

# AHEAD Survey Results: CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY SYSTEMWIDE



# Background

Compared to K-12 education and the general population, students with disabilities are underrepresented in postsecondary education.<sup>1</sup> The Association on Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD) aims to support higher education institutions in providing equal access to educational opportunities.<sup>2</sup> Such efforts include providing program standards and tools to assess existing policies and services offered to meet the needs of students with disabilities.

During the 2016-17 school year, the California State University (CSU) Chancellor's Office distributed AHEAD surveys to four stakeholder groups on all CSU campuses to get feedback on the utility, quality, and effectiveness of services on campus to support students with disabilities. Online surveys were distributed to students with documented disabilities, faculty, administrators, and Directors of campus student disability services offices. Although campuses have previously conducted surveys on services to students with disabilities, this was the first time where all campuses used the same standardized instrument.

In total, 1986 students, 2014 faculty, and 506 administrators across CSU campuses participated in the AHEAD surveys. In addition, each disability services office (n=23) submitted a self-assessment of the student disability services office.

**This systemwide report addresses three key evaluation questions:**

1. *What are the characteristics and needs of students with disabilities at the CSU?*
2. *What are the experiences of students with disabilities at the CSU?*
3. *In what ways is the CSU equipped to accommodate students with disabilities? Where are the challenges?*

Students  
reported an  
average of

4

disabilities.



<sup>1</sup> Kurth, N., & Mellard, D. (2006). Student perceptions of the accommodation process in postsecondary education. *Journal of Postsecondary Education and Disability*, 19(1), 71-84.

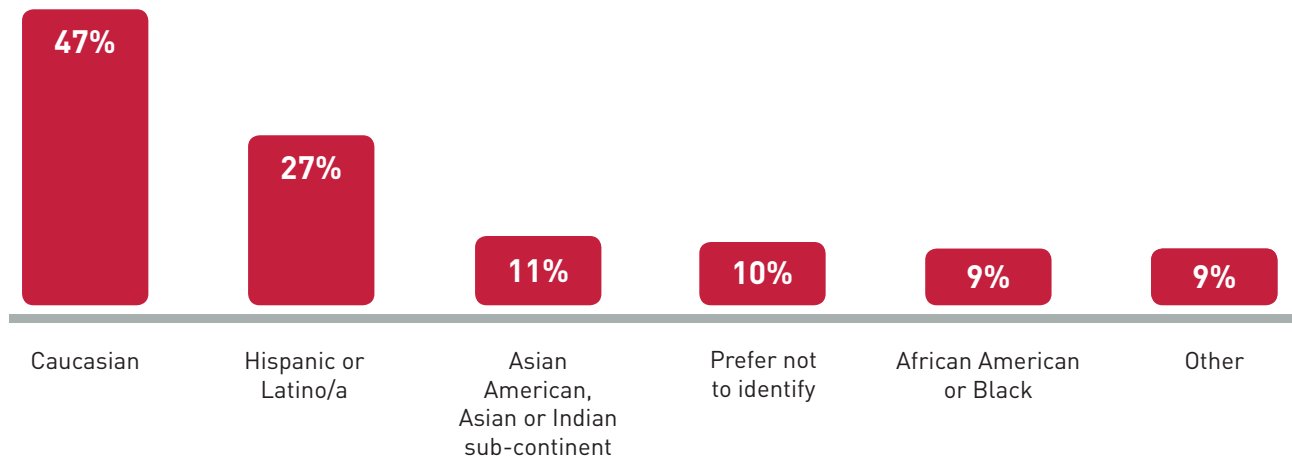
<sup>2</sup> Shaw, S. F., & Dukes, L. L. (2001). Program standards for disability services in higher education. *Journal of Postsecondary Education and Disability*, 14(2), 81-90.



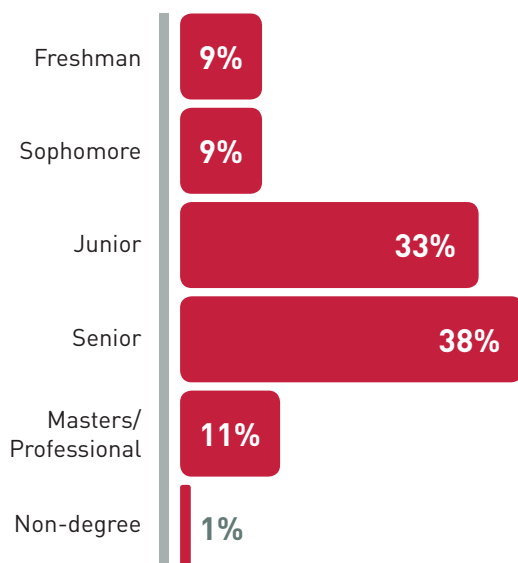
# Characteristics of Students with Disabilities

According to the Enrollment Data by Campus and Services to Students with Disabilities Code, disability support services were provided to 16,413 students on CSU campuses with verified disabilities in the fall of 2016, which accounted for 3.44% of the total student population.

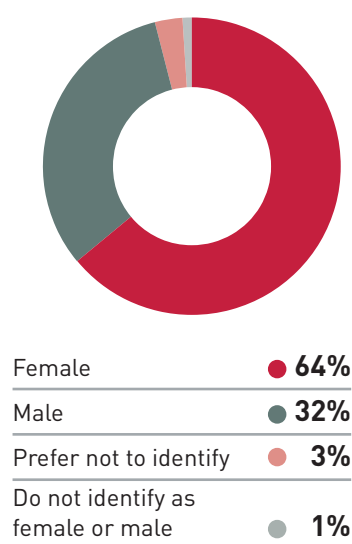
## STUDENTS' RACE/ETHNICITY<sup>3</sup> (n= 1961)



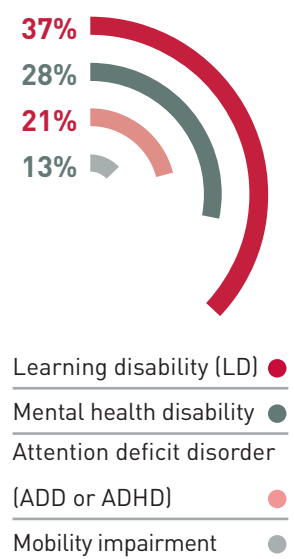
## ACADEMIC STANDING (n=1983)



## GENDER (n= 1976)



## TOP DISABILITIES REPORTED<sup>4</sup> (n=1986)



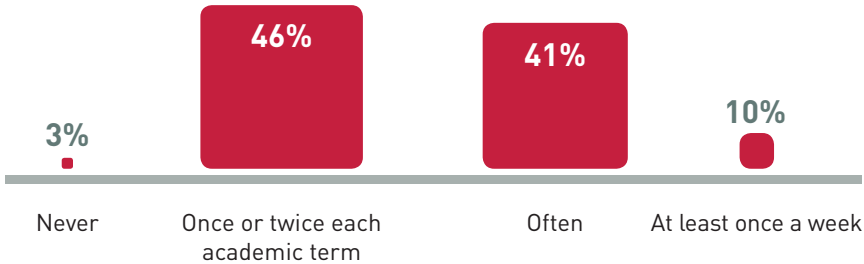
<sup>3</sup> Students could select multiple races/ethnicities. Percentages may add to more than 100.

<sup>4</sup> Types of disabilities are not mutually exclusive, such that students may have selected more than one disability type.



# Experiences of Students with Disabilities on Campus

## FREQUENCY OF VISITS TO THE STUDENT DISABILITY CENTER (n= 1975)

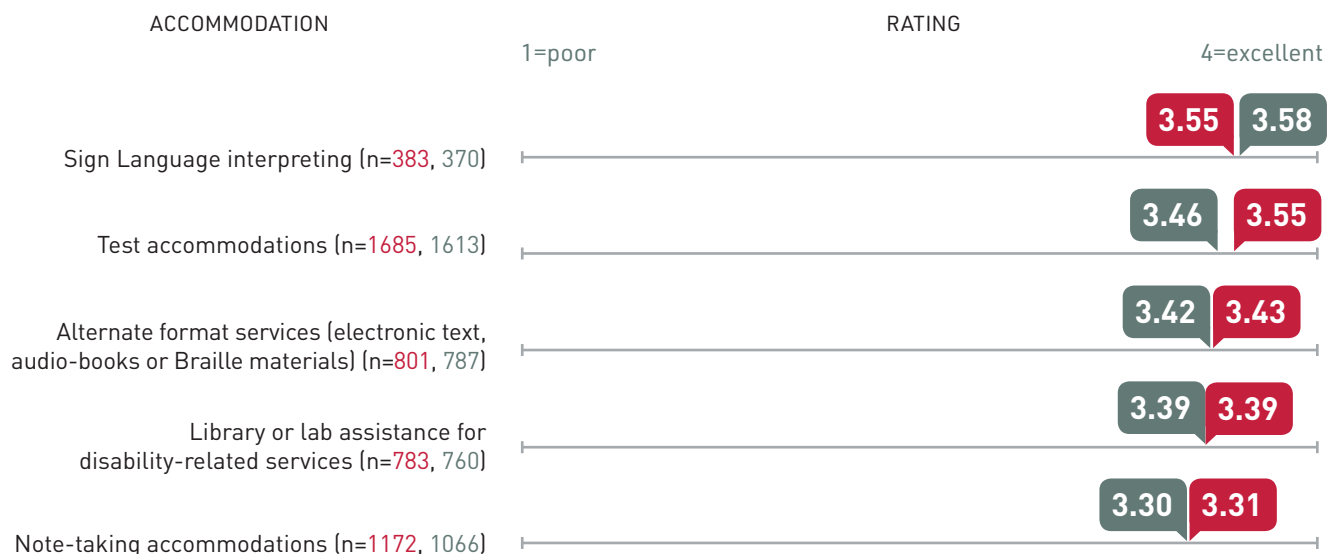


## Experiences with Disability Services and Accommodations on Campus

Students rated their experiences with campus accommodations and accessibility of campus offices, as well as their interactions with instructors and the student disabilities center. For each category of survey questions, the average score is shown for the overall category as well as for each individual item in the category. The number (n) of students who responded to each set of questions is also shown.

## STUDENT RATINGS OF ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATIONS

● Availability Rating (mean=3.43) ● Quality Rating (mean=3.38)







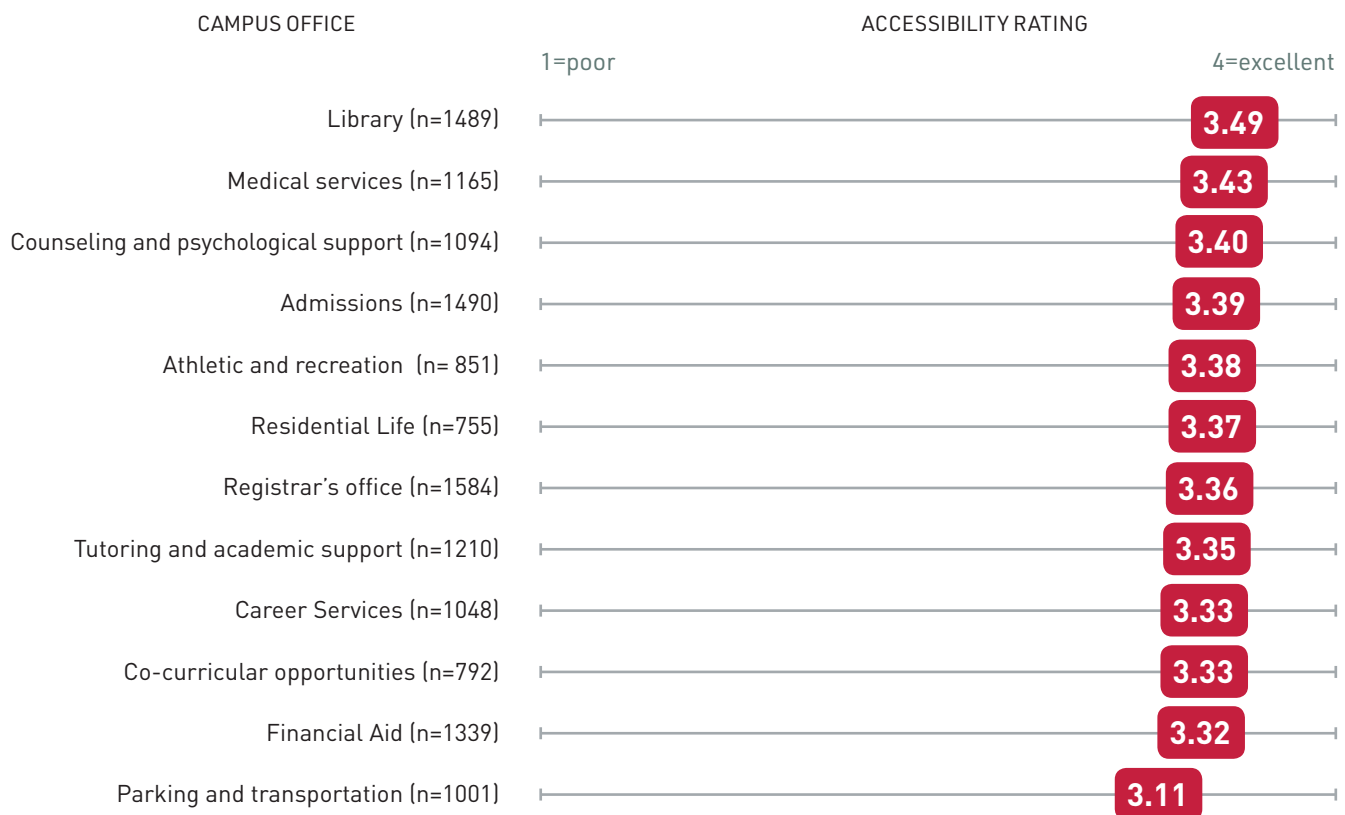
Student ratings for both the availability and quality of accommodations differed as a result of student gender

and nature of disability (see Appendix for detailed findings). On average, individuals who did not identify as male or female and those who identified as having a mental health and/or learning disability rated availability and quality of services lower than their peers. In addition, graduate students rated accommodation availability lower than undergraduate students, on average.

Students reported a range of experiences with academic accommodations available on campus in their open-ended responses. One student reported, “I really enjoy the services I am getting at CSU East Bay. They help put me in a position to succeed with my peers at school.” Other students reported challenges with access to note-taking

and test-taking accommodations. Some students described the process to find a note-taker as “hard” and “confusing” due to a limited number of note-takers and that once identified, note-takers were often unreliable, not uploading notes in a timely manner and providing poor quality notes (e.g., illegible, directly from the class PowerPoint). Students also experienced challenges with test-taking accommodations, including limited hours of availability, the need for scheduling far in advance, and noise and crowdedness of testing rooms. Some students reported feeling that their accommodation needs disrupted others (e.g., students who needed to read aloud to themselves) and others needed more quiet spaces for test-taking. One student wrote, “Test taking in rooms with others present and a noisy atmosphere both occur during midterms and finals. It hampers my ability to test well, every time.”

## STUDENT RATINGS OF ACCESSIBILITY TO CAMPUS OFFICES (mean=3.32)





Students differed in their ratings of the accessibility of offices across

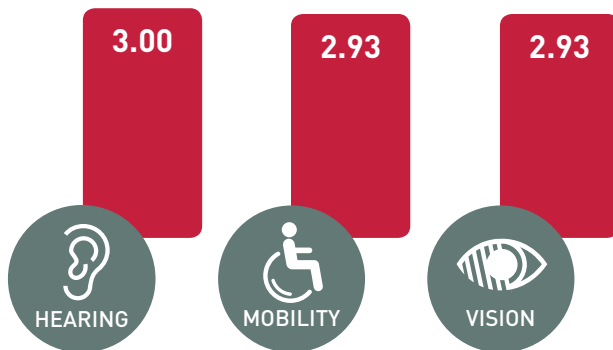
campus based on their gender, nature of disability, and academic standing (see Appendix for detailed findings). On average, students who did not identify as male or female, those with mental and/or physical disabilities, and graduate students rated campus offices as less accessible than their peers.

In open-ended responses, some students reported challenges getting access to resources and

amenities on campus. For example, some students reported limited access to computers in the library or computer labs that had the necessary programs for alternative media. Students also noted that not all amenities were easily accessible by wheelchair, such as some ramps are too steep for manual chairs, that there is limited access to desks designed for students with disabilities. Several students requested greater access to shuttle services, such as this student who asked for “increased access to shuttle services...for those with special needs. Many of us are in wheelchairs that cannot get around.”

## STUDENT RATINGS OF ACCOMMODATIONS FOR SPECIFIC DISABILITIES

ACCOMMODATION RATING  
(1=poor; 4=excellent)



## STUDENT RATINGS OF EXPERIENCES WITH INSTRUCTORS (mean= 2.60)

EXPERIENCES WITH INSTRUCTORS  
AND ADVISORS

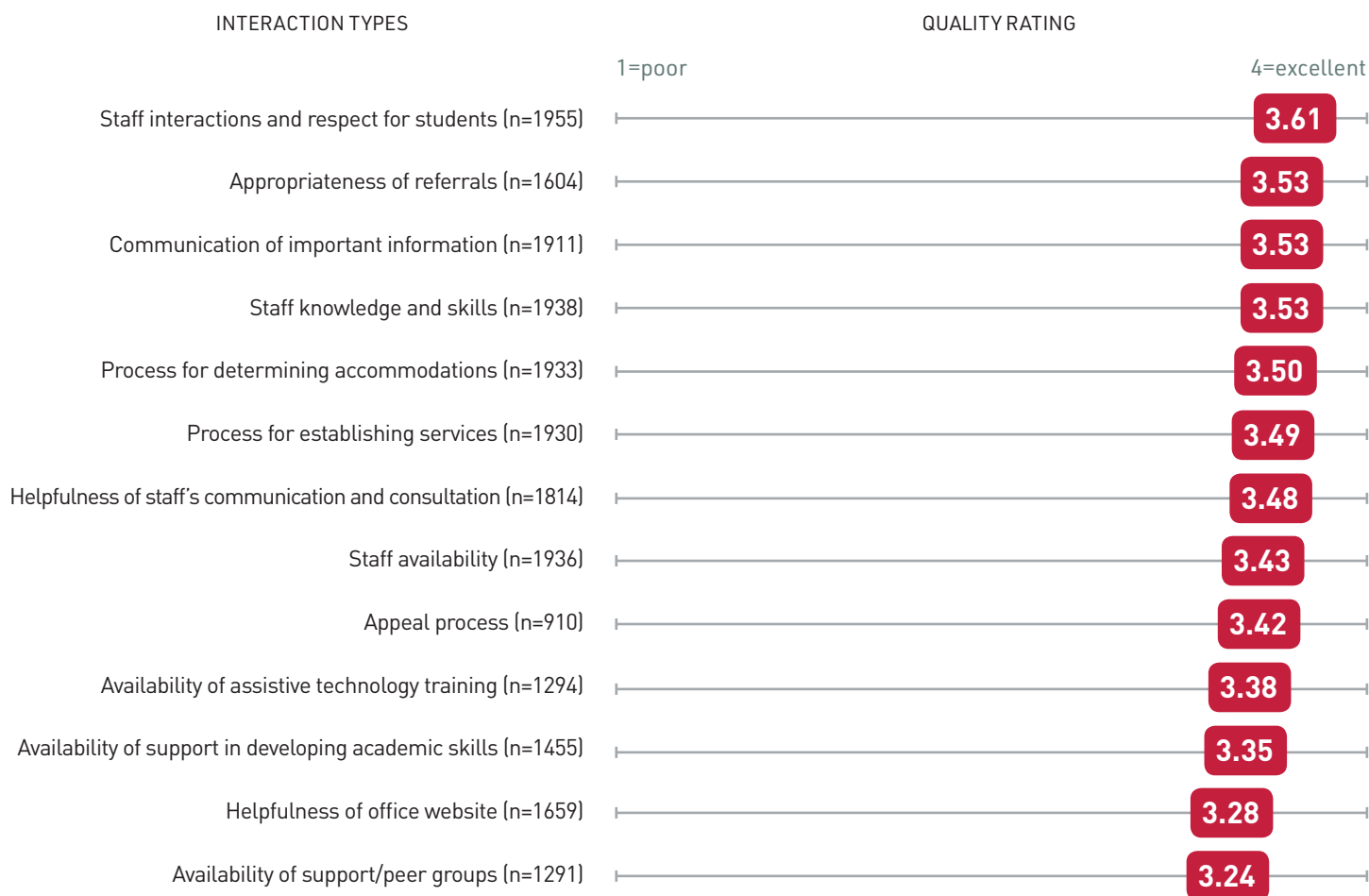
AGREEMENT RATING

(1=rarely true; 3=almost always true)

My instructors include a statement about disability and accommodations on the course syllabus (n=1902)	2.82
My instructors are supportive of me as a student with a disability; I feel welcomed and valued in my classes (n=1851)	2.64
My instructors understand the processes of the disability services office and its role in coordinating my accommodations (n=1867)	2.54
My academic advisor(s) have been helpful in planning my courses and academic programs, taking into account disability-related needs (n=1661)	2.54
My instructors are interested in talking with me about course requirements and accommodations (n=1837)	2.47



## STUDENT RATINGS OF INTERACTIONS WITH STUDENT DISABILITY SERVICES OFFICE (mean=3.60)



Student ratings for interactions with disability services offices differed based on students' gender, race, mental health and mobility disabilities, and academic standing (see Appendix for detailed findings). Specifically, students who did not identify as male or female, students who identified as Caucasian, students with a mental health and/or mobility disability, and graduate students rated interactions with disability services offices lower than their peers.

The majority of open-ended responses related to interactions with student disability offices were positive, with students reporting being treated respectfully, getting the help and the information they need from staff, and that the support services have allowed them to succeed in

college. One student said, "I really enjoy a place to sit and work, where I am far away from peers and can focus on my individual work without the distraction of others and attempting to find a space in the library. I really enjoy the staff and I am very grateful to have such a service to help me towards my goal." Some students, however, reported needing additional support to advocate for their needs with instructors who were not providing accommodations, and that outdated systems for requesting accommodations was burdensome. Open-ended responses also indicated that students were not only thinking about what services they could benefit from, but also how they could better support other students through peer-to-peer mentoring opportunities. One student said, "Those of us who have been around for a while may be willing to help newcomers navigate the campus or any part of life/school they may want or need."



# Faculty and Administrator Assessment of Campus Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

Across CSU campuses, faculty reported having an average of 13.9 years of teaching experience, ranging from less than one year to more than fifty years.

## Faculty Perspectives

In the faculty survey, faculty reported on their experiences accommodating students with disabilities as well as their satisfaction with the support they receive from the student disability services office. For each category of survey questions, the average score is shown for the overall category as well as for each individual item in the category. The number (n) of faculty who responded to each set of questions is also shown.



### FACULTY PERCEPTIONS OF ACCOMMODATING STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES (mean=3.20)

1=poor; 4=excellent

PERCEPTION  
RATING

FACULTY  
AGREEMENT

3.61

I believe that accommodations help to provide an equitable experience for students with disabilities (n=1979)

3.53

I believe that disabled students enrich the classroom with the diversity of experience they bring (n=1962)

3.17

I feel confident in my ability to teach students with disabilities (n=1976)

2.90

I have ready access to the resources I need to provide effective accommodations to students with disabilities (n=1964)

2.80

I find that having students with disabilities in my classes requires very little extra time and energy from me (n=1980)

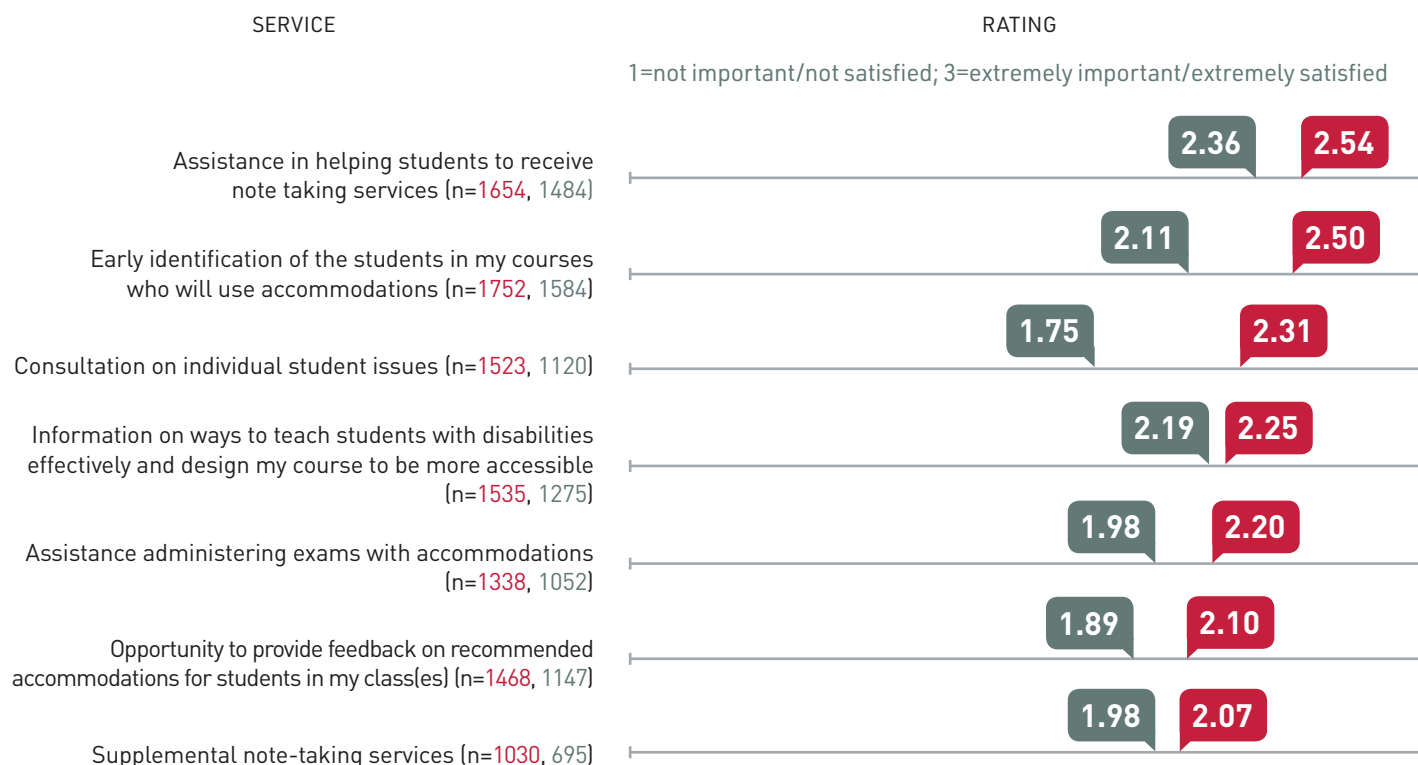
In open-ended responses, faculty reported a desire to meet the needs of all students, but felt unprepared to support students with disabilities. Some faculty reported being unaware of the accommodations available to students. Those that were aware of services reported that streamlining accommodation requests, including online access and increased automation, would reduce the some barriers to meeting diverse student needs. Faculty also reported understanding the need for materials

to be sent to disability services ahead of time, but that challenges arose when the timelines did not align with the development of the materials for the rest of the class. Suggestions included balancing confidentiality with earlier access to information about needed accommodations for students. One faculty member said, “It would be nice to know at the time students register for the course that they need accommodations. This would give me more time to prepare.”



## FACULTY RATINGS OF NEEDS AND SATISFACTION WITH DISABILITY SERVICES ON CAMPUS

● Need Rating (mean=2.31) ● Satisfaction Rating (mean=2.08)



Faculty perspectives on the needs for disability services and their satisfaction with provided accommodations varied in the open-ended responses. Some faculty reported receiving effective support from disability service centers, as well as seeing improvements in services offered over the years, as a result of increased funding and administrative attention. Common requests for improved services included needing greater communication between students, disability services, and faculty to ensure that students' needs are identified and accommodations are

coordinated. Similar to students, faculty reported challenges with accessing note-taking services for students and coordinating test-taking accommodations. Faculty also reported the desire for opportunities to share successful strategies with colleagues and receive direct support from disability services on implementing universal design. For example, one faculty member requested that disability services "provide some support for faculty to make meaningful changes to improve universal design in their courses."

## FACULTY RATINGS EFFECTIVENESS OF SERVICES (mean=2.39)



In open-ended responses, many faculty reported positive experiences with disability services and feeling that the disability services staff were working hard to meet the needs of students. Most commonly faculty reported the need for increased training related to available services; effective methods for teaching students with disabilities and meeting their diverse needs (autism, in particular, was a common theme); understanding and addressing stigma associated with disabilities;

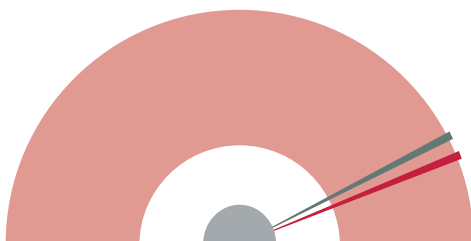
and access to examples for universal design curriculum so that faculty could modify courses to meet diverse student needs. Faculty also reported that written materials, such as newsletters, were helpful in increasing their efforts to support students. One faculty member said of the newsletters available via disability service center on the campus that “issues with information for instructors about providing assistance in class are really good!”

## Administrators’ Perspectives

In the administrator survey, administrators reported on the extent to which they believe the student disability services office provides support to their specific office/department in meeting the needs of students with disabilities, as well as an overall score of quality of services across campus. The average score is shown for the overall category as well as for each individual item in the category. The number (n) of administrators who responded to the questions is also shown.

### ADMINISTRATORS’ PERSPECTIVES ON CAMPUS DISABILITY SERVICES (mean=4.28)

1=poor; 5=excellent



4.22

From your perspective, overall, how well does the Services for Students with Disabilities office consult, collaborate and support your unit in its interactions with students with disabilities? (n=505)

4.35

From your perspective, overall, how well does the Services for Students with Disabilities office serve students with disabilities? (n=498)

In open-ended responses, administrators reported that disability services provide important resources for students on campus, and wanting to support the efforts to meet the needs of students with disabilities on campus. One administrator said, “I think that the office provides a valuable interface with students and administration, particularly for student who may have difficulty communicating with staff.” Similar to open-ended feedback from

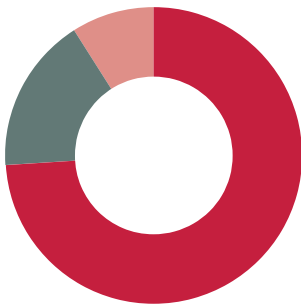
students and faculty, administrators reported a need for more streamlined processes in identifying students with disabilities and communicating with students and faculty to increase access to services. For example, an administrator suggested that when students request special arrangements for exams, “The [disability services] office should immediately send an electronic/hard copy of the request to the student, the instructor, and the department.”



# Self-Study

Directors of student disability services offices from 23 campuses rated their programs current success in serving as an advocate for issues regarding students with disabilities to ensure equal access. Results below represent the percentage of campuses that agreed with the provided statements. Directors could select all options that applied, therefore percentages add to more than 100 percent. On average, Directors rated their program’s success **3.67**, with scores ranging from 1-5 (1=relative ineffectiveness; 5=exceptional performance).

## DIRECTOR REPORTS ON THE CURRENT AVAILABILITY OF ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY ON THEIR CAMPUS (n=23)



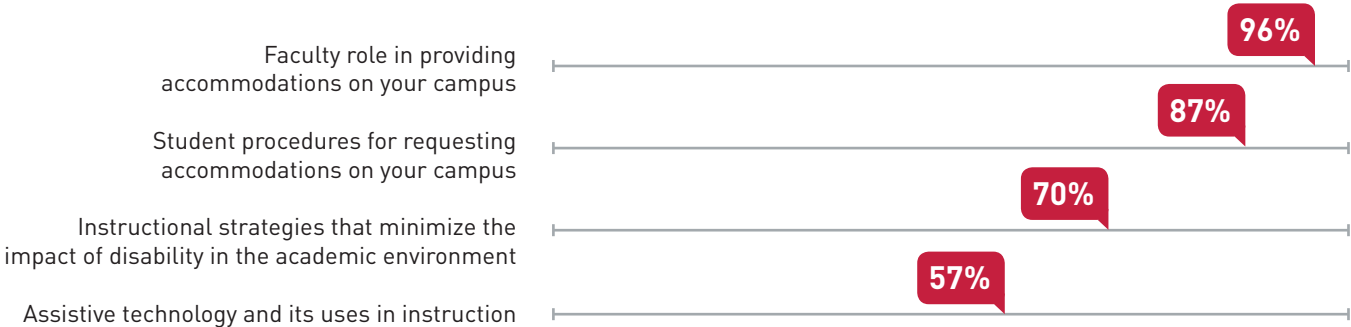
- While not all types of assistive technology are available throughout the campus, the technology requested by current students, faculty, and staff are in place and appropriately accessible ● **74%**
- The institution has not adequately integrated assistive technology throughout the campus ● **17%**
- The institution has appropriately integrated technologies that support access to printed and electronic communications ● **9%**

## DIRECTOR REPORTS OF FREQUENCY WITH WHICH FACULTY TRAINING IS PROVIDED (n=23)

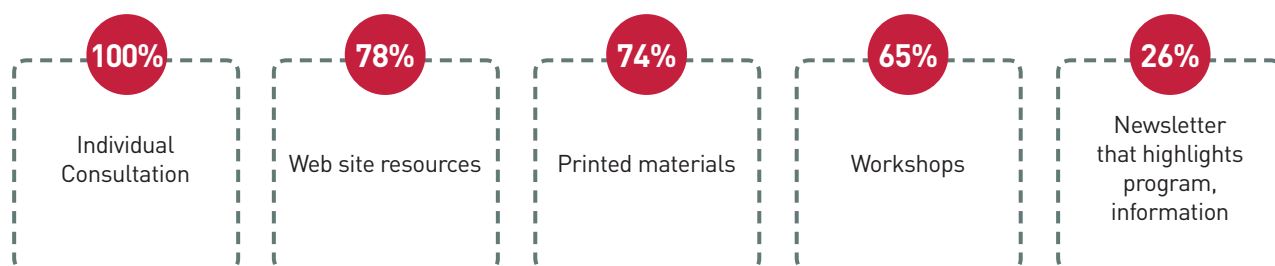


- Whenever requested ● **96%**
- Annually as part of faculty orientation/training in the fall ● **74%**
- Scheduled, workshops/trainings are offered at least once per academic term ● **35%**

## DIRECTOR REPORTS OF AREAS IN WHICH THEIR PROGRAM PROVIDES FACULTY TRAINING (n=23)

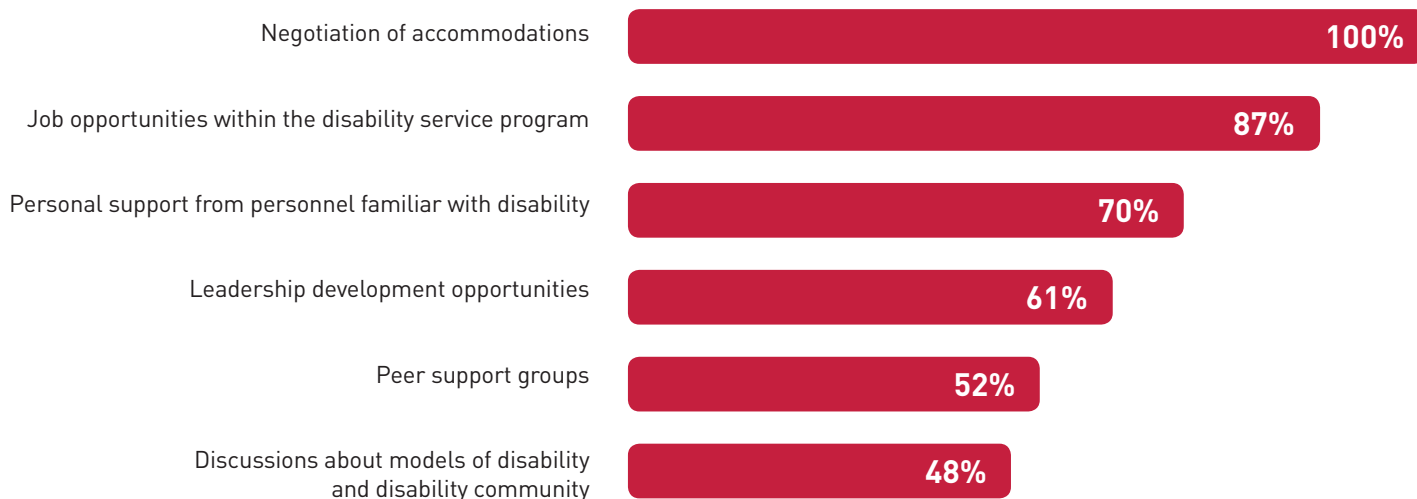


## DIRECTOR REPORTS OF WAYS IN WHICH STUDENT DISABILITY SERVICES CENTERS DISTRIBUTE INFORMATION ON THEIR PROGRAM\* (n=23)



\*Includes determination of eligibility, reasonable accommodation, universal design and instructional, and programmatic and curriculum accessibility available to instructors

## DIRECTOR REPORTS OF OPPORTUNITIES PROVIDED FOR STUDENTS TO ENGAGE (n=23)



**One hundred percent** of Directors reported that their office engages in an interactive process with students in the determination of reasonable accommodations.

**Fifty-two percent** of Directors reported that their program maintains records to measure and compare the retention and graduation rates of students with disabilities with the retention/graduation rates of all students.

## Self-Study Open-Ended

Across CSU campuses, directors of student disability services centers reported using a variety of strategies to reduce barriers for student access to services and accommodations as well as efforts to reduce the burden on faculty trying to meet diverse student needs. Most commonly reported by campuses was the adoption of online portals and forms to allow for easily accessible materials and accommodation requests and simplified communication between the disability services, students, and faculty. For example, one director said, “the office has committed to streamlining service delivery in a variety of ways.” The strategies identified included streamlining access via online programs, such as the ability of resources to be transferred to alternative media via online services; extended office hours with counsellors and support staff at the beginning of each term; and exam and mobility services that are provided Monday through Friday until 10:00pm and 8:00am to 5:00pm on Saturdays.





# Recommendations

This report reflects findings from the Association on Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD) surveys, administered across the CSU campuses during the 2016-17 school year to students with documented disabilities, faculty, administrators, and directors of campus disability services centers. The data presented and the following recommendations are intended to initiate dialogue at the CSU systemwide and individual campus levels to examine opportunities for improvements.

Overall, we recommend that the CSU incorporate a commitment to equity and inclusion in its *Policy for the Provision of Accommodations and Support Services to Students with Disabilities*. This would signify that it is not only the obligation of campuses to provide disability accommodations for students according to the Americans with Disabilities Act and unlawful discrimination laws, but that there is also a commitment of the entire CSU system to promote and champion equity and

inclusion in access to and quality of education for students with disabilities. An equity and inclusion lens to CSU student disability services would offer a common framework to use across the CSU system and could serve to shift the focus from meeting students' needs as required by law, to providing services for disabled students in a way that realizes equal access and authentic engagement of this traditionally excluded group into processes, activities, and decision-making. Such a campus-wide and cross-system focus on equity and equal access builds on the work of campus student disability service offices, creating supporting environments in which students with disabilities can thrive.

Below we present additional specific recommendations that emerged from the survey results around the areas of *Access, Accommodations, Campus Climate, Training for Faculty, and Ongoing Quality Improvement and Assessment*.

## ACCESS

Although there is the legal right for students with disabilities to access support services, not all students with disabilities request services,<sup>5</sup> and survey findings suggest that students and faculty perceive processes required for receiving accommodations as barriers to access. Based on the feedback from students and faculty, the following are suggestions for reducing barriers for students and faculty in accessing disability accommodations and services on campus.

1. Make information, resources, and disability accommodation requests easy to access on the university's website and automate submission and routing of forms/paperwork, wherever possible. This will help to improve and streamline communication between students, faculty, and staff in student disability services offices and make the process of receiving accommodations less onerous.
2. Perform regular quality checks on existing resources to ensure that resources are available to students as they are intended (e.g., accommodation requests are accessible and timely; test-taking accommodations are meet needs of students, students receive high quality alternate format resources, wheelchair ramps have appropriate inclines).
3. Outreach to graduate programs on campus to ensure graduate students are aware of and able to access disability services. Overall, graduate students rated availability of services lower than their undergraduate counterparts, which may suggest they experience unique barriers to accessing services. Further investigation into such barriers may be needed.

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<sup>5</sup> Kurth, N., & Mellard, D. (2006). Student perceptions of the accommodation process in postsecondary education. *Journal of Postsecondary Education and Disability*, 19(1), 71-84.



## ACCOMMODATIONS

CSU campuses offer a diverse array of accommodations for students with disabilities. Research suggests that when accommodations are low in quality, students may become frustrated or overwhelmed resulting in the underutilization of accommodations and reduction of benefits afforded to students.<sup>6</sup> The following recommendations are made based on student and faculty feedback on the challenges they experience with various accommodations.

1. Ensure that students receive accommodations that allow for them to access their course materials. For example, ensure that testing centers have flexible hours of operation with spaces appropriate for unique student needs, students receive timely alternative formats of course material, and there are staff and resources available for students with disabilities in labs and libraries.
2. Support students and faculty in identifying note-takers and consider opportunities to increase note-taking quality. For example, campuses might consider offering incentives for student note-takers who complete notetaking trainings and/or reward students who produce high-quality notes.
3. Increase automation of communication between students, faculty, and staff at student disability services offices. Automation can include reminders to send materials and coordinate accommodations for specific students, notifications when exams have been completed at testing centers, and notification when students with disabilities enroll in courses.

## CAMPUS CLIMATE

Some students with disabilities across the CSU reported feeling stigmatized by faculty and fear of stigma from peers. When students are supported, then they are likely to experience academic successes.<sup>7</sup> CSU campuses should work to promote safe and supportive environments for students with disabilities to help ensure equity in both policy and practice. The following recommendations are made to improve campus climate for students with disabilities.

1. Collaborate with student counseling and psychological services, student affairs, and other centers on campus to increase campus awareness about stigma, specifically related to student disabilities.
2. Offer peer support groups and/or peer-mentoring opportunities for students with disabilities on campus. Students with access to such opportunities identified a sense of social support and community on campus.

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<sup>6</sup> Marshak, L., Van Wieren, T., Ferrell, D. R., Swiss, L., & Dugan, C. (2010). Exploring barriers to college student use of disability services and accommodations. *Journal of Postsecondary Education and Disability*, 22(3), 151-165.

<sup>7</sup> Lightner, K. L., Kipps-Vaughan, D., Schulte, T., & Trice, A. D. (2012). Reasons university students with a learning disability wait to seek disability services. *Journal of Postsecondary Education and Disability*, 25(2), 145-159.

## TRAINING FOR FACULTY

Student disability services offices should consider the breadth of faculty experience on campus when developing policies, materials, and trainings to support faculty. Faculty who responded to the AHEAD survey ranged in years of teaching experience from one to 50 years. This suggests the need for both onboarding trainings for new faculty and regularly scheduled refresher trainings for long-time faculty.

1. Based on suggestions from students and faculty, we recommend ongoing training opportunities for faculty in these core areas:
  - Services and accommodations available at student disability services office
  - Effective methods for teaching students with disabilities and meeting their diverse needs, including universal design
  - Understanding and addressing stigma associated with disabilities
  - Legal obligations for accommodating students with disabilities
  - CSU framework of equity and inclusion for students with disabilities
2. Although it was not addressed on the current AHEAD surveys, we recommend that future assessments measure and examine differences between experiences and preparedness of full-time versus part-time faculty.

## ONGOING QUALITY IMPROVEMENT AND ASSESSMENT

This report provides baseline data for access, availability, and quality of accommodations and services for students with disabilities on CSU campuses. We recommend that assessment of student disabilities services is an ongoing effort and that student voices are at the center of these efforts. Specifically, the CSU and its campuses should consider the following:

1. Form advisory groups (at both the campus-level and system-level) composed of students with disabilities and faculty from various departments. Advisory groups can be consulted when designing policies, programs, services, and determining accommodations in student disability services offices.
2. Continue to assess quality and access issues across campuses. In addition to the use of AHEAD surveys, we recommend including additional opportunities for learning such as:
  - Providing opportunities for campus student disability services offices to learn from each other and share best practices for meeting the needs of students with disabilities.
  - Solicit qualitative, in-depth feedback (e.g. using interviews and focus groups) from students and faculty that could provide additional context to the survey findings presented in this report. Surveys are a useful tool for efficiently gathering feedback from a large group of people, but are often not as helpful in understanding the “why” of the feedback, or what needs to be done to remedy any identified short-comings.
  - Continue efforts to include opinions of all students with disabilities on campus in data collection. For example, think about how to engage students and faculty who did not respond to the AHEAD surveys, as non-responders may be distinct in characteristics and needs from survey participants.