Chapter 58
Online Courses Accessible to College Students With Disabilities

Dorea D. Bonneau

https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1575-0168
University of North Carolina at Pembroke, USA

Margaret M. Cramer
Northcentral University, USA

ABSTRACT

More students can attend colleges and universities from a distance due to broader access and technological advances. Therefore, facilitators are facing the challenge of providing more accommodations and modifications to nontraditional students. The provision of these special services, which have traditionally been provided by special educators, are receiving limited attention. Special educators are educated to make these adjustments on an individual basis in the elementary and secondary levels. However, this has not been the traditional role of the university professor. With today's mass enrollments in online courses, procedures for providing accommodations to all students have become a significant challenge. This chapter will review research on online course design and implementation to address the needs of students with disabilities.

INTRODUCTION

Technology trends are creating new challenges in postsecondary education. Community colleges and universities are implementing information technology by expanding distance education opportunities. Online education has grown tremendously. From 2004-2005, 65% of institutions offering face-to-face classes report an 18% growth in online courses at the graduate level and a 33% at the baccalaureate level (Allen & Seaman, 2006). Students with disabilities are also enrolling in distance education courses. According to Kinash, Crichton, and Kim-Rupnow (2004), people with disabilities are among the least

considered in the educational context of online learning. Failing to proactively address accessibility to information technologies can negatively impact the ability of students with disabilities to thrive in the online environment. This chapter will discuss the accessibility challenges of online learning faced by students with disabilities. It will suggest solutions to these challenges.

BACKGROUND

Special education services for students with disabilities have been addressed in public schools since 1975. However, limited attention has been given to the provision of these services to postsecondary students (Herbert, 2014; Ricardo, Alegre-de-la-Rosa, & López-Aguilar, 2012). Due to privacy issues, disability offices can provide researchers with limited data pertaining to the provision of special services to students. Even with the provision of services under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), only an extended time is given to students through the college or university's office of disability services. This accommodation, often utilized to assist students with access to education, is insufficient in serving the needs of a diverse population (Lewandowski, Cohen, & Lovett, 2012).

Access to content through modern methods of technology can have a positive impact on academic achievement, leading to more success for students with disabilities due to the multimodal nature of online courses (Englert, Zhao, Collings, & Romig, 2005). Students with disabilities may benefit from multimedia-rich courses and modern teaching methodologies addressing different learning styles (Buckley & Smith, 2007).

In public schools (preK-12), students with disabilities can receive instructional modifications and accommodations for assignments and specific programs of study according to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004. These students may require a reduction of written assignments, oral lessons, assistance for loss or reduced vision or hearing, use of technological devices, oral exams, small group instruction, social skills training, and technical training. Postsecondary students with disabilities may require similar accommodations. Unfortunately, most college faculty and course facilitators are not prepared to redesign online courses to address these unique needs. With specific training and resources, postsecondary educators can more appropriately address the needs of students with disabilities in postsecondary online courses (Grabinger, Aplin, & Ponnappa-Brenner, 2008).

Legislative Foundation

There is civil rights legislation associated with access to services for persons with a documented disability. Procedures have been established as defined by the 1990 ADA, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. To be protected under the ADA, a person must "have a physical or mental impairment that limits major life activities; have a documented history of impairment; or be perceived by others as having an impairment" (ADA, 1990, §12101 et. seq.). Major life activities include such major bodily functions as immune system functions, normal cell growth, digestive, bowel, bladder, neurological, brain, respiratory, circulatory, endocrine, and reproductive functions. Of significance is the fact that the ADA definition of a disability includes both mental and physical impairments.

Colleges or universities may not abide by the "perceived by others" component of the ADA. In 2008 the Americans with Disabilities Amendments Act (ADAAA) clarified who should be covered. It revised

Related Content

Visual Cultural Arts as a Gateway to Digital Literacy
Lesley S. J. Farmerand Christopher J. Farmer (2023). *Innovative Digital Practices and Globalization in Higher Education (pp. 16-35).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/visual-cultural-arts-as-a-gateway-to-digital-literacy/318784

Construction of the Definite Integral Concept Using Open Source Software
Lizzeth Aurora Navarro-Ibarra, Omar Cuevas-Salazarand Alan Daniel Robles-Aguilar (2017). *Handbook of Research on Driving STEM Learning With Educational Technologies (pp. 432-450).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/construction-of-the-definite-integral-concept-using-open-source-software/177016

The Mechanism of Flipped Classroom Based on Cognitive Schemas
Wangyihan Zhu (2023). *International Journal of Technology-Enhanced Education (pp. 1-12).*
www.irma-international.org/article/the-mechanism-of-flipped-classroom-based-on-cognitive-schemas/325077

Is Schema Theory Helpful in Teaching and Learning Based on Visualizing Research?
Xinhong Xia, Xianglan Chen, Jing Zhang, Hongliang Louand Yachao Duan (2022). *International Journal of Technology-Enhanced Education (pp. 1-15).*
www.irma-international.org/article/is-schema-theory-helpful-in-teaching-and-learning-based-on-visualizing-research/300332

Online English Reading Instruction in the ESL Classroom Based on Constructivism
Yan Liu, Hongbing Liu, Yan Xuand Hongying Lu (2019). *International Journal of Technology-Enabled Student Support Services (pp. 39-49).*
www.irma-international.org/article/online-english-reading-instruction-in-the-esl-classroom-based-on-constructivism/244210