

# Faculty Perceptions in Working with Students with Disabilities Who Have Accommodations

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## Introduction

As the number of students with disabilities pursuing higher education continues to increase every year, it is important to acknowledge the gap in higher education between individuals with disabilities and without. In 2014, “16.4% of individuals with a disability had a bachelor’s degree compared to 34.6% of those without” (U.S Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015). With such a large education gap, it is crucial to acknowledge hardships and lived experiences that hinder students with disabilities in college. The question therefore exists as to what Universities’ teaching faculty can do to foster a positive learning environment to support these students.

This research investigated the university faculty members’ attitudes towards accommodations for students with disabilities. Results found that the majority of faculty had a positive attitude when it regarded policies that provided students with accommodations as well as understanding of the services. However, findings also indicated a strong need for additional training when it came to these policies. Statistically significant differences in perceptions were found among faculty of differing prior training levels and experience teaching students with disabilities.

## Research Purpose and/or Question(s)

This study was designed to evaluate the difference in postsecondary faculty members’ perception of accommodation policies and overall climate of support services for students with disabilities, when faculty are grouped by gender, experience working with students with disabilities, and whether outside additional training was acquired. As this body of research regarding this topic is still growing, it can be anticipated that faculty with more outside training or experience working with students with disabilities would be more positively associated in themes like willingness to provide accommodations, knowledge of disability services, and support from the institution.

## Method/ Data Source(s)

On January 25th 2024, all faculty received an invitation email to fill out the survey for the study. Participants of this research study included teaching faculty from a medium-sized public four-year University in Central Arkansas. This included teaching faculty of the status tenure, non-tenure, tenure-track, and graduate assistants.

The online questionnaire included 26 prompts with 9 being demographic based questions. These demographic questions included teaching status, age, gender, what program they taught, years of teaching experience, and racial/ethnicity identity. Apart from demographic questions, the other 17 prompts were created using an alternating Likert scale with opposing values assigned to 1 and 7. These 17 items were selected following certain themes pertaining to the study. The themes included: familiarity of Disabilities Services, institutional support, and personal teaching policies regarding accommodations.

There was a 24% response rate, with 59 faculty members answering the survey. Out of the 59 individuals, 33 (55.9%) of faculty that participated identified as female, and 26 (44.1%) identified as male. Majority of participants 43 (72.9%) of participants have been teaching for over 10 years. In terms of teaching experience with students with disabilities, approximately 56 (94.9%) have experience in the past two semesters. Lastly, 30 (50.8%) of faculty members indicated that they have not been offered training related to disability and 29 (49.2%) indicated they have been offered training.

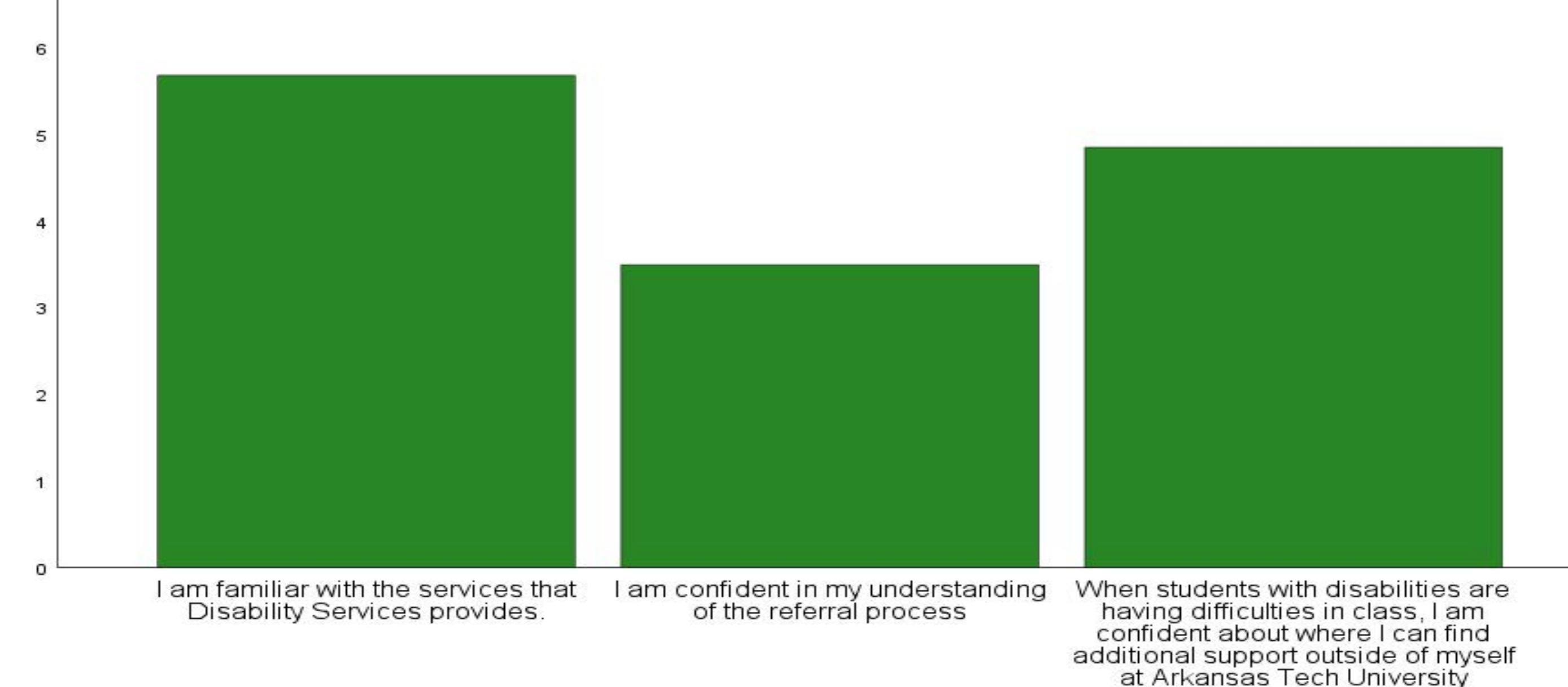
## Analysis

The general means and percentages of the survey questions following the themes: Knowledge of Disability Services, Institutional support, and Personal Teaching Policies, were calculated using a statistics software called SPSS. The hypothesis and other inquiries were analyzed using independent t-tests calculated by SPSS with grouping variables like prior training, experience with students with disabilities, and gender.

## Findings/Results

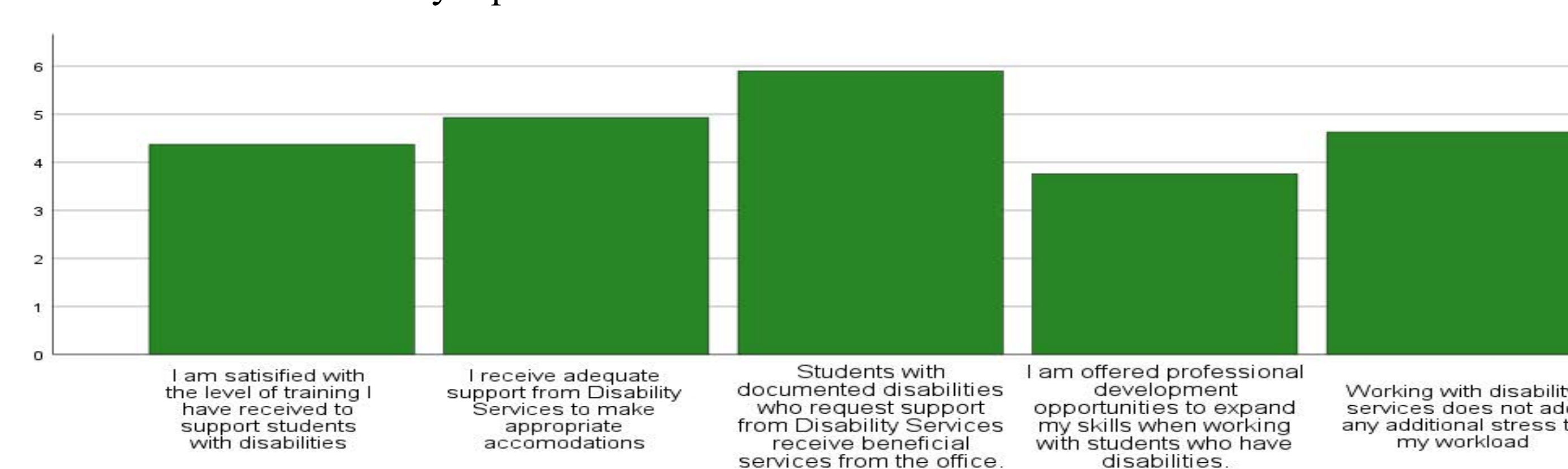
### Knowledge about Disability Services

Prompts following the “Knowledge about Disability Services” themes were ones created with the intention of measuring faculties’ prior knowledge and experience revolving around this support service. The means of these prompts are displayed in figure 1 below. Overall faculty members illustrated mixed understandings of Disability Services. Faculty indicated a less than neutral response responses on the prompt regarding confidence in the referral system with a mean of 3.49. Similarly, majority of staff indicated a neutral response with a 4.85 mean when asked if they were confident in finding support for a student with accommodations outside of themselves.



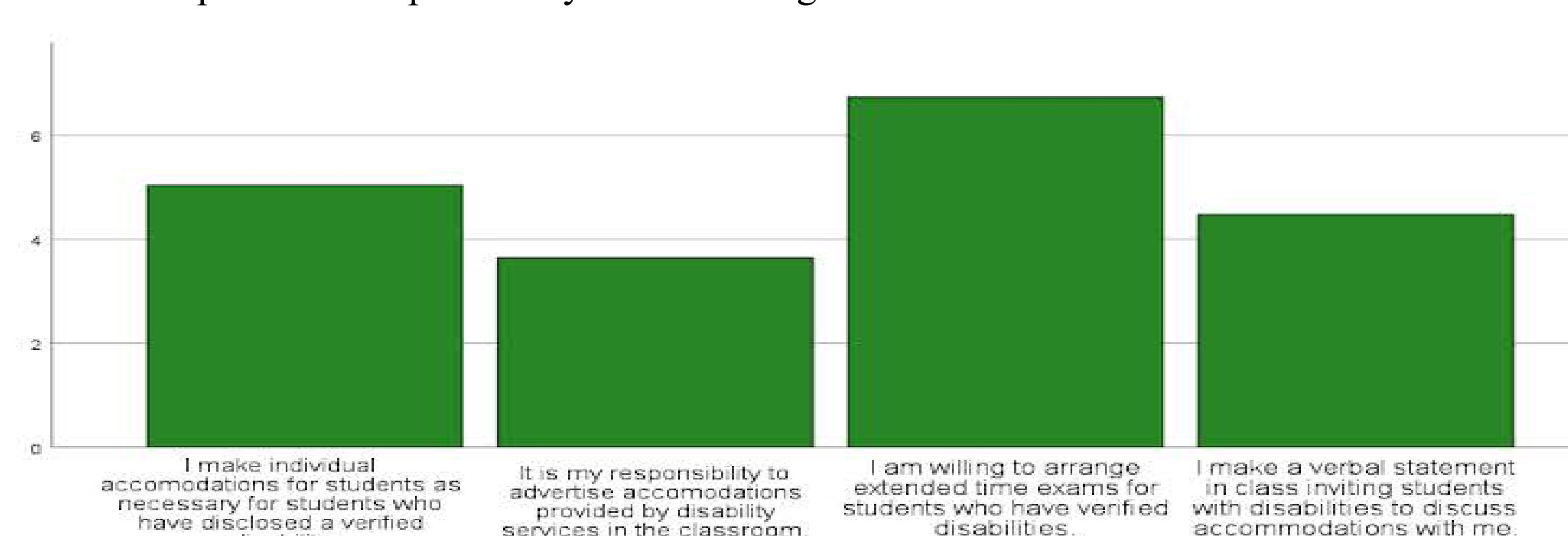
### Institutional Support

Prompts following this theme focused on training opportunities and faculties’ satisfaction with the services and support provided by the University. The means of these prompts are displayed in figure 2 below. Overall, faculty displayed positive attitudes when it came to these prompts revolving receiving support from the institution. The first question “I receive adequate support from Disability Services” received a mean calculated of 4.93. On the other hand, faculty displayed a need for more professional development training opportunities as when asked if they felt satisfied with the level of training they received to support students with disabilities the mean only equaled 4.37



### Personal Teaching Policies

This section of questions revolved around evaluating different teaching policies used in the classroom by faculty members. These calculated means are displayed in figure 3 below. Majority of faculty members at this institution seemed to implement positive teaching policies regarding accommodations for students with verified disabilities. On the other hand, there was a less than neutral responses in responsibility in advertising accommodations with a mean of 3.64.



## Results: Hypothesis addressed

To address the hypothesis, significant values ( $p < .05$ ) showed several statistical differences in specific prompts between the faculty members who selected that they haven’t been offered training related to disability compared to the individuals that have been offered training. Prompts that showed statistical differences include familiarity with Disability services, confidence finding additional support for students with disabilities, and receiving greater support and satisfaction with the services from Disability Services. Apart from these prompts that were represented in the different themes, there was no significant statistical difference between answers on other prompts. That means questions from the personal teaching policies theme showed no statistical difference in faculty answering.

The second part of my hypothesis consisted that “faculty with more experience working with students with disabilities would be more positively associated in themes like willingness to provide accommodations, knowledge of disability services, and support from the institution”. To compile the answers further from this question, groups were evaluated based on faculty who had taught less than 5 students with disabilities compared to working with more than 5 students in the past two semesters. From this t-test, the majority of the prompts didn’t show significant statistical answer differences ( $p < .05$ ) between faculty groups that had worked with 5 or fewer students compared to 6-10 students. The only statement that showed statistical difference, “I make a verbal statement in class inviting students with disabilities to discuss accommodations with me.”, resulted in a mean difference of 1.21. This indicates that teachers with more teaching experience working with students with disabilities were more likely to agree with this statement than the other group.

## Discussion and Conclusion

The results from this study indicate a fairly positive perception and understanding of accommodations used by students with disabilities from faculty members. While most faculty members do align similar opinions on prompts regarding knowledge about disability services, institutional support, and personal teaching policies, several statements resulted in mixed views from faculty. This included responsibility in advertising accommodations, satisfaction with professional development opportunities, and confidence in the referral process with Disability Services. Additionally, the results from this research indicated a slight statistical difference in opinions among faculty with prior disability specific training versus those without. Faculty that have been offered training working with students with disabilities indicated a higher confidence in implementing accommodations within Disability Services, greater satisfaction with the institution’s resources, and support received from Disability Services. Faculty with varying experience teaching students with disabilities only showed significant differing views on whether a verbal statement advertising accommodations was made in class.

From this study, it can be concluded that with more specific disability training opportunities faculty can continue to better the learning climate for students with disabilities to succeed. The perception and further understanding of resources for students with disabilities will remain a subject that needs far more research. With more research on these perceptions, steps can be taken to improve the conditions and post-secondary education for students with disabilities.

## References

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