Chapter 3

Rethinking the College Environment:
Do Colleges Have a Responsibility to Their Students Beyond College Life?

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ABSTRACT

The premise of my work circles around the ways in which administrators have "breached" or moved beyond these roles in order to help the lives of people with disabilities both in and out of school. This work not only centers on students but the ways in which multiple areas of the campus exist and need to adjust in order to create more equitable job opportunities for people with disabilities. Much of this work is done keeping in mind the four environments of college campuses, proposed by Strange and Banning. Using this lens I look at how different kinds of colleges are organized and how resources can be integrated into these systems in order to create more accessible information and environments for those with disabilities. This work also includes several case studies from universities, large and small globally and locally, in order to see how they are creating and sustaining new and innovative programs that go beyond just the classroom.

INTRODUCTION

Higher Education and Administration in the United States and around the world is changing rapidly. As colleges and universities become more reliant on performance based budgets, the academy is looking at the ways in which it can help contribute to the success of all students. This coupled with serious and dramatic movements towards creating more and more accessible technology and services since the signing of the Americans with Disabilities act in 1990 and other antidiscrimination movement worldwide, the landscape of education is changing. Administrators are not only finding ways to accommodate the students with disabilities they currently serve, which is reactive, they are thinking of new ways to incorporate programs, partnerships, and products that will enable their students to succeed both inside and

outside of the classroom, which is proactive (,2011). Through the lens of eight case studies I will explore the ways in which pockets of the academy both inside and outside the United States are acting, reacting, and innovating education for students, faculty, and staff with disabilities. These cases will explore the ways in which the college or university despite size and budget have found ways to facilitate accessible tools for education, introduce new ways of thinking about who should have access to education, and how to bring more students into the fold.

What are the traditional roles that colleges have played in a student's academic life and how have they breached the limits of tradition or moved beyond conventional roles in order to help the lives of people with disabilities both in and out of college? Through the lens of seven case studies, this work will center not only on students with disabilities but also on the ways in which multiple areas of the campus exist and have adjusted to or collaborated with the realities of such students in order to create more equitable opportunities for them within the immediate college environment and beyond. Technology is among the most important resources available to those who would rethink how a campus can become a more accessible one. Now more than ever before, all areas of a college must be cognizant of how technological advances enable students, faculty, and staff with disabilities to integrate more seamlessly into college and university life and prepare them for a brighter and more promising future. It is important not only be considering these advances but also know how to invest in them. At all levels colleges should be looking at where investment needs to happen so that people with disabilities will be able to access all parts of campus life to which their fully able-bodied counterparts have access. The case studies that follow here demonstrate how success in implementing programs depends on the strength of partnerships both within and without the college environment. Becoming politically active and aware and partnering with organizations that have self-determination and self-advocacy as their hallmark is another key to implementing the successful programs mentioned below. Becoming aware of who the champions are, whether they be politicians, fellow administrators, or private businesses, is essential to understanding how to create and sustain equitable programs for people with disabilities.

Strange and Banning identified four college campus environments that constitute the focus of the case studies that make up this chapter (Strange & Banning, 2015). Theirs is a seminal text that can guide those who look at the ways in which colleges organize and reorganize themselves when considering the overall welfare of students. In addition, this text uses easily accessible language for those not in the field of higher education and administration. By improving the campus environments as Strange and Banning address them, students, faculty, and staff will be able to see the campus as a place in which those with disabilities can succeed and thrive both within and without the classroom and beyond the university. While this work will present an overarching message of student success both inside and outside the classroom, foundational steps need to be taken in order to ensure that these goals are achieved. I look at the physical environment, i.e., the campus and the community which surrounds it, as well as the people who effect the changes that are or need to be taken on campuses also called the human aggregate. This work also assesses the organizational environment in the chosen examples, the people who are in charge of which campus area and how their actions affect the necessary critical services. Finally, it considers the ways in which all three of these environments contribute to the socially constructed environment and, the new ways colleges are going beyond mere compliance for students and individuals with disabilities (Strange & Banning, 2015). For this I have turned to universities which, through collaboration and creativity, are working on improving different aspects of the four environments which Strange and Banning have identified on their campuses.

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