



DISABILITY INCLUSION INDEX (DII) FOR UNIVERSITIES

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY BY **NICOLLO ELLIOT** | AUGUST 2020

According to the most recent census done in 2016, about 19% of undergraduate students in the US reported having a disability. These students are considered an underrepresented minority group within higher education and face significant obstacles in obtaining their education including harmful stigma from both their peers and university faculty. On top of this stigma, many students struggle to obtain the resources and accommodations that they need and/or the resources available do not satisfy all of the students' Special needs. In addition to being underrepresented in the overall population, Students with Disabilities (SWD)—specifically in higher education—are one of the least researched groups within the disabled population. This lack of research indicates that there is still a lot of work that needs to be done in order to ensure that universities are being inclusive and are providing SWD with the best possible environment to succeed while obtaining their education as well as post graduation.

In order to provide SWD with an equal opportunity for success within higher education, universities should adopt a Disability Inclusion Index (DII), which will serve as a metric for evaluating the inclusivity of universities. If universities adopt a DII, it will act as a blueprint to help close the gap within education in regards to persons with disabilities (PWD). With access to a defined, standardized framework that outlines inclusivity as well as a method of evaluating their own level of inclusivity, universities will be able to make higher education a much more welcoming and supportive environment for SWD.

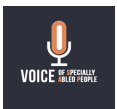
The creation of the DII was facilitated by a limited pool of secondary research on the experiences of SWD within higher education. The DII functions by quantifying and measuring a university's level of inclusion based on a 100 point scale. Inclusivity is evaluated from two different perspectives: one from the university faculty, and another from the university's student population. These perspectives are equally weighted and each represent 50 points of the overall DII score. They are both split up into different categories in order to gain the most in-depth insight into the experiences of SWD within higher education. The Questions for Universities are split into 5 sections: Student Resources and Policy on SWD, Admissions of SWD, Employment of PWD, Inclusivity in Academics, and Accessibility (Infrastructure, Transportation, and Technology). The Questions for students were also split into 5 categories: Student Resources, Faculty, Inclusivity in Academics, Inclusive Culture on Campus, and Accessibility (Infrastructure, Transportation, Housing, and



Technology). The categories were assigned weightages based on the assumed overall impact of what is being measured on the lives of SWD.

Universities across the US, and even the world, would greatly benefit from adopting a DII. The DII will reveal to universities what changes they need to make to their university policy, infrastructure, and even culture in order to best support SWD. In addition, the DII should be implemented officially into policy not as a recommendation, but as a requirement for all universities. Inclusivity is not an option, it is a necessity. Policy needs to be implemented that will require universities to do everything in their power to support all students on their campuses, including SWD. Universities should be required to maintain a DII score that is at or above a certain level in order to make this a reality.

There is undeniably so much work that needs to be done in order to create a society that is fully supportive and inclusive of PWD in all facets of society—including education. So much of this work is done through advocacy, and at the base level, listening to PWDs and uplifting their voices. This can be done within the field of academia through research that aims to shine light on the experiences of PWD and to create actionable change. That was the goal of this research project—to create a resource for universities to help them understand the experiences of SWD and how the educational institution affects their daily lives in hopes of eventually improving these circumstances. The DII makes this possible which aligns with VOSAP's mission to create an inclusive and accessible world. Many consider education to be the basis on which people, including PWD, achieve employment; therefore, by improving inclusivity within higher education for SWD, the DII serves as a gateway to help decrease the employment gap for PWD.



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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I thank Manushri Desai and Anusha Singh, VOSAP Research Internship coordinators, for their continuous support and guidance throughout the course of the research project. I thank Pranav Desai, founder of VOSAP, for his expertise in the disability sector and invaluable insights for our work.

WHY THIS MATTERS TO VOSAP

Diversity and Inclusion as relates to Persons with Disabilities (PwD) is gaining attention among higher education leaders. Per 2018 census data, only 15% PwD were college graduates. It is important to learn how universities, the places for higher education and learning are embracing, practicing inclusion of PwD. With this background, VOSAP has come up with a framework to help universities devise their Disability and Inclusion (D&I) strategy that is comprehensive in nature and a useful matrix to start measuring DII (Disability Inclusion Index) score.

ABOUT VOICE OF SPECIALLY ABLED PEOPLE INC.

The Voice of Specially Abled People (VOSAP) is a global advocacy organization built on the principles of Empowerment of Specially Abled People. In Special Consultative Status with UN ECOSOC, VOSAP is working to create an Inclusive and Accessible world by accelerating implementation of UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and goals of UN CRPD (Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities) treaty. The organization has created the VOSAP Mobile App through which volunteers can take a pledge to volunteer and rate the accessibility of public places, creating a crowdsourcing platform to aggregate demand for accessibility.

