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Office of the President

TO MEMBERS OF THE ACADEMIC AND STUDENT AFFAIRS COMMITTEE:

DISCUSSION ITEM

For Meeting of January 24, 2024

FINAL REPORT OF THE SYSTEMWIDE ADVISORY WORKGROUP ON STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Systemwide Advisory Workgroup on Students with Disabilities (SDWG) was launched in 2021 by then-Provost and Executive Vice President Michael Brown to advise the President on recommended actions to advance the University toward a more robust and inclusive approach to supporting students with disabilities. This report includes the workgroup's findings and 17 recommended actions for addressing those findings and transforming system and campus support for students with disabilities.

BACKGROUND

The population of students with disabilities at the University of California has risen steadily in recent years. Data from 2022–23 show nine percent of UC's undergraduate and graduate student population (approximately 26,000 students) receive an accommodation from campus Disabled Student Services (DSS) offices. The population is likely higher as this data point reflects only those students who receive an accommodation. Undergraduate and graduate/professional students with disabilities report lower levels of satisfaction and belonging at UC than students without disabilities. Accessibility in the classroom and maneuvering through the physical infrastructure of the campuses remain challenging for many students with disabilities.

To address the critical need to transform models of support and foster greater inclusion, the Office of the President established the Systemwide Advisory Workgroup on Students with Disabilities (SDWG) in December 2021 to assist UC leadership in determining how to better support students with disabilities through a new framework of inclusion. The final report of the workgroup is provided as Attachment 1.

The workgroup sought to provide the Office of the President with recommendations on the following impacts on the needs and experiences of students with disabilities, inclusive of intersecting identities and students' sense of belonging:

- Academic accommodations for students with disabilities, including assistive technologies.

- Physical accommodations for students with disabilities, including on-campus housing, classrooms, laboratories, and other facilities.

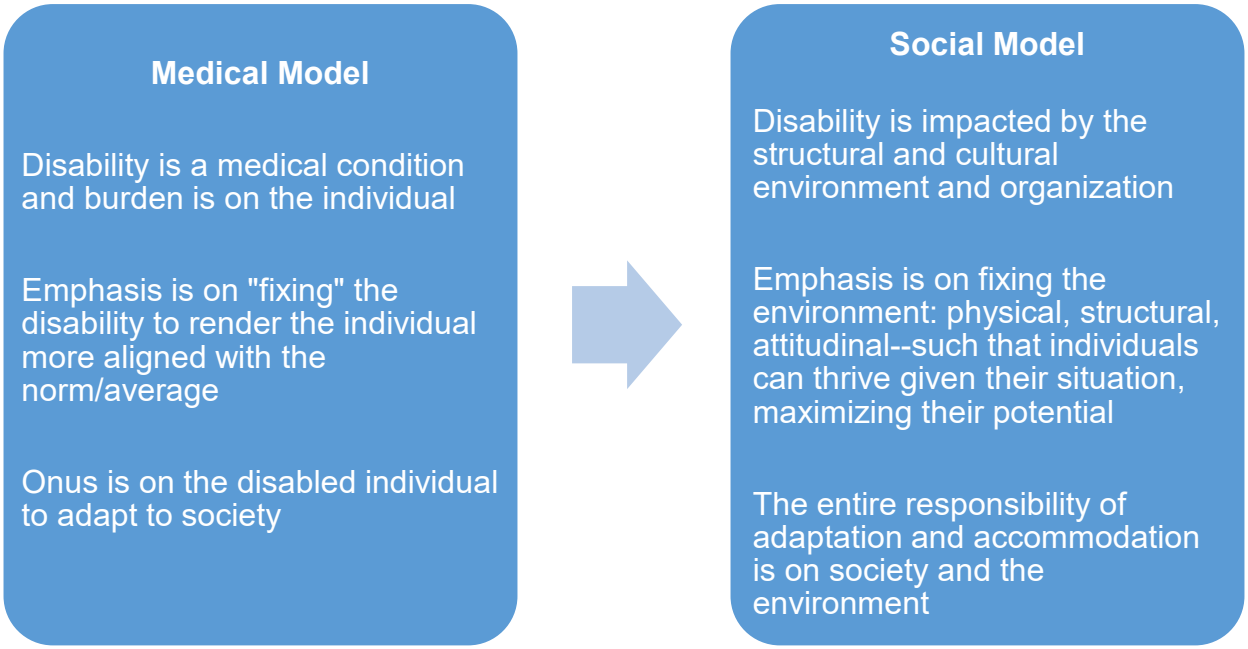
- Universal design as a tool to increase accessibility and expand inclusion in campus life experiences.

- Policy changes and/or programmatic improvements that better support students with disabilities.

The workgroup comprised UC students, faculty, and staff. Student representatives included undergraduate and graduate students familiar with the experience of being a disabled student. Staff representatives included Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliance directors, academic advisors, residential staff, diversity and equity professionals, legal counsel, and disabled-student services directors. Faculty members were selected by the UC Academic Council based on their extensive knowledge of supporting students with disabilities and/or the disability rights landscape.

Future Vision

The report identifies a new framework for future action, one that advances UC away from a reactionary medical model of support and toward a proactive social model of support.



Principles

The following principles guided the workgroup.

Academic culture: Curriculum design, and the overall attitude and approach of the faculty, must adequately align with needs of students with disabilities. The in-classroom experience of students with disabilities, the time it takes to request and receive an accommodation, accessibility to online learning and other tools for assistance living, and the cultural competency of instructors/teaching staff toward people of disabilities must be evaluated and transformed.

Campus culture: The practices of diversity, equity, and inclusion must recognize and include the values and needs of students with disabilities. Persons with disabilities must feel welcome and included at the University, and the University is in turn an environment where they can thrive to their maximum potential. Perceptions of belonging and climate; cultural competency training for students, faculty, and staff; and accessibility to campus activities and co-curricular opportunities, along with visibility of disability services and culture at the University, must be evaluated and transformed.

Infrastructure: All campuses must be as physically and technologically accessible as possible for people with all kinds of disabilities and contribute to making the University known as a welcoming environment through its accessibility. Policies impacting accessibility, including emergency evacuation operations, housing, and wayfinding (e.g., accessible parking, entrances to buildings and elevators, websites, and signage) must be evaluated and transformed.

Recommendations

The report includes the following recommendations for the Board of Regents, University leaders, and faculty:

<u>For the Board of Regents</u>

- Revise Regents Policy 4400, Policy on University of California Diversity Statement, to more emphatically position disability access as a diversity issue.

<u>For University Leaders</u>

- Undertake a review of Policies Applying to Campus Activities, Organizations and Students 140.00: Guidelines Applying to Nondiscrimination on the Basis of Disability to ensure that it is up to date for the current context.

- Strengthen guidance and support for civil rights at UC campuses.

- Make ADA coordinators fulltime positions and consider appointing UC chief accessibility officers to oversee the holistic approach of disability services.

- Confirm that all University media segments can meet accessibility standards.

- Develop student services strategic plans that include processes to achieve and sustain appropriate ratios of students to disability specialists, reduce wait times, and resolve bottleneck and barriers for requesting and receiving accommodations.

- Create inclusive spaces on each campus wherein students with disabilities can gather and share a sense of identity, culture, and belonging.

- Update each campus ADA transition plan and remediation schedule.

- Establish/strengthen chancellor-appointed advisory committees.

- Create a disability-inclusive emergency evacuation plan with procedures for each campus, and train key staff members on how to safely evacuate people with disabilities.

- Institutionalize data collection for students with disabilities, to create a systemwide dashboard on graduation rates per the Multi-Year Funding Compact with the State.

- Develop and sustain a professional learning environment for faculty and staff to learn and apply best practices to interacting with persons with disabilities.

- Investigate using common systems and data collection practices.

For Faculty

- Make inclusive courses accessible during the design or redesign phase rather than midcourse or later.

- Designate and support formal faculty liaison(s) to improve communication between faculty, disabled student services, and teaching and learning centers.

- Undertake review of Academic Senate regulations for incomplete grades and academic standing/progress policies more broadly to ensure that their local application does not have an unintended disparate impact on undergraduate, graduate, and professional students with disabilities.

KEY TO ACRONYMS

ADA	Americans with Disabilities Act
DSS	Disabled Student Services
PACAOS	Policies Applying to Campus Activities, Organizations and Students
SDWG	Systemwide Advisory Workgroup on Students with Disabilities (Shortened: Students with Disabilities Workgroup)

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1: University of California Systemwide Advisory Workgroup on Students with Disabilities, *Transforming Culture and Practice: Serving Students with Disabilities at the University of California*, January 2024 final report