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Academic, Physical and Human Accessibility to Promote Participation of Students in Higher Education

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Introduction: Higher education is the most significant variable that explains participation of people with disabilities in employment and society. Recent legislation related to people with disability rights and enforcement of accessibility regulations open opportunities for inclusion of people with disability in higher education institutions.

Objectives: The aim of the research is to examine the relationship between academic, physical, social, and technological accessibility to higher education, and academic and social participation and achievements of students with disabilities.

Methods: The research compared 170 students with physical, sensory, and mental disabilities with matched 156 students without disabilities. The main research tools were: a) College Student Experiences Questionnaire; b) Human, academic, and physical accessibility for students with disabilities; c) Assessment of Computer Task Performance; d) Independence in self-care; e) Health status.

Results: Only few differences were found between the two groups of students in their activities. However, students with disabilities had fewer experiences with computers, devoted more time to their studies, and had difficulties meeting deadlines. Students, who used computers, were more involved in academic and social activities. Students' participation varied according to different types of disabilities. In addition, correlations were found between available accessibilities and satisfaction, and between economic support and social participation.

Discussion: Academic achievements and participation of students with disabilities compared with typical students enables to uncover the students with disabilities experiences and needs in higher education. Furthermore, The importance of using computers for success and inclusion in higher education is evident.

Conclusions: The study presents evidence based recommendations and requirements to enhance academic, physical and human accessibility, including promoting awareness and knowledge of academic and administrative staff, in order to comply with legislation and to give equal opportunity to the growing group of consumer in higher education - students with disabilities.