

ABSTRACT

This poster session will showcase a campus initiative designed to enhance knowledge among faculty and staff about ability, accessibility, and inclusion. The Center on Disability and Development at Texas A&M University has created an interactive workshop, Aggie Ability Awareness, to open a dialogue about disability issues and concerns as well as providing support and resources to faculty and staff members who interact with persons with disabilities. The Aggie Ability Awareness workshop educates participants on the history of disability, legislation, and various disability models. Additionally, workshop participants learn cultural and sensitive issues surrounding disability issues. Also, the Aggie Ability Awareness workshop includes information about strategies for utilizing Universal Design for learning, assistive technology, and ADA accommodations we make available to persons with disabilities.

OBJECTIVES

This project was designed to assess the knowledge, awareness, and respect for people with disabilities among university faculty, staff, and graduate students on the campus of Texas A & M University.

BACKGROUND

Despite the current enforcement of disability law Section 504 of the 1973 Rehabilitation Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, which prohibits the universities and colleges from endangering students with disabilities to discriminatory acts, there remains a lack of knowledge base in these environments. This lack of knowledge includes misconstrued perceptions from university faculty, staff, and graduate students, beliefs, and practices in providing reasonable accommodations to students with disabilities. Previous studies have reported that higher education institutions have a difficult time providing students with disabilities accommodations that meet federal laws and regulations, which results from faculty members not being familiar with disability law (Getzel & Brown, 2000; Rao, 2002). However, since there is a lack of knowledge base of disability issues, I argue that there are missed opportunities that will continue to persist: a missed opportunity to support individuals with disabilities, a missed opportunity to be inclusive, and a missed opportunity to celebrate diversity.

METHODS

The Aggie Ability Awareness (AAA) was delivered on the campus of Texas A&M University. This presentation was offered a total of 8 times (4 Fall workshops & 4 Spring workshops) in the academic school year.

The Aggie Ability Awareness workshop is comprised of several sections:

- Presenting knowledge of social and medical models of disability, the history and legislation surrounding disability, and disability etiquette and person-first language.
- The workshop educated university faculty, staff, and graduate students about Universal Design for Learning (UDL).
- The workshop reviews accommodations and campus services for students with disabilities.

The current project uses a qualitative research design. A group administered questionnaire was distributed following the AAA workshop in the 2016 – 2017 academic year to collect data from participants.

A total of 273 participants responded to the questionnaire as it assessed their attitudes and opinions of the workshop. Furthermore, the questionnaire also incorporated open-ended questions for participants to provide any qualitative feedback.

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

Individual Level - These are individuals (faculty, staff, and graduate students) who participated in the training. These individuals will go back to their departments and colleges, report what they have learned from this training and begin to implement knowledge-based information in their settings.

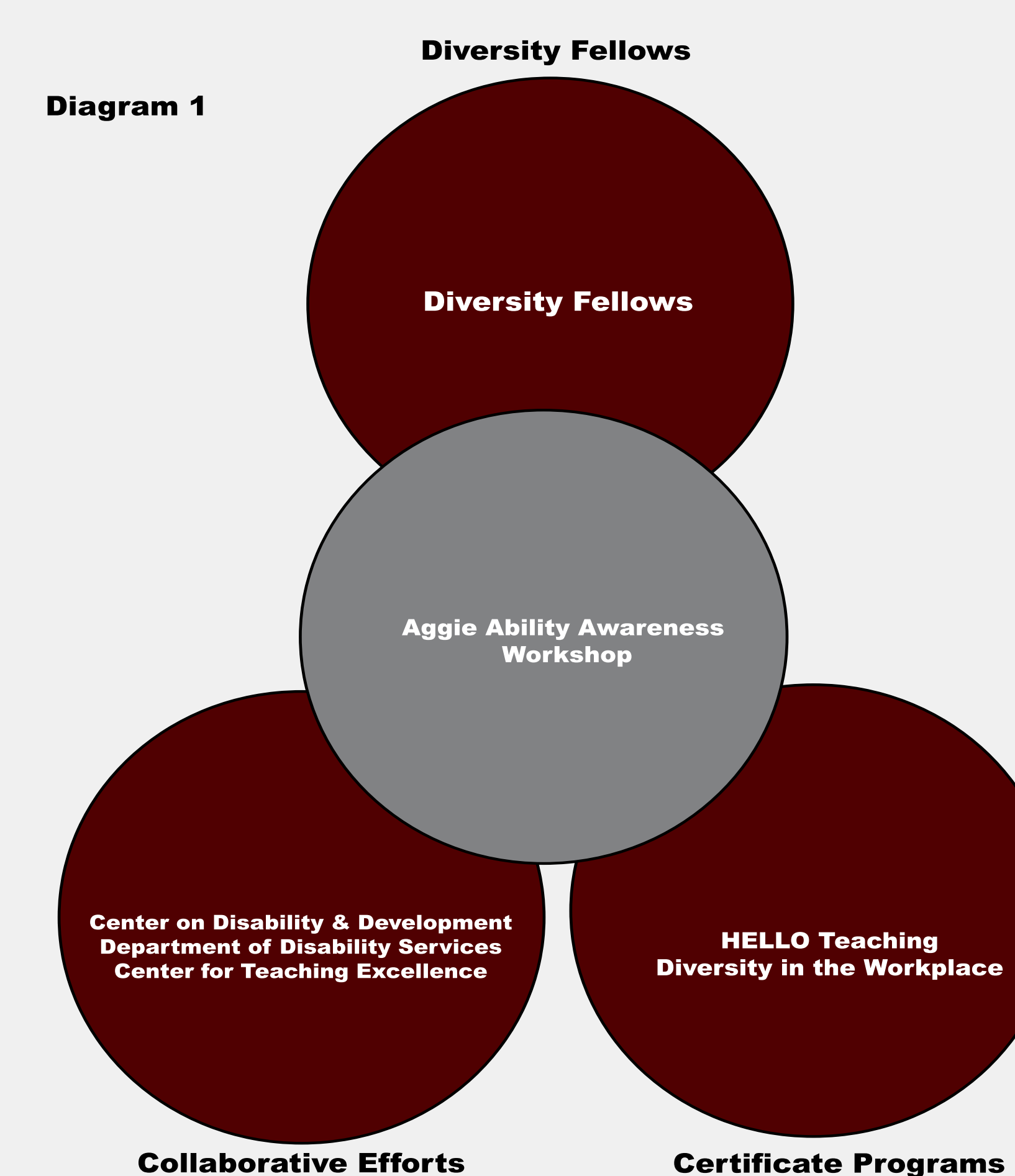
Question: What are you going to do with what you've learned?

"Be more conscious of students with hidden disabilities and lead them to right resources."

"Make sure my slides are more accessible, multiple ways of learnings, share a social media about this workshop, invite this group to other audiences."

"I will likely try to incorporate ideas, suggestions into my duties counseling faculty members, annual review of teaching, and committee discussions of teaching policies."

Systemic Level - How different centers and departments have reached out to work with us and incorporate this workshop in their curriculums.



"What has been helpful about participating in the Aggie Ability Awareness is the discussion of protocol for dealing with disability in the classroom. I am better aware of the mistakes I make in my lectures/presentations as well as thing I am doing right..."

Inclusivity

"What I learned by attending the Aggie Ability Awareness workshop is how to make my course more inclusive for everyone, how to put people first and ask them how they prefer to be addressed and accommodated..."

Diversity

"What has been helpful about participating in the Aggie Ability Awareness is as an educator and a person interested in Universal Design for Learning and Assistive Technologies, I found this workshop helpful for new ideas in delivery and development. It was also useful to hear from other entities around the university in their support and implementations..."

CONCLUSION

The preliminary findings of this project suggest the importance of university faculty members, staff, and graduate students' perceptions, beliefs and practices in providing reasonable accommodations to persons with disabilities.

By creating this program, it will increase the knowledge-based of disabilities. Also, it will set high expectations of requiring universities and colleges to follow disability laws, which supports persons with disabilities, encourage inclusion, and celebrates diversity. These entities are significant and impact university/colleges.

Furthermore, it permits the possibility of an initiative that can be utilized across system-wide campuses. This program can be replicated among other institutions, which can encourage curriculum changes that models inclusion, diversity, and accessibility for all persons on universities and college campuses.



Source: Crohn's & Colitis UK

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