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Title: Diagnosis Blind: Evaluation and the Reasoning behind the Aid for Blind and Visually Impaired Students

Abstract: The basic question was to assess the aid provided by the university to visually impaired students, and then determine why some aid is more effective than others. To do this, I went around looking for examples of this aid by first deriving what the problems were that visually impaired students came across, then looking in archival videos, by myself, and in interviews to find what the aid was that countered the various problems. Finally, I interviewed Mr. McMurray, the head of the vision and hearing coordination at DRES to confirm the level of effectiveness for each form of aid that I had already come up with based on my findings on each of the separate items or problems. From there, I researched the University's side of each aid to find out what was different between the effective and ineffective aids, and analyzed this difference in the final findings. In the end I establish a reason for ineffective aids and describe how to prevent them.

Initial Question: With the student population of the University of Illinois being so large, and its prestige attracting so many people from all walks of life, there are bound to be students with disabilities here on the campus. Many can be seen carrying on with their days, some even playing a game of wheelchair basketball. For me, this is where my research actually began, looking into the wheelchair sports, and how they have been adapted to accommodate people with motor disabilities. Yet, as we began to discuss our questions among the class, I found that everyone had picked something related to motor disabilities, and it made me lose interest in the subject. I felt if not already, the university would have many new research papers done on the motor disabled students on campus that my work would be insignificant. Then, while browsing the moodle site, I came upon the first piece of my current research project. There was an article about how a graduate of the university wanted her diploma to be in Braille so she could read it herself, and how the university reacted to the request.
This opened my eyes (no pun intended) to the concept of a whole new disability on campus: visual impairment. And so I began to look into what exactly can the university do for visually disabled students.

At first, I did not have a lot to go on in class considering we read no books about blindness, and hence had no discussion on it to draw from, however, my rough copy of this very question received much criticism (though in no way mean or harsh criticism) and I was able to use those ideas to come up with a new question.

I wanted to find out how the University of Illinois had been adapted structurally to accommodate the blind students. The next step in my research was to find out what they had to do by law, so I had somewhere to start from. This helped me to further understand, though not refine, my question because I understood what needed to be done to make the university accessible to blind students structurally, and I could understand some ways to solve these problems.

However, then my question again was not quite perfect, it was too broad to focus upon and find some real answers. So, upon the nudge from two classmates, I decided to put a timeline on my project. Perhaps it would be best to find not what the university has done or how it has evolved to accommodate the students, but to specifically find out how right now in the present the university helps blind students do everything seeing students can do.

After this, I needed to have solid research foundations. From looking at several other papers, I concluded that an interview would be the best primary source that I could build my report around. So I needed to begin to look for a blind student who could discuss with me what they think the university does, or doesn’t do to help them get around.

Back at the original piece, I was able to find my subject. Brian McMurray was not only a student here, but he currently serves as the visual and hearing coordinator at D.R.E.S., and he is blind himself. Basically, he is a triple threat to uncovering the problems blind students face at school and how to deal with them. From MR. McMurray I was able to put some of the final parameters on my question, and I was also able to define what I specifically wanted to look at. As Mr. McMurray said to me “when we refer to accessibility, it depends on the subject. Accessibility walking around typically refers to what we do for wheelchair-bound students, though there are some ways that blind people get around the university has done, and when we refer to accessibility specifically for a visually impaired student, we typically mean making websites and books
that talk.” From this, I was able to very accurately state what I wished to look at within the university, and at what time I wanted to look at it.

“Currently, what does the university have to aid visually impaired students as they travel to and from classes as well as what is done to help them view the same material for actually performing in these classes?”

From here, more research must be done. From my experience with other projects, a key concept to look at is obtaining an outside view on the situation to compare how what Mr. McMurray defines as aids are to what another blind person might view as aids, or what they think should be done. Furthermore, it will be essential to understand the terminology and law that goes along with each of the specific adaptations, and from the plethora of McMurray’s information, sources that can confirm much of what he said to better understand these aids or needs of blind students.

Some of this information was covered in class in the form of a video, which I was able to use and compare to McMurray, as well as provide the what is most likely to be the only student input I have on the issue.

But I hope that this is not the end of my sources. I would like to continue talking with Mr. McMurray and perhaps interview him while we walk about campus, so I can better understand the travel aspect of my question as well as find out what exactly he can do for students as far as material conversion to be audio instead of visual.

It may even be a good idea to read into other books about blindness, even if they are not about the blindness on campus so I can more accurately identify the problems students face so I can find if the University of Illinois has done anything to accommodate them.

The biggest challenges that I may face are purely barriers of the mind. Looking from the outside in, it is very hard to see what challenges a blind person faces everyday. Sure they walk around with their canes, but what exactly does that do? How can they know when other things are nearby or about to collide with them? Being on a campus with so many other people, not to mention the busses and bikes, it is dangerous to walk around, and I rely solely on vision, so I cannot even begin to imagine how a blind person does it, which is where Mr. McMurray has provided me the greatest aid.

Also, as for the material adaptations, I don’t know all what everyone
requires for classes. I need a notebook and a class book based on the material so I can read and take notes. From here I can find how the university overcomes these issues, but I cannot myself find other problems that may exist which is again where I will need to rely on other people’s testimonies to understand what to look at next.

Source Annotated Bibliography


Before I interviewed Mr. McMurray, I wanted to be up to date on the laws that he works to uphold, so as to better address my question, because the most important point of my research is to find how the University of Illinois helps its blind students. I think that it is important to describe what exactly is expected before I compare what the university does to what it could do or should do. On top of that, however, I want to incorporate the laws into my project because I think a lot of people don’t actually know the specifics of the law, or more importantly how it directly affects blind people, so it is a good place to start. Most of the information that I was able to gather from this piece was confirmed by Mr. McMuray after his interview, helping to make it a far more reliable piece of information in my report, and considering it is just a copy of the actual law, there is little bias involved, and it will not need to be addressed. It also helps me because even I was not precisely aware of the details of the act, so now I can better assess the university’s handling of the issue.


Although this document is huge, and contains tons of information that indirectly helps the my research as a whole, the major point is that this was the best place that I could extrapolate to find what percent of the college is blind. This helps me to answer my question because it puts in perspective just how much the university
has to do to accommodate blind students, for instance, a small office group including Mr. McMurray could easily handle all of the needs for a small group of blind students, however a large group would require many more faculty, so it is important to know about what percent of college students are legally blind. Of course I had this number checked when I went to see Mr. McMurray, but I thought I should have an idea before, and then solidify as opposed to basing so much information off of one source. Doing so led to this number not only being more concrete and reliable, but also assured me that there where no biases when Mr. McMurray agreed that about .25% of students at the university are blind, and that Mr. McMurray deals with about 25 to 30 students a year that need this help, which also confirms the idea that the small number is manageable by the university. Also, it helps me because otherwise it would be impossible to decide just how many blind students went to the university or what percent that was, which now I can very accurately estimate.


It actually both helps and hinders the point of my research, and it is not specific to the University, however the major benefit of the paper is to use it to show how an outside source believes you should act towards blind people coming from the viewpoint of a blind person. From this information I can show how the university does or doesn’t comply, what it does to help the blind students fit in more to the university, etc. Furthermore, I asked very similar questions of Mr. McMurray to ensure that they apply to the university as well as compare and contrast to get a better idea of how the blind population in general wishes to be treated. This had an added bonus of helping to eliminate any bias presented in the interview with Mr. McMurray, though in some cases that complicates the data I received from Mr. McMurray.


This is a video on Braille at the University of Illinois. Clearly, Braille is one of the biggest adaptations for blind students, however there
are many misconceptions about Braille, most of which are even depicted in the video, and I hope to use the video in contrast with the interview with Mr. McMurray to point out what Braille can actually do. It helps me answer how the university currently provides aid to blind students, as it is one of the major aids along with audio devices, and it shows an insight into a concept (Braille printing) that up until now I was unfamiliar with. Like I mentioned earlier, Braille is not exactly the perfect solution as the video depicts, considering that very few blind people actually read Braille, however, it does serve as a small aid, and should be addressed.


The first article on Braille and blindness at the university, this is the article that helped me decided to focus on blindness within the university and how the university handles it as opposed to motor disabilities such as polio or veterans and amputees all in wheelchairs. It specifically deals with one example of a form of aid that the university delivers to help blind students, in this case a blind diploma, but also reflects in some ways how the blind student feels about the university and the amount of effort that they put into making these adaptations. The credibility of this source was checked in the interview with Mr. McMurray to ensure that the ideas were true. This gave me a whole world of insight into the realm of the blind on campus that I had up until this point not even thought of researching. On the other hand, most of the sources that I have gathered since then paint a more broad, more successful depiction of the university, however, having different viewpoints is key to reaching a better overall stand point.


Basically the coolest guy ever, Brian McMurray is not only alum of the University of Illinois, he currently works at the D.R.E.S. cite on campus to help out students with problems much like his own. Most of the things that I focus on he has at least huge if not immense input to help me with, although he did make sure to warn that he cannot speak for all blind people, just most of them. This interview was carried out at Mr. McMurray’s office where I transcribed all of the conversation (he had so much to share I barely had to talk anyway), and it lasted about an hour and a half. Mr. McMurray has
helped me address my question more than any other source because of his position as a graduate and D.R.E.S. worker, and the amount of insight he has in subject comes directly from his life of experience, which makes it very valuable. For the most part he confirmed many of the preliminary research documents I had examined prior to the interview, giving me a large foundation to base my report on, and I can use his primary source knowledge to be the body of the report. He also gave me some interesting details that from the outside in I had seen in an entirely different way, such as the aid from sounds while walking, and the uselessness of the traffic beepers. The only downside to the interview is that he is only one person, and some of the facts he gave me I will need to check to make sure they are indeed correct as his opinions may have yielded a slight bias.


Just a simple fact that I wanted to make sure I had correct after I heard it from Mr. McMurray, it is the definition of legal blindness. I think I can use this not only in the beginning to explain what the disability means to the students, but also how the university does or doesn’t cope with it and how it could. It gives me some insight considering legal blindness is a very vague term, and the correct understanding is very important, not to mention that it helps me to narrow my question by defining the types of help the university can give based on the fact that not all visual impairments prevent sight. Furthermore, this confirms the data I received from Mr. McMurray, and coming from a medical sight, it is very credible.

**Revised Question:**

Nearly two weeks after my last revision, my question has seen quite a change. It is in fact not very different from my original question except that it takes the facts about what the university has done to aid blind students, and looks precisely at how effective these efforts have been considering they were not always enacted with the input of blind students. I arrived at this through a stream of thought during class discussion.

Trying to stay away from a simple fact based paper; I had to think “How can my research help others?” At first, I struggled very much
so with this question. And then my professor pointed out that I had one specific data point that did not fit with the rest, that being that the walk signals at streets do not actually "help" blind people because the loud noise disorients them.

However, after reviewing my interview with Mr. McMurray, I realized that is not the only data point I have pointing out how the university ineffectively handled blindness among its population. It is also a fact that most “blind” students are not fully blind, and in reality only need the print enlarged to read. Yet what do you see everywhere to help blind people identify room numbers and buildings? Braille might be what an outsider thinks is the solution for this disability, but in fact, most blind people cannot read Braille. That was a second mistake that the University of Illinois had made dealing with blind students.

I questioned Mr. McMurray about how these things happen, to which he responded “Well, I try to do a lot of things, but sometimes, and I’m sure you know where I’m coming from on this one Mason, I just couldn’t dedicate enough effort to the groups that chose these things to make sure they got the one I wanted.” And this made me realize, most of the improvements the University makes are not always going to be made by blind students.

From the various readings we have had in class, I recognized this as a problem, and where there is a problem, such as in Michael Berube’s Life As We Know It he is faced with the problem of aborting a down syndrome baby, which he researches to give the reader the option to make the decision.

I considered my problem carefully, and altered it and refined it based on what I heard other students say, and what other problems I could think of that had presented themselves in our other readings. I realized that I could use Mr. McMurray’s interview along with my other research to focus on the effectiveness of the universities aid to blind students, not just what they were, and at the same time I would be answering the question,

“How effective is the University of Illinois in aiding blind students considering the fact that they are not blind?”

It is a far bigger issue that affects the University than defining simply the actions of the University itself, and is a notable problem
to right on. Furthermore, it allows me to look at situations and give multiple opinions on it, recommend a course to fix it, and then leave it with the reader, allowing the paper to be engaging and above all, worth it.

From here, I will need to make another visit to Mr. McMurray to examine just what he thinks is an effective aid and what isn’t, to give me more to discuss in the paper, and possibly (although not very necessary) I can contact someone who has overseen all of the Universities’ improvements to find out just which ones have worked and which ones haven’t. I may also reconsider my sources. As of right now, All of my sources are still applicable, though some have changed their purpose, such as the definitions of blindness, and the A.D.A. concept of disability merely ways to help the reader get some background before considering all of the problems.

Over all, I believe that the tweaks to this question will take it away from a simple yes or no data driven report and make it into a research project that identifies a problem, information, and possible solutions, leaving the reader with a better understanding of the concept as a whole.

**Recommendations**

**Movement around campus** is the real area for improvement for the college. Providing simple plaques outside all of the university buildings would not be terrifically costly, and it has implications that would benefit not only the blind and visually impaired, but also the sighted community.

On the outside of campus, the problem has not changed nor has the solution. The street crossings are still very busy, very dangerous, and impossible to cross for most blind students. In order to fix the problem, correct A.P.S. need to be installed. It will
be costly, yet it would significantly improve the mobility of the visually impaired and the blind as well as actually confirming the University of Illinois’ reputation for handicap accessibility in general, and making it a quality example of what to do at other universities to benefit the blind and visually impaired community as a whole. Included in seeing the tasks through to the end, it is also imperative that University utilize its resources, including the community it wishes to help, represented by McMurray and others, to achieve the best result. The University must not give in, no matter the number of struggles they encounter, until they see the program through, the amount of aid it lends the community as a whole must not block their view of its effect on those it was aimed to serve. If the University can successfully implement these kinds of aids (the ones that have barriers to overcome), it will truly be a pinnacle of disability aid that other universities can strive to mimic.