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## Disabled Students and Their Access to Education

Students with disabilities are considered one of the most vulnerable populations in what concerns the issues of accessibility to education and school dropouts (Reschly & Christenson, 2006). Recently, they were categorized one of the most marginalized groups in what concerns equal opportunity to education. They are following the path of other vulnerable groups such as women, ethnic and racial minorities and low-income persons (Wolanin & Steele, 2004). Disability is defined as a “an umbrella term, covering impairments, activity limitations, and participation restrictions. Impairment is a problem in body function or structure; an activity limitation is a difficulty encountered by an individual in executing a task or action; while a participation restriction is a problem experienced by an individual in involvement in life situations” (World Health Organization, 2017). Students with disability experience functional limitations that influence and limit one or more life’s activities such as learning, seeing and walking (Corcoran, 2010).

Disability includes the following categories: attention deficit/ hyperactivity disorder, autism spectrum disorder, chronic medical, cognitive/learning disabilities, traumatic brain injury, visual, hearing and mental health disabilities and psychological disorders (The University of Rhode Island, 2017). When the problem of education of youth with disabilities is approached, we can take in consideration the students with disabilities already included in the university but which are excluded from the learning process because of many challenges such as the lack of a curricula adapted to their needs, the attitude of the educational staff and many others. Furthermore, access to education is limited for those which are not yet integrated in an university but they would if the university would identify their needs and would tackle the existing barriers (Daniel, Lucian Blaga, Peter Karla, Oradea Popovici Doru Vlad, & Bucure?ti, 2016). According to the National Authority for Disabled People, in Romania in 2009 about 100’000 disabled people aged between 18-34 were non-institutionalized. As mentioned in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, people with disabilities have the same rights as the rest of the citizens: civil, political, social cultural and economic institutions in each country (Mara, 2014).

Today’s college students with disabilities face complex experiences that have an influence over their decision to drop out. Moreover, they face a greater array of challenges compared with the students with no disabilities regarding transition from high school to college and access to education. The transition from high school it is considered difficult for any youth, but for youth with certain disabilities is particularly difficult. These challenges can influence the academic and social functioning of the college students with disabilities. At a college level, students are expected to be involved more in processing the information in their courses and it is responsible for understanding the course material. The transition from high school to college may imply a

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high level of stress for students with disabilities, leading to depression or anxiety (Ramsdell, 2014). The number of college students with disabilities is increasing and their academic success depends on a variety of factors. Usually the academic success has been reportedly lower than any students with no disabilities. Providing access to education is a method of equalizing the opportunities of youth with disabilities and also a form of increasing the inclusion later in the professional life (Costea-B?rlu?iu & Rusu, 2015). In addition, predicting and preventing dropping out plays an important role, since more universities focus only on enrollment management (Wessel, 2009).

Psychological-According to Bean and Eaton (2000), dropping out is a behavior and usually behaviors are 'psychologically motivated' by certain aspects. College professionals can develop supports for college students with disabilities once they identify psychological attributes that motivates them in staying in college. Those supports can help them develop the required attributes that hay may not have naturally (Rigler, Tucker, & Delaney, 2013) Attitudes, intentions and psychological processes include self-efficacy as a student, sense of self-confidence, self-development, motivation to study, need for achievement, satisfaction, internal lotus of control, sense of fitting, self-validation and intention. All these attributes are often overlooked when doing studies based on retention strategies for college students, including minorities such as students with disabilities. Students who enter an education institution already have certain psychological attributes which are shaped by different experiences, abilities and self-assessments. The interaction with the college environment the students does series of self-assessments. These self- assessments are guiding students to connect experiences happening in the institution with their feelings about being a college student. Most of them have adaptive strategies which help them cu cope with difficult situations and feel integrated. Usually, the psychological processes represent the foundation for dropping out decisions (Bean & Bogdan Eaton, 2001). To become integrated in an academic environment, college students with disabilities need specific attributes. They need to be constantly motivated and help them in develop coping skills. Once they have positive attitudes regarding college and have the intention to graduate, they have more chances to succeed and graduate (Wessel, 2009).

Organizational-The degree of satisfaction of college students with disabilities is influenced by the grades, courses and membership in campus organization and also about the physical environment. (Rigler, Tucker, & Delaney, 2013). Some of the barriers they face are architectural barriers which include building access, classroom access, features of building, elevators, restrooms and parking availability. For students who use wheelchairs, the lack of ramps represents a significant problem. There are certain cases in which universities do not have appropriate medical services such as having medical staff able to understand sign language in the case of deaf students having a medical emergency (Pingry, Markward, & Advisor, 2007). The Social Model of Disability (Ba, 1990) draws attention to the attitudes of people towards disability. The attitudes of the academic staff towards students with disability it is important

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because the literature suggest that teachers' negative attitudes have an influence over their educational outcomes. It has been proven that faculty's attitudes contribute to academic success, graduation for students with disabilities. Their willingness to ask for help depends also on past experiences with the educational staff.

The issue of accessibility is important also for the students with the disability but also for the actors involved in their education. Teachers having negative attitudes towards them can limit their learning opportunities, can have low expectations regarding their progress and may take curricular decisions that might not include the students with disabilities. Some of the factors that contributed to the differences regarding the attitudes of the educational staff are age, level of contact, type and severity of disability and social desirability. In the Babes- Bolyai University in Cluj Napoca, Romania the interest of participating in exploring the attitudes of educational staff towards students with disabilities was low. However, the people who completed the questionnaire declared that they have a positive attitude and they were willing to get involved in training activities with a focus on the needs of the students with disability (Costea-B?rlu?iu & Rusu, 2015). Furthermore, the curriculum needs to be adapted in terms of teaching approaches along with physical arrangement of the classroom, if needed.

The teaching strategies are often face-to-face requiring notes taken by the students and this represents a challenge by the students with disabilities. Also lectures support is considered a challenge because literature suggests that lecturers tend to answer negatively when students with disabilities ask for clarity of previous lessons. In the absence of support from the educational staff. Students with disabilities rely on peers for notes. Time extension during examinations and tests is different for students with disabilities and often ignored by the educational staff (Mosia & Phasha, 2017).The sense of belonging to a group or campus organization and if the group members show interest and that they value the student's achievements has a great positive impact on them. (King, n.d.) Even though the emotional disturbances may cause students with disabilities to be perceived as having low social skills, they are in fact likely to see their friends often. Certain organization support the college students with disabilities and give them the sense of belonging, which influences their decision to continue the education and prevent the drop out (Rigler et al., 2013). However, when it comes to volunteer activities or organized community groups, they are not likely to take part in. (Wagner et al., 2005)

Sociological Some of the structural factors that influence a student's with disabilities access to education are sociological. In this report we will discuss about the relation between access to education and the following determinants: Social isolation, Close friends, Memberships in organizations, Family and Race. If people have the right social attitudes toward disabilities, adults with disabilities can feel empowered to enter with confidence the higher education system (Wolanin & Steele, n.d.). Social isolationIn the process to a degree completion, the need for

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social commitment has been proved. The social acceptance can not be achieved simply by the students with disabilities due to barriers such as lack of social support. The lack of social support can be explained by the concept of stigma that has been defined by Erving Goffman as: „ a trait that causes a decline in an individual's social status and plays a major role in diminishing the status of those with disabilities in society” (King, n.d.) One of the aspects that lead to the stigmatization of the students with disabilities is the nature of the disability. Some disabilities may cause observable disfigurement which can be perceived as dangerous and push people away(Ablon, 2002).

Another aspect that leads to the exclusion of students with disabilities is the fact that non-disabled persons feel uncomfortable around them. Moreover, comparing to the interaction with a non-disabled person, individuals without disabilities have more negative thoughts while interacting with a disabled person therefore they might avoid it (Fichten, Amsel, Bourdon, & Creti, 1988). For students with disabilities, hostility and social isolation can turn the academic environment into a more challenging to complete and therefore more challenging to access (King, n.d.).Close friendsFor students with disabilities, having close friends is a form of natural support. For them, the natural support can have a great impact because it can link them or ease their access to existing academic or social support. Furthermore, it reduces the stigma associated with searching for disability services. Individuals with disabilities which can affect the social interaction such as autism or emotional disturbances can be deprived of interpersonal relationships. This can negatively impact their chances of having health friendships, romantic relationships and employment (Wagner, Newman, Cameto, Garza, & Levine, 2005).Sadly, in Romania studies show that most of the people are not close to individuals with disabilities or the personal contact with them is rare.(Costea-B?rlu?iu & Rusu, 2015)

Family Another important factor for students with disabilities in what concerns college life is the influence of the parental support. Parents with prior experience in college know how challenging the adjustment to college can be, more that parents who did not attend college. Even so, the ones who were not college students can also provide the support that is needed for their children with disabilities to adjust in the new environment (Corcoran, 2010).Sometimes, the help that the family members provide to the disabled students is considered counterproductive for the development of the autonomy and independence of a student (Doren, Gau, & Lindstrom, 2012). However, this collaboration is important for the success of students diagnosed with psychiatric disabilities. Siblings can provide and financial support, social and emotional support, advocacy, as well as detect signs of relapse and then help them prevent withdrawal. (Kupferman & Schultz, n.d.)RaceRace/ethnicity can be associated with relationships within families, cultural traditions or a strong group identification which can influence the paths youth choose after high school. There are no significant differences in the prospect of being enrolled in college across students with disabilities coming from different racial/ethnic groups. Furthermore, race/ethnicity has a independent relationship to the possibility of employment of

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the youth in the general population and also for those with disabilities. (Wagner et al., 2005)

Economical Usually, low-income students need financial assistance to be able to afford the costs of higher education programs. However, students with disabilities, have a much greater need for financial assistance, given their special needs, than other students. Therefore, the financial barriers students with low-income families face to higher education are bigger for students with disabilities. In order to meet their special needs, students with disabilities receive sometimes services from different professionals such as doctors, psychologists, and therapists. The costs for the services and treatments are not always covered by public and private agencies so they must be paid out-of-pocket. Also there are also other costs of a disability such as special foods according to their dietary restrictions or special devices. All these costs add up to the education ones. We may think of ways in which students with disabilities can look for financial aid but however, improving self-advocacy for the students with disabilities and developing their skills in documenting the needed disability-related expenses or the knowledge of financial aid administrators can not make a difference if enough money is not available to sustain the needs of students with disabilities (Wolanin & Steele, n.d.).

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