Postsecondary Faculty and Willingness to Provide Academic Accommodations for Students with Learning Disabilities

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Abstract

Faculty are responsible for providing academic accommodations needed and used by students with learning disabilities (SWLD). Since learning disabilities (LD) are hidden, faculty may question the need for, efficacy of, and fairness of accommodations. Yet academically accommodating SWLD is important to academic success and persistence. This sequential mixed methods study investigated whether faculty who said they were willing to accommodate SWLD showed positive actions that demonstrated that they were. First, quantitative data was gathered via an online survey. Respondents were grouped into four faculty types, based on two measures: (1) willingness to accommodate; and (2) action – to what extent accommodations were provided. Faculty types included Committed (high willingness and action), Well-Intentioned (high willingness, low action), Reluctantly Compliant (low willingness, high action), and Skeptically Resistant (low willingness and action). Statistical analyses were performed to explore how the four types differ. Next, a sample of faculty from each type was interviewed. Results showed that knowledge and effort were the factors that contributed to faculty support actions, with Committed and Reluctantly Compliant faculty showing the most positive support actions. Knowledge, including personal experience with SWLD and familiarity with LD and its accommodations, influenced the willingness of faculty; as did effort, in terms of how difficult an accommodation was to provide and how supported faculty felt in its provision. Only Committed faculty "practiced what they preached;" they said they were very willing and very able to accommodate SWLD, and their actions supported that.

Keywords: academic accommodations, learning disabilities, faculty willingness to accommodate

Postsecondary faculty hold the academic fate of students in their hands—they create course content, decide how it will be presented, and design the methods to assess whether learning goals have been accomplished (Murray et al., 2008). Faculty are also responsible for accommodating students with learning disabilities (SWLD). Since learning disabilities (LDs) are hidden, faculty may question the need for accommodations, and question whether accommodations provide an unfair advantage or compromise course integrity. They may resent intrusions on their time, teaching style, and academic freedom. Yet accommodating SWLD is important to academic success and persistence and is required by law.

Faculty Attitudes

Faculty do not determine accommodations but are responsible for providing them. Therefore, faculty attitudes toward accommodating students with disabilities (SWD) "may be particularly salient in student success" (Sniatecki et al., 2015, p. 259). Timmerman and Mulvihill (2015) found that faculty buy-in was very important to academic success of SWD. If SWLD sense that faculty have issues with providing accommodations, they will not self-identify and will not get the help they need. "Instructors who provide accommodations in a *neutral* or *unwilling* manner decrease the likelihood that students will assert themselves by requesting appropriate and documented accommodations" (Skinner, 2007, p. 41). Social psychological researchers have examined the relationship of attitudes to behavior, theorizing that attitudes are not reliable predictors of behaviors; therefore, other variables specific to the circumstances and situation must be explored (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1982, as cited in Bourke et al., 2000). While the current literature on faculty attitudes does not explore this incongruence, it can be assumed that while faculty attitudes are important in influencing positive support behavior, they alone are insufficient in predicting faculty actions. Faculty

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need to be both *willing* to accommodate and *able* to accommodate.

Faculty Willingness to Accommodate

While most faculty claim to be willing to accommodate SWLD, some research identifies faculty as unwilling or unable to provide accommodations. Unwillingness can have its roots in faculty personal beliefs about educating and accommodating SWLD and/or in the perceived ease or difficulty of accommodation provision.

Faculty personal beliefs. Beliefs and attitudes can help or hinder the provision of accommodations (Bourke, et al., 2000). Faculty may resent what they see as infringement on their academic freedom by being told how they must accommodate SWLD. They may question why they are not told which specific disability a student has, or how/why an accommodation was chosen (Wolanin & Steele, 2004). Zhang et al., (2010) studied faculty willingness and found that faculty personal beliefs were the only factor that had a significant direct effect on accommodation provision.

Due to Americans with Disability Act (ADA) protections, faculty are told only that they must accommodate a student in a certain way, and nothing specific about the student's disability. Withholding this information from faculty "results in a lack of faculty ownership of the accommodation plan, and thus also diminishes their commitment to implementing it" (Wolanin & Steele, 2004, p. 41). Vickers (2010) wrote that this perceived secrecy raised concern for faculty, especially around accommodating SWLD and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).

Willingness to accommodate declines when faculty feel an accommodation compromises the integrity of the school, the program, or the course. Bourke et al. (2000) found that faculty struggle with the ethical concerns of helping SWLD to the detriment of academic integrity. Jensen et al. (2004) found that most faculty realized they had a duty to accommodate and were willing to do so as long as academic integrity was protected.

Several studies show that faculty believe in a hierarchy of disabilities and are more comfortable dealing with students who have visible disabilities (medical disabilities like blindness, deafness, or physical impairments) and less comfortable with invisible disabilities (LD and psychological disabilities). Jensen et al. (2004) found that faculty viewed "learning disabilities differently from other disabilities" (p. 81) questioning whether invisible disabilities were legitimate. The hidden nature of LD made it hard for faculty to distinguish between SWLD and students who were unprepared. Students with hidden disabilities like LD "may experience more negative characterizations because of others perceiving them as not disabled and, thus, not worthy of the benefits of claiming a disability" (Barnard et al., 2008, p. 169). Sniatecki et al. (2015) found that 96.7% of faculty agreed or strongly agreed that students with physical disabilities can be academically successful at the postsecondary level; only 90.2% believed the same about SWLD.

Perceived level of difficulty. Willingness to accommodate declines as the perceived difficulty of providing an accommodation rises. Skinner (2007) concluded that faculty are more willing to provide accommodations that require less time and effort. Cook et el. (2009) found that faculty were unwilling to provide alternate or extra credit assignments; creating additional tests or assignments can intrude on faculty time, especially if multiple students need different testing or assignment vehicles. Murray et al. (2008) found that faculty are more willing to provide minor, as opposed to major, accommodations that do not compromise program or teaching quality.

Faculty Ability to Accommodate

Ability to accommodate can depend on faculty's lack of knowledge and/or support perceived/received.

Lack of knowledge. Faculty lack of knowledge may be in one of three areas: (1) the law, (2) learning disabilities, and/or (3) accommodation practices. Postsecondary faculty need to understand their legal responsibilities regarding academic accommodations. Yet they "have little knowledge about legislative mandates regarding their obligation in serving students with disabilities" (Katsiyannis et al., 2009, p. 36). West et al. (2016) found that a significant number of surveyed faculty did not feel confident in their knowledge of the ADA (47%) and Section 504 (58%) laws.

Murray et al. (2008) found that knowledge of LD was positively associated with inviting student disclosure and providing accommodations; having insufficient knowledge was negatively associated with willingness to provide accommodations. Cook et al. (2009) found that faculty believed it was important to understand the characteristics of various disabilities, and that the institution was not giving them the resources to gain that knowledge.

One factor that influenced providing accommodations was "level of comfort in interacting with individuals with disabilities" (Zhang et al., 2010, p. 276). Lack of experience in working with SWLD may contribute to negative personal beliefs about them. Skinner (2007) found a positive association between LD-related faculty training and willingness to accom-

modate. Murray, et al. (2008) corroborated when they found that disability-related training predicted faculty willingness to provide, and implement, instructional and testing accommodations.

Jensen et al. (2004) found that faculty revealed "a deep mistrust of how learning disabilities are assessed and how far faculty and instructional staff should be expected to go" (p. 83) to accommodate SWLD. Similarly, Sniatecki et al. (2015) identified gaps in faculty knowledge about disability services offices and accommodation provision that could have a detrimental impact on students.

Support received. Bourke et al. (2000) found that if faculty perceived support from the institution, it influenced how easy they thought it was to provide instructional accommodations. The greater their perception of department support, the greater their belief that accommodations help SWD succeed. The greater their perception of support from disability services, the greater their understanding of the need for accommodations. Skinner (2007) concluded that a supportive disability services office is critical for faculty. Murray et al. (2008) found that faculty who believed they had limited resources were less likely to be willing to invest time supporting SWLD. Zhang et al. (2010) determined that perception of institutional support directly influenced faculty personal beliefs and level of comfort in dealing with SWD.

Sensitive Subjects and Political Correctness

A great deal of research suggests that most faculty are *generally* willing to accommodate (Cawthon & Cole, 2010; Cook et al., 2009; Jensen et al., 2004; Marshak et al., 2010; Murray et al., 2009; Murray, et al., 2008; Quinlan et al., 2012; Skinner, 2007; Vickers, 2010), but several researchers indicate that faculty participating in studies may be giving lip service about their willingness because they know it is the politically correct thing to say (Cook et al., 2009; Lombardi & Murray, 2011; Vickers, 2010). Vickers (2010) found that faculty shared a "widespread criticism of current accommodation practices" that was "unlikely to surface publicly" (p. 9) because they did not want to be associated with an "anti-disabled" (p. 9) position.

Gaps in the Literature

Studies show that most faculty claim to be willing and able to accommodate students with disabilities. However, no study provides evidence that what these *willing* faculty say is reflected accurately in what they do. Since postsecondary faculty are a critical piece of academic success for SWLD (Jensen et al., 2004), this study sought to determine whether faculty who said they were willing and able to accommodate SWLD acted in a way that reflected that.

Research Questions

Five research questions were employed: (1) What factors influence the positive actions of faculty in support of SWLD? (2) Do the four types of faculty differ on those factors, and if so, how? (3) Which types are more likely to show positive support actions? (4) What themes emerge when faculty explain their experiences supporting SWLD? and (5) In what ways do the actions of faculty explain their self-reported willingness and ability?

Method

Research Design

This study used an explanatory sequential design. It started with quantitative data collection and analysis, followed up with selection of interview participants and development of an interview guide, proceeded to qualitative data collection and analysis, and concluded with the integration and interpretation of results. Quantitative data were gathered via an online survey to answer the first three research questions. Then, qualitative data were collected via faculty interviews to explain quantitative results in more depth and to answer the fourth research question. Finally, data from both strands was combined to answer the fifth research question.

Participants

For the quantitative portion of the study, the population was the faculty of a medium-sized private institution in the northeastern United States that is considered a "business school" but also offers degrees in the liberal arts. All current faculty received an email explaining the study's purpose and inviting them to participate in the online survey. A survey question asked if respondents were willing to be interviewed. For the qualitative portion of the study, all faculty volunteers were divided by faculty type and then randomly chosen for interviews.

Quantitative sample. This study used two non-probability sampling methods to find survey participants: (1) a voluntary sample, made up of people who self-selected into the survey, which was also (2) a convenience sample, made up of people who were easy to reach. Using a sample size calculator (Kohn et al., 2019) it was determined that using $\alpha = .05$, $\beta = .2$, an effect size of .5 (considered moderate) and 1 standard deviation, 126 responses would be desirable. A link to the online survey was sent to all faculty on the institution's faculty email distribution list (n=509), and 136 faculty responded (26.7%). Of 136 respondents, 19 did not finish the survey (13.9%); two of

the 19 completed all but the demographic questions so their data was included. With the reduced sample size, the effect size increased from .5 to .52.

Qualitative sample. Forty-two respondents volunteered to be interviewed, and 14 (33.3%) were purposefully selected from among the four faculty types; three faculty each from the RC and CO faculty groups, and four each from the SR and WI groups. Nine interviewees were from business departments and five were from arts & sciences departments.

Instrument

Several existing surveys dealing with faculty willingness were reviewed for question examples. Questions were drawn from surveys by Murray et al. (2008), Zhang et al. (2010), Baker et al. (2012), and Sniatecki et al. (2015). Questions were recombined, edited, and added to, to suit this study's needs.

Measures

Measures used to analyze the quantitative results included demographics, self-rankings, and scales created to define four faculty types.

Demographics. Table 1 summarizes demographic information for the sample (n=118) and the population (n=461). The sample is fairly descriptive of the population based on gender and age. Full-time lecturers are disproportionately represented, but they are the faculty who teach the most classes so are integral to the sample. There were slightly more survey respondents from business disciplines (n=69, 58%) than arts & sciences disciplines (n=50, 42%) which seems accurate given the institution's reputation as a business school.

Self-Rankings. Respondents were asked to rank their willingness and ability to provide academic accommodations to SWLD using a five-point Likert scale. This data was gathered to compare faculty self-rankings (how willing they say they are) and results of the data analysis (how willing the data shows them to be). It was hypothesized that most faculty would rate themselves as willing and able. Of 133 respondents, 126 faculty (94.73%) ranked themselves as willing or very willing; three faculty ranked themselves as very unwilling. Of 121 respondents, 112 faculty (92.56%) ranked themselves as able or very able; none ranked as unable.

Scales and sub-scales. Scales were created to combine variables that focused on the related topics of willingness, ability, and actions. The Willingness scale (M = 71.53, SD = 10.6, α=.869) was intended to assess faculty attitudes about SWLD and beliefs about accommodations being worthwhile, necessary, and effective. The Ability scale (M = 59.33, SD = 8.175, α=.785) was intended to assess faculty knowledge of the accommodation process and ability to accommodate SWLD. Two Ability subscales were created: knowledge, and effort. The knowledge subscale (M = 26.92, SD = 4.888, α=.707) was intended to assess knowledge of the institution's academic accommodation process. The effort subscale (M = 30.18, SD = 5.237, α=.826) was intended to assess faculty beliefs about how much effort it takes to provide accommodations. The Action scale (M = 23.54, SD = 4.96, α=.776) was created to measure actions faculty have taken in support of SWLD.

Procedure

Quantitative data were downloaded in CSV (comma-separated value) format and uploaded into SPSS for analysis. Scales were analyzed for reliability and internal consistency, and inter-item correlations were obtained. To answer RQ1, measures were tested for any relationship with faculty actions (dependent variable) using Pearson's correlations. Then faculty willingness and action scales were used to create a 2x2 matrix: (high vs. low willingness) x (high vs. low actions) to answer RQ2 and RQ3. Statistical analyses (means, one-way ANOVA, Tukey post hoc tests, and multiple regression) were performed to explore how the four types differ. Based on the matrix, 14 faculty were purposefully selected from among the four faculty types to be interviewed to answer RQ4; three faculty each from the RC and CO faculty groups, and four each from the SR and WI groups. More people from the latter two groups were selected because it was felt that faculty with low Action scores would have more interesting stories to tell. Audio files of interviews were transcribed and then uploaded into NVivo software for analysis. Data was filtered to search for patterns and was used in a descriptive fashion to answer RQ4. Finally, combining both strands of data provided the answer to RQ5.

Results

RQ1: What factors influence the positive actions of faculty in support of SWLD?

There were no correlations found to indicate a relationship between demographics and Actions. There were also no correlations found to indicate a relationship between Actions and faculty self-rankings of willingness and ability. It was hypothesized that faculty scores on Actions would correlate more strongly with Willingness and Knowledge than Ability; that is, that even if faculty have the tools to provide accommodations, they need to know how to accommodate and be willing to do so. As table 2 indicates, there were

weak correlations between Actions and Willingness as well as between Actions and Ability. A moderate correlation existed between Actions and Knowledge, indicating that faculty knowledge was the factor that most affected faculty actions. In addition, the Effort subscale showed a moderately positive correlation with Willingness, indicating that the effort that it takes to provide accommodations influences how willing faculty are to provide those accommodations.

Effects of knowledge and effort on actions. A multiple regression analysis was run to predict Actions from Knowledge and Effort. Together, these variables statistically significantly predicted Actions, F (2, 108) = 9.553, $p < .0005$, $R^2 = .150$. Coefficients test results showed that statistically, only Knowledge added significantly to the prediction, $p < .05$, which corroborated the results of the Pearson's correlation tests.

Effects of knowledge and effort on willingness. A multiple regression analysis was run to predict Willingness from Knowledge and Effort. Together, these variables statistically significantly predicted Willingness, F (2, 109) = 10.03, $p < .0005$, $R^2 = .155$. Coefficients test results showed that statistically, only Effort added significantly to the prediction, $p < .05$, which corroborated the results of the Pearson's correlation tests.

Faculty types. Most faculty said they were willing or very willing to accommodate, but there were weak correlations between Willingness and Actions scores. To explore this disparity, a 2 x 2 typology of faculty types was constructed (see Figure 1). Participants were grouped into four types, based on their Willingness and Actions scores. "Committed" faculty (CO) scored above average on both Willingness and Actions; "Skeptically Resistant" (SR) faculty scored below average on both Willingness and Actions; "Well-Intentioned" (WI) faculty scored above average on Willingness but below average on Actions; and "Reluctantly Compliant" (RC) faculty scored below average on Willingness but above average on Actions. Framing the issue in this way allowed the investigation of RQ2.

RQ2: Do the four types of faculty differ on those factors, and if so, how?

Statistical analyses were performed to explore how the four types differ, especially in terms of Knowledge and Effort. Both Knowledge and Effort were coded so that higher scores equaled a more positive attitude (a high Effort score means that faculty think providing accommodations is NOT too much Effort). Figure 2 shows the means of Knowledge and Effort for all four faculty types. ANOVA results showed that for both Effort (F (3,107) = 6.055, p = .001) and Knowledge (F (3,107) = 4.998, p = .003), there was a statistically significant difference among the faculty types.

Differences based on willingness. Both WI and CO showed above average Willingness but differed in their level of Actions. The WI claimed to be willing to accommodate SWLD's, but scored low on Action – why? Two possible hypotheses were that the WI (1) did not know what to do (low Knowledge), or (2) thought it was too much work (low Effort). The WI differ substantially from the CO in terms of their Knowledge. That is, Knowledge—not Effort—explains why the WI do less than the CO. The Tukey post hoc test revealed that Knowledge was statistically significant for both faculty types (p = .015), but there was no statistically significant difference for Effort (p = .998). Therefore, the differences between the means are not likely due to chance and are probably due to Knowledge. Both RC and SR faculty showed below average Willingness but differed in their level of Action. The RC provide accommodations, even though they do not really agree with them–why? They either (1) thought it would not require much Effort, or (2) had Knowledge of what to do. The means suggested that Knowledge was the answer, but the Tukey post hoc test revealed no statistically significant difference for either Knowledge (p = .446) or Effort (p = .983); the differences in the two groups must have been due to a mediating variable.

Differences based on actions. RC and CO faculty both showed above average Action but differed in their level of Willingness. The CO were willing and able to provide accommodations as required, but why? The two hypotheses were (1) they thought it would not require much Effort, or (2) they had Knowledge of what to do. Graph results show that CO faculty differ from RC both in terms of their Knowledge and their estimate of how much Effort it takes to accommodate. The Tukey post hoc test revealed that Effort was statistically significant for both faculty types (p = .008), but there was no statistically significant difference for Knowledge (p = .352). Therefore, the differences between the Means are not likely due to chance and are due more to Effort than to Knowledge.

SR and WI faculty both showed below average Action but differed in their level of Willingness. The SR do little in the way of action – why? The two hypotheses were (1) they thought it would require too much Effort, or (2) they did not have the Knowledge of what to do. Graph results showed that both groups have equal knowledge, but the SR have a lower level of Effort. This suggests that Effort explained how the SR are different than the WI. The Tukey post hoc test revealed that Effort was statistically significant for

both faculty types ($p = .045$), but there was no statistically significant difference for Knowledge ($p = .998$). Therefore, the differences between the means are not likely due to chance and are probably due to Effort.

RQ3: Which types are more likely to show positive support actions?

CO faculty have the highest Willingness and Action Scores, as well as the highest Knowledge and Effort scores. They willingly provide positive support actions. They know what to do and how to do it, and they have a good attitude about how much effort it takes to provide accommodations to SWLD.

RQ4: What themes emerge when faculty explain their experiences supporting SWLD?

Emergent themes showed the influences of Knowledge and Effort on willingness, ability, and actions.

Willingness issues. Willingness to accommodate was affected by Knowledge in terms of personal experience that influenced attitudes about SWLD. Knowledge was also a factor in two beliefs about accommodations: (1) that they were unfair and (2) that they left SWLD unprepared for the real world. Willingness was affected by Effort in terms of attitudes about accommodations.

Faculty responses showed that personal experience was a type of a *posteriori* knowledge that influenced their attitudes about SWLD. Many of the interviewed faculty had some personal experience with LD, either their own or those of a close relative. This experience had a strong impact on their beliefs and their willingness to support SWLD. However, this influence could either be positive or negative. For some faculty, personal experience made them more aware of the difficulties that SWLD encounter—and more committed to advocating for these students, even when the students do not self-advocate. For example, all the CO faculty (highest Knowledge scores) had immediate family with LD that had positively affected their willingness to accommodate. In contrast, there were some interviewees whose personal experiences led to the opposite effect. For example, two of the RC (high Knowledge) faculty had LD but successfully navigated college without accommodations. One discussed what he needed to do to succeed academically, stating "I have an invisible disability as well and I've been working with it for 38 years. I describe it as 'I just suck it up and do it.'" He never received help for his LD in college: "I just had to discipline myself, budget my time." While CO faculty had positive personal experiences, and RC faculty had negative ones, most of the SR (low Knowledge) had no personal experience with SWLD, and the WI (low Knowledge) had mixed personal experience. Positive personal experiences with SWLD influenced the willingness of the CO faculty; having negative, or no, experience resulted in the other faculty types being less willing to accommodate.

Responses showed that familiarity with LD influenced faculty attitudes. This was especially true regarding the fairness of accommodations and how SWLD will fare once they leave college. One theme was whether providing accommodations would give SWLD an unfair advantage. High-willingness faculty believed that accommodations were necessary and merely gave students tools they needed to succeed. One CO faculty member pondered non-willing colleagues' issues with fairness based on LD being hidden: "If they don't see something that's either extreme or something that's physical, that they can't sort of quantify … they think it's just some ploy to gain an advantage over other students." Low-willingness faculty felt that giving an alternate assignment or exam would be to the detriment of other students; they also worried about how much attention SWLD would need, meaning "less time to go around to everybody else." Another theme that emerged about accommodations was how students would fare once they left academia. Positive responders were hopeful, but unsure. Negative responders worried about what happens to SWLD in the real world, and whether it was fair that students who had been accommodated would be judged as *equal* to someone else vying for a job. One RC faculty member stated that in the real world, "you are not going to have double time to do your work, and you're not going to be able to say 'well gee, I just don't feel well today so I guess I'll stay home,'" adding that hidden disabilities are "invisible, which makes it even worse."

Qualitative results showed that willingness was affected by Knowledge, in terms of personal experience and beliefs about accommodations, and affected by Effort, in terms of attitudes about accommodations.

To faculty from the groups with the highest Effort scores (CO and WI), accommodations were seen as part of the job and necessary for SWLD to succeed academically. A CO faculty member stated, "Some of these accommodations are really not that hard. They're just not." Faculty from the groups with the lowest Effort scores (SR and RC), were less enthused. Some accommodations required more effort for some faculty; in addition, many faculty questioned whether accommodations were actually needed. A third theme was that the more effort accommodations took, the less willing faculty were to implement them. This was especially true for exam modifications, the most common accommodation seen at the institution. No

CO faculty mentioned issues with exam accommodations, and WI faculty had the fewest issues. RC and SR faculty, with the lowest Effort scores, had the most problems with providing exam accommodations. A final theme that emerged was that accommodations may be unnecessary, especially extended exam time. CO and WI faculty had no issues with extended time; RC and SR faculty had issues with the fairness and efficacy of extended time, believing it gives an unfair advantage, and suggesting that most students do not use the extra time, so they must not need it.

Ability issues. Ability to accommodate SWLD was affected by Knowledge, in terms of training or lack thereof, and Effort, in terms of support received.

Responses showed that training can impact the ability of faculty to accommodate SWLD. For some, training made them more aware of the need for accommodations and ways to improve the educational experience. For example, CO faculty had specialized training or personal experience through parenting and were also open to additional training. Faculty without training were unaware of institutional processes and resources which hampered the effective provision of accommodations. This was especially true for WI faculty, none of whom had formal training. One did not know about the existence of the Test Center, and one was unaware that many SWLD have multiple diagnoses and therefore multiple accommodations. One admitted to not reading accommodation forms because "it's usually they just need more time on exams…I don't do exams, so it doesn't matter." SR faculty also had no formal training, did not mention training as an issue, and did not seem bothered by their lack of knowledge.

Responses showed that support received can impact the ability to accommodate. Support can come from colleagues, a department, or the disability services office (DSO). CO and SR faculty (high Effort) helped colleagues with exam accommodations, using conference rooms or offices and proctoring others' exams. In some departments all students with extended time accommodations for a course take the final exam in the same room to make it easier to proctor. Receiving support from faculty and colleagues increases the ability of faculty to provide testing accommodations. However, faculty had mixed feelings about seeking support from DSO. Many non-CO faculty believed it took too much effort to use the Test Center; SR faculty balked at the "tricky" and "cumbersome" Test Center rules.

Action issues. Several interview questions sought to determine what types of actions faculty would take in the support of SWLD. Knowledge was an issue when faculty wanted more information about students than DSO provided; Effort was an issue when faculty were questioned about changing the way they teach or test.

Knowledge, or the lack thereof, about specific SWLD proved to be an issue for some faculty. They wondered about information not included on accommodation forms, about students with undiagnosed LDs, and about what to do when SWLD did not follow the institution's rules. Faculty from all groups were unsatisfied with the information provided on accommodation forms. Some felt left out of the process since they are told nothing about the students' disability; others complained that students did not say anything about why accommodations are needed.

Three scenarios were employed to ascertain what actions faculty would take in support of SWLD. The first scenario asked interviewees what they would do if they believed that, based on a hand-written assignment, a student might have LD but had not given them an accommodation form. The CO and the RC (high Action) would take positive steps to help the student, including reaching out to the student or to DSO, though one RC faculty member thought it would be insulting to ask a student if they needed help. The WI and SR (low Action) were much less likely to take action. Only one WI respondent would take responsibility to help the student; the others assumed someone else would. Similarly, only one SR faculty member would take positive actions; the rest reported they would do nothing to help.

A second scenario about test accommodations asked what actions they would take if a student who needed test accommodations did not follow the rules for requesting the accommodation for a particular exam. The CO and RC (high Action) would take, and have taken, positive actions to accommodate. CO faculty set up the accommodations in advance and took the initiative to remind the students that they need to make plans to get accommodated. RC faculty also remind students, but more out of a sense of duty. The WI and SR (low Action) had mixed responses. Some would do nothing. One SR faculty member considered it the student's responsibility: "Even if they have a learning disability, they can put a note in their phone to remind them to remind me."

While faculty did not always have the knowledge they wanted or needed, they still made accommodation decisions. Actions taken without appropriate Knowledge may have helped or hindered their students. Supportive action was also affected by the amount of effort it would take to provide accommodations.

The third scenario asked faculty whether they would consider modifying coursework or the course itself if an increasing number of students in a course

needed accommodations. The CO and the WI (high Effort) were willing to change course and assignment formats, but not necessarily exam formats. CO faculty had already taken different learning styles into account, planning classwork and offering assignments and exams to suit a wide variety of students. For example, one assigned mostly papers but offered choices wherever possible on other work. Like CO faculty, the WI were more open to changing the way they teach as opposed to changing the way they test. However, it seemed they had more questions than answers, and were not as willing to put the effort into modifications. The SR and the RC (low Effort) were less willing to change course and assignment formats, and fairly unwilling to modify exam formats. SR faculty were reluctant to create alternate exam types. One had issues with the possibility of needing to adapt a course because of an increased number of accommodations. RC faculty were concerned about the fairness of providing alternate assignments and exam types. For example, one would create an alternate exam but not "beyond what an accommodation might require."

RQ5: In what ways do the actions of faculty explain their self-reported willingness and ability?

The survey asked respondents to rate their willingness and ability to accommodate SWLD on 5-point Likert scales (1= Very Willing or Very Able, 5 = Very Unwilling or Very Unable). Interviewed faculty were asked to identify where they fell on a range of opinions. On one end of the range, at a 1, were people who felt that SWLD are just as smart and hard-working, and just as likely to succeed in their careers, as their peers, but they need a little extra help to be academically successful in college. On the other end of the range, at a 10, were people who felt that SWLD are just not as capable as their peers, and are not going to be successful, so it is a waste of resources to try and push these students into careers that they are not suited for – and also, it is unfair to give them an advantage when they are competing against other students for grades. Comparing the self-reported range from the interviews with the self-rankings from the survey showed that the majority of faculty reported that they were willing and able to support SWLD. However, where they locate themselves on the opinion range more closely correlated with the group they were placed into based on quantitative data. Only CO faculty claimed to be willing and able and acted in a way that demonstrated that willingness and ability.

Discussion

This study explored whether faculty who say they are willing to accommodate SWLD are acting in a way that demonstrates that they are—are they practicing what they preach? CO faculty are the only group "walking the walk"—they say they are very willing and very able, and the data showed that their actions support that. The WI claimed to be willing, which they were, but their lack of knowledge led to lack of action. All but one of the SR claimed to be willing and able, but they were neither. Their low willingness and low knowledge result in low action. (The one who rated himself very unwilling, was in fact unwilling.) Finally, the RC claimed to be willing and able but put themselves on the end of the range that agreed that SWLD "just aren't as capable as their peers and are not going to be successful." Their high knowledge led to high action, but they provided accommodations because "that's the rule" as opposed to because it would help students. In fact, they believed that accommodations hurt students' career prospects.

Willingness

Most faculty reported that they were willing to accommodate. However, their willingness was affected by personal beliefs and the perceived ease of providing an accommodation.

Personal beliefs. Personal beliefs can influence how a faculty member feels about the need for accommodations and the types of disabilities with which they feel comfortable. An overwhelming majority of surveyed faculty (92%) agreed that SWLD could be successful at the college level, but only 62% believed that SWLD had similar IQs to their peers. When asked if some students take advantage of the system and get accommodations that they do not need, 60% agreed or were unsure. When asked if too many people were being diagnosed with LD these days and whether it was the latest fad in medical diagnosis for students, 35% agreed or were neutral. Yet 95% of these faculty rated themselves as willing or very willing to accommodate. Differences in personal beliefs were evident once faculty were divided into the four faculty types, especially concerning their personal experiences with SWLD.

Ease or difficulty of providing accommodations. A majority of surveyed faculty (76%) agreed that they had no problems providing accommodations, corroborating a study by Bourke et al. (2000). However, there were differences found based on the type of accommodation and perceived difficulty of provision, corroborating a study by Murray et al. (2008) that found faculty were more willing to

provide minor accommodations. CO faculty had no problem providing any accommodations, and in fact looked for additional ways to help students. RC faculty had issues with extended exam time accommodations, which were sometimes hard to schedule and which they felt provided an advantage in some courses. They also had trouble with distraction-free exam locations, not wanting to use the Test Center where they could not be present to answer student questions. WI faculty had no issues providing accommodations, most of which were for extended exam time. None had thought about whether the accommodations helped; they just provided what was requested. All the SR mentioned extended exam time accommodations, and the fact that most of the students do not use it, concluding that they do not need it. They found that extended time on final exams was hard to schedule, most mentioning the difficulty of dealing with the Test Center.

Ability

Confirming Ajzen and Fishbein (1982), a willing attitude was not the only predictor of positive support actions. While most faculty (92%) reported that they felt able to accommodate SWLD, support they received as well as lack of training and knowledge affected ability.

Support received. Slightly more than half of faculty (57%) agreed or strongly agreed that DSO adequately supported them. This number is lower than results of Bourke et al. (2000) who found that 75% of faculty believed they received adequate support from their DSO. Their study showed that this type of support influenced the understanding that accommodations are important and the belief that accommodations work. Skinner (1998) concurred that a supportive DSO is critical for faculty providing accommodations.

Quantitative data showed that 79% of surveyed faculty knew whom to contact with questions about accommodation requests, but only 14% "almost always" or "sometimes" call DSO to ask questions about a specific student's disability. Slightly more than half of surveyed faculty (53%) have never visited the DSO website. These issues highlighted the need for additional or revised faculty training from—and about—DSO. Bourke, et al. (2000) found that department support influenced the belief that accommodations helped students succeed academically. Results showed that different faculty get and provide different levels of support from and to departments and co-workers.

Lack of training. Lack of training can be a barrier to faculty ability to accommodate. Several studies (Cook et al., 2009; Jensen et al., 2004; Katsiyannis, et al., 2009) mentioned that college faculty do not receive training in how to teach, let alone how to accommodate. This was corroborated in this study, since less than a quarter (23%) of respondents had attended DSO training. The CO faculty had all received specialized training, confirming findings of Skinner (2007), which showed a positive association between LD-related faculty training and willingness to accommodate. All the RC and SR faculty, and most of the WI faculty, had never received formal training on the accommodation process or on SWLD. This corroborates the findings of Murray et al. (2008) who showed that disability-related training predicted faculty willingness to provide, and use, instructional and testing accommodations. In this study, non-CO faculty lacked training. One RC respondent said, "I think they really need to educate us."

Lack of knowledge. Lack of knowledge about SWLD and accommodations "could negatively impact students" (Sniatecki et al., 2015, p. 259). Several studies (Sniatecki et al., 2015; Timmerman & Mulvihill, 2015; Zhang, et al., 2010) have shown that faculty knowledge is important in determining how able faculty feel to provide accommodations. Results of this study confirmed those findings – the quantitative data showed that knowledge ($r = .358$) was the only factor that contributed to positive faculty actions in providing accommodations. CO and RC faculty had the highest levels of knowledge, and consequently the highest levels of Action.

Implications of Findings

The findings showed that different types of faculty have different commitment to accommodating SWLD. Knowledge, especially personal experience, and Effort, especially how cumbersome faculty believe an accommodation is to provide, can have a significant effect on willingness and ability. This information would benefit DSO staff and administrators. The findings justify the creation and revision of faculty professional development and training. Faculty would benefit from additional knowledge about the process and the students. SWLD would benefit by taking courses with instructors who respect their learning differences and provide accommodations with no skepticism or reluctance.

Overall, the two factors that influenced faculty actions regarding accommodations were Knowledge about what do, and the Effort required to do it. The two faculty groups with the highest Knowledge scores, CO and RC, also scored highest on Action. The two groups with the highest Effort scores, CO and WI, also scored highest on willingness.

With two faculty types, Knowledge resulted in increased support. The CO faculty, with the most Knowledge and positive personal experience, showed very positive actions in support of SWLD. The RC faculty also showed positive support actions, but their negative personal experiences resulted in compromised willingness; no one had accommodated them, yet they succeeded on their own, so they did not understand why their students could not do the same. They provided accommodations, though begrudgingly, and with trepidation for the career prospects of SWLD; they did not think the effort to accommodate was worth it. The other two faculty types lacked Knowledge. The WI had lower Knowledge scores than CO faculty, and their lack of knowledge caused them to be confused about providing accommodations and how best to help SWLD, resulting in low Action. The SR had Knowledge scores equivalent to the WI, but their personal experience providing accommodations led them to conclude that it required too much effort.

Since CO and RC faculty provided required accommodations (high Action), the other two faculty groups would cause the biggest implications. Nearly everyone in the WI and SR groups stated that they were "very willing" or “willing,” yet their actions showed them to be far less willing than average. This implied that either they really believed they were willing (self-delusion) or they told the researcher what they thought was politically correct. Either way, their low Action scores could imply that their SWLD were not receiving appropriate accommodations or were subjected to bad faculty attitudes. In addition, not complying fully with accommodations could open the institution up to legal issues (Learning Disabilities Association of America, 2016).

Practical Application/Recommendations

It is important that the institution demonstrates its commitment to SWLD and the disability service providers (DSPs) that support them. For example, Barnard et al. (2008) found that faculty may not consider disabilities a piece of a campus’s wider diversity initiatives. If institutional diversity training does not include a portion on disabilities, this should be remedied. In addition, if DSOs are understaffed or lack sufficient resources and funding, or if DSPs lack training and experience, they may have trouble implementing recommendations.

The findings of this and other studies show that faculty willingness can be affected by personal beliefs and the perceived ease or difficulty of providing accommodations; ability can be affected by support received, as well as lack of training, lack of experience, and lack of knowledge. There are some factors that the institution and its faculty have no control over, including classes with standardized content and exams; the number of students to be accommodated in any given class; and students not seeking help and not following rules. But the institution can do something about faculty knowledge, which this study showed is one way to influence faculty actions. Since the level of knowledge differs in the four faculty types, the recommendations differ as well. Based on the findings the institution has three distinct problems to solve: (1) increasing the Knowledge of the SR and the WI; (2) persuading the SR that providing accommodations will not require as much Effort as they think, and that accommodations make a difference; and (3) convincing the RC that SWLD can be successful in their chosen careers.

Increasing knowledge of SR and WI faculty. The easiest ways to increase faculty knowledge are providing training and easier access to information. Training faculty does not guarantee their willingness or ability, but it may influence their actions. For non-CO faculty, training may be perceived as inadequate or inconvenient; some stated that current training options did not cover necessary topics, including legal requirements. Topics should include the institution’s accommodation process, the academic challenges SWLD face, the types of LD and typical accommodations, and classroom scenario training. Faculty should be generally familiar with the diagnoses that make up LD and the kind of issues SWLD may experience as well as ADA regulations. While difficult to provide personal experiences with SWLD, training could inform faculty of other faculty’s (or students’) experiences. CO faculty should help design and deliver training. They are fully on-board with supporting SWLD and can contribute their personal experiences and knowledge. Training should be offered online as well as in person; informational brochures or videos should be available online on-demand.

The institution should also consider offering training in Universal Design for Instruction (UDI) and/or Universal Design for Learning (UDL). While most respondents had not heard of UDL, many were already using some of its principles, e.g. offering oral vs. written exams, including several different types of questions on exams, and splitting class sessions into multiple activities to engage different types of learners. Training in UD may be an easier sell, especially to the SR, because it focuses on improving learning for *all* students; this would help alleviate their concern about giving special treatment.

Persuading the SR. SR faculty need to be convinced that providing accommodations will not require as much effort as they think and that accom-

modations make a difference. Since support received can influence ability, the institution, specifically the DSO, needs to work with faculty to help them provide accommodations. One way is by following up with faculty - once a student requests accommodation, no one ensures the accommodations are taking place or asks if they are being used or seem to help. Early in each semester, DSO staff could survey faculty who have received accommodation forms. In addition, DSO could use the institution's progress report system to solicit faculty feedback.

SR faculty had no personal experience with SWLD and no training in the accommodation process. This contributes to their lack of effort, and their refusal to take responsibility for helping students with accommodations. This also makes them hard to convince about the need for and benefits of accommodations. They will not willingly attend training and in fact think they do not need it. They may be persuaded by DSO following up on accommodated students. In addition, hearing personal stories from CO faculty of accommodations that were relatively straightforward, and that really worked for a student, may change their thinking.

Convincing the RC that SWLD can be successful in their careers. RC faculty expressed concern about SWLD once they get out into the real world. DSO should convene a panel discussion of graduates with LD and have them discuss how they are coping in their jobs – do they receive accommodations? Do their LDs make any aspects of the job more challenging, and how do they deal with that? This would help faculty see how graduates fare in the real world and may alleviate some of their concerns; it would benefit current SWLD as well, so they know what they can expect once they are employed.

Limitations and Future Research

The study was undertaken at a single institution which may affect the generalization of findings to a larger population and therefore the external validity. Considered a "business school" it may employ significantly different faculty than would be found at another institution. Quantitative data collection limitations included a small sample size; the online survey was only accessible to respondents via computers or smartphones which may have precluded some people from responding. Faculty self-selected to participate in the survey, so the respondent population could have been skewed to include people who were already passionate about the topic. To address sample size limitations, the researcher invited all faculty of the institution to complete the survey and sent several reminder emails before the survey closed. A small number of faculty who started the survey did not finish; this may have been caused by survey fatigue or disinterest in the topic. The researcher reviewed the survey progress data to ensure that there was not a common question or place in the survey where a high percentage of people stopped. The selection of faculty interviewees could have been biased by the researcher. To address this, faculty were purposefully selected from the four groups in survey-response order, contacting the next person when someone declined or did not reply. Any interview could have been affected by recall error, reaction to the interviewer, or self-serving responses (Patton, 2002). Interviews were transcribed verbatim so as not to interject any personal biases.

Future researchers should replicate this study at other types of institutions to see if similar results are found. They may want to add additional, more specific, open-ended survey questions to allow respondents to explain some answers more fully. While this study found no correlation between demographics and willingness, other studies have (Bourke et al., 2000; Hong and Himmel, 2009; Murray et al., 2008; Skinner, 2007). Researchers should consider adding more demographic questions to the survey, perhaps about ethnicity or department. Specifically, a question that asks if respondents have personal knowledge of LDs – either their own or that of a spouse or child – should be added.

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About the Author

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Table 1

Population Demographics vs. Survey Respondent Demographics

Demographic	Population	Sample
Gender		
Male	279 (60%)	63 (53%)
Female	182 (40%)	53 (44%)
No Answer		3 (3%)
Age Range		
Under 25	2 (<1%)	2 (2%)
25 to 35	79 (13%)	14 (12%)
36 to 45	116 (19%)	19 (16%)
46 to 55	132 (22%)	31 (26%)
56 to 60	70 (12%)	9 (8%)
Over 60	197 (33%)	44 (37%)
Teaching position is considered		
Full time	284 (62%)	86 (72%)
Part time/Adjunct	177 (38%)	33 (28%)
Current position		
Professor	83 (29%)	19 (16%)
Associate Professor	76 (27%)	25 (21%)
Assistant Professor	39 (14%)	20 (17%)
Senior lecturer/Lecturer	86 (30%)	54 (45%)

Table 2

Correlations Among Variables

	Willingness	Ability	Knowledge	Effort	Actions
Willingness	--				
Ability	.353	--			
Knowledge	.112	.778	--		
Effort	.389	.807	.270	--	
Actions	.100	.256	.358	.046	--

Figure 1

The four faculty types based on actions vs. willingness.

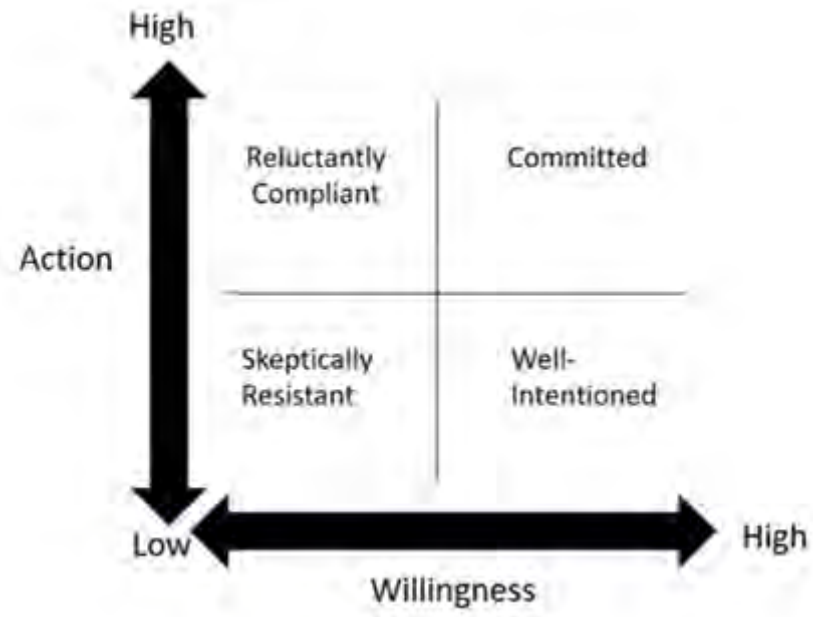

Figure 2

Means of Knowledge and Effort for all four faculty types.