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## An Analysis of Policies and Practices for the Inclusion of Students with Disabilities in Public Universities in Mexico

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## **An Analysis of Policies and Practices for the Inclusion of Students with Disabilities in Public Universities in Mexico**

### **Abstract**

The purpose of this study was to analyze the laws and regulations regarding the inclusion of students with disabilities in selected Mexican universities. Seven public autonomous universities on the northern border of Mexico were selected for participation. Official documents were reviewed and administrators were surveyed to determine the extent to which federal legislation requiring inclusion was implemented at their respective institutions. Faculty members of psychology were also surveyed regarding the guarantees and accommodations provided by their institutions and the effectiveness of those efforts. Principal findings were that the commitment to serve students with disabilities was high, however the existing plans and efforts were insufficient to accomplish the goal of inclusion and to provide the necessary accommodations. Administrators ranked institutional efforts higher than faculty members. Of particular note was the lack of clear diagnostic criteria, inadequate faculty and staff training, lack of information on best practices, and limited financial resources. Recommendations were provided that included greater centralization of services and an increase in financial resources.

### **Author Statement**

Lilia Lopez, Ed.D. Dr. Lopez is a 2020 graduate of the CSUSB Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership Program and is Professor, Faculty of Human Sciences, Universidad Autonoma de Baja California. Her work was supervised by Dr. Stanley Swartz, Dr. Angela Louque, and Dr. Esther Vazquez.

### **Cover Page Footnote**

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## **An Analysis of Policies and Practices for the Inclusion of Students with Disabilities in Public Universities in Mexico**

Lilia G. López Arriaga, Ed. D.

### **Objective**

Efforts to provide accommodations and services to include and support students with disabilities have become a priority for institutions of higher education in Mexico. Currently these efforts have been isolated and not part of a larger plan to coordinate efforts or to share resources or experiences. Given this lack of coordination, this study considered current attitudes regarding inclusion and reviewed practices that might be used to centralize and inform efforts to promote the inclusion of students with disabilities.

This study included a review of research and practices in the United States and in Mexico. This is due to the interaction and historical influence of states on the southern border of the U.S. on practices in Mexico.

A primary objective of this study was to develop a set of recommendations regarding policy and regulations that might improve the inclusion and provision of services for students with disabilities in universities in Mexico.

This study was developed as an extension of earlier, preliminary work, "Inclusion of Students with Disabilities in Postsecondary Education" comparing practices in the United States and Mexico that support the inclusion of students with disabilities (Swartz, Lopez, Louque, & Swartz, 2018).

### **Methods**

This study was designed to assess and analyze the current status of efforts to accommodate students with disabilities in selected state universities in Mexico. A variety of procedures were used to accomplish this, including: (1) an analysis of the various laws and regulations governing the inclusion of students with disabilities in Mexican higher education, (2) a comparison of the authority for inclusion in the United States and its implications for similar efforts in Mexico, (3) a review of governing documents used in Mexican state universities to

organize and provide services to student with disabilities, (4) a survey of faculty involved in the inclusion process relative to the current state of inclusion efforts, and (5) a survey of the administrators charged with the responsibility of implementing services for students with disabilities. In addition to the information regarding current efforts of implementation, data were collected regarding attitudes toward inclusion and perceived obstacles to accomplishing a comprehensive program of inclusion.

A variety of methods were employed to report and analyze data. Document analyses were reported in comparison matrices and narrative description. Similarly, results of administrator interviews were tabulated and compared to the written implementation plan. Survey results were analyzed using non-parametric statistical tests because assumptions were made about the population distribution of the participants and the sample size. Responses were recorded and analyzed using Pearson Correlation Coefficient.

## **Results**

Policies and practices to include students with disabilities in the universities on the northern border of Mexico have a long way to go to become a reality. Inclusion of the groups identified as vulnerable is presented as more of a policy issue where nondiscrimination becomes an institutional commitment. What is clear are good intentions with a lack of any specific plans for implementation. Nondiscrimination is a mandate and the understanding and acceptance of that fact is critical. Inclusion of those with disabilities is an effort of a much higher order. Accommodating this group will require substantial changes in how services are provided. Access is not only attitudinal, but requires a vast array of services and supports. It is recommended that this group be targeted and planned for separately.

As for the Institutional Development Plans reviewed in this part of the study, the general conclusion is related to the lack of policies to guarantee inclusion. There are some practices that may serve some students with disabilities, even though they appear to be provided on demand and not as part of the university commitment to educate all Mexicans. This practice would be consistent with the Constitutional prohibition of discrimination and exclusion practices.

### **Administrator Interview**

An administrator was interviewed and provided clarification for administrator survey responses. High commitment to the principles of inclusion was reported. All federal guidelines were respected in the development of their plan. Specific procedures to accomplish this plan were less specific and, in some cases, appeared to be minimal. Lack of funding was identified as the major obstacle to implement accommodation necessary for the inclusion of students with disabilities. Training was also identified as a need for all personnel involved in the process.

### **Faculty Survey**

It has been noted that psychology faculty have been given primary responsibility for designing accommodations for students with disabilities. Students are assigned to faculty as part of their workload on a case-by-case basis. These faculty members reported various levels of training and experience to perform this function.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

The legislative process in Mexico relays in, once laws are passed, assigns the interpretation and implementation of laws delegated to state governmental offices and individual universities. It might be said that the federal government tells you what needs to be done and it is up to you to figure out how to do it, sometimes with extraordinary funds, and most of the time just with the policy enforcement.

Other conclusions drawn by this analysis leads to the next questions: Is there a clear definition of who qualifies as disabled? Who makes this diagnosis? What service criteria have been identified? Who is qualified to provide these services? And there are no clear answers.

Documents available for analysis demonstrated that a comprehensive plan to implement the federal law regarding the inclusion of students with disabilities is minimal. Mexico relies on a case-by-case configuration of services and it is difficult to identify who is in charge of providing services and support. There is no active recruitment of students with

disabilities in Mexico. And results suggest that Mexico is reactive in regards to providing services to students with disabilities.

Issues of training are comparable between universities in Mexico and the U.S. though personnel in the specific office that serves students with disabilities are trained, the same is not true for faculty.

Based on the common barriers that students with disabilities face in their pursuit of higher education, there are a number of recommendations that might be considered:

1. It is a requirement of the public schools that students with disabilities receive services from highly qualified personnel.
2. The accommodations necessary for success in college have not been clearly identified and the need for research focused in this area is clear.
3. The identification of best practices for the inclusion of students with disabilities in higher education should be established as a high priority.
4. It is apparent that services provided by universities are separate from and not coordinated with the faculty.
5. Successful inclusion of students with disabilities will require a well-informed faculty who have the tools to accommodate the needs of these special learners.

The inclusion of students with disabilities in higher education is a moral imperative. If a society is measured by how they treat their members with the greatest needs, then providing equal access to all of the services and benefits of the society is both right and just. In addition, the evidence is clear. Students with disabilities flourish in higher education and the accommodations necessary for their inclusion are a reasonable expectation. Anything less than this full access and inclusion is discriminatory at best and inhumane at worst.

In Mexico's system of higher education, there is a need for leaders to develop the issue of inclusion from the legal and policy point of view, so those regulations can be supported by the appropriate implementation, with all the necessary resources.

## References

Lopez Arriaga, Lilia G. (2020). An analysis of policies and practices for the inclusion of students with disabilities in public universities in México. Electronic Theses, Projects, and Dissertations. 1135. <https://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/etd/1135>

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