

Research Proposal:

Student Satisfaction in the MSU Disability Resource Center

Adam Crawford

Missouri State University

### Research Proposal: Student Satisfaction in the MSU Disability Resource Center

How confident can student affairs professionals be that their work is contributing to the successful support and development of students at our institutions of higher education?

Administering satisfaction surveys to students has been a straightforward way of measuring an office's ability to satisfy students' needs. This is also true of disability services offices, such as Missouri State University's Disability Resource Center. Another concern of disability resource professionals is how students themselves define disability in their lives. Both of these topics—student satisfaction and self-definition of disability—will be explored in this research.

This study will consist of an emailed online student satisfaction survey to be administered to students registered with the Disability Resource Center at Missouri State University to gauge their level of satisfaction with the office, as well as MSU as a whole. In addition, the survey will measure students' definitions of disability and compare that to their age and student classification. This research will relate to "Student Development and Evolving Student Populations", a subarea noted in the NASPA Research and Scholarship Agenda (NASPA, 2011). Disability as a student population is significant, and the satisfaction and development of students with disabilities are important to track. Student affairs professionals must ensure access and inclusion in their work to create an equitable playing field for students in higher education. Satisfaction levels of disabled students is a good place to start.

### **Literature Review**

Organizations in the service sector have commonly dedicated their efforts to measuring and evaluating the satisfaction of their customers (Lawson, Leach, & Burrows, 2012). Measuring customer satisfaction is important to evaluating current programs, determining what customer expectations exist, and for designing services for the future. One area of focus has been on the

gap between expectation and reality of service, and how that gap can affect customer satisfaction.

Social science researchers have developed various methods with which to measure customer satisfaction (Lawson, Leach, & Burrows, 2012). The most popular tool, SERVQUAL, asks respondents to reveal both their evaluations of services and their expectations before receiving the service, though the value of the latter data has been questioned by some researchers. Another variation, SERVPERF, allows participants the option to weigh the importance of their answers. HEDPERF, a higher education specific tool, has also been developed (Lawson, Leach, & Burrows, 2012).

Universities have concerned themselves with the opinions and decisions of their students for a variety of reasons (Danjuma & Rasli, 2012). Increased competition between institutions for attracting and retaining students, as well as the evolution of students being viewed as customers with buying power, has led to a student-satisfaction-centered approach. Satisfaction is also linked with attachment, an important factor for loyal and generous alumni (Danjuma & Rasli, 2012). Asking for student feedback has also been shown to have benefits for students. Feelings of empowerment, valuing, and importance are often the result of universities showing interest in student satisfaction. These feelings are further solidified when the institution takes action based on student opinions, such as University of Derby's You-Said-It-We-Did-It campaign (Lawson, Leach, & Burrows, 2012).

Universities gather feedback from students in a variety of ways, such as "formal and informal discussions with programme/course representatives, module and programme/course questionnaires, questionnaires that focus on specific services such as the library or catering, and general questionnaires" (Lawson, Leach, & Burrows, 2012, p. 7). Some researchers have questioned whether student satisfaction is an appropriate measure of university success. Should

universities be in the position of satisfying/accommodating students or challenging/educating them? Lawson, Leach, & Burrows (2012) offer that institutions of higher education should use student satisfaction surveys as an integral, but partial indicator of university success, and should be coupled with qualitative research and institutional data.

Disability services have a relatively new history in higher education. Veteran educational assistance, Section 504 of the Vocational Rehabilitation Act, and the Americans with Disability Act of 1990 (and 2008 amendments) propelled disability into the higher education sphere (Madaus, 2011). Throughout the past thirty years, disability services at universities have focused on providing appropriate accommodations, educating faculty, and consulting with other offices on accommodations (Cory, 2011).

Recently, disability studies has pushed a new perspective on disability. Now, disability can be viewed through the social model; it is not the disabled individual who is flawed or deficient, but rather the design of the environments and programming within which he or she must function (Taylor, 2011). Disability resource centers encourage faculty to engage in principles of universal design. Universal design is a concept that promotes the inclusion of all individuals in the design process. Students support this model for education (Kortering, McClannon, & Braziel, 2008). In addition, students' comfort with approaching faculty with accommodation needs is a determining factor in student success (Fichten & Goodrick, 1990).

Disability resource centers, or their equivalents at institutions of higher education, commonly engage in student satisfaction surveys. A quick Internet search engine inquiry found several past surveys developed by disability resource centers readily available online (CSU, 2009; McGilton 2010; University, 2010). These surveys asked about the students' perceptions of staff demeanor, testing accommodations, faculty cooperation, and functionality of assistive technology. Demographic data, such as school year, race, gender, and disability type, were also

collected. Some researchers have encouraged disability resource centers who have already completed a quantitative study on student satisfaction to further their research using qualitative designs can help answer some of the *why* and *how* questions often left unanswered by survey data (Lawson, Leach, & Burrows, 2012; Reinschmiedt, 2008) For example, students satisfaction with disability services can be affected by functionality, accessibility, or availability of those services (Reinschmiedt, 2008).

Based on this review of the literature, it is clear that focusing on student satisfaction in a higher education setting fits well within the realm of reason. Attention should be paid to both the satisfaction with services and the expectations of services. Survey questions on students' comfort with approaching professors can help evaluate their success at receiving appropriate accommodations. The Disability Resource Center at Missouri State University has not conducted a student satisfaction survey for the past few years, so this study will fill a void in professional knowledge for that department. A survey will be the best method, since it is important to lay the quantitative foundation before following up with qualitative research for student satisfaction.

Disability Studies offers a new way of framing disability away from the medical view. The social model of disability has taken a prominent role in disability services in higher education. Attention should be paid to how students define disability in their own lives. Peer-reviewed examples of student satisfaction surveys in disability resource centers were scarce in the literature, so few models exist for designing appropriate questions. Reliance on valid and reliable survey designs in other contexts will help disability services researchers in evaluating student satisfaction.

### **Research Questions and Hypotheses**

1. Is there a relationship between DRC students' perceptions of the DRC and student satisfaction?

- $H_0(1)$ : There is no relationship between DRC students' perceptions of the DRC and student satisfaction.
2. Is there a relationship between DRC students' perceptions of MSU and student satisfaction?
    - $H_0(2)$ : There is no relationship between DRC students' perceptions of MSU and student satisfaction.
  3. Is there a relationship between DRC students' definition of disability and age?
    - $H_0(3)$ : There is no relationship between DRC students' definition of disability and age.
  4. Is there a relationship between DRC students' definition of disability and student classification?
    - $H_0(4)$ : There is no relationship between DRC students' definition of disability and student classification.

### **Study Design**

This study will include an online survey administered to the students registered with the DRC to gauge their satisfaction with the DRC and MSU, as well as their perception of disability. All registered DRC students are entered into an email list utilized for communicating department information, such as upcoming events or a change in policy. The study population will be these students registered with the DRC. The sample will be determined by which students take the initiative to complete the survey. The survey will be cross-sectional, because the participants will only be measured once. The study will be retrospective, focusing on their impressions of past events and services. This study will also be non-experimental, intending to trace back student satisfaction to a particular aspect that could be the source.

The survey will be created on an online survey creation website. The first page will consist of a consent form that students must agree to in order to proceed to the actual survey questions. Questions will consist of Likert scale responses to measure students' satisfaction. Students will then be asked to choose between two definitions of disability, one based on the medical model and the other on the social model, as to which one best fits their own personal definition. Age and student classification will also be measured to compare to the disability definitions. The response rate for student surveys has historically been low, according to the current director, so efforts will be made to boost the participation. Students will receive reminder emails about the survey after the initial invitation to participate. Students who visit the DRC, for testing or appointments typically, will be reminded by DRC staff that the survey is available online for them to take.

### **Setting**

This study will be completed at Missouri State University, a public Master's level university located in Springfield, Missouri. The university is made up of approximately 21,000 students (Simpson, 2012). Using the generally accepted statistic that 19% of the United States population has a disability (United States Census Bureau, 2012), one can assume that approximately 4,000 students on MSU's campus has a disability. Only a fraction of those students, approximately 100, are registered with the Disability Resource Center. There are a few reasons for this gap. First, the DRC only serves students with physical or health-related disabilities. Students with learning, cognitive, or neurological disabilities work with a separate office, the Learning Diagnostic Clinic. Second, some students with disabilities may not feel the need to register with the DRC, perhaps because their disability is easily managed or because they have other means of addressing barriers in their education. Third, some students may lack the self-advocacy skills to seek out the disability resources on campus.

The main office of the Disability Resource Center consists of a director, an assistant director, a part-time administrative assistant, a graduate assistant, and a student worker. The office is a part the Division for Diversity and Inclusion at MSU. The DRC provides registered students with accommodation memos detailing their approved accommodations for the students to give to their professors. The DRC also provides rooms and equipment for out-of-class testing. In addition, the DRC sponsors disability awareness programming, facilitates conflict mediation between students and faculty, and consults on universal design and accessibility. An affiliated office, the Access Technology Center, is staffed by an associate director, a graduate assistant, and several student workers. The ATC provides students with accessible equipment, books, and programs, as well as training on how to utilize these resources.

### **Research Instrument**

A copy of the research instrument can be found in the appendix. An online survey will be used because of its ability to reach a wide audience in a quick and simple fashion. With the DRC email list, an email invitation will serve as the most efficient way to reach all of the DRC students. Online surveys are also more accessible for blind or visually-impaired students. There are some weaknesses, however. Since emails are easily ignored, the response rate runs the risk of being low. Too low of a response rate could invalidate the data.

This study will exclusively be collecting primary data about students' attitudes and opinions. First, this study will measure students' satisfaction with the Disability Resource Center. This data will be broken down into several aspects of the DRC, such as the accommodations provided, the staff sensitivity, the staff availability, and the technology available. Satisfaction will be measured on a Likert scale with the following options: very unsatisfied, somewhat unsatisfied, neutral, somewhat satisfied, and very satisfied. Students will also have an "N/A" option for those aspects that do not apply to them. Next, different statements



will be provided that measure how satisfied, comfortable, and welcomed students feel at MSU. Students will have the following choices: strongly disagree, somewhat disagree, neutral, somewhat agree, and strongly agree. Then, students will be provided two statements that represent the different models of disability, as used in a previous DRC survey. Students will be asked to choose which one best fits with their own personal definition of disability in order to measure the number of students that subscribe to a medical vs. social model of disability. Finally, demographic information will be asked in order to compare the disability definitions between students of different ages and student classifications.

### **Sample**

The study population will consist of students that are registered with the Disability Resource Center. The sample will be those students that complete the satisfaction survey, which will be emailed to all DRC students. This population will emerge from who completes the survey. There are near 100 students on the DRC email list. A 10% response rate goal will consist of about 10 students. The sampling design will be random in the sense that it gives the entire population an equal chance of participating. The sample will be self-determined, though, based on who decides to complete the survey. Students will receive an email asking for their participation, in which they can click a link and complete the survey. The sample will not be pre-determined; it solely depends on participant initiative.

### **Ethical Issues**

One important ethical issue related to this study will be informed consent. Students will need to provide their consent before participating in the study. The first page of the survey will require students to read and agree to a statement of consent before proceeding to the survey questions. The consent statement will inform them of the purpose of the survey, their right to skip questions or stop their participation at any time, what their participation will consist of, and

what risks are associated with this study. For a survey, only minimal risk exists, such as bringing up uncomfortable subjects. The surveys will be anonymous, meaning no identifiable information will be collected for confidentiality's sake. No medical information will be asked either, to prevent any unethical handling of sensitive information. The researcher has also undergone CITI training to ensure proper study design and implementation.

### **Analysis of Data**

The data gathered from the study will be analyzed using simple statistics to find mean, median, and mode. Frequency distributions will be found for the satisfaction with the DRC's website, process to receive accommodations, accommodations received, testing accommodations, process for scheduling out-of-class testing, technology, staff's assistance/availability/sensitivity, ability to remove barriers, and the DRC overall. Frequency will also be found for students' agreement with the acceptance/welcoming statements about MSU, the number of students who subscribe to either disability definition, age, and student classification. In addition, cross-tabulations will be visually compared between the age/student classification of a student and their definition of disability.

### **Problems and Limitations**

One problem with this study will be response rate, which has been terribly low in previous surveys conducted by the DRC. The study also has a few limitations. The researcher will not have the resources to ensure a high response rate. Being limited to only quantitative questions, the how and why of students' satisfaction will be difficult to determine. The study results will not be applicable to all students with disabilities at MSU, because (a) not all disabled students register with the DRC or LDC, and (b) the DRC only works with students that have physical or health-related disabilities. There will also be a limited time frame to collect the data, perhaps straining the amount of time that will be available to gather said data.

## References

- CSU Disability Resource Center (2009). Assessing effectiveness: Disability resource center. *Clayton State University*. Retrieved from <http://www.clayton.edu>
- Cory, R. C. (2011). Disability services offices for students with disabilities: A campus resource. *New Directions for Higher Education*. 154. doi: 10.1002/he.431
- Danjuma, I., Rasli, A. (2012). Service quality, satisfaction, and attachment in higher education institutions: A theory of planned behavior perspective. *International Journal of Academic Research*. 4(2). Retrieved from <http://www.ebscohost.com>
- Fichten, C. S. & Goodrick, G. (1990). Getting along in college: Recommendations for college students with disabilities and their professors. *Rehabilitation Counseling Bulletin*. 34(2). Retrieved from <http://www.ebscohost.com>
- Getzel, E. E. & Thoma, C. A. (2008). Experiences of college students with disabilities and the importance of self-determination in higher education settings. *Career Development for Exceptional Individuals*. 31(2). Retrieved from <http://www.ebscohost.com>
- Kortering, L. J., McClannon, T. W., & Braziel, P. M. (2008). Universal design for learning : A look at what algebra and biology students with and without high incidence conditions are saying. *Remedial and Special Education*. 29(6). doi: 10.1177/0741932507314020
- Lawson, A., Leach, M., & Burrows, S. (2012). The implications for learners, teachers and institutions of using student satisfaction as a measure of success: A review of the literature. *Education Journal*. 138. Retrieved from <http://www.ebscohost.com>
- Madaus, J. W. (2011). The history of disability services in higher education. *New Directions for Higher Education*. 154. doi: 10.1002/he.429
- McGilton, Phil. (2010). Disability resource center student satisfaction survey. *Bellevue College*. Retrieved from <http://www.bellevuecollege.edu/>

- NASPA Task Force on Research and Scholarship. (2011). A research and scholarship agenda for the student affairs profession. *NASPA*. Retrieved from <http://www.naspa.org>
- Reinschmiedt, H. J. (2008). Postsecondary students with disabilities receiving accommodations: A survey of satisfaction and subjective well-being. *Southern Illinois University at Carbondale*. ProQuest. Retrieved from <http://www.books.google.com>
- Simpson, Doug. (September 19, 2012). Missouri state university springfield campus sets enrollment record. *Missouri State University News*. Retrieved from <http://www.news.missouristate.edu>
- Taylor, S. J. (2011). Disability studies in higher education. *New Directions for Higher Education*. 154. doi: 10.1002/he.438
- United States Census Bureau (July 25, 2012). Nearly 1 in 5 people have a disability in the U.S., census bureau reports. *United State Census Bureau Newsroom*. Retrieved from <http://www.census.gov>
- University of North Florida Disability Resource Center (2010). Student satisfaction survey fall 2009-10. Retrived from <http://www.unf.edu>

## Appendix

Online Survey Tool, copied from Surveymonkey.com

## **DRC Student Satisfaction Survey**

Page 1/3

Thank you for agreeing to take the Disability Resource Center's Student Satisfaction Survey. Below is a statement of consent, explaining the research study associated with this survey. Please read the statement and provide your consent below.

### **WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY?**

The purpose of this survey is to better understand how students feel about the Disability Resource Center, Missouri State University, and disability in general. The results will be used both by the DRC and for a research project in a graduate course on quantitative research.

### **WHAT WILL I NEED TO DO AS A PARTICIPANT?**

You will simply answer approximately 5-10 minutes worth of survey questions.

### **WHAT ARE THE RISKS AND BENEFITS TO ME?**

Minimal risk is involved with this study. You may be asked a question that makes you uncomfortable, or otherwise causes you to not want to answer. If that happens, just skip that question and move on.

This survey will be used by DRC staff to evaluate their office and services, as well as MSU. This could potentially result in a better student experience with our office, which could be a benefit for you.

### **ARE MY ANSWERS CONFIDENTIAL?**

This study is completely anonymous and your confidentiality will be maintained at all times.

### **WHAT IF I DON'T WANT TO PARTICIPATE?**

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. Your refusal to

participate will involve no penalty or loss of accommodations to which you are otherwise entitled.

You do not have to answer every question, and you are free to stop taking the survey at any time.

\*

**1. By answering "yes", you give your consent to participate in this research survey.**  
Yes

## DRC Student Satisfaction Survey

Page 2/3

Please answer the following questions.

**2. Please rate your satisfaction with the following aspects of the Disability Resource Center. For those items that do not apply to you, select "N/A".**

	Very Unsatisfied	Somewhat Unsatisfied	Neutral	Somewhat Satisfied	Very Satisfied	N/A
DRC Website	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Process to Receive Accommodations	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Accommodations Provided	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Testing accommodations	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Process for Scheduling Out-of-Class Testing	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
DRC/ATC Technology	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
DRC Staff's assistance	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
DRC Staff's availability	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
DRC Staff's sensitivity	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
DRC Staff's ability to remove academic barriers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
DRC Overall	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**3. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements:**

	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neutral	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
At MSU, people with disabilities are	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neutral	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
treated fairly.					
I would recommend attending MSU to a prospective disabled student.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
When a barrier is present in a course, faculty are willing to work with me to resolve it.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel welcome on campus.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel I am a part of the campus community.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

#### 4. Which of the following best fits how you define disability:

- A deficiency or abnormality that resides in the individual. A disability is a physical or mental impairment that substantially affects one or more major life activities.
- A difference that is valued as an integral part of our diversity. A disability is a consequence of environmental, social, and attitudinal barriers that prevent people with impairments from maximum participation in society.
- Neither of these options adequately fit my definition of disability.

#### 9. Your Age:

- Your Age: 18-24
- 25-29
- 30-39
- 40-49
- 50-59
- 60+

#### 10. Your Student Classification:

- Your Student Classification:
- Freshman
- Sophomore
- Junior
- Senior
- Graduate Student