Students' Experiences of Navigating College with a Disability

by

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Students Experiences of Navigating College with a Disability

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to conduct an exploratory analysis of the experiences of students with disabilities in college. Participants (N=26) were SUNY New Paltz students aged 18-54, who identified as having a disability. A series of semi-structured interviews were conducted on Zoom, in person, and through an online typed version of the questionnaire. The Postsecondary Student Survey of Disability-Related Stigma (SSDRS) was completed online before completing the interview. To gain a better understanding of what it is like to be a student with a disability attending a post-secondary institute, participants were asked to talk about their experiences. Additionally, participants were asked different questions based on whether they were registered with the Disability Resource Center. Three themes were identified as the most prominent: the importance of accessibility, accommodations (the good and the bad); and the struggle with faculty to receive accommodations. Overall, participants felt a lack of accessibility on campus and had issues acquiring accommodations. Participants also noted that there seemed to be some stigma on campus. Participants were overwhelmingly interested in a self-advocacy class. Findings were discussed in light of recent scholarship.
Students Experiences of Navigating College with a Disability

“If my heart could speak, I’m sure it would say, I wish I were someplace else today. Among these books, a great amount of knowledge there must be, but what good is knowledge where others carry the keys. Through the last ten years many improvements have been made, but the final words seem to say, don’t forget, my good man you’re still a patient here today. Intelligence, ability, and knowledge surely will never last, why, all we want to look at my good man, is your past. I wish that some of these people, who write the books and make the rules, could spend just a few years walking in our shoes.” -Anonymous (found in Payne, 2009, p. 201)

Over the past few years, there has been an increase in the number of students with disabilities (SWD) attending post-secondary institutions (Hansen & Dawson, 2020; O’Shea et al., 2021). According to the Americans with Disabilities Act, all colleges must offer services to these students if the student wants to have accommodations (Disability Rights & Laws | Office of Accessibility Services | College of Staten Island Website, n.d.). These accommodations help SWDs have a college experience similar to their peers. Despite this, it has been found that college SWDs graduate at a lower rate than their non-disabled peers (Francis et al., 2019; Kim & Kutscher, 2020; O’Shea et al., 2021). However, there are many different types of disabilities that a student can have, and most studies tend to only look at a narrow range of disabilities. For example, Shpigelman et al. (2021) looked at the importance of disability support centers (DSCs) and the impact that they have on a student's success in college. Their study found that most research looking into DSCs focused primarily on students with learning disabilities, including attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). The limited scope of this study leaves many of the disabled community out of research intended to improve the educational experiences of
students. More studies consider actual experiences of SWD in college are essential for understanding how services can be changed to help these students. Accordingly, this study explores the experiences of college students with disabilities widely defined to understand their experiences and why some students with disabilities seek institutional support while others do not.

While SWD may be seen as a vulnerable population, their input is essential. It is crucial to understand what assistance these students need to help them succeed to the best of their ability. Therefore, there is a growing need to ask SWD how college is going for them directly. This was the aim of the study. Not only did participants answer questions about how their college experience had been so far, but they were also asked about their involvement with the school's disability services and why some have not registered with the Disability Resource Center.

The services that are offered to disabled students vary by school. While available services may differ, the general idea of the accommodations is typically the same; ranging from note-taking assistance to providing special housing accommodations. The UN Convention for People with Disabilities determined that being able to get a higher education is an international human right, and the convention determined that it is required for “educational establishments to offer reasonable accommodations, adaptations, or modifications to enable the participation of SWD” (Shpigelman et al., 2021, p. 1777). To get these accommodations, a student must show documented proof of disability. This can be costly and time-consuming (Emens, 2021). Accommodations are an important part of making education equal for students with disabilities. Being a SWD myself, I was infinitely curious about the personal experiences other SWD at the college level. Did their accommodations fit their needs? Did they have good experiences? Did
they think changes need to be made? These questions led to this study and the central question: What experiences were students with disabilities having at SUNY New Paltz?

**Literature Review**

**Increasing Prevalence of Students with Disabilities in Post-Secondary Education**

Helping SWDs succeed in college is crucial, as the number of students with disabilities in post-secondary education is increasing yearly. As of 2014, one study found that 11% to 12% of students identify with some type of disability, but there is other evidence that suggests this percentage is closer to 15% (Kimball et al., 2016). However, these percentages may not accurately depict the true number of students with disabilities in college as these numbers do not capture those students who have not disclosed their disability to their school (Kimball et al., 2016). A study by Fichten et al. (2020, p. 22) found that “over 11% of students enrolled in two-year and four-year colleges in Canada and the United States have a disability; however, the 2016 American Freshman Survey, based on 137,456 full-time students who entered 184 American 4-year colleges and universities, found that 21.9% self-reported a disability.” Experts in the study of SWD research Alison L. May and C. Addison Stone (2010) discussed the rise of SWD on college campuses in their article “Stereotypes of Individuals With Learning Disabilities: Views of College Students With and Without Learning Disabilities.” According to the most recent statistics from 2021, 19% of all undergraduate students have some kind of learning disability (Students With Disabilities – PNPI, 2022), a 9% increase from 1994 statistics (Paul, 2000). May and Stone (2010) report that the exact number of students with disabilities in college is hard to determine because colleges do not need to report or provide services for students with learning disabilities (LD), and most LD students are afraid to self-identify. It was also reported by Hansen and Dawson (2020, p. 309) that another reason that students do not report their disabilities to
their schools is “because stigma concerns tend to restrain some students’ disclosure.” Murray et al. (2008) found that less than 50% of undergraduate students notify their university that they have a learning disability. This suggests that many students are not receiving adequate or appropriate support. Not only are students with learning disabilities choosing not to report to their colleges, but students with mental health-related disabilities are also hesitant to report. Mental health-related disabilities have steadily increased over the last few years. This increase is thought to be estimated at between 10% to 20% (Martin, 2010). Markoulakis et al. (2013, p. 77) stated that “at least 20% of U.S. and Canadian university students have experienced a mental health problem, which can greatly affect their likelihood of success or failure in this community. Increasing numbers of university students are experiencing mental health problems, and these conditions are escalating in severity.” Having a disability can affect a student's success rate within the college. Whether or not a student reports their disability to the school can impact a student's success.

To Report or Not to Report…Which is More Beneficial?

To get support from post-secondary institutions, students must go to the school’s disability services and report their disability, essentially “outing” themselves as having a disability. Some students never self-identify as they are too afraid to do so. Their hesitance to self-identify may be due to fears of being treated differently or because the student feels the school does not offer services that would be beneficial (May & Stone, 2010). Eccles et al. (2018, p. 195) noted that the “Fear of disclosure is linked to issues of risk and stigma - that students will be negatively impacted on and/or that they will carry a ‘label’ which differentiates them from other students.” This risk can impact whether a student decides to get school aid or not. Some research reports “that less than one-quarter of students with disabilities in college” report their
disability to their college and use the college’s disability services, which has an “impact of social and structural stigmatization on students’ reluctance to disclose [which] may be more pronounced for students with certain types of disabilities” (O’Shea et al., 2021, p. 301). For example, “fewer than 10% of students with psychiatric disabilities choose to disclose their disability to the university and register with the” school disability service centers “as the stigma surrounding psychiatric disabilities continues to be pervasive within and outside of academia” (O’Shea et al., 2021, p. 301).

Due to this fear, there appears to be a cost-benefit analysis that students consider when looking to acquire help from school disability services. Many evaluate if it is worth disclosing their disability to those in power. They also must consider if they have the correct documents to get accommodations. Most SWDs know that it is common for people with disabilities to be treated badly by those who do not have a disability; this poor treatment often leaves students disinclined to “disclose their disabilities in the context of college. Students may fear being singled out by an instructor for their disabilities, which may encourage them to conceal their disabilities, if possible” (Gin et al., 2020, p. 3). This fear of stigma puts a roadblock in front of students with disabilities to access the services they need. It also may make the student feel that registering is more trouble than it is worth.

In some cases, students may feel the hassle of registering with an on-campus disability center is not worth their time. Even if the student does get through this hassle and becomes registered with the school’s disability office, what the school offers the student may not be beneficial. For students with hearing difficulties, for example, not all classrooms have equipment for listening devices. The student may need note-taking assistance, but the college may not offer a solution that works for the student. A study found that SWD are often afraid to ask for
accommodations due to “...the fact that they fear being viewed as less-than by their peers or instructors. This fear is justified because many faculty members also believe that accommodations provide an unfair advantage” (Krebs, 2019, para 2).

Other problems can arise for SWD dealing with faculty and staff that are unwilling to work with a student with a disability. One of the main focuses of the DRC (Disability Resource Center) in New Paltz is to push students to self-advocate for themselves. While this gives students a safe place to learn how to self-advocate, it makes them feel more helpless than usual when no one listens. Several studies have shown that students with LD have up to a 20% lower undergraduate graduation rate than their nondisabled peers (May & Stone, 2010). Factors such as stigma and the lack of knowledge that some faculty have regarding working with SWD plays a significant role in the hard times these students have in college (Hansen & Dawson, 2020). With all these potential problems, it is easy to understand why a student may hesitate to report their disability. This also means that students with proper documentation can easily register for school services and are more likely to be studied. Until recently, learning disabilities, such as ADHD or dyslexia, were the most common disabilities in college, meaning that most studies focused on these populations; however, in the past few years, psychiatric disabilities have become “the largest and fastest growing subgroups of college students with registered disabilities on U.S. campuses” (O’Shea et al., 2021, p. 300). This surge in psychiatric disabilities has caused research in this area to expand, but there is still a gap when looking at the services students feel they need to succeed. Even with research and knowledge that there are growing numbers of students with different types of disabilities in college, there is still a lot of stigma surrounding SWDs.

The Stigma of Disability
Stereotyping is one form of stigma that can affect a SWD college experience. Stereotyping by fellow peers, faculty, and staff can negatively impact a SWD college experience. May and Stone (2010) break down stereotyping into two different categories. The first type of stereotyping is called “categorization attitudes,” when someone views students with LD as one group, ignoring individual differences and making blanket statements about all SWD. The second type of stereotyping is called “depersonalization of attitudes,” which strips people of their human qualities by saying they do not have those qualities. For example, May and Stone (2010, p. 492) state that “depersonalization attitudes … dehumanize individuals by saying they lack certain human characteristics, e.g., ‘People with learning disabilities have to spend a lot of time learning basic things and they can never be like a normal person, in respect to their learning abilities.’” While these stereotypes have been less frequent in recent years, some people still believe that SWD do not belong in the regular college classroom. Gibbons et al. (2015, p. 158) found that some faculty felt as though having students with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) in their classrooms might make “traditional students … feel uncomfortable if students with IDD were in their courses” and would disrupt class time. Faculty also felt that IDD students would require more instructor time than traditional students. Previous research has found that faculty are stressed about having IDD students in their classrooms due to accountability standards, curriculum adaptation, sustaining active learning, lack of training to work with SWD, and not knowing how to deal with difficult student behaviors (Gibbons et al., 2015). This stress felt by faculty members is likely to be a continuing cause of stereotyping of SWD in campus communities.

For students with mental health-related disabilities, the stigma is even more pronounced. Martin et al. (2009, p. 259) report that "stigma is a powerful force in preventing university
students with mental health difficulties from gaining access to appropriate support.” Martin et al. (2009, p. 259) studies looked at “university students with mental health difficulties” and “found most students did not disclose their mental health problems to staff at university.” The study found that the reasons that students did not report their mental health disabilities “was primarily due to fear of discrimination during their studies and in professional employment,” which caused students to go through “considerable efforts to hide their mental health condition and in doing so struggled to meet university requirements” (Martin, 2010, p. 259). This also meant that students were more likely to bypass “social aspects of their university experience,” which includes “not attending classes, avoiding participation in group work, and missing campus social activities” (Markoulakis & Kirsh, 2013, p. 87). Students in the study stated that the reason for not attending social events was due “to external sources such as stigma toward mental illness in the university environment and the fear of stigmatization” (Markoulakis & Kirsh, 2013, p. 87). With these fears of stigma, the use of mental health services is low among the student population (Conley et al., 2020). This means that besides the fact that “Stigma complicates the experience of mental health problems,” it also “interferes with students’ likelihood of pursuing needed services” (Conley et al., 2020, p. 1). This drives students to hide their mental health struggles, which can impact their education; this also means they are less likely to get a formal diagnosis and delay possible treatment (Woodhead et al., 2020).

**Consequences of Not Understanding SWD**

Despite the stereotypes and stigma around SWD, some faculty have positive attitudes regarding helping SWD. While faculty may not know how to help a student with a disability, many are more than willing to assist a student needing extra support. Murray et al. (2008) found that most faculty know nothing about on-campus disability services, disability-related law, or
how to make student accommodations. For example, Lipka et al. (2019) found that approximately 71% of faculty needed more training in working with LD students. Despite this lack of training, many faculty were still willing to work with students. Providing proper information to faculty could help faculty better assist SWD.

It is not faculty members who should receive additional information and training about these programs intended to enable them to best assist SWD, but administrators and student workers would also benefit from understanding these resources. Newman et al. (2021) found that SWD who did not disclose their disability and used on-campus services that are open to all students (i.e., New Paltz’s Center for Student Success) did better than students who disclosed their disability to the institution of higher learning and only used disability services. This shows that the services provided for all students are just as good, if not better, for SWD than programs specifically for SWD. This suggests that school disability centers should encourage students to use other campus services more as they may be of better help. One way to do this is to educate administrators on the benefits of cross-programming and the students volunteering to help their peers.

Dyer (2018) found that most SWDs do not graduate from college because they are not socially prepared for college. Students with disabilities have more difficulty connecting with others and need more support to make social connections with peers and faculty/staff. Dyer (2018) stated that faculty and staff need to be a support system for SWD, as well as being knowledgeable about current disability laws and the types of accommodations that they can provide to help SWD be successful in college. This research also found that faculty and staff need to be more aware of the rules and accommodations that can be offered to students because students do not always know what they can receive and may feel that they do not want to report
to the school due to thinking that they will not receive the accommodations they need. Lalor et al. (2020) argue that because only 35% of college SWD disclose their disability, the college disability centers must collaborate with other outreach programs to provide help and information to students who have not disclosed their disability. Lalor et al. (2020) express the need for all campus faculty and staff to work together to make an environment that is accepting and helpful to all students to benefit students who have not declared their disability. These two recent studies reiterate the same findings from the earlier studies. While accommodations and support for SWD continue to improve, there is still a gap in helping SWD who do not feel comfortable enough to report their disabilities to their college. Research suggests colleges should train their faculty and staff to better support SWD instead of waiting for the students to “out themselves” to the school.

**Current Study**

Studies have examined how faculty, staff, and other students feel in college, but few look at SWD specifically. These studies found that students are not reporting their disabilities and assume this to be because SWDs feel they will not be helped; however, research has yet to explore why some students keep silent about their disabilities by not reporting them to their colleges. There could be many reasons a student has yet to report, and the reasons could help make colleges more inclusive to more students. A qualitative approach would be particularly valuable to understand these students’ perspectives.

Given the gaps in the literature, this study aimed to explore the subjective experiences of students who self-identify as having a disability and are currently attending a mid-sized public University in New York State. The following research questions guided the study:

Q1: How do students with disabilities who are registered with the DRC feel about their experiences in the classroom and with the DRC?
Q2. How do students with disabilities who are registered with the DRC feel about their self-advocacy skills?

Q3. How do students with disabilities who are not registered with the DRC feel about their experiences in the classroom?

Q4. How do students with disabilities who are not registered with the DRC feel about their self-advocacy skills?

Q5. How do students not registered with the DRC explain why they have not utilized campus disability services?

Q6. What is the reported stigma that students with disabilities feel they are subjected to on campus?

**Method**

**Participants**

This study included twenty-six (N = 26) participants who self-identified as having a disability. Participants were recruited based on their disability status, including disabilities under several categories. There were 14 participants (53.8%) registered with the DRC, and 12 participants (45.2%) were not registered with the DRC. The categories of disabilities (and some examples) included were: learning disability (e.g., dyslexia, dyscalculia, and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder), mental disability (e.g. post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety disorders, Obsessive-Compulsive Disorders, and depression), physical disability (ex. cerebral palsy, spina bifida, and muscular dystrophy), health disability (ex. chronic health conditions which can include, migraines, irritable bowel disorders, and narcolepsy), mobility disability (ex. amputation, paralysis, multiple sclerosis, arthritis), psychological disability (same as mental disability), developmental disability (ex. autism spectrum disorder, and Down syndrome), and/or
some other disabilities the participant did not want to specify. Some participants also indicated having more than one type of disability, as shown in Table 1. Participants' disabilities category choices were based on participant definitions, as they were given the opportunity to explain their disability in their own words. For example, this means that mental and psychological disabilities are the same but are described by participants using different words. The most common disabilities were: learning disability (n = 12, 27.9%), mental disability (n = 8, 18.6%), and physical disability (n = 7, 14.0%) (Table 1). Students with mental disabilities were the only group with more students who reported not being registered at the DRC than those reporting being registered.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Disability</th>
<th>DRC</th>
<th>Counts</th>
<th>% of Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learning</td>
<td>Registered</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>16.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-Registered</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11.60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental</td>
<td>Registered</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-Registered</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical</td>
<td>Registered</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11.60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-Registered</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>Registered</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-Registered</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobility</td>
<td>Registered</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-Registered</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological</td>
<td>Registered</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-Registered</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developmental</td>
<td>Registered</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11.60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-Registered</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Registered</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-Registered</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.30%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Participants were recruited through the SUNY New Paltz school-wide email using the academic surveys email blast and through an email to all psychology students. The study was
also put on the SUNY New Paltz subject pool. All participants were over 18 and consented to participate in the study. Socio-demographic information such as age, gender, ethnicity, how long they have been a New Paltz student, how long they have known about their disability, and if they were registered with SUNY New Paltz’s Disability Resource Center (DRC) was obtained. Most of the sample was female (n = 17, 65.4%). The average age was 23.7, and the median and mode age were 21. Most participants identified as Caucasian/white (69.2%). The average time spent at New Paltz was 1.83 years, and the average amount of time a participant knew about their disability was 10.3 years (See Table 2).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name*</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Years At Np</th>
<th>Years Known About Disability</th>
<th>Registered With The DRC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ANNE</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SHELLEY</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Black, Jamaican</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BEATRICE</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White but Jewish</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASLAN</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Gender Queer</td>
<td>White, Caucasian</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ATTICUS</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Transgender Male</td>
<td>Indian, European</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WOOLF</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Latino, Hispanic</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TONI</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Non-binary</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Learning: 5 Mental: 3</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BASTIAN</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>White, Hispanic</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHARLOTTE</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White, Caucasian</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name*</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td>Years At Np</td>
<td>Years Known About Disability</td>
<td>Registered With The DRC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BELLA</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Hearing: 20 ADHD: 10</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WILLA</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10+</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BRAM</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Mexican</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCARLETT</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DAISY</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELOISE</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HERMIONE</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White/Puerto Rican Hispanic</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRIM</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ZORA</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CROCKETT</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>White, Caucasian</td>
<td>Half a semester</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DANTE</td>
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<td>OPHELIA</td>
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<td>JULIET</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
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<td>OCTAVIA</td>
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<td>Female</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
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<td>HARPER</td>
<td>54</td>
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<td>VIRGIL</td>
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<td>Male</td>
<td>Jewish</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>LILLI</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Names changed to pseudonyms for the protection of the participant’s identity.

Materials/Procedure

Data were collected through a series of semi-structured interviews. The researcher scheduled and conducted all interviews remotely. Before the interview, participants were read an informed consent and verbally agreed before proceeding with the study. The interview was recorded and transcribed using Otter.ai, a textual data collection software. The interviewer asked participants questions (See Appendix A) such as “What do you think the college community needs to know about students with disabilities registered with the DRC?” The questions focused
on several themes: the nature of the disability, how long they had known about their disability, and what their experiences as disabled students have been like.

Once the interviews were concluded, participants were debriefed and thanked for their participation. They were also informed to email the primary investigator (PI) if they had questions about the study or their participation.

In addition to the semi-structured interview, participants completed the Postsecondary Student Survey of Disability-Related Stigma (SSDRS) online, (Trammell, 2006). This scale measures the extent to which students with disabilities experience stigma. This included stigma from others and themselves. Trammell (2006) (Appendix B) used and created this scale. Ratings were made on a five-point scale, with the points being: never, occasionally, regularly, frequently, or all the time.

Analysis

The participants were given a pseudonym and numerical code during transcription. After the interviews were transcribed, reflexive thematic analysis (TA) was used to analyze the data. This was done by creating codes and then themes based on those codes. Reflexive thematic analysis “is a flexible analytical method that enables the researcher to construct themes—meaning-based patterns—to report their interpretations of a qualitative data set” (Terry & Hayfield, 2021, p. 3). As a first step, all transcribed interviews were read in full multiple times, and a list of codes was generated, each representing a distinct idea. These codes were then grouped into meaningful categories that represented larger concepts. An experienced qualitative researcher served as a secondary coder and examined all codes for consistency and validity. Extensive discussions were held to ensure that the interview data met the standard criteria for theoretical coding.
Results

To understand the experiences of college students with disabilities, I asked them a series of questions to understand better what college has been like for them. The questions the participants answered depended on whether they used the school's disability services (the DRC) or if they were unregistered and did not use the DRC. The answers the participants gave painted a good picture of what it is like to be a student with a disability in college.

Before being interviewed, participants were asked to fill out the Postsecondary Student Survey of Disability-Related Stigma (SSDRS). There were 25 participants who filled out the SSDRS. Table 3 below shows the results of the SSDRS.

Table 3
Results of the SSDRS Showing the Percentages Breakdown for Each Choice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Occasionally</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Regularly</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Frequently</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>All the time</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I think about my disability</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students with disabilities don't receive as many opportunities as those without disabilities</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers view me as having a shortcoming</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My friends think I'm different because of my disability</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People with disabilities are treated differently</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think of myself as smart</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Occasionally</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Regularly</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Frequently</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>All the time</td>
<td>%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>----</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Students with disabilities are not treated equally</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Teachers view me positively</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do not have trouble making friends</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Society stereotypes people with disabilities like mine</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel frustrated about school</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students with disabilities are successful</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do poorly on tests in part due to my disability</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Students are understanding about disabilities</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>I get support from other students with disabilities</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel good about myself</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students with disabilities are successful in the workplace</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My grades are not as good as I would like</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My disability causes obvious strains to my relationships</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
There are four statements that had interesting results that are noteworthy. The first statement is “People with disabilities are treated differently.” For this statement, 56% of participants indicated that this happens frequently or all the time. This finding is indicative of the way that SWDs feel they are being treated in their day-to-day lives and on campus. These results show that they feel they are not treated like their peers. While the SSDRS does not state in what ways they feel they are being treated differently, it does shed light on the stigma that some participants feel. To understand the nuances of this finding, qualitative research is needed. The second statement that 48% of participants indicated was true frequently or all the time was, “Students with disabilities are not treated equally.” This statement sheds light on the fears that participants shared about not getting equal opportunities like their peers outside of the classroom. Participants mentioned that they were afraid that professors would not ask them to do extra activities, such as participating in labs, due to their disability.
The third statement of note is, “I feel frustrated about school.” For this statement, 48% of participants indicated that this happens frequently or all the time. Given that there is no way to really know why participants feel this way, qualitative research is required.

The final statement is, “Society stereotypes people with disabilities like mine.” This statement had 80% of participants indicating that this happens frequently or all the time. This is very telling of the atmosphere surrounding SWD. The bulk of participants in the study had learning disabilities which are hidden disabilities, but 80% of participants still felt that they were being stereotyped for having a disability. After completing the SSDRS, participants were interviewed.

**Question 1: Can you describe your general opinion of the DRC?**

To understand how participants felt about the DRC, I asked them to describe their opinions and experiences with the office.

**Accommodations: The Good and the Bad**

Overall, some participants (29%) felt that the accommodations the DRC provided fit their needs and were helpful. For example, Zora remarked that,

“Yeah, they asked me what I wanted and then pretty much just gave it to me because I think what I asked for was reasonable for my illness.”

Some accommodations included extra testing time, separate testing locations, typing answers for written exams, and note-taking assistance. On the other hand, over half (57%) of participants had negative experiences with the accommodations the DRC offers. In particular, several students found issues with testing accommodations. Some students, for example, were allowed access to testing locations outside their assigned classroom. The DRC handled this testing accommodation
by assigning students to a large room with several other students. This can cause problems, as a participant pointed out.

“I think the way it's set up is kind of like just the test taking part of it is difficult because there's so many of us with different disabilities and then we all have like separate location but then they put like 20 of us together so then it's kind of just the same thing. And like some people are more like vocal or like move around a lot when they're like taking tests. So I think it's like sometimes it feels more distracting than if I were to like just take it regularly.” -Toni

In the above quote, the student makes several important points including that the “solution” is problematic in and of itself.

The Importance of Accessibility

Not only are the testing rooms full, but it is also hard for some (28.6%) to physically access the testing rooms. One participant said,

“Um, other than that, like it's okay, I guess like the elevator is a little narrow but again, like you know, it's kind of hard for me to get back to the testing area with how they have it set up because you walk in and you go down this hallway which is a part of the room and then you're in like the bigger space and they have like desks lined up against the wall. Like once you went to full side of the wall like once you enter the hallway, and so they always end up having to move them so that I can go through because it's hard and then I you know make a lot of noise and I sadly disrupt the people that are taking the exams when I'm going into take mine.” -Prim

Even participants without physical disabilities noticed the lack of accessibility in the DRC.
“So, my the thing with nothing like with the DRC specifically, but one thing that I will mention is that the door the button to the door that opens the door in Haggerty was broken for like the entire first semester. So that I think it's just important to mention because that's where the DRC is. So anyone that needs to like get in there and needs that button wouldn't have been able to get in and get to the DRC for the entire first semester.”

-Juliet

The DRC is viewed by some as not accessible even though it is the office for accessibility. This is extremely problematic. Despite this, the DRC had some positive reviews.

**The Good Staff**

While the lack of access and the unfortunate state of their testing rooms may not be the DRC’s fault, it is clear that participants are frustrated with the DRC. Although they may be frustrated, participants still really liked the staff at the DRC and felt they were lovely. As Toni noted,

“I feel like, like the people in the DRC are really great,”

At least the staff seemed to soften some of the students' frustration when things did not go right. However, the DRC is not the only one impacting a participant’s New Paltz experiences.

**Question 2: Tell me about a positive interaction with a faculty or staff member regarding your disability that stands out to you.**

**The Supportive Professors**

Most participants (50%) stated they had supportive interactions with professors. In Anne’s case, she said,

“just, I mean, any. I mean, I have a psych professor and like, the psych professors like I feel like they particularly understand like sometimes the DRC isn't entirely you know. So
he was just like, yeah, like, if you guys need anything like you can come to me, you don't have to go like and we will or he will like, go through to the DRC so that it's maybe a little bit like more heard, which was like, very nice. I felt like and he said that just generally to the whole class, he didn't pull any one aside. or anything. Just that's like, you know, because I feel like some people get discouraged by like, yeah, and then so I appreciated that from him a lot.”

This participant liked the support that the professor offered them. Other participants (21%) felt their professors were understanding and conscientious of students with disabilities, affording participants comfort in asking their professors for more support or other accommodations when it was needed.

“Yeah, my freshman year in one of my art classes I had, like a really intense project on my body like it was just like a lot of hours of carving. And I had like, gone up to my professor and was like, I don't know that my body can physically handle this deadline. Like what can I do? And he was like, as long as you get it done before the end of the semester, and you give other people good critiques. Like in our crit, even though your project isn't there. Like we can have a separate critique just you and I so that I can give you some feedback and then like, you'll be fine, which was like the amount of stress that was relieved off of me after because it was like, two weeks away, and I was like, it's not gonna happen. Like, I no, can't do that. And he was really great about it, too. He was like, It's okay. You got it. That's great.” -Zora

Overwhelmingly participants had positive experiences with their professors (71%). As Harper noted,

“They are all positive. They are compassionate and respectful and accommodating.”
There were, however, some negative interactions that participants had with their professors.

**Question 3: Tell me about a negative interaction with a faculty or staff member regarding your disability that stands out to you.**

**The Struggle**

This section was about accommodations and how professors handled them. Participants talked mainly about how some professors had difficulty following the participant's accommodations (50%). For example, Bella had a bad experience in one of her classes when she needed specific accommodations.

“Last semester, I had a class that focused on film, meaning we watched several movies in-class. The teacher consistently forgot to turn on the captions for the movie, despite me having to correct this every time. It felt very dismissive, having the same problem arise every single time in the semester, and causing issues that didn't have to happen if the teacher was more attentive.” -Bella

This simple accommodation can be completed with the click of the mouse. However, the participant found that the professor often forgot to turn on the visual aid. Another student discussed needing extra time and how the professor had issues with the accommodations because the students failed to understand the procedure for testing accommodations.

“My other teacher. I think it was like, I was a freshman. And she I told her I was like, I like get extra time. And I we had the exam and then she was coming in passing it around. And I was like, oh, like, what do you want? Like, what do I do to get extra time because like, no one really talked to me about that. And she's like, Oh, shit, and she was like, we'll just take it and then if you need to, like we'll talk about it after and it's like, I understand,
but like, then I take it like there's nothing that can be done after you're gonna let me take it again.” -Charlotte

This is an instance where the participant sought guidance from the professor who was not able to help at that time. In other cases, students looked for help, but the students felt the professors were unwilling to help. Charlotte also explained an instance where a professor indicated that the accommodation that was most helpful to her was viewed as a burden, noting

“And she was like, Well, it's a lot for me to do I have to like, email the DRC I have to do this and I'm like, I What do you think I have to do? Like I it's not like it's it's the same for me. You just if this is your job like you're supposed to accommodate for me.” -Charlotte

The participant acknowledged that she was a freshman and was still unsure about how all the accommodations worked, but she hoped the professor could help her instead of denying her need for assistance.

For a different participant with a physical disability, getting around campus can be difficult. The participant asked one of her professors for accommodations, Prim says,

“I did have a professor last semester who was my 8 am professor again on the second floor of old Main three time a week that I had asked him to move, politely ask him if it was possible to move his class to the first floor because it was very hard for me because it was my only class last semester that was on the second floor. And he pretty much told me he was one of those people was like, I'm teaching the same room for so and so years, like I'm not really going to move it. And I was like, I get that, like, I know it's an inconvenience for you. But personally, I'm very nervous about the fact that if the elevator breaks, I can't promise you that I can climb the three flights of stairs to come to class like it's just too much for me.”
This class was a real struggle for Prim, and she also said she had trouble getting to class on more than one occasion because the accessibility aids on campus were down.

Question 4: Please explain why you have not reported your disability to SUNY New Paltz.

The Effects of Disclosure

Most participants reported being afraid to report their disability to the school because the students did not know how this status would affect their education (50%). Daisy remarked,

“\[I\] am afraid that professors will view my capabilities differently and that I may not get the same opportunities as others. Additionally, I try to push myself to believe that I can do just as well as everyone else on certain tasks even though I know I am struggling more.”

Students with disabilities want the same opportunities as their peers but fear they will not get them because they are seen as disabled. In addition, shameful feelings impact students' decisions not to report to the DRC.

Shameful Feelings

For some SWDs, accommodations are essential to allow them to succeed, and for participants who are too afraid to speak up, this can impact their grades. Some participants felt that their disability was not severe enough to ask for help, while they felt ashamed for needing accommodation (25%). Willa stated,

“Shame, not feeling as if it is valid enough reason to request extra help/services.”

For another participant, speaking up did have an impact on themselves, which later impacted their grades.

“Um, yeah, I've had like, I've asked for accommodations before. And as soon as I did, I was like, I'm actually never gonna do that again. So I really just accommodate for myself,
which has impacted my grades. But yeah, I have asked for accommodations before in the past.” -Shelley

Shelley stated multiple times that she did not want to continuously disclose her disability status to professors and peers to get her needed help. This ultimately led to her no longer asking for accommodations, impacting her grades.

Too Much Red Tape

Others felt that too many steps were needed to get accommodations in the first place. These feelings prevented some participants from getting their accommodations (8%).

“I just think there's a lot of steps and a lot of process like a lot of things that have to go into getting like accommodations and just getting like the help that like I need in general.” -Charlotte

While there are rules to ensure that accommodations are handed out appropriately, SWD felt they needed to get the help they needed. Octavia talked about her frustrating experience, saying:

“Yeah. So basically, at my other school, I essentially kind of just had to have some sort of documentation of my disability and I was able to apply for whatever accommodations I had in high school. I think I actually only handed my 504 to them that I had throughout high school. And they took that and they gave me essentially the same accommodations. Here they required doctor's notes for my rooming accommodation, which is fine. But then when it came to in class accommodations, they required more doctor's notes, and I didn't really have access to the kinds of doctors who are willing to sit down write those notes to me. So I had to go out of my way to get an entire psychiatric evaluation just to be eligible for in class accommodations. So that was a very long and lengthy frustrating process.”
Octavia later said,

“I would say, an easier process to get accommodations rather than a two week holding period. Needing very specific, long, lengthy documentation, maybe just a doctor's note. Or proof of medical condition would be enough…”

While this did not stop Octavia from getting accommodations, her experience shows that even students who have gotten accommodations still have a lot of red tape to cut through. It was a more straightforward reason for other participants who did not register with the DRC.

**Minimal Impact**

Some participants (33%) felt accommodations were unneeded as their disability did not impact their learning.

“I haven't really gone because it hasn't been relevant in my studies.” - Atticus

A few other participants echoed this feeling, several did not ask for accommodation because accommodations would not impact their education. Aslan said,

“...I don't, I don't like think of it as something that debilitates me from doing my homework or doing my work. It just affects my social habits…”

The student felt that the DRC provided only in-class accommodations and could not help them if their problem was not academic based; therefore, they did not register with the DRC. Another participant also felt this sentiment. Both participants (16%) felt the DRC should offer more specialized help. Shelley, stated,

“I just feel like I would be more likely to reach out if there was like trauma informed practices already.”

She continued saying that New Paltz and the DRC needed to offer more support for those with mental health disabilities.
There are many reasons why someone does not want to report their disability to the school. However, regardless of whether the participant was or was not registered with the DRC, most were interested in a self-advocacy class.

**Question 5:** How would you feel about participating in a class that helps you learn skills to self-advocate in contexts related to your disability?

Participants had different feelings and ideas about what they would want for a class on self-advocacy skills. Overall, participants supported a class and were interested in when it would be offered to students.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
<th>Quote</th>
<th>Percentage Registered</th>
<th>Percentage non-registered</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>When Do we Start?</td>
<td>Interested in taking a class to help them with self-advocacy skills</td>
<td>“Yeah, that'd be great. And like, also, just having someone for advice, you know, someone who like, is teaching that like, I'm sure they'd give great advice about like, things you can do or they'd even help you out if like, something's not working out, you know?” - Anne</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Thank you</td>
<td>The class would not be helpful and did not offer what they wanted</td>
<td>“I had classes in primary school called resource room, ELA support and Math Support. They helped but I really just need tutoring with actual arithmics, not time management or organization or study tips or self management.” - Eloise</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>I'd Volunteer to Teach</td>
<td>People who felt they had acquired quite a bit of skill in advocating for themselves were interested in teaching the class and helping others once prompted</td>
<td>“I would do that. Actually, I do that with my own daughter...so men in my generation don't like to say things like, Oh, I you know, have a weakness you know, or something that you know, they don't like to admit that and so, I don't think I think that you know, the people coming up though, like the both boys and girls, they don't have those issues like we did and like those so they'll be better equipped to advocate but still, they might not know the best ways to do so. And I feel like I could help with that. Like, I've helped my own daughter.” - Beatrice</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not For Me, But Maybe For Others</td>
<td>The class may not be suitable for them, they felt it would be good for others</td>
<td>“I think that could be an extremely useful tool for many people, but one that I would not necessarily need for myself. I feel as though I have had enough past experiences to know how to properly advocate for myself already.” - Bella</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maybe…</td>
<td>Needed more clarification about taking a class</td>
<td>“I would potentially be interested,” - Willa</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comfort of Peers</td>
<td>An informal club would be much better than a seated class</td>
<td>“…that would make it more comfortable instead of people who don't really understand or not understand, but they don't have the personal perspective of where you're coming from. So that would be nice.” - Octavia</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
While most participants supported the class, others still had differing views on the class and its benefits. The following things impacted the participants' decision when thinking about taking part in the class: who would be teaching the class, how the class would be administered, and how strict the class would be. Even with all those factors, it seems like a self-advocacy class would be helpful for all students, not just those with a disability.

**Question 6: In what ways do you feel like the college community does or does not stigmatize students with disabilities?**

*Accidents Happen*

There were mixed responses when participants were asked about the amount of stigmatization they felt from the college community due to their disabilities. Some felt that the stigma was unintentional (12%). Anne stated,

“Um, oh, man. This is I feel like well, I mean, where we are now at New Paltz. Like, I feel like, like one of many other focuses is like not stigmatizing disabilities, which is very nice. And I feel like a lot of students on this campus like feel sort of a sense of like that. Especially like maybe disabled students can feel that, but also like, turning over the same leaf. Like, I'm sure that there are still things that feel, you know, I mean, I personally like I am not entirely like too involved. I just tried to kind of keep my head down and like go about it and do what I need to do. Um, but like, I’m sure there's things like I've definitely been like, oh, like, you know, that's a little weird. And then just like, whatever. Like, I've definitely had those moments, but I can't pinpoint an exact like, time where something's been like, but like, I do feel like there's or there kind of has to be a general like destigmatization of disabilities.”
Anne felt that the stigmas she encountered were not on purpose. The other participants talked about how the campus is not disability-friendly. Aslan said,

“Ah, there's a lot of stairs. There's a lot of broken elevators. There's a lot of cramped classrooms with a lot of chairs. There's a lot of things and stuff. I'm glad that they did. They'd like finished the walkways and stuff so people can have an easier time getting in and out of like, the different buildings because like, I feel like it would be troublesome if I had to, like use a cane and like also open a door to get to my next class because a lot of the classes are right next to each other, just in separate buildings. Um, and like I think the college does recognize that they have a population of people who are disabled, either physically or mentally. I mean, that's why they have the Counseling Center. That's why they have Student Association. Um, honestly, that's why they have clubs. I feel like they want to make people feel more included. Like people who have autism and stuff like that. Because they advertise the clubs to anybody. It's like not something that's like a secret thing, like you only know about because you're in this certain like degree path and like now it's open to anybody. So I think the college is aware of the people who have disabilities, they just, you know, infrastructure is hard to manage. It's hard to maneuver sometimes, but that's what you like. That's the cost of like building a college in a very hilly area as well. We're not in like Wisconsin or something where everything is just flat and then you just got a little building there. It's like okay, cool. So yeah,”

This is a similar feeling shared by other participants. The campus has some handicap-accessible issues due the geographical area. While these participants did not feel that the stigma was on purpose, other participants felt that the stigma was on purpose.

_The Stigma is Real_
The fact that SWD who do not talk about their disabilities have a harder time is important in understanding these students' struggles. Several participants (46%) felt that there was stigma on campus and had strong opinions about how the college community viewed students with disabilities.

“I think there is an expectation placed upon students to be constantly socializing or working or networking, and I think we place disparaging labels such as ‘lazy’ or ‘unmotivated’ on students who struggle. Even if people are not explicitly ableist, it is not inherently fair to expect all students to perform at the same level, and it is unfair to judge those who need extra assistance or simply do not feel the need.” -Bella

There were quite a few participants who felt the same way as Bella. Daisy felt that how college students talked about disabilities was a form of stigma. Daisy said,

“I think a lot of college students abuse the terms for mental illnesses and their lack of education on them describes how they present the terms. For example, maybe students will say ‘I’m so OCD right now’ or ‘I can’t focus I definitely have ADHD’ but then don’t really understand what a person with either of those illnesses actually suffers through. On the flip side, many students are aware of these illnesses, so they are supportive of their struggling peers.”

Juliet felt that because the campus was so inaccessible, it was a form of stigma.

“I think that the campus as a whole is very inaccessible. And I think that that in itself is stigmatizing without anybody even doing anything because if you can't get to where you need to go that like makes you feel crappy already. As far as I have never had an experience here with anybody. I’ve never felt that my disability has been stigmatized on
this campus. However, I can't speak for everybody else because my disabilities are not very visible.” - Juliet

While this is the majority view of those who participated in the study, a few participants had differing views.

**I See No Stigma Here**

Scarlett and Atticus (7%) felt no stigma on campus.

“I don't really think they do the DRC is really open and stuff and professors usually just talk about it casually. So I've never really had that stigma on me luckily So at least in college.” - Scarlett

Atticus said,

“... for if not most of the time, they will direct students to resources that can help them so I don't feel like the college stigmatizes any sort of disabilities. Most of the time, it's just not really broached upon but because of that you can tell they don't stigmatize it much.”

Interestingly, one student noted that there may be a difference in the experiences of students who are “out” about their disability and those who are not. Willa noted that,

“I feel that SUNY New Paltz in particular is very inclusive and supportive of peers and those in their community with disabilities however the ones that are often silent are treated as ‘normal’ when they may in fact be struggling.”

While several participants felt there was no stigma because it was not talked about or talked about so casually, other participants felt this was a problem.

**We Don't Talk About. . .That**
There was a feeling by some (7%) that because disabilities were not discussed, it was hard to know if there was a stigma on campus because there was no open discussion about students with disabilities. Toni says,

“I don't know if it necessarily does but I think that there's just not really any discussion of it in general. So I think I don't know if it's like good or bad, but it's just like not there.”

Other participants (15%) felt there was no discussion about the topic.

“I'd say you don't hear about I mean, I guess you don't hear about it a lot like disabilities”

-Hermione

One participant with a visible disability had experiences with students on campus coming up and asking insensitive questions because they wanted to know more than she felt comfortable telling them about her disability. When prompted, Octavia felt that,

“. . .So I think a little education would be good.”

This education would teach students and staff about the different disabilities and struggles SWD go through. One participant felt that the school was ignoring SWD.

**Oh, I’m Sorry, I Didn’t See You There**

Charlotte stated that she felt the school was ignoring students with disabilities. Charlotte stated,

“And like, we went around the campus and we're like looking at the like, what's it called the accessible ways like that, like students and like wheelchairs and stuff can get in and like, they are not like they're, it's awful. Our school it is not good with that. We like would go around and like we all emailed like the DRC and like the school like talking about how, like, we're not set up for like, that kind of things, like even the accessible parts, like, students have to go way out of their way just to, and not everywhere has an
elevator, or stuff, but so I feel like they don't really since it's not the main percentage of people, they tend to, like, not look at that. And they kind of like, just push it aside and I feel like with like, the DRC like, like teachers just think that it's like, oh, like, okay, like, we'll see what we can do like, with like, the DRC. And it's, it's not that I like we'll see what we can do. It's that I need this. It's like, not a question. It's like, I need it.”

Charlotte feels the school has dropped the ball for students with disabilities. While not all participants felt this way based on the previous responses, some felt the same as Charlotte did. With these different feelings about stigma on campus, the participants were then asked what the community needed to know about students with disabilities on campus.

Question 7: What do you think the college community needs to know about students with disabilities who are registered with the DRC?

Accommodations for Success

Many participants (57%) registered with the DRC expressed how the accommodations they receive from the school are an integral part of their success in college.

“People with disabilities, even those with accommodations received through the school, are regular students. You would likely never notice many students who utilize the DRC during class, and it is not fair to judge or to think that students through the DRC have advantages through their accommodations. It is simply a way to equalize the learning experience between students.” -Bella

As previously stated, even students who had problems with the DRC and their accommodations continued to use them because they needed them to graduate. The rest of the responses talked about how their disabilities affect them.

It Affects Me More Than You Know
The majority of participants hinted at the fact that having a disability impacts them on a personal level (71%).

“Maybe they just need, need to know like, how the student feels about their disability, it doesn't make sense like how it impacts them personally, and like and academically and like, maybe there's different things like, what do you feel like, what accommodations you need and stuff like that?” -Anne

There was a feeling that classmates and faculty don’t always understand the impact a disability can have on a student. There was talk about how educating everyone, in the aforementioned class, would be important for closing this gap. Some participants talked about the hypocrisy and criticism that come with accommodations.

**It's Not An “Advantage” It's An Equalizer**

Participants (42%) wanted people to know that when they say negative things about SWD in college, it affects the student. SWD needs accommodations to be successful, even if it seems like an unfair advantage to someone without a disability. Zora said,

“And that's the difference between like I don't know. I think that these people just don't understand the difference between like being an abled student and being disabled student and why we get the accommodations because it seems like unfair from the outside, but if you've never lived with a disability then like, it's just like, hard to understand.”

Beatrice explained it perfectly in her interview,

“. . .I thought like something like I saw like a great picture. was like that's not trying to get them to above you is trying to get them to the same place you are the accommodations are for like they'll have a kid that sees over the fence and then another
like little kid standing on something and like you standing on something so you can see
the same amount as the other kid. . .”

Figure 1 below is the picture that the participant is referencing. The boxes being used so that
everyone can see over the fence represent the importance of accommodations for SWD, and how
every SWD may need a different amount of help.

![Figure 1. A visual representation of what accommodations do for SWDs (Ce, n.d.)](image)

This is an important concept when considering accommodation and the good they do for SWD.

There are two other important themes noted amongst the participant responses, including the
following:

**Uniquely Me**

The first thing that participants touched on was that disabilities make you unique.

Participants (35%) felt that even with a disability, they are unique in their way, just like everyone
else, regardless of the handicaps placed on them by their disability.

“But to me, I'm just kind of like, it's the same. It's the same kind of like, thing, like, just
because someone has a disability doesn't mean they're less intelligent. It's just like
different. So I think that's probably the main thing.” -Toni

This is very important when trying to destigmatize SWD.

**I Am a Person Too**
Finally, 35% of the respondents felt it was necessary to remind people that although they might have a disability, they are still students and should be treated equally.

“People with disabilities, even those with accommodations received through the school, are regular students.” - Bella

Crockett summed up this thought process very well by stating,

“We're going to do that we're pretty much the same as everybody else. There's not that much of a difference. So we go to the same colleges, same classes. We go to the same places. We eat the same foods, we do the same fun stuff, we do the same things that Average people do, we, some very, very friendly. We can do it. They can, they can make the gym more accessible. They can make the cafeteria more accessible. . .”

These concepts are very important when educating the college community about their disabled peers. The feelings and experiences of SWD should not be discounted or forgotten when plans and changes are being made, but instead be strongly considered as part of the process. Finally, participants not registered with the DRC were asked the same question.

**Question 8: What do you think the college community needs to know about students with disabilities that are not registered with the DRC?**

**Let’s Talk About That**

One of the main things that participants expressed was that there needs to be more discussion about students with disabilities (33%).

“I think that teachers like similar thing with extended deadlines that like professors need to know that it's not like people aren't just being lazy. Once a student that's registered says that they can’t do their work like they probably can't. So I think that there needs to be training and a greater understanding of that.” - Juliet
Being able to educate and teach everyone about disabilities would be beneficial for all. Another thing that would be beneficial for all is universal accommodations.

**Universality**

While most of the other points these participants suggested were similar to what the DRC registered participants said, there were some other things that non-registered participants brought up. One thing that these participants (16%) suggested was the need for universal accommodations. Shelley stated that,

“Well, they make a whole big thing about the fact that like, so like, the thing is like, there is such a thing as like universal accommodations. I actually can't remember what the term is but something like that. and like there’s things that people can do that would just like simply benefit everybody. Everybody at the classroom, like all of us, not even just people with disabilities, but like teachers love to do this thing where they're like, if you need me to accommodate you, you should come to me and like disclose.”

Universal accommodations can be beneficial for all students in a classroom. Universal accommodations “offers flexibility in the ways students access material, engage with it, and show what they know,” which includes different “strategies, tools, processes, and methods across all instructional modalities” (Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and Accommodations Policy, 2022, para 2). In simpler terms, this means that these accommodations work to teach all students in a variety of ways that use different mediums of information dispersion and allow students to show what they have learned in a multitude of ways. These accommodations are ones that do not need to be approved by school disability services but are accommodations that are applied in a classroom for all students (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2015). Some examples are: posted lesson goals, assignment options, flexible workspaces, digital and
audio text, and regular feedback (Cast, 2023). These are just a few examples of things that can be implemented into the learning environment to help enable success of all students with and without disabilities, and regardless of their registration status.

**Just Give Me A Hand**

Along with universal accommodations, some participants (42%) felt that discussing what the school could offer disabled students would be beneficial. One participant felt discouraged when trying to receive accommodation which caused them to not register with the school. Virgil states,

“I think a part of it as to my own personal like, like, I'm like I was self-conscious about it. I was for sure discouraged. In college. A big part of it was I wanted to kind of like quietly get the extra time that I needed. But when I went to like the offices that deal with it, they're like you have to fill out all this paperwork. You have to reach out to this person and for me at that point in time, like now maybe I'm like more maybe a little more mature at this point in time but still for like a while I was like okay, you know, after all these extra things, you don't want to do these extra things and make it look like I have these disabilities. You know, like in my mind, I was telling myself this. So I was just I think I was just very discouraged. I did go to an office to ask about it. I'm like, I know I need extra time. I have focusing issues in high school. I had extra time. And then they told me I have to fill out paperwork and speak to this person speak to this person and speak to that person and I just kind of backed off.”

Being able to explain and talk openly about accommodations and services that the school offers could help more students feel comfortable registering with and using the DRC. However, another issue needs to be addressed before this can happen.
Accommodations Are Not Given Equally

Some non-registered participants (25%) also felt the DRC needed more equality because some students seemed to get more accommodations than needed or were given accommodations they never used. In contrast, others needed help to get the basic assistance they needed.

“I have a I have a classmate who literally has like issues with walking at points in time and they wouldn't even grant them the opening the doors with the you know, the automatic doors, they wouldn't even give them a key. I was able to get it. But that also shows that I mean, and I can walk perfectly fine now sometimes I have like sensitive in my sensitivity and my knee. But like that just goes to show up people are not treated equally.” -Virgil

This inequality, even among accommodations, can negatively impact not only the image associated with SWD but also SWD themselves and the accommodations they need to succeed. Another participant brought up another point about image and the school.

We Should Look Into That

Finally, the last subject mentioned was the need to investigate both students and those in charge of the school (16%). On a positive note, one participant said that students with disabilities should check out the DRC because they might be able to help them.

“Well, I would definitely tell them to check out all of the information about the DRC because it's not just something like Oh, now I'll get extra time on a test. It's like, literally a written Hey, he's struggling with something he might because you might run into a professor one day that's not going to give you an extension, but meanwhile you just spent the last three or four days shaking in your bed because of your panic attacks. And you haven't been able to either commute to class or get out of your dorm room bed. And that
professor might just be a hard ass and say, No, you don't get an extension. The DRC is going to help you out with that.” -Woolf

On the other hand, one participant felt that the school needed to investigate the problems the students have been having with the services offered by the school. Shelley said,

“I think that the college really has to ask themselves. why there aren't more people registered with the DRC. I think that could answer a lot. And I think we have to, like, learn to go from a place of like, internal benefit instead of external appearance because I noticed there's like this trend with the College of like saying, like, did you know that our stats for this thing are like this low and telling the world's that, like our stats are so low for like, assault? And it's like, that's not true, like people aren't telling you when they're assaulted, but also like, Do you really like you probably know, that's not true. Why are you like changing the fact that people aren't coming to you like, why are you so focused on like, your external appearance?”

All these questions and points help paint a picture of what it is like to be a disabled student in college.

**Discussion**

This study was done to understand better what it is like to go through post-secondary education with a disability (Hansen & Dawson, 2020; O’Shea et al., 2021). There is a rise in the number of students beginning college with some sort of disability. It is essential to understand the needs and struggles of these students to give them the best possible college experience.—

Some of the main themes of the study repeatedly focused on accessibility and accommodations.
This study uncovered the ventures of these students while also allowing them a place to speak about what they thought could be improved. The main ideas that the participants talked about will be discussed below.

**The Importance of Accessibility for All**

One of the most talked about topics brought up by participants was the lack of accessibility. The participants felt that the school was not accessible to everyone. The need for better accessibility was brought up by students who have physical disabilities and by students who have noticed that the accessibility on campus is not suitable. These students who did not need accessibility accommodations brought up the fact that many of the handicapped doors on campus do not work and that there are a lot of stairs and very few or easily accessible elevators. Many students mentioned possible improvements that could be made. Fixing doors and keeping up with these repairs are essential while trying to make buildings more handicap accessible. Most participants acknowledge that there are limitations to these improvements but that some effort should be made. Participants also highlighted the importance of education on disabilities for faculty, staff, and the student body. As Hansen and Dawson (2020) suggest, faculty and staff need to be better prepared to handle the influx of disabled students in college.

**The Universality of Accommodations**

The other topic frequently brought up by participants was the need for better accommodations. At the same time, not everyone in the study had accommodations provided by the school; they still stressed their importance. Accommodations equal the playing field for students with disabilities. Several participants stressed this idea, and it is essential to remember. There was also talk about more education about the importance of accommodations. Some
participants felt that professors did not understand why they needed accommodations. Other participants did not prefer having to out themselves to use their accommodations in classes. Accommodations are essential, and faculty need to be more understanding and accepting, for students with and without visible disabilities. Hansen and Dawson (2020) and Kimball et al. (2016) mention the difficulties with school services and accommodations when having a hidden disability. Students with disabilities need support to succeed, and more education can help.

**Stigmas Impact**

Stigma was something that several participants talked about in their interviews, and they felt that stigma was an issue on campus. For students not registered with the DRC, 75% of participants stated that they did not register because they feared the effects of stigma or felt shame associated with their disability. There have been several studies that support the idea that stigma plays a huge role in how students utilize campus services (Eccles et al., 2018; Hansen & Dawson, 2020; Markoulakis et al., 2013; Martin, 2010; Shpigelman et al. 2021; Woodhead et al., 2020).

There were also instances where those who were felt stigma on campus. The participants felt it came from faculty and peers. Participants felt that registered his could be fixed through more education, which is a typical response. College is a place where people come to learn and discover their passions. Students are required to take general education classes, so including a class on disabilities would help to make the campus less stigmatized and more accepting. Students who have visible disabilities or are open with their disability are more likely to experience stigma. Participants who said that they were not open about their disability and could pass as someone without a visual disability felt that there was no stigma on campus. The
responses of this study supported the idea that those who do not talk about their disability and can pass are less likely to experience stigma.

**Support in Speaking Up for Yourself**

Participants overwhelmingly supported the proposal for the creation of a self-advocacy class. Several participants pointed out they would like the support of someone with self-advocacy knowledge to talk to when they had issues on campus. While some participants were hesitant about having those who knew nothing about having a disability teach a class on self-advocacy, some participants felt everyone, not just SWD, should take a class. Woodhead et al. (2020, p. 735) stated, “Self-advocacy training may be valuable in preparing students for the required, and potentially stressful, interactions with faculty about accommodations.” Other studies agreed with this finding and recommended SWD taking self-advocacy classes (Keenan et al., 2018; Shpigelman et al., 2021). Hansen & Dawson (2020, p. 315) stated that “…a lack of self-advocacy was perceived by many faculty as a student who lacks work ethic and just waits for others to help and ‘fix things’…” Not only do students face the risk of stigma because of having a disability but not being able to self-advocate can bring students even more problems. Due to SWD's struggles, a self-advocacy class would help them build the skills they need to get support and succeed.

**Limitations**

This study had several limitations. First, the sample size was small. Although this is typical in qualitative research, it did not allow for systematic comparisons of people with different types of disabilities. In addition, it was limited to people who volunteered after a campus-wide email. There are over 7,500 students who attend SUNY New Paltz with graduate and undergraduate programs combined, (At a Glance|SUNY New Paltz, n.d.). This study only
had 26 participants, 0.003% of the student population. In addition, it is unclear who would be most likely to volunteer to participate in this type of study, a potential selection bias. Second, demographic data was not linked to the SSDRS data, an oversight that may limit the usefulness of the data. Although it provided descriptive data, there was no way to tell how group members’ experiences of stigma differed as a function of being registered or non-registered. This should be examined in future work.

**Future Directions**

One future direction for this study would be to look into the experiences of faculty and staff members with disabilities who work in post-secondary education. While the professors’ experiences were not discussed in this study, one participant mentioned witnessing the struggles that one of her disabled professors has gone through. It would be invaluable to look at what it is like to teach others with a disability as someone with a disability. As there is an increasing number of graduates with disabilities, it would only make sense that, at some point, there will be educators with disabilities teaching the next generation. Looking into the impact of teaching with a disability could be very interesting.

Another future direction could be looking at faculty and staff opinions of SWDs and asking them what would help them to be able to work better with these students. It would also be interesting to examine how much faculty know about the range of disabilities by hosting a seminar and then fielding opinions and what they learned from the subject matter. Obtaining the same insight from the campus disability services staff members, as well as upper-level administration, could also provide valuable insight. Looking into the faculty and staff seems like a logical next step in understanding students with disabilities’ experiences in college.
A final possible future study would look into students' opinions without disabilities. The study could look into how to change attitudes and better educate peers in a way that would make them more conscientious of their disabled peers. This could be done again through a pre-test/post-test of a class. It is tricky to try and educate people on disabilities because it can breed hostile feelings, but I believe that it is possible. A study looking into this would be significant.

**Practical Suggestions**

This study has shown that SWDs on campus need more support and accessibility. The first thing that SWD wanted was a self-advocacy class. While I do not know who or how the college would handle a self-advocacy class, it seems to be something SWD wants. A good trial run for this is a seminar that the DRC could run for a semester to help draw people in. Alternatively, the DRC could set up a club where students with issues could talk to one another and get advice from peers.

Another topic that was brought up was accessibility on campus. Participants with physical disabilities all felt that the campus was not handicap friendly. Several stated that the handicapped doors did not open or that buildings were too hard to enter or move around in. They also said that the dorms were not accessible and that it was hard for them to live in the dorms. Participants also stated that the many stairs, hills, and crumbling sidewalks on campus made it hard to get around with mobility aids. While the school may be older, it is still disturbing to hear that students with physical disabilities cannot access the places they need to go. While facility upgrades can be expensive, access for the entire student body is essential.

Finally, participants brought up issues with their DRC accommodations. While some participants felt that the accommodations provided to them by the DRC were reasonable, others felt differently. They took issue with the fact that a separate testing location means you move
from one side of the campus away from your classmates to another side of campus with almost the same number of people in a room. For those who need quiet or a place where they cannot disturb others, being put in a room with a handful of others who are also SWD did not improve the testing location. While space is limited, the DRC should find rooms to accommodate students who need a quiet place alone to take their exams. Other participants felt that the DRC had too many hoops to jump through to get their accommodations for the next semester or even testing accommodations every time there was an exam in one semester. The DRC could streamline this by allowing students to put all their exams or quizzes at the start of the semester. Since the exam dates can change, allowing the exams to be edited, and sending reminders to students about exams would make this more accessible for the students. A few participants talked about how they often needed to remember to put in their testing requests because, right now, you can only put them in two weeks before an exam. Participants also suggested streamlining the test request system, as a few participants with ADHD mentioned that it was too long and complicated for them to fill out the forms. Allowing students to put all their tests in at once may help this issue.

The other thing students asked to change was how semester requests were done. Participants did not like that they must reapply each term for accommodations and that it takes at least a week to send accommodation letters to faculty. Student accommodation letters are not sent out until one to two weeks after the start of the semester. This delay in accommodation letters is a disadvantage to the SWD as faculty may be reluctant to allow accommodations until they receive the official letter from the DRC. The DRC could change this by having a database of accommodations that teachers must log into to see the students in their classes who need these services. Students should also be allowed to send their schedules to the DRC so that requests can
go through this automatic system. This helps make accommodations easier for students to use.

**Conclusions**

This study explored the experiences of students with disabilities in college. The nature of this study was exploratory and used people's subjective interpretations and experiences as the primary information. While all the participants had different experiences, most only talked about the problems they have dealt with on campus. As a student with a disability, I hoped that most students on campus would have had better experiences than I felt I had. Unfortunately, most other participants felt the same way. As a researcher, I looked at the data objectively, but could not help but feel bad for most of these participants and what they had to go through. It was uplifting to hear that a minority of students did have good experiences while having a learning disability and showed what things could be like for others if circumstances were different.

In conclusion, the majority of the participants in my study agreed that changes could be made to how the University handles students with disabilities. While some of these changes may not be obtainable, other changes are. This study shows that we still have a long way to go to make post-secondary education more accessible for everyone, regardless of who they are or what their disability may be.
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https://ici.umn.edu/welcome/definition#:~:text=Examples%20of%20developmental%20disabilities%20include,intellectual%20disability%2C%20and%20spina%20bifida.

Appendix A

Interview Questions

- **DRC Students**
  - **Demographics**
    - Gender
    - Age
    - Race/Ethnicity
    - Major(s)/Minor(s)
    - Undergraduate/graduate student
    - How many years have you attended SUNY New Paltz
    - What category does your disability fall into (check all that apply)
      - Learning disability
      - Mobility disability
      - Health impairment
      - Psychological disability (mental health disability/disorder)?
      - Developmental disability
      - Other
      - I am unsure
        - Leave box for if they want to specify what their disability is
        - Leave box for including anything they might want to share about their disability
    - How long have you known about your disability?
      - How would you describe your disability?
▪ How do you describe your disability to others?

▪ Tell me about your accommodation history; including when you were first given accommodations.

○ DRC Questions

▪ Can you describe your general opinion of the DRC?

▪ Are the accommodations offered to you by the DRC appropriate for your disability (meaning do they suit your needs)? Yes or No

▪ Please explain.

▪ In what ways has the DRC given you the support that you need to perform the best that you can?

▪ In what ways has the DRC not given you the support that you need to perform the best that you can?

▪ Tell me about a positive interaction with a faculty or staff member regarding your disability that stands out to you.

▪ Tell me about a negative interaction with a faculty or staff member regarding your disability that stands out to you.

▪ Do you feel that you self-advocate for yourself to your professors and the DRC regarding your disability?

▪ If not, please explain why you do not self-advocate?

▪ If yes, describe how you feel when you self-advocate for yourself.

▪ Describe a time when you have self-advocated for yourself that went well?
- Describe a time when you have self-advocated for yourself that did not work out?
- How would you feel about participating in a class that helps you learn skills to self-advocate in contexts related to your disability?
- If you were asked to consult with the DRC about their services, what changes would you recommend?
- In what ways do you feel like the college community does or does not stigmatize students with disabilities?
- What do you think the college community needs to know about students with disabilities that are registered with the DRC?

- **Non-DRC Registered Students**
  - **Demographics**
    - Age
    - Gender
    - Race/Ethnicity
    - Major(s)/Minor(s)
    - Undergraduate/graduate student
    - How many years have you attended SUNY New Paltz
    - What category does your disability fall into (check all that apply)
      - Learning disability
      - Mobility disability
      - Health impairment
      - Psychological disability
- Developmental disability
- Other
- I am unsure
  - Leave box for if they want to specify what their disability is
  - Leave box for including anything they might want to share about their disability
- How long have you known about your disability?
  - How would you describe your disability?
    - How do you describe your disability to others?
- Tell me about your accommodation history; including when you were first given accommodation.
- Please explain why you have not reported your disability to SUNY New Paltz.
- Do you feel that you self-advocate for yourself to your professors regarding your disability?
  - If not, please explain why you do not self-advocate?
  - If yes, describe how you feel when you self-advocate for yourself.
    - Describe a time when you have self-advocated for yourself that went well?
    - Describe a time when you have self-advocated for yourself that did not work out?
- How would you feel about participating in a class that helps you learn skills to self-advocate in contexts related to your disability?
In what ways do you feel like the college community does or does not stigmatize students with disabilities?

What do you think the college community needs to know about students with disabilities that are not registered with the DRC?
Appendix B

Postsecondary Student Survey of Disability-Related Stigma

Ratings were made on a five-point scale, with the points being: never, occasionally, regularly, frequently, or all the time.

1. Postsecondary Student Survey of Disability-Related Stigma

   1.1. I think about my disability

   1.2. Students with disabilities don’t receive as many opportunities as those without disabilities

   1.3. Teachers view me as having a shortcoming

   1.4. My friends think I’m different because of my disability

   1.5. People with disabilities are treated differently

   1.6. I think of myself as smart

   1.7. Students with disabilities are not treated equally

   1.8. Teachers view me positively

   1.9. I do not have trouble making friends

   1.10. Society stereotypes people with disabilities like mine

   1.11. I feel frustrated about school

   1.12. Students with disabilities are successful

   1.13. I do poorly on tests in part due to my disability

   1.14. Students are understanding about disabilities

   1.15. I get support from other students with disabilities

   1.16. I feel good about myself
1.17. Students with disabilities are successful in the workplace
1.18. My grades are not as good as I would like
1.19. My disability causes obvious strains to relationships
1.20. I support other students with disabilities
1.21. I feel that I am treated fairly on campus
1.22. Students with disabilities need more support services and accommodations
1.23. I ask for accommodations
1.24. I talk to others about my disabilities