Executive Summary on the Status of People with Disabilities

A Survey of Faculty and Staff at the University of New Hampshire (Fall 2011)

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The President’s Commission on the Status of People with Disabilities

The rationale

The President’s Commission on the Status of People with Disabilities at the University of New Hampshire collected data on prevalence of disability among UNH employees and the employment climate for employees with disabilities at UNH. The results of the survey will be used to guide the Commission’s work in the future as we develop programming and policy initiatives that seek to improve accessibility for and acceptance of people with disabilities at UNH.

The mission of the President’s Commission on the Status of People with Disabilities is to promote empowerment and inclusion of students, faculty, staff and guests with disabilities at the University of New Hampshire. The Commission acknowledges that people with disabilities are a diverse group that includes individuals with visible and non-visible disabilities.

The Commission shall provide a forum for discussion and assessment of disability-related issues and opportunities that are relevant for the campus and larger community. In addition, the Commission shall advise the President, Vice Provost for Faculty Development and Inclusive Excellence and the Director & Title IX Coordinator, Affirmative Action and Equity on disability–related issues, policies, services, attitudes and practices on campus. This mission is motivated by the belief that people with disabilities are assets to our community, adding value and diversity to our living, working and learning environment.

The study

The study was approved through the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research (IRB) at the University of New Hampshire (ref # 5294). The survey design was based on a survey done by the Chancellor's Committee for Persons with Disabilities at Missouri University (MU) and was altered only to change University of New Hampshire-specific information. The survey was then sent on to the UNH Survey Center where it was distributed to UNH employees (including Durham and Manchester campuses) through email. The survey was taken online by all respondents (N=700) using SNAP. The survey is 508 compliant and is accessible via text-to-speech software. The survey included 51 questions with opportunities at the end of each section for the respondents to elaborate on their responses or to include something not captured in the question as written. The survey took approximately 10 minutes to complete.
The sample

The response rate for the survey was nearly 17% with a sample size of 700 and a population size of 4,128. The sample characteristics are as follows:

- Disability: 11% of employees self-identified as having a disability
  - Single Disability: 8.3%
  - Multiple Disabilities: 3.3%
  - Physiological Disability: 1.9%
  - Psychological Disability: 2.9%
  - Sensory Disability: 2.9%
  - Other Disability: 7%
- Type of position: 19% faculty, 81% Staff
- Gender: 30% male, 70% female
- Campus: 91% Durham, 9% Manchester
- Employment type: 91% full-time, 9% part-time
- Age: 29.2% Under 40, 59.5% 41-60, and 11.2% 60 and older
- Duration of employment: 52.9% 10 years or less, 47.1% 11 years or more

Key Findings

Accessibility

- Just under half the respondents felt that overall accessibility at UNH is good or excellent (49.6%), 40.9% felt overall accessibility is fair to poor, and 9.5% had no opinion.
- Campus accessibility was further broken out into physical accessibility, sensory accessibility, and technology accessibility. A majority of the respondents reported that physical accessibility at UNH was either excellent or good (58.2%). Between 30-38% of respondents feel that sensory accessibility at UNH is excellent or good. Only 38.6% of all employees felt technology accessibility is excellent or good.

Training

- Just under one third of employees (32.2%) have been offered training about working with people with disabilities and one quarter of employees have participated in some training about working with people with disabilities.
- There are no statistically significant differences among employees with and without disabilities in terms of being offered or participating in trainings.

Workplace attitudes and climate

- More than 40% of all respondents reported having a co-worker with a disability. Just over 5% of respondents have observed harassment or similar unfair treatment of employees with disabilities.
- Fewer than 10% of respondents with a disability reported that they did not feel accepted in the workplace. However, 16.5% of respondents with a disability reported having experienced discrimination at work based on disability and 13.9% reported having experienced harassment or similar unfair treatment in the workplace based on disability.
• Of respondents with a disability, 55.6% know how to file a complaint about job discrimination based on disability at UNH; 42% believe UNH does an effective job responding to complaints and concerns based on disability.

Knowledge of disability issues, resources and policies
• 87.3% of all respondents believe they are knowledgeable or somewhat knowledgeable about workplace disability issues and 92.4% of respondents with disabilities believe they are knowledgeable or somewhat knowledgeable about workplace disability issues.
• 76.8% of all respondents feel their supervisors are knowledgeable about workplace disability issues.
• A majority (nearly 70%) of all respondents are aware of the employment provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), as well as the rights and responsibilities of employees with disabilities at UNH.
• Just over 60% of respondents know where to find UNH policies and guidelines on job accommodations and employees’ rights and responsibilities if injured on the job.
• A majority of employees report being aware of many of the UNH units which provide resources relating to disability. Some respondents commented that even though they do not have knowledge of some of the specific units, they are confident they could find them if necessary.

Accommodations
• Just over half of the respondents with disabilities know how to request a job accommodation.
• 67.5% of respondents with disabilities have self-disclosed their disability to their supervisor. Of those employees who have not disclosed their disability, 38.5% are concerned that self-disclosure will negatively affect them.
• Among employees who requested an accommodation, 97% received an accommodation. However, the question as written did not reflect how many times the request was made, if it was initially refused or if the employee received the specific accommodation requested. It is clear from the comments that some employees asked for accommodations multiple times or were offered what they perceived to be inappropriate accommodations.

UNH Manchester
• While just 2% of UNH faculty and staff are employed at Manchester, 9% of our respondents are employed at Manchester. Since the number of respondents on the Manchester campus is small relative to Durham, we cannot break down questions by campus and disability status as the cells would be too small to report without breaching confidentiality. Instead, we have highlighted some of the differences between Manchester and Durham in accessibility, training, workplace attitudes/climate, and knowledge of disability issues.
• The differences between Manchester and Durham seem to center on accessibility and training.
  o Employees at Manchester report higher accessibility ratings as well as more training opportunities around working with people with disabilities. These differences could be due to different physical and building environments. The
relatively small size and frequent interactions among faculty and staff likely contribute to improved communications in the workplace.

What are we doing well?

On numerous occasions employees cited the inherent challenges of being in the Northeast and on a campus built before the era of accessibility. Many of the positive comments surround what is currently being changed, and look to the future. Of particular note are the comments praising the sensitivity and commitment to providing quality services to people with disabilities displayed by Transportation and Dining services.

Recommendations

One of the primary goals of this survey project was to collect information so that the Commission can develop programs and initiatives that address access for and acceptance of employees with disabilities at UNH. With this goal in mind, we respectfully submit the following recommendations:

1. Increase participation of people with disabilities in the planning and design phases of new or renovated physical spaces, programs and events based on a review of current practices.

2. More than 40% of respondents rated campus accessibility as fair or poor. To address this issue we recommend the following:
   a. Evaluate the walkways, reduce or eliminate uneven paths. Develop policies that address obstacles on the pathways including vehicles, bicycles and skateboards, and a means of enforcing those policies.
   b. Evaluate all new construction and renovation projects to ensure that the acoustics of the room reduce or eliminate ambient noise.
   c. Provide more education and training around the use of amplification and assistive listening devices.

3. While the University does provide a range of training opportunities, only 25% of respondents have participated in such trainings. The University as a community, including managers, faculty, staff, and students can benefit from more training and information. We recommend the following training initiatives:
   a. Disability in general (relating to employees and students), including a broad understanding of what disability is and where to find more information on specific forms of disability. With this should be training on person-first language and general sensitivity training. Understanding was a main theme that came out as an area at UNH that could be improved. Many of the employees noted that they would like to see better understanding of disability so as to be more accepted and more comfortable.
   b. Collaborate with the EEO/ADA Compliance Officer to review information and training currently available to employees concerning their rights and responsibilities about workplace accommodations. Make recommendations on content and distribution of the information based on the review. Possible topics include but are not limited to:
i. For managers: how to handle requests; how to create a safe environment for disclosure (to make sure employees don’t fear negative consequences of disclosure) and accommodation requests. Develop guidelines for supervisors to use when approached by an employee about an accommodation.

ii. For employees: how to make requests, deciding what a reasonable request is and the best way to make that request, and how to file a complaint. Only 55.6% of respondents with a disability report that they know how to file a complaint about job discrimination based on disability.

4. Refer the very specific concerns raised by UNH Manchester to the UNH Manchester HR partner and Facilities Maintenance manager.

The President’s Commission on the Status of People with Disabilities is divided into three working groups: programming, communication and physical access. The recommendations contained in this report will be referred to the appropriate work group for action.