

Effect of Disability Etiquette Training on UMass Community Attitudes

Disability is highly stigmatized in higher education and disabled university students report experiencing ableism on campus. These facts are not surprising as the majority of Americans have negative implicit bias towards people with disabilities. Additionally, according to research, most faculty and graduate students are not knowledgeable about disability and accommodations, yet do not believe they are contributing to a negative campus climate for disabled students. However, they have indicated many would like to receive education about disability and how to support disabled students. Previous research has shown that training focused on disability accommodations and types of disability can help non-disabled faculty and staff feel more positively about students with disabilities. However, these trainings have not included substantial sections about disability as a social identity, nor have they searched for changes in implicit bias pre- and post- training. The present study seeks to determine whether an ableism and disability identity focused training can change explicit and implicit attitudes in faculty, staff, and graduate students and whether between-group differences exist in level of bias. To measure bias, the study uses the Attitudes Towards Disabled Persons Scale- Form A and the Disability Attitudes Implicit Association Test, measures of explicit and implicit disability bias respectively. These scales are administered immediately before and after participants take the training, as well as two weeks after completing the training. The study found that the disability etiquette training reduces explicit disability bias, but does not affect implicit disability bias, as implicit bias is resistant to change from education. This finding suggests that disability bias in higher education can be reduced, but not eliminated, and that new methods should be explored to eliminate implicit disability bias. Additionally, the study found that staff have more positive implicit disability attitudes before taking the training, and faculty have more positive explicit disability explicit attitudes before the training. No significant differences between groups exist after the training. From these findings, it is recommended that future disability training should emphasize disability as an identity and the importance of classroom accommodations to ensure the best outcome for disabled students. Additionally, more extensive training should be tested to see if it can change disability implicit attitudes. Important limitations of this study include a small sample size, a lack of random assignment to the training, the fact that all participants come from the same northeastern US university.

Keywords: disability, disability training, implicit bias, stigma