junior colleges are meeting the needs of persons with handicaps was evaluated. A 23-item questionnaire was sent to the state's 57 higher education institutions, and 45 responded. The findings are discussed in relation to admission and orientation procedures; social barriers; and architectural barriers for students in wheelchairs, students with visual handicaps, students with auditory handicaps, and students with systemic-neurological handicaps. Among the findings are the following: 86.7 percent of the schools admit all applicants regardless of their disability; about half have no written policy concerning students with handicaps, and the majority of schools use flexible admission policies; most of the schools have various types of human service programs for students with handicaps, including specially designated counselors and special facilities or activities; only 11 schools have no special arrangements for students with handicaps; there are numerous architectural barriers for students in wheelchairs; 75.6 percent have designated parking for the handicapped, and 16 schools have ramps to all buildings; 60 percent have viable volunteer services to support the visually impaired; and lecture halls typically have no microphones or regular loudspeaker system. Changes from an earlier assessment in 1973 (an eight-year period) are noted, along with a number of areas for which immediate, low-cost changes and long-range, more expensive changes can be made. Among these recommendations are to employ persons with handicaps to help increase awareness among the university community and support an active human services program. (SW)

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Barriers in Higher Education for Persons with
Handicaps: A Continued Challenge

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How well are university and college administrations meeting the needs of students with handicaps? Said from a different perspective, how are policy, social and architectural barriers inhibiting the development of higher education students with handicaps? Both questions state the challenge for those of us who are training human service providers for higher education, secondary education, rehabilitation and community work settings. Professionals and clients need this information to help manage their resources and to help plan their educational and life-careers.

Previous efforts have tried to develop partial answers to these challenging questions. Some of these efforts have tried to sensitize educators to the needs of students with handicaps (e.g., Dailey, 1979; Rusalem, 1962; Weinberg, 1978). Penn and Dudley (1980) found that higher education students are in a double bind: they have a great desire to become their own person and see higher education as a way to reach their goal, but they need help to overcome such challenges as psychological fears, architectural barriers, adjustment to academic schedules and social isolation. Stilwell and Schulker (1973) collected data which suggested higher education administrators frequently had developed open admission policies, but often failed to develop the services to support students with handicaps, and to make physical adjustments for students

(e.g., sloping curbs, lowered water fountains and telephones). Based upon questionnaire data Stilwell and Schulker suggested a number of inexpensive and immediate changes as well as several expensive and programmatic changes to improve the architectural, policy and social challenges confronting students with handicaps.

Since the Stilwell and Schulker paper was published, two very important pieces of federal legislation have had an impact on higher education. The Architectural Barriers Act of 1968 required any new facility built with federal funds to be fully accessible to handicapped persons. More recently Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 mandated institutional accessibility--in every way--to persons with handicaps. Thus, in a sense, the present study allows us a "before-and-after" examination of institutional responsiveness to federal directives and to perceived social needs.

METHOD

The purpose of this study was to determine the degree to which one state's public and private colleges and junior colleges have responded to meet the needs of persons with handicaps. The Commonwealth of Kentucky has 57 institutions of higher education.

Questionnaire

A 23-item questionnaire was sent to each of the institutions. The previously used questionnaire (Stilwell & Schulker, 1973) was revised to obtain more answers on selected areas (e.g., fewer items on the visually impaired and more items on wheelchair handicapped). Forty-five or 78.9% of the institutions completed the questionnaire.

RESULTS

In order to organize the results, the data are presented and discussed in three categories: admission and orientation procedures, social barriers, and architectural barriers for students in wheelchairs, students with visual handicaps, students with auditory handicaps and students with systemic-neurological handicaps. Table 1 presents selected data for these areas.

Insert Table 1 about here

Admissions and orientation

Since the enactment of crucial federal legislation, the authors anticipated consistent admission policies concerning students with handicaps. Thirty-nine of the participating schools (86.7%) report admitting all applicants regardless of their disability. The admission policies for private institutions did not appear to be different from their public counterparts.

The implementation of the admissions policies is far less consistent. About half of the participating institutions (22 of 45) report having no written policy concerning students with handicaps. The majority of the schools report their use of flexible admission policies (80%). Kentucky colleges and universities appear to be using a case-by-case approach to decisions on admitting students with handicaps.

Social barriers

Institutions of higher education have developed various degrees of human service programs for students with handicaps. For example, 14 schools report specially designated counselors for students with handicaps. Overall, 38 of the participating schools indicate at least some special facilities or activities and/or a designated counselor. Indeed, 29 of the reporting schools have either written or oral orientation programs and over half of the schools have on-going volunteer services for their students with handicaps. Only 11 of the schools reported no special arrangements for students with handicaps.

Students in wheelchairs seem to have an especially great challenge to overcome. Presently, over half (n=25) of the reporting institutions allow an attendant to accompany a person in a wheelchair to an extracurricular event. Six schools provide special seating. Only two schools report either no provisions or inaccessible locations for students in wheelchairs. In a related area, 17 schools report that a volunteer-attendant service is available and 24 of the schools indicate a willingness to provide assistance in finding attendants for students in wheelchairs. Thus, it appears from our data, that admission/orientation programs are supported by attempts to reduce the social barriers confronting students with wheelchairs.

Students in wheelchairs

The data suggest that students in wheelchairs will have to be careful in selecting their college or university. The numerous architectural barriers are discussed in this section.

Ramps. Over 70% (n=32) of the reporting schools indicate ramps are available for half or more of the buildings. Only three schools report no ramps to any classroom building. Further, only nine institutions fail to have a wheelchair ramp for their library. More positively stated: two-thirds of the reporting institutions do have wheelchair ramps for their libraries and a third of the reporting schools have all floors within their library accessible to students in wheelchairs.

Designated parking. The number of schools reporting on parking spaces designated for students with handicaps demonstrates the challenge. Twenty-seven of the reporting schools (60%) have specially designated parking spaces for the handicapped outside all buildings and another seven of the schools have, at least, one designated parking lot for persons with handicaps. Thus, selected college and university administrators have allocated some of their physical resources to help meet the needs of students with impaired mobility.

Curb cuts. It was found that eight schools reported all sloping curbs to facilitate students in wheelchairs' movements about campus. However, 24 of the reporting schools report few or no sloping curbs.

Living areas. Students in wheelchairs continue to have difficulties in dormitory and classroom building bathrooms. Discounting the 12 public junior colleges which do not have dormitories, the reporting institutions have only begun to make living quarters accessible to students in wheelchairs. Sixteen or 35.6% have made some provisions for wheelchairs in the living areas.

Bathrooms. Slow progress has been made in making the bathrooms in classroom buildings and in the libraries more accessible to students in wheelchairs. Forty-six and seven tenths percent (n=21) of the reporting institutions have some buildings in which bathrooms are accessible to wheelchairs and 13 have all buildings with bathrooms which are large enough for wheelchairs.

Elevators. Over half of the reporting schools indicate either elevators in all buildings or in some buildings. Only seven schools report no elevators (the majority of this group was private two-year institutions).

Telephones. Making a telephone call is often a challenge. Public telephones in 15 schools are not accessible (low) to students in wheelchairs. Another six schools report they have few low telephones. The telephone situation becomes more bleak when it is pointed out that only nine schools (20.0%) have low telephones in all buildings and that a total of seven more schools have low phones in half or most of the buildings. Typically, when telephones are not available, the institutions indicated the student could use a professor's desk phone (often an even more inaccessible phone, considering the barriers created in some professors' offices!).

Water fountains. The lack of low telephones can only be matched by the number of water fountains that are accessible to students in wheelchairs. Seventeen of the schools reported no low water fountains (one school reported cups were available upon request!). Thus, students in wheelchairs will find some major, expensive renovations/reallocation of resources (e.g., ramps and established human service programs), but little or no progress in selected, less obvious areas. From the

data on architectural accessibility of campuses, we can suggest that students in wheelchairs can try to live on campus, but they still must be careful about which campus.

Students with visual handicaps

Colleges are required by Section 504 and related Executive Orders to provide interpreters and readers (Dailey, 1977). There is diversification in the types of active programs to assist blind students: volunteer services are available (60%); reader services are provided (8.9%); and free ads for readers are published in the campus paper (8.9%). Seven of the schools (15.6%) report that a tape library is available. The data suggest that more than three quarters of the Commonwealth's institutions have active reader programs for students with visual handicaps.

Reading to a student with a visual handicap can be a problem. Only ten institutions allow readers in a visually handicapped student's room, if the reader is of the opposite sex. The preferred mode (33.2% of the schools) is for the student and the reader to be of the same sex or to read in a special room. The private four-year institutions, as a rule, indicated the problem was unusual, but they would help the visually handicapped students as the situations arose.

Students with visual handicaps often have difficulty in obtaining books from the library for sufficient periods of time. Nineteen of the schools reported special library reading rooms and 21 schools reported extended check-out for reading or for taping the materials. Thus, all but five of the reporting schools have anticipated these particular needs of visually handicapped students.

One discouraging set of data was collected relevant to students with visual handicaps. No school reported that all buildings had been marked with braille numbers on classroom and office doors. Only seven (15.6%) schools reported braille numbers on some doors. At a time when blindness still occurs, it is particularly frustrating to note that four out of five reporting schools have no braille and/or never considered brailled markings important for their students.

Students with auditory handicaps

Students with auditory handicaps continue to present a different problem for college and university human service providers and educators. Three-quarters of the reporting institutions indicated they did not have telephones with amplifiers to assist these students. The response to the auditory handicapped needs is limited in a number of ways: (1) four four-year institutions have an interpreter available who could sign a lecture; and (2) one public two-year college has made headphones available to students with auditory handicaps. The questionnaire data revealed that lecture halls typically had no microphones (n=16) or regular loudspeaker system (n=4). These students, with unseen handicaps, must try to keep the institutions' administrators aware of their unique needs.

Students with systemic-neurological handicaps

Many students with other invisible handicaps (e.g., diabetes, epilepsy or asthma) are enrolled in the Commonwealth's colleges and universities. Often, without appreciable warning, these students may require immediate emergency care. Six schools (all two-year colleges) report a designated emergency person for each building. Two other

two-year colleges indicated that most of their buildings have a person who is designated to provide emergency care. A majority of the schools use student health, central campus hospital, or local health care teams.

COMPARISON: 1973 AND PRESENT

Over the eight years since the "before" report a number of significant changes can be noted. In this section several of the more dramatic changes will be presented:

1. Now nearly three-quarters of the reporting schools have established some kinds of human service programs for students with handicaps. Previously 61.5% of the schools reported no special arrangements for students with handicaps.

2. Now 64.4% of the participating schools report presenting either written or oral orientation programs for unique students. In contrast previously only 28.2% of the schools offered an institutional orientation to students with handicaps.

3. Now three institutions report no ramps to any classroom building. In the previous study 19 schools indicated no ramps.

4. The number of schools reporting ramps to all buildings has doubled to 16.

5. Now 75.6% of the reporting schools have designated parking for handicapped. Earlier only 27.7% of the institutions had similar designated parking spaces.

6. Now 60% of the schools report on the existence of viable volunteer services to support the visually impaired. Earlier only 20.5% of the schools reported any kind of volunteer services.

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Students with a variety of handicaps enrolled in the Commonwealth's colleges and universities continue to meet a varied set of challenges. Previously collected data (Stilwell & Schulker, 1973) suggested three levels of challenges for students with handicaps and for institutional administrators. Subsequent to the earlier study, two important pieces of federal legislation on architectural, policy, and social barriers brought an impact upon colleges and universities. The present study collected information on the degree to which these pieces of legislation impacted upon the challenges confronting students with handicaps within the Commonwealth of Kentucky.

College and university administrators and their designated human service providers (e.g., academic advisors, rehabilitation counselors, and student personnel workers) appear to be more aware of architectural, policy and social challenges for higher education students with handicaps. Many of the institutional responses to the needs of students with handicaps have required substantial reallocations of financial and human resources (e.g., new elevators and ramps and highly visible human service programs). Other of the institutional responses to the needs of these students have been less expensive (e.g., revising policies to facilitate learning by visually impaired students). The present authors have made a note-so-subtle shift from talking about "disabled students" to collecting data on "students with handicaps". This shift recognizes the value of the total individual and their unique specific skill excess or deficit (Worell & Stilwell, 1981). Still, the changes are not so complete that more could not be planned and implemented by administration, faculty and students.

There continues to be a number of areas for which immediate, low cost changes can be made:

- 1) invite the public relations representatives for the telephone company to sponsor accessible telephones for students in wheelchairs and for students with auditory deficits;
- 2) stimulate social awareness and integration of programs for students with handicaps such that faculty and other students become involved in helping the institution meet the needs of students with handicaps. Weikel (1980) has suggested a handicap awareness day for the institution;
- 3) employ persons with handicaps to help increase awareness among the institutional community;
- 4) designate an "emergency" coordinator on each floor in each building; and,
- 5) establish an advisory group of students and employees with handicaps to advise the institution's human service delivery system.

In addition, a number of long-range and more expensive changes are suggested by our data:

- 1) ensure that "handicapped routes" allow a student full accessibility across the campus;
- 2) equip each building entrance with a power-assisted door for students in wheelchairs;
- 3) support an active human services program (e.g., counseling, housing, and life-career planning) for all students, including those with handicaps;
- 4) renovate designated areas for students in wheelchairs (e.g., low water fountains, enlarged bathrooms with accessible doors, space in lecture halls for more than one chair);

5) anticipate the needs of older students who might be returning to higher education after retirement; and,

6) promote faculty development of coursework to make students aware of accomplishments by people with handicaps.

Table 1

Facilities Available to Disabled Students₁

Category/Question	Four Year Institutions	Two Year Institutions	Overall Percent ₂
Participating/Total in state	17/27	28/30	78.9
<u>Admission and orientation</u>			
Admission Policy			
Admit all	14	25	86.7
Admit mildly disabled	1	1	
Refuse admission to all	0	0	
Refuse admission to severely	1	0	2.2
Other	1	2	6.6
Special Orientation			
Occurs before classes	9	10	42.2
Provides written info.	4	6	22.2
Volunteers	7	18	55.6
Other	1	1	4.4
<u>Social barriers</u>			
Special counselor/program			
Special counselor	8	6	31.1
Special activities	4	1	11.1
Some special facilities	8	11	42.2
No special arrangements	2	9	24.4
Other	3	4	15.6
Attendant service			
Volunteer service available	4	13	37.8
Assistance to find attendant	8	16	53.3
No assistance	0	0	0.0
Free ads for attendant	2	3	11.1
Other	3	2	11.1

Category/Question	Four Year Institutions	Two Year Institutions	Overall Percent ₂
<u>Extracurricular events</u>			
Attendant attend no charge	8	17	55.6
Attendant extra ticket	1	2	6.6
No provisions	1	0	2.2
Separate seating	4	2	13.3
No separate seating	0	0	
Locations inaccessible	0	1	2.2
Other	2	3	11.1
<u>Students with wheelchairs</u>			
<u>Building entrance ramps</u>			
None to any classroom building	0	3	6.7
Ramps to all classroom buildings	1	15	35.6
Ramps to half or more	10	6	35.6
Ramps to few buildings	4	2	13.3
Ramps to at least one temporary ramp, when needed	0	2	4.4
Other	3	3	13.3
	1	0	2.2
<u>Library entrance ramp</u>			
Yes	11	19	66.7
No	5	4	20.0
All floors accessible	6	8	31.1
Some areas accessible	4	1	11.1
Other	1	0	2.2
<u>Parking facilities</u>			
Handicapped parking outside all buildings	12	15	60.0
One handicapped lot	2	5	15.6
No special parking	0	4	8.9
Other	3	3	13.3
<u>Curbing on campus</u>			
All sloping	2	6	17.7
Few sloping	7	10	37.8
No sloping	2	5	15.6
Other	4	1	11.1

Category/Question	Four Year Institutions	Two Year Institutions	Overall Percent ₂
Living Areas			
Large bathrooms and handrails	1	0	2.2
Handrails, small bathrooms	0	1	2.2
Accommodate wheelchairs, but no rails	0	1	2.2
No housing available	3	4	15.6
Some provisions for wheelchairs	11	5	35.6
All housing has ramps	0	0	0.0
Non-residential	2	12	31.1
Library/classroom building bathrooms			
All bathrooms large enough	3	10	28.9
Handrails, small bathrooms	0	0	0.0
Accommodate wheelchairs, but no rails	0	5	11.1
No building accessible	0	3	6.6
Some buildings accessible	3	8	46.7
Other	1	2	6.6
Elevators and keys			
All buildings are accessible	5	10	33.3
Some buildings, as needed	6	6	26.7
No keys available	1	0	2.2
No elevators	2	5	15.6
No elevators, but ramps	0	5	11.1
Other	3	1	8.9
Low level public phones			
All buildings have one	1	8	20.0
Most of the buildings	4	1	11.1
Half of the buildings	2	0	4.4
Few phones	3	3	13.3
No phones	5	10	33.3
Other	1	4	11.1
Low water fountains			
All buildings have one	1	10	24.4
Most buildings	4	0	8.9
Half of the buildings	2	0	4.4
Few fountains	3	4	15.6
No fountains	5	12	37.8
Other	1	1	4.4

Category/Question	Four Year Institutions	Two Year Institutions	Overall Percent ₂
<u>Students with visual handicaps</u>			
Braille on doors/buildings			
All buildings	0	0	0.0
Some buildings	5	2	15.6
No braille	8	19	60.0
Never considered important	2	7	20.0
Other	2	2	8.9
<u>Students with auditory handicaps</u>			
Telephone amplifiers			
All buildings have one	1	1	4.4
Most buildings	1	0	2.2
Half the buildings	0	0	0.0
Scattered phones	3	0	6.7
No phones	10	25	77.8
Other	1	2	6.7
Amplifications in lectures			
Head phones	0	1	2.2
Loudspeaker system	2	2	8.9
No microphone	5	11	35.6
An interpreter	4	0	8.9
Other	4	9	28.9
<u>Students with systemic- neurological handicaps</u>			
Emergency treatment			
Designated person in each building	0	6	13.3
Most buildings have person	0	2	4.4
Student health services	11	4	33.3
Central campus service	5	12	37.8
Other	3	6	20.0

Note 1: Institutions often selected more than one response to an item. Each response was coded.

Note 2: Not all items were completed by the participating schools. "Overall percent" is based on n=45 which means the total percent is often less than 100.

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Notes

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