



Launching Tomorrow's Leaders: Developing a Summer Internship to Prepare the Next Generation of Professionals

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Background

Individuals with disabilities struggle to find employment in the United States. Just over one third of people with disabilities in the United States are employed¹ though surveys show many more want to work².

Additionally, people with disabilities who do work can experience lack of inclusion in the workplace. Oregon Health and Science University's 2013 Climate Survey revealed that employees with disabilities are least likely to be satisfied with their experience at the institution and rated the diversity climate much lower than employees without disabilities³.

Project description

OHSU's University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (UCEDD) Summer Internship Program (SIP) began in 2002 and has provided opportunities for youth and young adults with and without disabilities to explore health care careers and gain valuable experience in disability research, public health, social work, clinical support, and communications. The internship runs for eight weeks from mid-June to early-August and had eight participants ranging in age from 16-21.

The SIP underwent extensive review and redevelopment in 2015 to improve the quality of education for interns, improve communication with and support for supervisors, and measure student outcomes. The project redevelopment included identifying specific outcomes that addressed the need for young people with disabilities to gain career experience, developed a disability-inclusive perspective among future professionals, and provided opportunities for interns with and without disabilities to work together.

Staff developed a comprehensive curriculum that was added to the internship orientation. The curriculum covered topics such as implicit bias in the workplace, cultural competency, disability awareness and inclusion, UCEDD history, and career and self-awareness.

Objectives

The UCEDD Summer Internship Program aims to expand the number of professionals who work to improve the health and well-being of people with disabilities and integrate a disability-inclusive perspective into their professional practice.

By implementing an inclusion-focused curriculum as well as offering opportunities to work with peers with and without disabilities at the UCEDD, our aim is to reduce bias against people with disabilities and increase inclusive attitudes and practices.

This poster discusses the use of the Attitudes Toward Disabled Persons Scale⁴ (ATDP) to answer the following evaluation question:

After participating in the Summer Internship Program, did participants' attitudes toward people with disabilities scores increase, decrease, or remain the same?

Methods

The Attitudes Toward Disabled Persons Scale is a validated instrument widely used in research that measures individuals' attitudes toward people with disabilities. The 24-item scale presents differences between people with disabilities compared to people without disabilities on an acceptance-rejection continuum ranging from "agree very much" to "disagree very much".

The scale was administered to program participants at the start of the internship, prior to receiving any curriculum components, and again at the conclusion of the eight-week program. Surveys were paper and pencil and completed in-person. The surveys were de-identified.

The ATDP Scale was analyzed using the developer's scoring instructions. Two mean scores were computed for each participant. Then a difference score was also computed. Frequencies were computed and interpreted.



The 2015 OHSU UCEDD Summer Interns and program staff

Results

All eight participants completed all items on the scale. At pretest, six of the eight participants "agreed very much" with the statements provided. The remaining two "agreed pretty much."

At posttest, all eight participants "agreed very much" with the statements. All but one of the participants' scores increased between pre and posttest. The magnitude of increase ranged from one point to eleven points. The decrease was one point.

While all participants scores increased at posttest, the increase was not hugely significant given scores were high at pretest. Overall, scores did not vary much at pre and posttest, however there was more variation among questions relating to specific topics. Questions related to housing, employment, minimum wage, and community inclusion scored higher at posttest compared to other questions. Given these topics were addressed specifically in the orientation curriculum, there is a possibility that these results were due to education received in the program.

Considerations

Recruitment may have played a major role in the results and contributed to only seeing a slight increase in participants' scores. Program recruitment focuses on students who have a prior interest in working in the field of disability, as well as students who themselves experience disability or who have family members with a disability. It is assumed that individuals with this background, experience, and interest would be pre-disposed to score higher than those who are interested in a health care internship but without a particular focus or interest in the field of disability.

Further exploration is needed on how to measure whether participants achieve a higher level of full acceptance and full inclusion of people with disabilities through the internship experience.

Additionally, while the ATDP Scale has been widely used to measure attitudes of general populations, it may not be the best instrument for gauging professional interest and capacity to work with people with disabilities, particularly people with intellectual disabilities. The scale uses outdated, non-person-first language. There is a need in the field of disability studies to develop and validate more instruments that use inclusive language.

This evaluation provided program staff with insight into how to develop outcomes that promote a climate of full inclusion as well as support pre- professionals to become advocates for people with disabilities in a health care environment.

References

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