Students with Disabilities at the University of Canterbury: Experiences and Recommendations for Change

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Abstract

This research combines qualitative and quantitative methods to investigate how students with disabilities experience the academic and personal support services at the University of Canterbury and what changes, if any, students would like to make in order to have their personal and educational needs better met.

Five students with disabilities were interviewed in order to identify the issues confronting students with disabilities and incorporate these into a questionnaire. All 295 students who identified as disabled at the tertiary institution were sent the questionnaire and 70 students responded. Individual meetings were held with four staff members and publications on provisions for students with disabilities at the University were reviewed to establish what the University claims is available so that this could be compared with students' accounts of their experiences.

The information from University staff and the promotional material showed that there were a variety of resources and procedures in place in order to meet the needs of students. Thus the University indicated an active willingness to meet the needs of students with disabilities. The majority of students with disabilities reported that most of their academic and personal needs were met at the University. However the majority of students also put forward recommendations regarding changes that could be made so that their needs could be better met. Students adopted strategies to cope with the barriers that confronted them at University.

This research found that students with disabilities felt personally responsible for the barriers that confronted them. This was evidenced by the strategies students used to confront these barriers and the medical model of disability which influenced resource provision for students with disabilities. I argue that a social model of disability needs to be adopted if the under-representation of students with disabilities is to be addressed and the University's legal obligations to provide for these students is to be fulfilled.

Chapter One
INTRODUCTION

Our growing participation suggests that we, as New Zealanders, are increasingly recognising tertiary education's importance. For example, between 1986 and 1996 numbers of New Zealand tertiary students attending universities increased from 61, 979 to 105, 690. This is a massive growth of 41% in 10 years (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 1988; New Zealand Ministry of Education, 1997b). When the contribution of demographic forces, such as, a growth in the population aged 17-24 who comprise the majority of tertiary students is taken into account, evidence still exists that our participation is on the increase (Stephens, 1997). While the number of people attending tertiary institutions has increased, research and peoples' accounts of their personal experiences show that minority groups, particularly persons with disabilities, continue to be grossly under-represented in this area (Cahill, 1991; Grace, 1990).

Why is this a concern? As Hurst (1996) states, "Higher education is important in giving people the qualifications and credentials necessary for future employment" (p.128). Thus, reduced tertiary educational opportunities for people with disabilities directly affects their employment prospects. Several writers (Abberley, 1996; Cahill, 1991; Wicks, 1991) have drawn attention to the lack of employment opportunities for disabled people. Abberley (1996) suggests that whilst this might be a further form of discrimination, it also suggests that disabled people may be presented with barriers in their attempts to obtain the required qualifications.

A number of mechanisms, including state intervention through legislation, are designed to ensure that as many people as possible are given the opportunity to access higher education and thus experience equal educational opportunity, for example, the Human Rights Act 1993, the Education Act 1989 and the Education Amendment Act 1990. However, evidence exists that the ideal of equal educational opportunity is not being reached (Gordon, 1997; Grace, 1990; Lauder, 1990).

Given that legislation is in place to ensure that the rights of students with disabilities to equal educational opportunity are protected, how have people with disabilities come to be poorly represented at Tertiary Educational Institutions[1] (TEIs)? To address this question it is first necessary to examine the context in which this problem occurs. In this chapter, the influence of New Right policies in New Zealand on the education of disabled students is explored through a critique of government documentation pertaining to students with disabilities: *The Todd Report* (Ministerial Consultative Group [MCG],1994). Details of legislation designed to protect the rights of students with disabilities to equal education are outlined. I will argue that because TEIs are afforded a significant degree of freedom as to how they interpret and adopt legislation relating to disabled students educational opportunities and outcomes for students with disabilities are substantially reduced. These reduced educational opportunities have been recognised by the government in the form of a funding package due to be implemented in 1998.

The funding package reflects a change in government policy and the theory underpinning this policy. I will outline how disability theories have

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[1] Tertiary Educational Institutions will hereafter be referred to as TEIs. TEIs include Universities, Polytechnics, Colleges of Education and Wananga. There are currently 39 TEIs in New Zealand.

evolved. Theories are important and are outlined in this research report because they shape and are shaped by the experience of disability. Our theories of disability affect our understanding of disability and consequently how we react to people with disabilities.

After examining the disability, I will illustrate that parallel to developments in disability theory movements in disability research have occurred. The increase in the use of qualitative research methods is illustrated in the second half of this chapter where studies between 1980 and 1997 involving disabled students at TEIs are reviewed. The aims, methodological issues and results of these studies are examined and the rationale for this study is provided.

The present study explores the experiences of students with disabilities at a Tertiary Educational Institution. Changes that students with disabilities would like to see so that their needs are better met are investigated. This study employs both qualitative interviews and analysis as well as quantitative survey research method. Consistent with recent research employing an emancipatory research model, the lived reality of disabled students is portrayed. The use of quantitative and qualitative methodologies enables the experiences of many students to be described.

New Zealand: The Context

The influence of the New Right on the lives of tertiary students with disabilities

As a nation, New Zealand operates as part of a global market. Indeed, many of its policies, including fiscal, trade, employment and education, are influenced by other western countries. During the early 80's and throughout the 90's, there has been a strong trend in western countries,

such as the United Kingdom and the United States of America, towards adopting policies which are commonly known as 'New Right' (Codd, 1990).

The term 'New Right' has been used so widely to define a number of ideas, theories and government policies that to ensure consistency of understanding for this research, a common definition is necessary. A definition which encapsulates my understanding of New Right and which will be used in this report has been put forward by King (1987).

King (1987) states that there are two central elements to the New Right: liberalism and conservatism. These two elements co-exist. However, liberalism is the principal element because conservatism originates from this. King (1987) defines liberalism as the

> ...superiority of market mechanisms as a promoter both of economic prosperity (because of the supposed greater efficiency of the market in the allocation of scarce resources); and of the maximisation of individual freedom through the limiting of state intervention: freedom must be market based freedom rather than state imposed. (p.9)

Conservatism occurs as a result of the pursuit of Liberal economic policies and involves a combination of values including "...those advanced by social authoritarians concerned to re-establish power, moralists wishing to restore religious and pre-1960's values, and conservatives who fear the reduction of inequality and extension of citizenship rights. (ibid, p.17).

New Right beliefs regarding the benefits of less state intervention, and the resulting freedom of choice for consumers have been introduced to New Zealand and adopted (Grace, 1990). The influence of the New Right has permeated all areas of the state sector including social welfare,

broadcasting, health and education (Gordon, 1997). The dominance of this political trend is outlined in this research report because it has radically changed the face of tertiary education, and consequently, the outcomes for under-represented groups, such as students with disabilities, have been greatly affected.

Justification for implementing New Right policies took place before they were introduced. This involved criticising the existing tertiary education system on the grounds that it was inefficient and lacked accountability (Peters, Peters, & Freeman-Moir, 1993). This paved the way for a reduction in State intervention, introduction of user pays, and the re-birth of tertiary education as a commodity (ibid).

Researchers and writers have argued that educational policies which reflect the New Right doctrine work against the aim of equal educational opportunity for disabled students (Brown, 1994; Oliver, 1988). Ballard (1992) has described the detrimental effects of New Right policies on the compulsory schooling of children with special needs. He outlines how education has become a commodity to be sold in the marketplace, thereby requiring schools to reduce costs to compete successfully. Schools now have a "choice" in whether they apply for extra funding because of the special needs component of the school population (ibid). As a result, parents with children with disabilities report having to sell their child to the school which by rights their child is entitled to attend (Brown 1994). As Ballard asserts, "Economics, therefore, sanctions discrimination against students with disabilities" (Ballard, 1992, p.17).

It is evident that the effects of New Right policies on disabled students does not stop at compulsory school level; tertiary students with disabilities are also detrimentally affected. I will illustrate how this has occurred by firstly critiquing an example of government documentation

pertaining to disabled students: *The Todd Report* (MCG, 1994). I will use peoples' personal accounts and research to support this argument.

In 1993, the Ministerial Consultative Group (MCG) was established to advise the government on funding and growth in tertiary education. The MCG released a report titled *'The Todd Report'* (1994). *The Todd Report* (ibid) contained a series of recommendations which were categorised under two options: A and B. Of the two options, Option A was chosen by the government (Stephens, 1997). Option A specifically mentioned the tertiary education of students with disabilities. It acknowledged that

> People with disabilities also face significant barriers to full participation in tertiary education and training. . . .Many tertiary institutions already provide support for students with disabilities as part of a wider range of student services. However, students with disabilities face costs and impediments which are inadequately recognised (MCG, 1994, p.99).

Furthermore option A recommended that:

> a "tertiary support" fund be established to purchase additional services for students with disabilities from tertiary providers; the fund could be located within the Ministry of Education[2] or the Special Education Service with an advisory board of representatives of people with disabilities; and institutions tender for an amount depending on the number of students they would anticipate they may have needs for in a given year. (ibid p.99)

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[2] The term "Ministry" will herafter refer to the Ministry of Education

The MCG recognised the under-representation and inadequacy of provision for disabled students in tertiary education by recommending that this should be addressed. However, the MCG indicated its lack of commitment to the importance of these issues by omitting these recommendations from its executive summary (National Foundation for the Deaf [NFD], 1995).

There was also evidence that the underlying tenets of the New Right doctrine were considered more important to the MCG than the under representation of specific groups such as students with disabilities. This was apparent in *The Todd Report's* terms of reference. The terms of reference mentioned the increasing demands for education and suggested that participation in tertiary education results in considerable benefits to the individual so that "students should therefore bear a significant portion of the costs of their tertiary education" (MCG, 1994, p.15). The requirement of 'user pays' is a key characteristic of the New Right."...Consistent with the concept of the possessive individual is the view that education is a private good and should therefore be paid by the individual" (Lauder, 1990, p.11). The suggestion that in the future students with disabilities should pay more for their tertiary education contradicted the MCG's acknowledgement that disabled students already faced additional costs which were not fully recognised.

One effect of the increased emphasis on cost and TEIs operating economically and competitively as outlined in *The Todd Report* has been that there are insufficient resources to meet the needs of students with disabilities. As the Ministry confirms "Some students are effectively being denied admission to TEIs because resources are not available to meet their support needs" (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 1996, p.7). For instance, Deaf and hearing impaired students who require interpreters

to relay lectures are unable to attend TEIs because TEIs do not have sufficient funds to provide this resource (NFD, 1995). It seems that efficiency and economics are deemed a higher priority than the learning needs of disabled students.

Thus, whilst increasing numbers of non-disabled students attend TEIs, the continued under-representation of students with disabilities indicates that they experience considerably less success (Lang, 1993). Additional evidence exists which indicates that the lack of sufficient resources contributes to the under-representation of disabled students (Lang, 1993; McKay, Rowlands, Ballard, Smith & Gleeson, 1995; "Funding Threat," 1997). For example, The Press ("Funding Threat," 1997) detailed how Phillip King, a first year engineering student at Christchurch Polytechnic, may be forced to discontinue his studies. This was because Phillip could not raise the $25,000 needed to fund an interpreter and note taker, necessary for him to continue his study, for the rest of the year.

McKay et al. (1995) investigated the experiences of students with disabilities at three TEIs in Dunedin, and recommended that

> The Ministry needs to determine what resources are required for students with disabilities to achieve education equitable to their non disabled [sic] peers and to ensure these resources are available at under graduate and post graduate level to ensure equal access to education. (p.235)

Another detrimental effect that the implementation of New Right policies has had for disabled students is that the government has been absolved of responsibility for providing for them. The Ministry has claimed that TEIs are funded to provide for students with disabilities as this is included in their bulk funding. However, as McKay et al. (1995) and

NFD (1995) point out, statistical information has not been collected by the Ministry regarding the number of students with disabilities at TEIs and their resourcing needs, so it would be virtually impossible for the Ministry to incorporate resourcing needs of disabled students into bulk funding and to distribute this funding equitably to each Tertiary Educational Institution.

Individual students (P. King, personal communication, 23 August, 1997) and organisations (D. Murray, personal communication, 23 August, 1997) report that their requests to TEIs and the Ministry for funding for disabled students have been met with an unsatisfactory response, that is, the Ministry and the TEIs have blamed one another. Students with disabilities as individuals and as groups such as ACHIEVE, have become 'piggy in the middle' in a game of 'toss the responsibility'.

What are the implications for disabled students of being made to play 'piggy in the middle' ? One implication is that disability is 'individualised'. The issues surrounding disability such as the shortage of funding are framed as individual problems of students with disabilities rather than a problem or issue for the institution or government. Students' difficulties in accessing tertiary education is deemed a personal responsibility.

According to Mills (1970), personal troubles are "...issues construed as private matters which occur within the character of the individual" (p.8). The lack of responsibility by both the TEIs and the Ministry over the provision of resources for students with disabilities can be seen in light of this definition. In contrast it is possible to frame students difficulties as a social issue. Mills (1970) defines social issues as those matters which "...espouse public values and which involve institutional organisation and involvement" (p.8). As I will illustrate later in the 'new

funding' sub-section, it was not until half way through 1997, the year that this research was undertaken, that any concrete evidence emerged that the concerns of disabled students would be formally recognised by the State as a human rights issue, and thus, a social issue.

Given that students with disabilities are protected from discrimination by legislation, why has it become necessary to implement strategies such as the new funding mechanism to redress the under-representation of students with disabilities? The next sub-section outlines legislation pertaining to students with disabilities and reveals how this legislation fails to fulfil its intended purpose.

Legislation

The rights of disabled students to access and attend tertiary education are protected under the Human Rights Act 1993, the Education Act 1989, and its subsequent amendments 1990 and 1995. However, existing legislation is limiting in according students with disabilities equal educational opportunity. I will argue that this is largely because TEIs are presumed to have compassionate views regarding the identification and resourcing of under-represented groups such as disabled students.

As described, the current economic climate in New Zealand has increased the pressure on TEIs to operate as successful businesses. These economic factors have reduced the financial incentive for TEIs to adopt a compassionate view towards under-represented groups. Furthermore, the continued implementation of New Right policies, for example, 'A future educational policy for New Zealand: Tertiary education review' (Ministry of Education, 1997a) ensures that the likelihood of TEIs allocating

resources to increase representation of students with disabilities is diminishing.

The Human Rights Act 1993 prohibits educational establishments from

...refusing or failing to admit a student with a disability; or admitting such a student on less favourable terms and conditions than would otherwise be made available, except where that person requires special services or provisions, which in the circumstances cannot reasonably be made available. (Human Rights Act, 1993, p.26)

The amended Education Act 1995 stipulates that University councils are required to give to the Ministry an account of the extent to which they have

• eliminated unnecessary barriers to the progress of students; and

• avoided the creation of unnecessary barriers to the progress of students; and

• developed programs to attract students from groups in the community-

(i) Under-represented in the institution's student body; or

(ii) Disadvantaged in terms of their ability to attend the institution (p.214).

Current legislation affords TEIs considerable flexibility and autonomy in terms of its interpretation and application (NFD, 1995). For example, the Human Rights Act 1993 states that TEIs are obliged to

resource disabled students unless these resources cannot reasonably be made available. For TEIs to comply with legislation and establish that resources can reasonably be made available requires that they will take a benevolent approach and identify students with disabilities as requiring attention and give these resources priority over other demands on funding.

The decision to provide or not to provide resides with the TEIs. The Ministry (1996) states, "There is no clear delineation of responsibilities among different parties for providing assistance for people with disabilities in tertiary education and training. Under current legislation considerable responsibility rests with the TEIs themselves" (p.6).

The Ministry, (ibid) provided evidence that the flexibility in the interpretation of legislation works against disabled students. The Ministry (ibid) identified the frequency with which students with disabilities have been identified as an under-represented target group in TEI's charters and revealed that students with disabilities have been given considerably less attention when TEIs carried out planning and reporting than other groups in the community (for example, Maori and Pacific Island students) who experienced barriers to participation.

Catherwood (1997a) highlights that TEIs are autonomous and they have the legislative authority to determine their own governance and management procedures, hence there may be little accountability to ensure legislation is complied with. The lack of specific detail in the legislation combined with the lack of incentives stemming from the New Right economic reforms means that students with disabilities right to equal educational opportunity is thwarted from the outset.

The recognition by the government that legislation was not fulfilling its intended purpose, and that holding TEIs responsible for the

funding of disabled students was not resulting in the needs of students with disabilities being met, contributed to the recent announcement of a funding package for students with disabilities. This forms the focus of the following sub-section.

New Funding for Students with Disabilities

In 1997, effective 1998, the New Zealand government announced new funding to cover high cost resources for students with disabilities. The new funding involves the distribution of $9.9 million to TEIs for students with disabilities spread over the period 1998 to 2000, at which time it will be reviewed (ibid). The money will be provided to each Tertiary Educational Institution at a flat rate of $29.25 per equivalent full time student (EFTS based funding model) for the express purpose of meeting the needs of tertiary students who have high cost support service needs (ibid).

The objectives of the new funding policy as stated by the Ministry are to

- improve the access of students with disabilities to educational opportunity at tertiary institutions;

- increase the level of enrolment of students with disabilities at tertiary institutions;

- improve the levels of educational achievement by students with disabilities; and

- increase the accountability of tertiary institutions for their support of students with disabilities consistent with their obligations under the Human Rights Act 1993 and the Education Act 1989. (ibid, p.1)

The new funding has answered the call of many people to meet the resourcing needs of students with disabilities. However, the EFTS model of funding chosen by the government, over two alternatives of either a needs based system or a EFTS based bulk fund, means that it is probable that TEIs will receive a disproportionate amount of funding relative to the actual funding needs. That is, TEIs which have a high number of students with high cost needs will have difficulty finding the means to resource these students. For example, based on current student numbers, Christchurch Polytechnic is forecast to fall approximately $100,000 short of its necessary resource needs (Catherwood, 1997b).

A positive side of the new funding for students with disabilities, is that it signals a change in how the State perceives disability; that it is a social issue rather than a personal problem (Mills, 1970). This change is parallel to developments that have occurred in disability theory. These developments are explored in the next section.

Disability Theory

Traditionally the medical model has dominated our ideas about disability. These ideas have been challenged, largely by people with disabilities themselves, and as a result two social theories have been put forward to explain the experience of disability. Consequently three theories or models of disability currently coexist and are examined in this section.

The Medical Model

Much has been written about the influence of the medical model (Cahill, 1991; Sullivan, 1991). The medical model is important because it

has previously dominated peoples' views of disability with implications for disabled students. For the purposes of this report two themes are examined. Firstly the theme of the 'individualisation' of disability, as previously raised in the sub-section on the effect of the New Right on students with disabilities, is considered. Secondly, the relationship between the medical model and education has particular relevance and is explored.

The medical model has been identified as a major factor that contributed to the discrimination and disempowerment of people with disabilities, in education and in other sectors of society (Cahill, 1991). The medical model is the belief that people with disabilities are unable to cope without the assistance of the medical world (Sullivan, 1991). That is, all people with disabilities require professional intervention of some kind. The problem with the medical model is that people are viewed in terms of their problems or deficits. As a result, they become categorised in an all encompassing way. In other words, disabled people are seen as though their disability defines who they are (Cahill, 1991), for example, 'the blind man'.

Underpinning the medical model are two ideas: firstly, the belief that behaviour which deviates from normal in a negative direction is abnormal, and secondly, the belief that this behaviour should be changed or cured to "normal" behaviour (Reger, 1972, p.9).

A major implication of medical model thinking, and one which continues to influence how we view people with disabilities today, is that disability is "individualised" (Sullivan, 1991, p.259). That is, disability is seen as an individual problem that someone has to cope with. For example, some students report that when they encounter obstacles at TEIs, they are given the impression that it is their problem and they have to fix it (Lang,

1993; McKay et al., 1995). This is consistent with the idea I raised in the funding sub-section that the funding problems that students with disabilities experience are defined by the society as personal problems rather than social issues (Mills, 1970).

Aligned to the medical model are several other ideas including the individual tragedy model and the charity model (Cahill, 1991; Sullivan, 1991). These are based on the assumption that someone with a disability would benefit from a restoration to 'normality'. An example of the charity model is the argument presented in the legislation sub-section that legislation presumes TEIs will have compassionate views towards students with disabilities by voluntarily prioritising their funding so that these students needs are met.

People with disabilities frequently report being treated as though some tragedy has befallen them and that they are unable to handle everyday situations without the financial, emotional or physical assistance of the able bodied population (Brightman, 1985). Disabled students experience this. They report that they do not want to be seen as different from their peers (Lang, 1993). Thus there is a distinct disparity between the assumptions underlying the medical model which influence our ideas about students with disabilities, and what students with disabilities want. This stereotype is perpetuated by the media because people with disabilities are commonly depicted as recipients of aid (Cahill, 1991). For instance, a recent blind dog appeal has the motto "We're pinning our hopes on your support".

People with disabilities and researchers argue that the medical model has been so pervasive that the ideas regarding a link between disability and medicine have been transferred into other areas of society including the educational realm (Reger, 1972). An example is the

existence of separate schooling for students with disabilities and professionals such as special education staff employed to assess and measure the performance of students (Ballard, 1994). In order to access resources, students with disabilities have increasingly been required to legitimate their need/s, which often takes a medical or medically based form (Biklen, 1988).

Because of the influence of the medical model and the labelling of people with disabilities, structures such as the education system are absolved of responsibility when the needs of disabled students are not met (Reger, 1972). For example, it can be argued that a student has 'dyslexia'. If this student experiences educational outcomes which are substantially less than the mainstream, these reduced outcomes are seen as understandable because the student has a condition which absolves the educational system of responsibility (ibid). Effectively the label is used as a reason for reduced outcomes. As Reger states, "If a child cannot read, it is a learning problem; to relegate this problem to limbo through the use of such pseudo medical jargon as 'dyslexia' to classify the problem is an evasion of responsibility" (ibid, p.12).

Supporters of the medical model could highlight the improvements in peoples' health that have emerged from medicine. People with disabilities acknowledge that medicine has been beneficial in terms of improving the health of some people with disabilities. The problem is the extent to which medicine has been transferred into other areas (Oliver, 1990). As Cahill (1991) states "Medicine has been a two edged sword" (p.7). That is, while obvious benefits have emerged from medical developments, discrimination and segregation have occurred as a result of disabled people constantly being defined in medical terms.

Because of the implications of medical model thinking, such as reduced educational opportunities for people with disabilities, alternative ways of explaining disability have been put forward. These involve looking at society and social factors which contribute to the experience of disability. In the next two sub-sections, the social theories of disability are examined.

The Social Construction Theory

It was through a social construction approach that most of the critique of medical discourse has been made. The social construction theory proposed that peoples' attitudes were the problem. It suggested that the labelling of people as 'disabled' resulted in people being treated differently, thus they became poorly represented in education, employment and other areas (Oliver, 1988). Oliver summarises the social construction theory by stating "...the problem lies in the fact that some human beings define other human beings as disabled, and therefore treat them differently. Change the way people think about disability and you eliminate the problems of disabled people" (ibid, p.17). The social construction theory reflects the idea that disability is constructed by society. Discrimination experienced by people with disabilities is seen as a problem of the able-bodied in society and not a problem of the individual. The idea that emerged from medical model thinking that disability is an individual problem is rejected.

Supporters of the social construction theory use the term 'people with disabilities' to remind the able bodied population that "disabled people are people first" (Oliver, 1992, p.21). This definition is consistent with the social constructionist belief that peoples' attitudes are the major factor contributing towards the discrimination that people with disabilities experience. In other words, changing the terminology to

'people with disabilities' was an attempt to change people's attitudes, and thus reduce or remove the discrimination that occurs against disabled people.

The social construction theory suggests that we construct disability in various ways. One of the main ways in which we do this is through language. The theory stresses the importance of language in shaping our thinking as well as conveying our thoughts. The World Health Organisation released a set of definitions, relating to disability, to be adopted. They defined the term 'impairment' to refer to a loss of bodily function resulting from a genetic, disease or injury cause; the term 'disability' to refer to the measurable effects of an impairment; and the term 'handicap' to describe the social consequences of an impairment. The World Health Organisation definitions have been rejected by many people with disabilities because they still "see the individual as the focus of the problem" (Ballard, 1994, p.316).

Critics of social construction theory have highlighted that the poor outcomes experienced by people with disabilities are due to more than the culturally determined attitudes of people who create the idea of disability. The problems people with disabilities experience are more deep rooted than simply peoples' attitudes. For example, if peoples' attitudes are the sole cause of the problem, how do we explain the problems experienced by a person who is blind not being able to read the bus timetable or the person with a wheelchair not able to access a building?

The Social Creation Theory

These criticisms have lead to the development of an alternative model termed the social creation theory. The social creation theory proposes that disability is created in society via physical structures and

policies regarding education, employment and health (ibid, 1994). Disability is "a social creation located within the institutionalised practices of society" (Sullivan, 1991, p.259).

The environment which we live in is based upon a definition of what disability is understood to be. This definition involves ideas such as having a disability is problematic; disability involves separate schooling and people with disabilities are abnormal. Thus, people with disabilities and other members of minority groups are classified on a continuum according to what society perceives as normal. According to this theory "Difference is not abnormal; difference is normal" (Reger, 1972, p.11). This notion is supported by Oliver who states that "Normality is a construct imposed on a reality where there is only difference" (Oliver, 1992, p.25).

The importance of language is also highlighted by proponents of this theory. The term 'disabled people' is deemed most appropriate because it incorporates the idea that "people are disabled by society" (Ballard, 1994, p13). Also, to use the term 'person with a disability' as proposed by the social construction theory has been criticised because this treats the person as though their disability is an "appendage" when in fact "...it is an essential part of self" (Sullivan, 1991, p.256).

The existence of three theories which attempt to explain the experience of disability indicates the contentious nature of this issue. Thus, the notion of social versus medical notions of disability are certainly not simplistic (French, 1994). French challenges the idea that disability is totally socially created. She questions whether if socially imposed restrictions are removed a person with a disability is no longer disabled. For example, if a person who is visually impaired is given everything necessary to do their work in an office, will he/she be able to

do their work at the same pace as a non-disabled person (ibid) ? French argues that he/she will still work at a slower speed than non-visually impaired people. Thus, although many situations are amenable to social solutions this is not always the case (ibid).

The debate over the best way to encapsulate the experience of disability illustrates the complexity of disability and the danger of simplifying the experience and stating that it is totally a result of medical or social factors. Consistent with this idea I have intermittently used the terms 'students with disabilities' and 'disabled students' in this report. My use of these terms also acknowledges the importance of language in the disability area and reflects my preference that social theories of disability best explain the experience. As I outline in the next section, whatever theories about disability underlie research, these can have far reaching implications.

Disability Research Trends

During the late 1980's and early 1990's, disability research increasingly came under fire. It was criticised for two main reasons. Firstly, because "...the experience of disability has been profoundly distorted" (Oliver, 1992, p.102), and secondly, because "the links between research and social change have been seen as relatively simplistic" (ibid). The effect of this was that research did not result in change for people with disabilities (ibid). In this section I examine what has occurred as a result of the criticisms of previous disability research methods.

One of the key factors identified as contributing to the lack of positive change as a result of disability research was the dominance of positivism. Positivism is a form of empiricism. The Collins concise

dictionary (Hanks, 1989) states that it: "rejects metaphysics and holds that experimental investigation and observation are the only sources of substantive knowledge" (p.893). Up until the 1990's, social research, including disability research, has been dominated by positivism (Oliver, 1992).

The problems, resulting as a consequence of the dominance of the quantitative research method and its underlying positivist assumptions, have lead to the more common usage of qualitative research methods. This is consistent with a tendency that is occurring in the social sciences. Thus more disability research employing a qualitative method is being carried out in the 90's than was the case in the 80's.

Bogdan and Biklen (1992) identify five key characteristics of qualitative research. Firstly, qualitative research has the natural setting as the data source whilst the researcher is the primary instrument (p.29). Secondly, "qualitative research is descriptive" (p.30). That is, it contains descriptions of people or pictures rather than numbers. The third characteristic is that "qualitative researchers are concerned with process rather than simply with outcomes or products" (p.31). Fourthly, "qualitative researchers tend to analyse their data inductively" (p.31). That is, they do not set out to prove a theory or hypotheses. These are built in the process of gathering data and carrying out the research (p.31). The fifth characteristic is that "'meaning' is of essential concern to the qualitative approach" (p.32). In other words, researchers want to capture and understand the participants' perspectives and they want to do this accurately.

The following comparison of two research studies carried out in the 80's and 90's illustrates the difference between the quantitative and

qualitative research methods and provides an example of the increasing use of qualitative research in the 90's.

A comprehensive study of the attendance and experiences of students with disabilities at TEIs in New Zealand was carried out by Alexander and Bridgeman in 1982. The impetus for their research stemmed from the authors' realisation that disabled students had specific needs which were not being met by the education system. The research had four key objectives

- to continue the compilation of a bibliography on provisions for disabled tertiary students that had been started by a previously formed "further education for the disabled" group.

- to survey provisions for disabled tertiary students in TEIs

- to make proposals for further research; and

- to gain a comprehensive picture of the difficulties confronting students with disabilities. (Alexander & Bridgeman, 1982)

The research involved a questionnaire, and in the results and discussion sections, the voices of students with disabilities were virtually absent. That is, although the research aimed to assess how provision was made for students with disabilities at TEIs, there was little indication of the thoughts of the students with disabilities themselves.

Alexander and Bridgeman's (1982) research contrasts strongly with recent study carried out by McKay et al. (1995) and many other studies currently being carried out in the social science arena which do not employ a quantitative method, but use one or more of a host of other methods that have emerged. McKay et al. (1995) investigated the

experiences of disabled students at three tertiary educational institutions: The University of Otago, Otago Polytechnic and Dunedin Teachers College. The main objective of the research was to find out what disability meant to students, staff, and teachers in terms of the general life of the campus, and for accessing resources that ensured equitable treatment (McKay et al., 1995). The research was undertaken by people with disabilities (and able bodied people) and differed markedly from Alexander and Bridgeman's study in that the results were presented in the participants' words as much as possible.

The increased usage of the qualitative research paradigm has not gone unchallenged. Oliver (1992) argues that qualitative research still involves researchers who have considerably more power than the research participants, the result being that people with disabilities experience no change in their quality of life, whilst researchers continue to benefit, for example, in terms of status. Oliver (1992) argues that a major factor underlying the positivist and interpretivist research paradigms, and responsible for the disparity between reality and research, is the social relations of research production. Oliver (1992) defines the social relations of research production as "the structure within which research is undertaken" (p.102). He asserts that at present social relations involve the researcher being seen as the expert who sets the agenda for the research which participants then follow.

In response to the criticisms aimed at positivist and interpretivist research methods, Oliver has advocated a new research paradigm: the emancipatory research paradigm (ibid). Emancipatory research involves challenging the power relations of traditional research methods. Oliver defines the three key tenets of this new research model as gain, reciprocity and empowerment (ibid, p.111). Examples of research adopting

the emancipatory research paradigm are referred to in the next half of this chapter.

In summary the first half of this chapter outlined that students with disabilities rights to equal educational opportunity have been substantially reduced because of the dominance of New Right policies in New Zealand and the inadequacy of legislation. It has been argued that new funding designed to address the under representation of disabled students represents a change in the theory underlying policy from a personal or medically based theory of disability to a social theory of disability. Social theories of disability involve recognising the importance of social factors which affect the experience of disability. They have been formulated because previous medical models of disability which dominated our ideas about disability have been linked to reduced outcomes for people with disabilities in all spheres of society including education.

Oliver criticised previous research methods involving people with disabilities. He has described and has advocated a new research paradigm: the emancipatory research paradigm. Not surprisingly the criticisms of previous research methods have impacted on the way in which research involving students with disabilities has been carried out. The next half of this chapter outlines the current state of knowledge on students with disabilities and their experiences at TEIs. The research of students' experiences is reviewed and critiqued in terms of the theories of disability the authors draw upon, the research methods they use and the research findings they report.

Literature Review: Research on Students with Disabilities at TEIs in New Zealand (1980-1997)

Studies carried out between 1980 and 1997 involving disabled students at TEIs in New Zealand, form the focus of this literature review. This time span has been selected so that, as outlined in the previous section, the trends towards using different research methods that have occurred in the late 80's and early 90's can be illustrated. In the first section the aims, methods employed and the theoretical positions adhered to in these studies are closely examined. The first section is followed by a critical review of the results and recommendations that have emerged from this research. After the state of knowledge in the area of tertiary education for students with disabilities has been summarised, the rationale and aims of this present study will be presented.

Consistent with my previously outlined preference for social theories of disability the studies in this review are examined using Olivers' (1992) recommendations for disability research as a frame of reference. Olivers' recommendations can be summarised in four key points:

- "Disability research should not be seen as a set of technical objective procedures carried out by experts (ibid, p.102). Disability research should not be carried out by "outsiders" but by people with disabilities. (ibid, p.101)

- "Disability is socially produced" therefore, the focus of research should be changed to the disablist society. (ibid, p.101)

• Disabled people should be involved in disability research from the outset. That is "...the method of research must also change building in participation and reciprocity." (ibid, p.111)

• "The social relations of research production do have to be fundamentally changed; researchers have to learn how to put their knowledge at the disposal of their research subjects for them to use in whatever ways they choose". (ibid, p.111)

These recommendations are used as a frame of reference for this review because consistent with Olivers ideas I wish to work *with* disabled people and confront the oppression that people with disabilities experience. In addition, I wish to undertake research according to the three tenets of gain, reciprocity and empowerment of emancipatory research as proposed by Oliver (ibid, p.111).

Aims and Methodological Issues

In the late 1980's and early 1990's a trend away from the use of quantitative methods for conducting disability research and towards the use of qualitative research methods has occurred. To illustrate this tendency the studies in this sub-section are presented in chronological order.

The first study in this review involving students with disabilities at TEIs, was carried out by Alexander and Bridgeman in 1982. The dominance of quantitative research methods during the early 80's was evident in the method used by Alexander and Bridgeman (1982). The study involved two groups of participants: staff members at each tertiary educational institution in New Zealand and people with disabilities consulted by the co-ordinating councils for the disabled. Staff at each tertiary educational institution were asked to provide information, in a

questionnaire, (based on Chamberlain, 1974) on the policy and provisions for students with disabilities at that specific institution. The co-ordinating councils for the disabled were asked to seek the views of people with a variety of disabilities on the provisions provided by each institution in its area. The analysis involved calculating the number of participants who commented favourably or less favourably on a range of provisions at the tertiary educational institution, and ranking the tertiary institutions.

A more recent study was carried out by Kirkland at the University of Otago in 1990. There were four main objectives of Kirkland's (1990) study. These were firstly, to identify the incidence of disability within the student population; secondly, to identify how these students' disabilities affected their ability to function in the university; thirdly, to establish what needed to be done to increase students' participation in the university community; and fourthly, to formulate recommendations to achieve these goals.

Kirkland attempted to gather data by using a survey along with interviews, but the predominantly quantitatively reported findings and scarcity of detailed information on the kinds of questions asked in the interviews or the nature of analysis carried out with that data set, makes one question whether qualitative data based on interviews were given adequate importance. Ballard (1994) reminds us that, "Researchers and writers from the disability movement in New Zealand and elsewhere argue that the voice of those with disabilities, their families, whanau and caregivers be attended to. It is they who can tell us what disability is" (p.297).

Lang (1993) carried out a comprehensive study incorporating qualitative and quantitative methods at Victoria University. The aims of

the study were threefold: to find out the incidence of disability on campus, to determine the barriers to participation at the University and to identify ways in which these barriers could be reduced or eliminated. More than 100 disabled students (n=132) responded to a questionnaire, and 37 of these students took part in small focus group interviews.

The focus group interviews were a strength of this study. The participants reported that these provided them with the opportunity to share their experiences in the safety of a group situation (Lang, 1993). A checklist was used as a guide by the researcher enabling the group members to talk about a range of issues relevant to them without being restricted by pre-defined criteria laid down by the researcher. An advisory group comprised representatives from the students with disabilities society, university staff members, a communicator for the deaf and the researcher. The advisory group was involved in the research process from the beginning to the final write-up. Thus, a valuable aspect of the research was that students with disabilities were involved in the questionnaire design, method, public relations, publicity issues and the re-drafting of the report. This was consistent with the researcher's aim that the methods be empowering for students with disabilities (Lang, 1993). This was also compatible with Oliver's (1992) recommendation that "...the method of research must also change building upon trust and respect and building in participation and reciprocity" (p.107).

Two studies by Carr (1994) and the NFD (1995) have focused specifically on the experiences of Deaf and hearing impaired students.

The main objective of Carr's (1994) research was to gain an account from Deaf and hearing impaired students of their experiences at TEIs and to find out whether or how far their needs had been met. Participants were recruited through advertisements in disability magazines and via

questionnaire forms sent to disabilities resource officers at 35 TEIs. Again the tendency towards adopting qualitative research methods more in the 90's than the 80's was apparent as the survey contained open-ended questions and the results were presented predominantly in the participants' words.

The NFD research involved three separate processes. Firstly, current literature and policies related to Deaf and hearing impaired post secondary students was reviewed. Secondly data regarding this population and the resources they required was analysed. Thirdly groups and agencies such as the Special Education Service (SES) and educational institutions likely to have contact with deaf post secondary students were surveyed to establish the number of deaf and hearing impaired post secondary students and the number of resources that were available.

In 1995 Boyles conducted a study with 12 students with disabilities studying at undergraduate and postgraduate level at Victoria University and the Wellington College of Education. All of the students reported some degree of discrimination within the tertiary education system. In the process of carrying out the research, they formed a support group called Disability Action Research Group (DARG). They complied a prioritised list of issues to address which then became the objectives of the study. Disability equity training was unanimously agreed on as the central research focus. Meetings were held with key university staff in an effort to get the disability equity training underway. All meetings were taped and made available to group members. Each group member used the process to clarify their role and what they aimed to gain from the process.

This research was the only study I could identify that was purely emancipatory in that the participants decided on the research objectives

and controlled the research process. This was consistent with Zarb's (1992) definition of emancipatory research that the aims, methods and analysis of the research are owned by the people themselves. Furthermore, the research emphasised the importance of the social construction theory of disability, thereby acknowledging that previous disability theories and models have had limited influence in according students with disabilities equal educational opportunity. Although Oliver (1992) argues that future research involving people with disabilities should adopt this method, its use is limited by the fact that it is often a very lengthy and expensive process (Barnes, 1992).

Another study employing a combination of quantitative and qualitative research method was carried out by McKay et al.. (1995). They aimed to discover what meaning disability had for students with disabilities and staff at three TEIs. One hundred and sixty seven students either provided personal stories or were interviewed or surveyed and 72 staff responded to questionnaires.

A strength of McKay et al.'s (1995) research was that the emphasis was on the qualitative and interpretive aspects, that is, "...on the description and analysis of the experience of disability on campus from the perspective of those who have disabilities" (McKay et al., 1995, p.9).

McKay et al.'s (1995) research emphasised the social factors that impact on the lives of people with disabilities, as it was based on the assumption that "...people are disabled by environments that fail to acknowledge their needs and wishes" (ibid, p.5). This was of significance because the researchers noted that the other models of disability have not resulted in improvements in the lives of disabled people.

Two of the primary researchers were disabled whilst the other three had knowledge and experience from working in this area. Thus, people with disabilities worked with non-disabled people on the research project. Boyles (1995) noted "...the positive impact of the working relationship between disabled and non disabled people" (p.144).

The next sub-section highlights the findings of research between 1980 and 1997 involving students with disabilities. These findings are then related to the rationale for this present study.

Research Results and Recommendations for Change

In this sub-section, the key findings and recommendations that have emerged from studies concerning students with disabilities at TEIs in New Zealand between 1980 and 1997 are presented. Although studies report that students with disabilities are confronted with barriers at TEIs and although many recommendations to address these barriers has been put forward in these studies, these barriers have persisted.

I have previously argued that the barriers have persisted at least partly because of the influence of the New Right policies and flexible legislation. These factors have resulted in the continued presence of barriers because of:

-the lack of resources allocated to TEIs without any financial incentive to reduce these barriers

-the confusion of whether the Ministry or TEIs are responsible for increased funding

-the reliance on the goodwill of TEIs to reduce the barriers

-the lack of teeth in the relevant legislation

Another contributing influence is the persistence of the medical model rather than the social model of disability. This has individualised disability and has contributed towards shifting responsibility away from the TEIs and the government.

So the literature points to some of the reasons for and a picture of the relative lack of progress in reducing the barriers at TEIs for disabled students. Following is an outline of the literature's description of the barriers and recommendations for change.

<u>Physical Access</u>

Students with disabilities commonly experience difficulties with physical access (Alexander & Bridgeman 1982; Lang, 1993; McKay et al. 1995). Kirkland (1990) noted that at the University of Otago students continually experienced access problems. Many of the students' comments referred to inadequate or heavy doors and lack of well designed ramps. Other comments referred to inadequate handrails and bumps in entranceways which made life around campus difficult for some students.

Thus a common recommendation emerging from studies was that Universities need to become more physically accessible. Two studies in 1982 (Alexander & Bridgeman, 1982; Davis, 1982) recommended that urgent attention needed to be given to modify buildings to ensure they were physically accessible. More recent research (McKay et al., 1995) suggests that this is still a problem.

The fact that physical access was a common problem reported in most of the studies reflects that the majority of the students in several of the studies were physically disabled (Kirkland, 1990; Lang, 1993). Thus, research results have to be interpreted in relation to the profile of the students involved in the study.

Lack of awareness/Information

Fifteen years ago Alexander and Bridgeman (1982) recommended that staff awareness of students with disabilities at TEIs should be increased. This recommendation has been repeated in almost all other studies concerning students with disabilities and higher education since then (Boyles, 1995; Lang, 1993; McKay et al. 1995; NFD, 1995).

Also, often when the needs of the students with disabilities needs are acknowledged and resources allocated or systems set up to meet their needs, the students with disabilities are often not aware of such provisions. That is, they are not informed about the availability of resources (Alexander & Bridgeman, 1982; Lang, 1993; McKay et al. 1995).

Boyles (1995) reported that there was a dire need for staff to be educated on disability awareness. Early on in the research process students involved in her study identified that lack of awareness was a key factor contributing to problems that they experienced. The remainder of the research involved developing a disability equity training package with students and staff to address this problem.

This need for increased awareness was echoed in several other research reports (Lang, 1993; McKay et al. 1995). McKay et al. (1995) found that students at all TEIs involved in their study experienced prejudice from staff (and students). Students reported that people tended to generalise about disability which resulted in their experiences being undermined.

Although, in previous studies, the need for staff to be more aware has been highlighted and the effects of the lack of awareness on students with disabilities have been outlined, what is missing is an explanation or

understanding of why this lack of awareness and the perpetuation of other barriers continues.

Assessment

Tertiary students with disabilities commonly experience problems with assessment (Alexander & Bridgeman, 1982; Boyles, 1995; Kirkland, 1990; Lang, 1993; McKay et al., 1995). Alexander and Bridgeman (1982) reported that although overall assessment procedures at Universities for students with disabilities were 'good', there was a lot of inconsistency between the examination and assessment provisions for students with disabilities at different universities (Alexander & Bridgeman 1982, p.12).

Similarly, McKay et al. (1995) found that there were disparities in the assessment provisions between institutions. They found that students studying at several institutions were frequently confused when exam provisions available at one tertiary institution differed from those offered at another institution.

Given the findings that problems with assessment occur frequently when students with disabilities attend more than one Tertiary Educational Institution, can we deduce that students attending one institution are not likely to experience difficulties? Kirkland (1990) reported that even when students attended one tertiary educational institution, they experienced difficulties with assessment. She found that, although the examination provisions for students with disabilities "are reported as satisfactory and are appreciated" (p.36), students experienced a variety of other problems related to assessment including disbelief by staff that students had a disability, persistence of major difficulties even when provisions were used, and a shortage of resources, for example, readers and writers (Kirkland, 1990).

Lang (1993) also identified assessment as one of the main barriers which hindered the participation of students with disabilities at University stating that, "most students had experienced problems academically in lectures, tutorials or examinations, with assignments or in the course of study" (p.10). Likewise, Boyles (1995) reported that assessment procedures discriminated against students with disabilities and advocated a review of those procedures. Several studies involving Deaf and hearing impaired students (Carr, 1994; NFD, 1995) also identified assessment as a key obstacle affecting the success of students in tertiary education.

Shimman (1996) investigated the frequency of use and effectiveness of individualised educational plans in polytechnics (IEPs). Shimman concludes that IEPs are commonly used and highly regarded by teachers in New Zealand polytechnics. The results of his study suggest that a possible solution to the assessment problems encountered by many disabled students could involve IEPs.

It is clear from the research reviewed that assessment was a problem at the TEIs involved in the research, however, there does not appear to have been any material improvement in assessment for students with disabilities since the first study in this review, carried out by Alexander and Bridgeman (1982). Also, although students with disabilities at various TEIs have reported problems, these results can not necessarily be applied to all TEIs. There are differences in assessment, even between some departments on the same campus, so it is certainly true that assessment of students with disabilities will vary across different tertiary educational institutions.

Students with certain kinds of disabilities were often under-represented in the research possibly suggesting their extreme under-representation in tertiary education.

Deaf and hearing impaired students

McKay et al. (1995) commented that students with hearing loss and impaired were under-represented in their study and are generally under-represented in tertiary education. Whilst only a small number of deaf and hearing impaired students took part in the survey, McKay et al. (1995) identified several key issues specific to this group of students. One of the main issues with serious implications for their participation in tertiary education is the lack of trained interpreters and note takers. Several other researchers have also recommended that resources need to be channelled specifically to meet the needs of Deaf and hearing impaired students (Carr, 1994; NFD, 1995). Appleby's (1992) statement that, "Not enough deaf people study at the tertiary level. This is because tertiary institutions do not cater for them" (p.46) appears to summarise the situation that deaf and hearing impaired people experience at TEIs.

Learning disabled students

Another group of students with disabilities under-represented in the literature was learning disabled students. McKay et al., (1995) found that learning disabled students often had to prove that they had a disability because of the disagreement between 'experts' regarding what constitutes a learning disability (McKay et al. 1995). This conflict has unfortunately become linked to learning disability and has resulted in scepticism regarding the existence of the disability (McKay et al. 1995). The scepticism combined with the invisibility of learning disability

means that learning disabled students are especially nervous about attending tertiary education. Learning disabled students in McKay et al.'s (1995) study stressed that adequate support needed to be available at TEIs and students needed to receive reassurances of its availability as early as the school level. This was consistent with a finding from a study by Davis (1982) who carried out research on the New start program at Auckland University specifically for people with disabilities studying at a Tertiary Education Institution for the first time. All of the nine participants reported that they benefited from the knowledge that support was available at the University when they attended full time.

Disabled Maori students

The under representation of Maori students with disabilities could be related to the shortage of Maori researchers (McKay et al., 1995). Researchers and TEIs often provide a fixed definition of disability. These can often be different from the Maori definition of disability and thus can cause students to not be involved in the research or to feel excluded at TEIs (ibid). Maori students with disabilities can lose out on resources that are available at TEIs simply because they are not seen as eligible and/or they continue to be under-represented in research (ibid).

Psychologically and psychiatrically disabled students

Kirkland (1990) found that students with psychological and psychiatric disability were under-represented. Kirkland (1990) cited evidence from a study carried out by Mein (1985) concerning the provision of mental health services for the University of Otago and allied institutions which indicated that the incidence of psychological and psychiatric disability was much higher than suggested in her study. Although Kirkland (1990) acknowledged that "For obvious reasons, most

students are reluctant to identify with psychological or psychiatric disability" (p.25). Thus, due to fear of discrimination, students with psychiatric or psychological disabilities often remain anonymous.

Intellectually disabled students

A group of students whose voice was virtually absent in the literature was students with intellectual disabilities. McKay et al. (1995) reported that, students with disabilities were traditionally under-represented in Universities and Teachers Colleges and more commonly attend Polytechnics. They recommended that TEIs should consider ways in which courses could be made available to students with intellectual disabilities. A study by Cretney & Reid (1996) supports the idea that students with intellectual disabilities should have access to courses at TEIs. They aimed to find out why students enrolled in a variety of courses at Nelson Polytechnic came to polytechnic and what they wanted to learn. They concluded that the participants take part in tertiary education for similar reasons as other students.

Summary of the Literature

The use of qualitative and emancipatory research methods which emphasise the reporting of the reality of students with disabilities experiences has been highlighted in previous studies. The usefulness of quantitative information is also indicated by the number of studies which combined quantitative and qualitative methods. As McKay et al. (1995) stated, "Quantitative information can be important for identifying, for example, how representative a tertiary setting is compared with the general population..." (p.8).

As well as emphasising the importance of undertaking qualitative and quantitative research, previous studies also highlight the importance of students with disabilities being involved at all stages of the research process. Thus, the use of surveys, which did not provide evidence that students with disabilities were involved in their construction, some of which were developed overseas, may not be relevant for the experiences of disabled students in New Zealand.

All of the studies identified that students with disabilities were under-represented in tertiary education. In the majority of the research this formed the rationale for the studies. Most of the studies put forward recommendations regarding how the barriers confronting students with disabilities could be addressed. However, few studies, except for a study by Shimman (1996) regarding the use of Individual Educational Plans (IEPs) in polytechnics, and another by Davis (1982) about the New Start program for people with physical disabilities at Auckland University, mentioned how their research findings could impact on the future retention of students with disabilities. Thus, there is a need for future research to investigate the factors contributing to the retention of disabled students at TEIs.

There were many common findings and recommendations in the literature regarding how barriers confronting students with disabilities could be removed, however, research results that emerged 15 years ago were still being reiterated in 1995.

Although TEIs appear to have been slow to change and adopt previous studies' recommendations that is not a valid reason to discontinue research on identifying barriers confronting disabled students at TEIs and formulating recommendations to remove these barriers. The next section outlines this study and why it has been undertaken.

This Research

As early as 1982, Alexander & Bridgeman suggested, "that institutions formally and actively seek feedback on disabled students' views on provisions made and needs they may have" (p.63). Most of the studies since then have highlighted the need for further research with disabled students in New Zealand.

McKay et al. (1995) stressed that the results of their research are not directly generalizable to another context. They state that

> Our data is not a prescription for action that once implemented will cure a problem. Rather, this kind of research should be part of an ongoing development in which institutions should attend to what is learned in settings similar to theirs, but in addition they should listen to their own constituent members, analyse and understand their experiences and then act on policy and practice. (McKay et al., p.8)

This is consistent with the notion of community as described by Booth (1995). He highlights that notions of inclusion or exclusion vary between communities. Thus we cannot presume that the experiences of students with disabilities at specific TEIs necessarily transfer to other TEIs. Research is necessary at each Tertiary Educational Institution.

None of the previously reviewed research has been specifically conducted on the barriers at the University of Canterbury. It is possible that the experiences of students at this University differ from the experiences of students at other Universities. It is also important that the views of the disabled students are heard. The extent of the positive change to be made by the University as a result of the research may be limited due to the inertia apparently displayed by TEIs in the past.

However, as will be shown later in this study at least some positive tangible change has resulted from this research with the establishment of a full-time Inclusive Education Co-ordinator position at the University. This suggests that perhaps the environment is starting to change and that research such as this study will have increasingly practical application at each Tertiary Educational Institution.

Consistent with Olivers' (1992) recommendation that disability research needs to reflect the lived reality of the participants, this research adopts a qualitative and quantitative method. The qualitative aspect is based on the five principles put forward by Bogdan and Biklen (1992) as outlined earlier in this chapter.

Previous qualitative research, such as the often cited, famous study by Egderton (1993), has not always succeeded in ensuring that the voice of people with disabilities is the primary focus. In fact, in Egderton's work the view of the institution was privileged. Therefore this research employs qualitative methods which involve students with disabilities in different stages of the research process, "attention is thus given to understanding and describing the processes by which people make sense of their lives in given settings-what is significant in their lives, their rules and interpretive procedures" (Barton, 1988, p.87).

Accordingly the questions addressed in this research project are as follows:

* What are students with disabilities' experiences of the academic and personal support services at the University of Canterbury?

* If students suggest changes have to be made to ensure their needs are better met, what are these changes?

Chapter Two
METHOD

In this chapter the procedural details of the present research project, that investigated the experiences of students with disabilities at the University of Canterbury, are outlined. The research design of the project is detailed at the outset. This is followed by a description of the setting and the participants. An account of the procedure constitutes descriptions of the data collection and the data analysis methods.

Design

Aims and Assumptions

This study involved a combination of qualitative (meetings, interviews) and quantitative research methods (postal questionnaire) to gain an account of the experiences of students with disabilities at the University of Canterbury, and the changes students wanted to see implemented so that their needs are better met. Consistent with the recommendations in the literature (Hurst, 1996; Oliver 1992; Zarb, 1992) the focus of this research was on the actual experiences of students with disabilities at the University.

This design of this research was based on the ideas put forward by Clough and Barton (1995) that critical reflection of the relationship between the researcher and the way that the research is carried out is essential. It was recognised that, "research is not a value neutral activity" (Barton, 1988, p.91), rather, it is a product of the assumptions, paradigms and theories that the researcher has.

Therefore, a self critical approach achieved through writing analytic memos about the research process was followed (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). Accordingly, the questions put forward by Clough and Barton (1995) such as, "What assumptions do I have about SEN [special educational needs]/disability which are inevitably present in the way I conceive of the study?" (p.3) and "Why and how did these assumptions, questions and circumstances suggest or require the particular methods which I chose?" (p.3), were kept in mind during the course of the research project and reflected on in analytic memos. This approach was also consistent with a suggestion by Barton (1988) that "Researchers are now being encouraged to offer first person accounts in an attempt to demystify the method..."(p.87). These thoughts are condensed and presented here.

It is hoped that this research will go some way towards meeting the objectives of the emancipatory research model of reciprocity, gain and empowerment put forward by Oliver (1992). The involvement of students with disabilities during the research process was an attempt to achieve reciprocity. The students with disabilities voiced their experiences and concerns with the knowledge that these concerns would be presented to the management at the University of Canterbury in an attempt to achieve worthwhile changes. I hoped that the management would implement some of the recommended changes and that this would result in gain and subsequently more empowerment for the students with disabilities.

Formulating the Research

This, my first disability research project, is the result of a general interest I have in disability issues which has become an important part of my life. My initial interest in this area stemmed both from having several close friends with disabilities and from examining disability issues through several under graduate University courses. In 1997, this interest

was fostered further when I undertook a postgraduate course at the University of Otago which involved analysing the inter-relationship between community and disability. As a result, I developed an understanding of the shared assumptions, theories and paradigms that the research community bring to their work and the implications this has on research involving people with disabilities, for example, the method that is used; the participants in the research and people with disabilities in the wider context.

I also gained an understanding of the social models of disability. Although I recognised that not everything can be explained totally by social factors, I rejected the way in which the medical model had shaped and dominated peoples' ideas about disability, and favoured the social construction and social creation theories, which highlighted the degree of influence that social factors have on the experiences of people with disabilities. Thus, my research was formulated on the assumption that although disability is a complex issue, social models of disability appeared to be the most constructive way of undertaking research in this area.

The opportunity to undertake research at the University of Canterbury in 1997, was unplanned, but when it arose, the decision to focus on disability issues was favoured by me. Initially I had ambitious plans to interview many parents on their experiences with their disabled child/ren, but these plans were quickly relinquished when I took into consideration time constraints and access constraints.

Being a University student and having friends with disabilities at the same University who had shared many of their experiences with me, combined with my realisation that access would be the first major hurdle in any study that I undertook, were the factors that contributed to my

decision to focus my research on an investigation of the experiences of students with disabilities at the University of Canterbury. Also, as I identified in Chapter One, no such detailed research has been undertaken at the University.

After reading so much of the importance of research being carried out by people with disabilities, one of the first dilemmas that confronted me was how as a non disabled student and researcher I could carry out this project. I was reassured at this time by a quote from Oliver (1992), "I am not convinced that it is necessary to have an impairment to produce good quality research within the emancipatory model" (p.121).

The design of the research was shaped by my concern to ensure that the reality of the experiences of students with disabilities' was captured. Another important consideration was my wish to reach and hear about the experiences of as many students as possible whilst, at the same time keeping within the time and financial constraints of my study. These dilemmas involved choosing between reaching large numbers of students with disabilities which, due to time constraints would involve quantitative research, or reaching a smaller number of students and carrying out effective qualitative research.

After considering which path to take and reading widely on disability issues and specific studies involving tertiary students with disabilities, I learnt that a common method adopted by researchers involved combining survey (quantitative method) and interviews (qualitative method) (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). Miles and Huberman (1984) commented that a great deal of research involves a "blending" of different research perspectives (e.g. quantitative and qualitative) and that virtually no qualitative research is "fully consonant with the epistemological stance underlying the approach" (p.20).

Initially, I planned to survey all students who self identified on the pre-enrolment form as disabled, and then to supplement this information by interviewing, observing and obtaining written personal accounts from a small number of students who were willing to participate. I would be able to develop the questionnaire myself, post it out and collect the data in a short period of time. After several weeks reasoning overtook simplicity. If, as I claimed, I valued the perspectives of students with disabilities, how could I develop a questionnaire with items which would be answered by students with disabilities? That is, how could I claim that my experiences had any similarity or relevance to the experiences of students with disabilities?

The need to be flexible and for the research design to evolve when carrying out qualitative research is well documented in the qualitative research literature (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Eisner, 1991). I began to gain an understanding of this. As Ely, Anzul, Friedman, Garner and McCormack Steinmetz (1991) stated,

> Qualitative researchers accept in increasingly whole-hearted ways that they themselves create the boundaries of their research and that these evolve in response to what they learn along the way. They delight in the fact that the boundaries of their research plan are begun but not ended before they commence study. Concomitantly, these researchers depend on their own flexibility and humour in accepting that things are not as they seemed when they were planned - even yesterday - and that change may be our only constant. (p.102)

With the realisation that it was not wrong or problematic to change my initial plan, I thought about how I could incorporate the views of students with disabilities in all stages of the research process, whilst

still hearing about the experiences of as many students with disabilities experiences as possible. It then seemed obvious that I could interview, observe and gain written accounts from a relatively small number of students with disabilities, compile a questionnaire based on this information and send this to all disabled students at the University of Canterbury. Ely et al. (1991) report that this is not uncommon, "...many people begin to learn about qualitative research experience a flash of understanding, a feeling of rightness" (Ely et al. 1991, p.103). Also, as I later learnt from Bogdan and Biklen (1992), "It is common for example in designing questionnaires to do open ended interviews first" (p.42).

My aim of carrying out qualitative research was to present a descriptive account of the everyday experiences of students with disabilities and what changes they would like to see in the environment at the University of Canterbury in order to gain positive change. In analysing and presenting the results I aimed to focus on the actual experiences of students with disabilities and to ensure that their voices were represented accurately.

Setting and Participants

Setting

This research project was carried out at the University of Canterbury over a twelve month period. The University of Canterbury is situated in the city of Christchurch in the South Island of New Zealand. Christchurch is the largest city in the South Island and the second largest city in New Zealand. The University covers 76 hectares on a site in the suburb of Ilam. Enrolment numbers have progressively grown to reach the latest 1997 total of 11, 600 (J. Carson, personal communication, February

9, 1997). At the time that this research project was undertaken, the number of students who identified as disabled was two hundred and ninety five, comprising 2.5% of the total student population.

Participants

Staff at Canterbury and Lincoln University

In order to gain an understanding of the available support services for students with disabilities and compare these with students' accounts, I had informal meetings with four staff members at the University of Canterbury who had direct involvement with disabled students on campus and thus would be knowledgeable about the support available for them. The staff members interviewed were: the Overseas Admissions Officer in the Registry, who is also the initial contact person for students with disabilities and who is responsible for providing them with information and support; the Equal Employment Opportunities Co-ordinator; the Examination Co-ordinator, who also has the responsibility of arranging special examination provisions; and the Director of the Student Health Centre who administers the students with disabilities support fund.

I also met with the Inclusive Education Officer at Lincoln University whose role is to support disabled students. Lincoln has a reputation for having an excellent level of support for students with disabilities. The purpose of this meeting was to compare what support services are offered at Lincoln with those offered at Canterbury.

Students with Disabilities

Five disabled students, two males and three females, took part in individual interviews. Although the students had the choice of providing written accounts, being involved in observations, or being interviewed, all

students with disabilities chose to take part in interviews. One female interviewee was Maori and one student was in his final undergraduate year, the remaining being pakeha and post graduate students. One student was emotionally disabled; two were hearing impaired; one was physically disabled and one had a learning disability, thus representing a range of disabilities.

All of the 295 students who had self identified on the pre-enrolment form were sent questionnaires (See Appendix A). The original sample of 295 students was reduced to 283 because six students did not receive the questionnaire (as their questionnaires were returned marked that they had shifted and I had no way of ascertaining their correct address) and six students no longer identified as disabled. A profile of the questionnaire sample is provided in the next chapter.

Procedure

Data Collection

Meetings with Staff

Staff members at the University of Canterbury and at Lincoln University were contacted by phone or approached in person. They were informed that I was conducting research on provisions for students with disabilities at the University of Canterbury, and that I would like to talk with them about this. All staff agreed to meet with me individually.

Meetings were held in their offices. The duration of meetings varied between 15 minutes and an hour and a half. Staff were asked general questions, such as, what provisions did they know to be available for students with disabilities. They were also asked more specific questions

relevant to their respective positions. For example, the Examinations Supervisor was asked, 'if I was a student with a disability, what procedures would I have to go through to have extra time for an exam?'

Field notes about staff meetings were written up immediately after each meeting. These were assumed to be accurate records and not returned to the staff members for verification. Informed consent was not gained from staff members because it was not decided until later in the research that this information would be included in the final report.

The meetings were held over a period of four months (early February - early May 1997).

Instrument Development: Interviews with Students

After the background information on support services for disabled students was gained from staff, students with disabilities were interviewed. In order to identify the key issues faced by disabled students, so as to incorporate these into a questionnaire, I had interviewed five students with disabilities from the University of Canterbury.

Interviewees were recruited in one of the three ways described below:

1) Students with Disabilities Society on campus: The Society is comprised of a group of students who support students with disabilities on campus. I attended a Students with Disabilities Society meeting early in the academic year (11 April 1997) and outlined to the group the aims of the research, and ways in which participants would be involved (See Appendix B). I requested participants to contact me if they were

interested in participating . As a result of this meeting, two students volunteered to take part.

2) Personal contacts: I knew one student personally so asked him if he would take part, he did.

3) Word of mouth: Two participants heard about the research through word of mouth and volunteered to take part.

After contacting the prospective interviewees by phone, I outlined from the information form what the research involved (See Appendix C). It was stressed that the main purpose of the research was to bring about positive change for students with disabilities on campus. Mutually convenient times to meet were arranged to talk about the aims of the research and what their participation would involve. I told prospective interviewees that at the meeting they could read the information form which outlined the aims of the research. If, after reading the information form they still wanted to be involved, they would have an informal chat with me about being a student with a disability. Before I met with the prospective interviewees, I asked them to think about their experiences as a student with a disability and how these might differ from those of non-disabled students.

At each meeting I gave the prospective interviewees an information form and a consent form (See Appendix D). They were asked to read the information form and invited to ask any questions. They were asked if they would like to be involved in the research and to sign the consent forms if they did. The consent forms were returned to me for my record and the information form was retained by the participants so that they could contact me if necessary. All five students who initially expressed

interest in the research still wanted to take part after they had read the information form.

Three of the interviews were carried out in a meeting room or classroom at the Education Department at the University of Canterbury, one at the participants' home and another at the workplace of the participant concerned.

At the beginning of the interviews, students were asked to reflect on how their experiences might differ from those of the non-disabled students at the University. They were asked what they thought of the academic and personal support services at the University, and whether they would like to make changes to any of these. If necessary, I asked the interviewees whether issues that previous students had raised were a concern for them. I kept a checklist of the issues as they were raised. A checklist was used rather than specific questions, as the purpose of the interviews was to gain an idea of the issues facing students with disabilities without suggesting that specific answers were required. Consistent with the recommendation by Borg (1981) that interviewers should have counselling skills, I had undertaken a post graduate course on guidance and counselling so I was able to use counselling skills, such as summary and reflection, in an effort to minimise the influence that I, as a researcher, might have on the participants.

The interviews were held over a period of 2 months (13 May 1997-7 July 1997).

Initially the interviews were not taped, but after three interviews I had received feedback on the accuracy of the field notes from two of the interviewees. For example, a student who was emotionally disabled felt that although I had done a thorough job recalling the interview, it was not

as detailed or specific as what it would have been if I had taped it. I decided to tape the remaining interviews and transcribe these.

The field notes and transcripts were returned to the students for any changes or omissions that they wanted to make. The field notes were altered by the interviewees largely to descriptive words to phrases. For example, one participant changed "feelings" to "complex psychological issues". None of the transcripts were altered.

During the period that the interviews were carried out, I wrote analytic memos to myself regarding the themes that seemed to be emerging from the interview transcripts and the field notes. I reflected on my biases and assumptions which were apparent from the interviews and explored how I could address these.

After the interviews, I read the field notes and transcripts several times, so that I could get closer to the data and identify the issues facing students with disabilities (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). I broke up the transcripts and field notes into units. Units consisted of paragraphs or sentences of speech which indicated a change in topic or theme (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). As I pored over the data I identified themes which were common to all or a number of the participants.

Lists of themes were developed and used as codes so that all of the units of data could be accounted for under one or more of the these. 37 coding categories in total were used (See Appendix E). Each unit of data was assigned one or more of the codes. The text was then sorted according to the "Cut-Up and-Put in Folders" Approach recommended by Bogdan and Biklen (1992, p.177). That is, field notes were then cut into the marked units and put into folders which represented each of the codes.

Units of data which came under more than one code were photocopied so that they could be placed in more than one folder.

The units of data were methodically examined starting with the biggest folder to determine whether they were in the right pile or whether they could fall under another code too. Beginning with the biggest one, these folders of data were re-examined. Questions on the experiences of students with disabilities were then derived from the data to develop a questionnaire.

The questionnaire consisted of seven parts:

-pre-enrolment/enrolment

-physical environment

-provision of services

-staff

-assessment

-general issues

-personal details

All of these areas, except the personal details section, were included in the questionnaire assuming these to be representative of the types of issues that students with disabilities experienced at the University of Canterbury. Personal details of students who were surveyed were gathered in order to develop a profile of the students with disabilities and relate this to the research findings. For example, if the survey results revealed that tactile signage around campus was commonly desired, this could be better understood if the profile indicated that the majority of respondents were visually impaired.

The questionnaire involved a combination of open and closed questions. The majority of questions required descriptive responses.

Although this did make analysis more difficult it allowed me to represent the students with disabilities viewpoint instead of reflecting my interests or viewpoints.

Three students with disabilities, all of whom took part in the interviews, helped me pilot test the questionnaire. They were asked to take the questionnaire home for a week, fill it out and suggest recommendations to make the questionnaire more relevant. All recommendations put forward were adopted. These students were told that their responses from the pilot test would not be included in the survey, so if they wanted to take part, they would have to complete and return the survey to me when they received it in the mail.

Instrument Application

The questionnaire accompanied by a cover letter (See Appendix F) and a stamped addressed envelope was sent out to all students self identified as having a disability at pre-enrolment, together with those who approached or were referred to the Overseas Admissions Officer. Due to the Privacy Act 1993 I could not see the students' addresses, so the questionnaires were given to the Overseas Admissions Officer and he arranged the posting out to the students. Participants were given three and a half weeks to return the questionnaire. As some questionnaires were still received after this date, it was not until 5 weeks after questionnaires were sent out that a letter was sent out to all students thanking students who had already taken part and reminding other students they could still be involved.

The survey was carried out over a period of 2 months (20 August 1997-20 October 1997).

Data Analysis

Participants who responded to the questionnaire were assigned a number in order to relate the hard copy of the questionnaire to what was kept on computer. Because the questionnaire required mostly descriptive responses, a system of analysing the information had to be devised.

The questionnaires were analysed according to the data analysis methods recommended by Bogdan and Biklen (1992, p.166). The responses for each question were examined for commonalties, topics the data covered, and themes which encompassed all, some or one of the responses (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992, p.166). Coding categories for each question which encompassed all of the questionnaire responses were devised. Codes were collapsed and combined many times to ensure the least number of codes were used, so that data analysis was simplified. Abbreviations of each code were developed to reduce the amount of writing and work. After this, each response on each questionnaire was assigned the relevant code. For example, a student's comment that "I can never find a disabled car park before my morning lectures" would be coded according to the category 'Not enough disabled car parks' which was abbreviated 'NEDC'. As it was sometimes difficult to determine which responses fell under which code, the coding categories were refined over the coding process and definitions of codes were developed. A data base program (File Maker Pro) was then set up which summarised each student's responses to the questionnaire. The database was used to recall how many participants made a specific response to a specific question and who these participants were. I could then refer back to the actual questionnaires to see what the specific comments made by the participants were. The trends that emerged from the database are presented in the results Chapters Four and Five.

Questionnaire Coding Reliability

In order to determine the reliability of the coding categories, five questionnaires were selected randomly and photocopied without the personal details and the codes, to be coded by another student. A female postgraduate student with a disability was given verbal instructions to code the questionnaires according to the code which she thought best summarised the questionnaire response. She was also given a copy of the definitions of the coding categories used by me for the coding.

Reliability was calculated by calculating the coded items in each questionnaire I had coded which corresponded with the coded items in each questionnaire that the postgraduate student had coded. It was initially considered that there was total reliability between the two coders, that is each questionnaire was initially considered to have 20% reliability. Therefore 54 separate items in each questionnaire meant that 0.37% was deducted from the total 20% for each item in each questionnaire that was coded inconsistently between myself and the postgraduate student. Reliability of 74% was achieved.

Ethical Considerations

The procedure used to conduct this research was reviewed and approved by the University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee (See Appendix G). Written consent was obtained for all disabled students involved in this project using a consent from which outlined their rights such as withdrawal from the project at any time and access to a summary of the research findings. The anonymity of the interview participants was protected by the use of pseudonyms in the transcripts and the field notes. The anonymity of the questionnaire participants was protected by

entering their responses in coded form onto a database which precluded identification.

Chapter Summary

The methodological procedures employed in this study were outlined in this chapter. The design of the study was detailed from prior to the setting of the research questions to the data collection stage. A description of the research participants and setting was followed by an outline of the research procedure which comprised data collection and data analysis.

In the next two Chapters the results of this research are presented. Chapter Four outlines the results pertaining to the first research question as stated at the end of the introduction. Chapter Five presents the results relevant to the second research question.

Chapter Three
CONTEXT: THE UNIVERSITY OF CANTERBURY

This chapter reports on information gathered during meetings with staff responsible for supporting students with disabilities and information derived from published material on provisions for students with disabilities at the University of Canterbury. Thus, this is a summary of how the University describes itself, and what resources staff and published materials claim are available for students with disabilities studying at the University of Canterbury. After the context is described, a profile of the questionnaire respondents is presented. This information can be related to the experiences of students with disabilities and their suggestions for change as outlined in Chapters Four and Five.

University Policies

The University is bound by legislation pertaining to students with disabilities under the Human Rights Act 1993 the Education Act 1989 and its subsequent amendments 1990 and 1995. However, as I illustrated in Chapter One, TEIs are afforded considerable flexibility as to how these Acts are interpreted and how vigorously they are applied.

The clause pertaining to equal educational opportunity in the University of Canterbury Charter currently states that "...no person qualified to be a student is denied educational opportunities, or in any way discriminated against, on the basis of ...*physical* [italics added] or economic condition..."(University of Canterbury, 1997, p.2). Thus, although it is implied that students with physical disabilities are protected from discrimination, no mention is made of students who are disabled in other ways. In 1998, it will be formally recognised that *all* students with

disabilities are under-represented when the charter is adjusted to read "no person qualified to be a student is denied educational opportunities, or in any way discriminated against on the basis of...disability..." (J. Carson, personal communication, 28 October, 1997).

Disabled students are also mentioned in section 5.11 of the University's statement of objectives where the assistance available for them is outlined. It states,

> At present the University provides assistance to students with disabilities in the following areas: Special conditions during exams; Students with disabilities handbook; Faculty contacts; limited financial assistance (Director of Student Health and Counselling); Library Assistance; Free Photocopying; Improvement of Physical Access and Provision of Parking. (University of Canterbury, 1997)

More specific reference to people with disabilities is contained in the Universities' equal opportunities policy. The aim of the policy is "...to enable people to pursue and develop their studies and careers without their opportunities being affected by matters which are considered irrelevant to the requirements of those studies and careers" (Clark, 1997, p.13). Disability is listed as an irrelevant matter.

The Identification of Students With Disabilities

During pre-enrolment students have the choice of identifying themselves as having a disability on the pre-enrolment form. Students can also indicate whether this is a permanent or temporary disability. Although this form is due to change in 1998, up until this time, students have not been asked to provide information on their specific type of

disability. Comments from staff considered this to be a reason for difficulty in ensuring that the needs of students with different kinds of disabilities are met (J. Allardyce, personal communication, April 18, 1997 & J. Carson, personal communication, March 4, 1997).

Services and Support for Disabled Students

Pre-enrolment/enrolment

Students can indicate at pre-enrolment that they require assistance during enrolment week. This assistance involves being supported through the enrolment process by volunteers. Contact details of students who identify as having a disability are kept on file by the Overseas Admissions Officer and students are sent information in the form of a booklet *Information for Students with Disabilities* (Carson, 1997). The booklet aims to "...help students with disabilities make the adjustment to studying at the University of Canterbury quickly and easily" (p.1). It outlines all of relevant information for students with disabilities including a map outlining access to buildings and other amenities, such as disabled persons toilets and disabled persons car parks information on enrolment assistance, library assistance, photocopying and the Student Health Service. In addition, students are also sent ongoing information about scholarships throughout the year.

Personnel

The University has a support system set up for students with disabilities. This comprises a staff member at the Registry, the Examinations Supervisor, the Student Health Centre Director and staff members in each faculty specifically responsible for assisting students with disabilities in any way that they can. The Overseas Admissions

Officer in the Registry has been the initial contact person for students with disabilities since 1993. This officer is responsible for advising students with disabilities of the available support provisions specific to their disability, and mailing such information to them. His job is primarily to accommodate the needs of overseas students so the support that he can offer to students with disabilities is limited because of this role (J. Carson, personal communication, March 4, 1997).

A proposal based on preliminary findings from this research for a full-time Inclusive Education Co-ordinator was presented to the University administration during the course of this research. It was hoped that the announcement of the new funding from the Ministry, combined with evidence from students with disabilities voicing the need for such a position would increase the strength of this proposal and ensure its success. This proved to be the case and as a result a full-time Inclusive Education Co-ordinator is due to be employed at the University of Canterbury early in 1998.

Financial Assistance

The University also has a specific budget for the support of disabled students (1997: $15,000) which is administered by the Student Health Service. The purpose of this fund is to ensure that each person receives adequate assistance for their situation (J. Allardyce, personal communication, April 18, 1997). Students can apply to this fund to have expenses paid for which would not be incurred without their disability. For example, a student with a hearing impairment who cannot use the phone may need to use the fax machine to contact people as a result of the University work he/she is doing. He/she could apply to the Student Health Service to have this paid.

Disabled students are informed through the *Information for Students with Disabilities* (Carson, 1997) handbook of the photocopying facilities that exist on campus and that if their disability is such that extra photocopying is required an application can be made for this to be paid by the Students with Disabilities Support fund administered through the Student Health Service.

Assessment

If a student's disability is such that they require alternative academic assessment there are two ways in which this can be arranged (J. Allardyce, personal communication, April 18, 1997). Firstly, if their disability is obvious or, they have a notice from their doctor regarding their disability they can bypass the Student Health Service and approach the Examination Co-ordinator who will make the appropriate arrangements. Secondly, if students do not have evidence of their disability or if this is not apparent they are required to have a formal assessment. By approaching the Student Health Service, students can then be referred to the appropriate agency to be assessed. The University pays for the assessment. If the assessment ascertains that the student is disabled, the appropriate alternative assessment is implemented.

There are a wide variety of alternative assessment provisions such as a student presenting an essay orally rather than in written form but the most commonly used alternative assessment involves examinations or tests (J. Cockle, personal communication, April 16, 1997). These include the students sitting the exam in a separate room; having a reader/writer and having extra examination and/or test time. The University is hesitant in allowing students to complete exams on a computer. This is for two reasons, firstly because of computers' capacity to store and process information and secondly because for some students with computer skills

using one in an exam could be seen as an unfair advantage. The aim of alternative assessment provisions for students with disabilities is to bring them up to par but to not give them an unfair advantage (J. Allardyce, personal communication, April 18, 1997).

Other Support

A Students with Disabilities Society exists on campus and aims to support students with disabilities and advocate on behalf of students regarding any problems/grievances they may have. The Society meets monthly to discuss issues pertaining to disabled students on campus.

The University has undertaken ongoing work in an attempt to make the University more accessible for disabled students (S. Clark, personal communication, February 1997). In 1990, a major report was compiled under the jurisdiction of the Equal Opportunities Co-ordinator by an independent architect (Rattray, 1990). The aim of the report was to provide an account of physical barriers that exist for students and staff who are disabled around the University campus (Rattray, 1990). Individual departments and the Buildings Registrar were then advised of the changes that were necessary in order to improve access (S. Clark, personal communication, February 1997). Since then a variety of improvements have been implemented such as new railings leading up the central library steps; extended railings on some of the bridges leading to and from car parks; the installation of ramps at various locations; automatic doors at various locations and the installation of disabled toilets in some buildings (S. Clark, personal communication, Feb. 1997).

Questionnaire Respondents: A Profile

Of the 285 students who were sent questionnaires, 70 (25%) responded. Some respondents wrote lengthy answers for all sections whilst others did not respond to some sections.

Faculty/Programme	% of Students
Arts	77
Science	13
Law	13
Engineering	4
Commerce	4
Music and Fine Arts	4
Social Work	3
Forestry	1
Journalism	0
Total	119%

Table 1. Distribution of respondents by faculty/programme[3].

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[3] Number of students does not add up to 100% as more than one faculty/programme was given by some students.

Respondents studied across the range of faculties and programmes at the University of Canterbury. As Table 1 shows students from eight of the nine different faculties and programs took part in this research. More respondents studied in the Arts faculty than in any other faculty or programme.
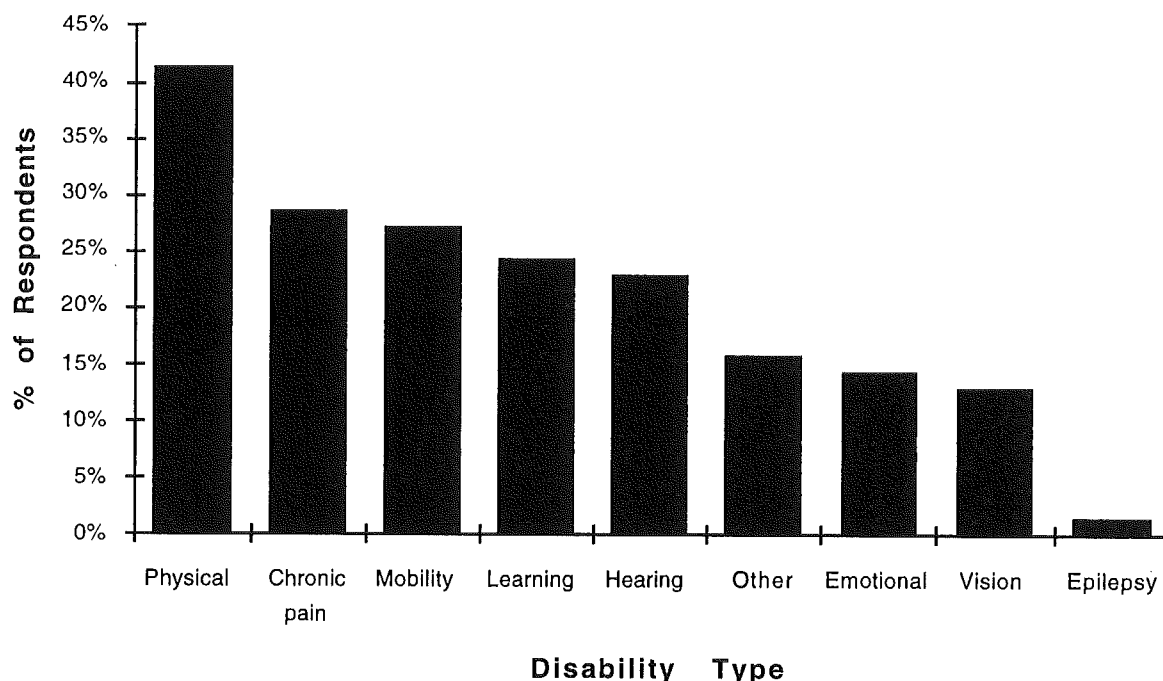

Figure 1. Distribution of respondents by disability.[4]

As Figure 1 illustrates, the students who participated in this study were disabled in a wide range of ways. The most commonly mentioned disability were physical disabilities. The questionnaire responses indicated that students with physical disabilities were also more likely than not to have other types of disabilities. Some students with physical disabilities commented that the effect of their physical disability was such that this resulted in them being disabled in other ways. For example, due to the effects of being physically disabled some students were also

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[4] Percentage of respondents according to different disability does not add up to 100% because some students reported more than one disability

disabled emotionally. Forty nine percent of students reported being disabled in one way, 29% reported being disabled in two ways and 23% students reported more than two disabilities. One student reported on the questionnaire that they had left University because they had found no support there. This participant's response was retained as part of the sample as it was thought that their response added valuable information about students' with disabilities experiences at the University of Canterbury.

As can be seen from Figure 1, 16% of students described their disability as 'other'. That is, they indicated that their disability could not be fully described by the pre-defined categories that were provided in the questionnaire. Of these students, some expanded on this by describing their disability. Descriptions of 'other' disabilities that students put forward were: head injury; psychiatric disability; major memory and concentration impairment; ME (Myalgicencephalo myelitis); OOS (Occupational Overuse Syndrome); respiratory; MS (Multiple Sclerosis); visual disturbances; focusing problems; sequencing; memory and bladder control.

Chapter Summary

This chapter established that the University and staff portrayed an active willingness to meet the needs of students with disabilities. This willingness was illustrated by the policies that the University has developed to protect the rights of students and the availability of services and support for students. Changes to policy and provisions for disabled students reflect the University's level of commitment to the providing for those students.

A profile of the questionnaire respondents revealed that the majority of respondents studied in the Arts faculty and were physically disabled. The next chapter outlines these students and the interviewees experiences of the academic and personal support services at the University of Canterbury. Chapter Five explores students suggestions for change to the academic and personal support services.

Chapter Four
STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES

In this chapter, the results that address the first research question, 'what are students' with disabilities experiences of academic and personal support systems at the University of Canterbury?', are presented. The results pertaining to the second research question are presented in Chapter Five.

Questionnaire responses form the focus of this Chapter and Chapter Five because the interviews with students were carried out largely in order to assist in the design of the questionnaire. Questionnaire results were drawn from an analysis of the results database (File Maker Pro). Some quotes from the original interviews are used when the interviewee provided a particularly powerful account of an important issue or theme which complements the information put forward by the questionnaire respondents. The interview results were drawn from the coded transcripts and field notes from the interviews. Unless stated as an interviewee response, all quotes in this chapter and Chapter Five are from questionnaire respondents.

The results are presented in five sections. The first section outlines strategies students used on campus. The second section outlines students' experiences of the resources on campus. This is followed by an overview of students' experiences with procedures. The fourth section presents an account of students' experiences with the University's staff. A summary of this chapter and an introduction to Chapter Five is provided in the final section.

Each section is introduced with a summary of the relevant main findings. The most common responses that students put forward are then described in more detail with examples of comments from students.

Percentages are used the majority of the time in this chapter and Chapter Five. These percentages are derived from the total number of questionnaire respondents in this study (70). When references are made to five or less students these are kept as raw figures. Names have not been used when students are quoted however, references to departments or rooms or areas of campus by students are used to identify where students report positive or negative experiences.

Strategies

The majority of students (67%) adopted strategies to deal with barriers that confronted them at University. Strategies that students adopted were wide ranging. The three most commonly used strategies were planning (26%), support (19%) and use of equipment (13%).

Planning

Several students mentioned the need to plan ahead. For example, one student commented, "I need to work hard at time management." Other examples of planning included three students who were hearing impaired who mentioned that it was necessary to arrive early to lectures or other appointments in order to find a place where they could best hear and lip-read.

Support

This included either external support (off the University campus) or internal support (on the University campus). The types of external support

that students mentioned were wide ranging and included support from individual family members, friend/s and/or spouse and groups. Comments about family support included "A very understanding partner" and "A wonderful support network and my husband and family." Other students mentioned specific support groups such as "Princess Margaret mental health department run an agoraphobic therapy group" or individuals: "Regular contact with external advocates". The internal support mainly involved groups students had received support from at University such as "Mature students association"; "study groups" and "Student Health counselling service."

Equipment

The most commonly used equipment students used as a means of support was a dictaphone or tape recorder to tape lectures or meetings with supervisors. An interview participant used a tape recorder he had applied for to the Student Health and Counselling Service. Several students (three) also commented that they use computers with spell checkers.

Resources

Lecture theatres and Tutorial rooms

When asked whether lecture rooms and tutorial rooms suited their specific needs, 93% of students replied. The majority of respondents (63%) stated that lecture rooms and tutorial rooms were suitable. Students who found lecture theatres and tutorial rooms not suitable were asked to comment on this. The most frequent comments were those relating to furnishings, acoustics and structural problems (lifts, doors and stairs).

Furnishings

Of the students who commented that lecture theatres and tutorial rooms were not suitable for their needs, the area mentioned most often was furnishings. Several students (three) with physical disabilities with wheelchairs commented that there were no desks for them to sit at in lectures. This resulted in students having to write their notes on their knees. Two of the students commented that they felt stupid sitting up in front of everyone in lecture theatres. A student with OOS commented on the design of the desks in lecture rooms "Some of the lecture theatres have narrow desks on an angle for students to write on. The narrow nature, especially but also the angle make it painful to write on."

Other students (five) commented that the lack of leg space and design of the chairs was poor. For example: "Though it would be difficult to change or improve, the seats in the theatres are greatly unsuitable to me and probably anyone else with a serious back problem. They force you to sit on an angle that places a lot of stress to both the back and legs."

Some students (three) mentioned that rooms, especially tutorial rooms, were cramped and overcrowded. Two respondents indicated that this made it difficult for wheelchair access.

Acoustics

Several students (four) mentioned specific areas where acoustics were especially bad; "tutorial rooms in history block"; "older lecture theatres have terrible acoustics and tend to be quite echoey" and "Sociology 241, 327." One student found that "Acoustically the use of microphones are a big help with audibility." An interview respondent found that the larger lecture theatres are especially difficult to hear in. Although students tried to get to lectures early in order to secure the best position to hear and lip-read, because of overcrowding, this was not

always possible. One student commented that "The seating arrangements make it difficult for me to find a position from where I can lip-read everyone in the room."

Structural Issues

Structural issues were defined as comments relating to structural problems, that students identified, such as stairs, doorways and doors. The most common statement regarding structural issues was that doors are too heavy for students with wheelchairs. Although one student commented that "Some doors around campus are particularly heavy e.g: law building, and doors to A1-A3 lecture theatre foyer from outside-now there are also automatic doors - a big improvement."

Buildings

Nearly half of the respondents (45%) commented that they had concerns regarding specific buildings on campus such as the Library, the Registry, the Student Health Centre and the Student Union. Twenty four percent of the comments related to physical access to buildings and 21% related to physical access inside buildings.

Physical Access to Buildings

Many students (21%) commented on the inaccessibility of the library. This included comments (three) on the difficulty of obtaining a swipe card or key for the lift door: "To get the key for the lift is a long and difficult task" and the fact that in order to access the library this meant that the person has to go out of his/her way: "All access should be available for those in wheelchairs or on scooters (mobility scooters) that does not require the student to go out of their way or require further time to get there."

The Registry was noted by four students as non user - friendly. Aspects that were mentioned were the heaviness of the doors; the steps at the main entrance and access was out of the way and as one student noted therefore "...not complying with the inclusion policy that the University should be adhering to."

An interviewee commented positively on the accessibility of his/her department but highlighted that this was because it was a separate unit and therefore easier to access than the majority of the campus.

Several students (three) referred to the problems experienced as a result of ramps being too steep. For example, one student pointed out that he/she "can't access the student union because both sides of the road are too steep."

The Law building was mentioned by a number of students (three). Concerns regarding heavy doors and back-door access dominated students' comments. For example, "Can't get into the law building from the main campus-this is a real pain when it's raining."

Although students recognised the attempts made by the University to cater for students with disabilities these were not always suitable: "Rails e.g. into the Library. The round metal ones up the middle are easy to grip. The side metal concrete ones cannot be gripped. The middle ones are often blocked by people sitting by them and I have to ask people to move - I hate having to ask for consideration."

A common theme that emerged from students' responses was how they often needed to ask others to make allowances and how they disliked having to do this. For instance, "It should be noted that I am a very private person and hate having to have special arrangements made for me. We have

to make a fuss to use alternative routes - I am a student first and disabled last."

Physical Access Inside Buildings

Physical access inside buildings was cited as a problem for many respondents. Again, the library was mentioned the most often. The most common problem was with doors.

As well as causing students difficulty outside buildings ramps were cited as problematic inside buildings. The ramps in the Commerce building were mentioned: "Commerce building - must go up steep ramps before one can access lecture rooms or building levels (via elevator)." Another student also described his/her experiences in the Commerce building, "I am absolutely lost and disoriented in this building - where are the toilets? How do I get out?"

Cafeterias

The majority of students (81%) did not have any concerns regarding the cafeterias on campus. In fact, many students made positive comments, such as, "Service provision is good and access is great" and "staff are great." The remaining 19% of students reported varying problems. The main issue raised by students was lack of space whilst other issues mentioned were queues and heavy doors or difficult entrance ways.

Lack of Space

Tables in the Student Union; Law and James Height cafes were reported as poorly laid out. As one student commented: "Poorly laid out tables and chairs make getting between tables difficult if not impossible." This lack of space meant that some students who were physically disabled were restricted in where they could sit. For instance, "Tables are too crowded in James Height, I have to sit in the front."

Restricted space at the checkout was also identified as a problem area when students tried to get tea and coffee at the cafeterias.

<u>Other Issues</u>

Several students (three) found that queues put them off going to the cafe. "It's hard to stand in line for ages." One student commented that counters are too high. Another student found the level of hygiene off-putting: "In library cafe - lack of hygiene - tables dirty, bins overflowing - the final straw on a bad day."

<center><u>Toilets</u></center>

A third of all respondents (33%) commented that they had concerns with the campus toilets. The majority (12%) of comments related to cleanliness. Access was also mentioned as problematic.

<u>Cleanliness</u>

The student union toilets were noted as especially dirty. Related to cleanliness was the use of disabled toilets for other purposes, as one interview participant noted: "they tend to use toilets as a storage for cleaning equipment which is not appropriate."

<u>Access</u>

A number of students (nine percent) referred to the heaviness of toilet doors. Other access issues raised by students were the lack of signage for toilets, inappropriate location, layout and the size of toilets, that is, "Far too small". One student commented, "I have not found a single toilet anywhere on campus that I have been able to get into with my wheelchair. This is a great problem."

<u>Parking</u>

As Figure 2 illustrates, 43% of students commented that there were not enough car parks. Many (20%) students acknowledged that non-disabled students were in the same position. Fewer students (12%) commented that there was a shortage of disabled car parks. A range of suggestions put forward by students regarding how the car parking problem could be addressed are outlined in the next chapter on students suggestions for change.
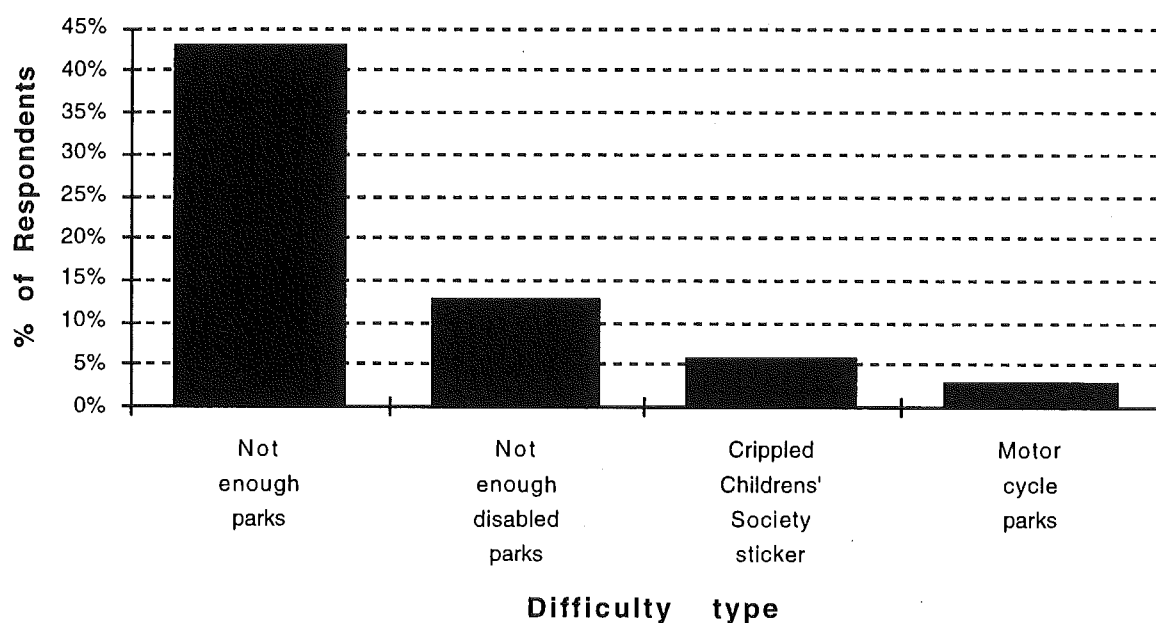

Figure 2. The percentage of students who have difficulties with parking and the types of difficulties that they have.

<u>Not Enough Car parks</u>

Most of the students who commented that there are not enough car parks stated that they are not physically disabled but they do experience a shortage, "For any student at peak times car parking is non-existent." Several students (three) stated that looking for a car park is an unnecessary stressor as one student stated, "...I do find it really tiring to

walk long distances or getting stressed trying to find car parks". One student commented that car parks are not policed frequently enough, whilst another student complained that renovation work was carried out during term time when this should have been done in the holidays.

Not Enough Disabled Car parks

Two students commented that disabled car parks were also not policed frequently enough which resulted in others illegally using car parks. Other students (three) reported that there is a shortage of disabled car parks because too many people have the sticker which entitles them to this. "Has anyone counted the number of Disability Parking cards - the reality of the Car Parks!!!." One respondent suggested that these are too easy to get and another car parking system needs to be implemented at the University specifically to address this problem. An interview respondent commented that some of the disabled car parks are unsuitable for parking, "You park your car in a disabled car park which is on an angle - such a high angle that you can't keep your wheelchair still when you're getting into it."

Frequency of Parking Problems

When asked, if they did experience a car park shortage, how frequently they experienced this, 14% of the respondents reported that this occurred between three to five times per week. The majority of students who reported experiencing a shortage of between one to two times per week, commented that this was only because they were studying part-time. Respondents reported that the most difficult time to find a car park was during morning lectures.

Photocopying

The majority of students (55%) did not know that if their disability was such that they required free photocopying they were eligible for this. Students commented that the questionnaire was the first time they were informed of this resource. Two students contacted the researcher and commented on this. The students who did know about the service were generally pleased with it however they did identify some problems.

No Knowledge Of Photocopying Service

Most students who prior to reading the questionnaire were not aware of the photocopying service made positive comments regarding this resource but many questioned why they were not advised about the availability of the service. For example, "I wish I had known about it sooner" and "I could benefit from this as I need to fill in gaps that I don't hear in lectures by extra reading, often requiring photocopying restricted loan materials. I don't know yet how to get this or if I qualify."

Problems With Service

Several students (three) mentioned that they were unable to get the full benefit from the photocopying service because they used other libraries and this service was only available at the main library. Although one student mentioned that the library staff were very helpful, other students (five) commented that the effectiveness of this service was influenced by how busy the library staff were, "Service is useful however it is often too much of a time demand on library staff." Two students referred to the quantity of photocopying that students were allowed and one suggested that a limit be placed on students that related to the number of course credits each student is enrolled in. An interview respondent commented on the fact that he/she had to attend the Student

Health Service to register for the photocopying service: "I could get photocopying but I would have to go through Student Health to do that."

One student highlighted that, although the photocopying service is beneficial for students with disabilities, this should not be used as the sole means of providing note taking accommodations for students with disabilities. He/she stated:

> Fine as one service BUT this should not be used to negate the
> need for student or trained note takers for Deaf/hearing
> impaired students . Encouraging these students to 'borrow notes'
> and use free photocopying is NOT reasonable accommodation.
> This creates a dependency relationship rather than client-
> provider.

Students with Disabilities Society

The majority of students (63%) were aware that there is a Students with Disabilities Society on campus. Of those students who had heard of the group, 27% had attended meetings. Of those students, who had heard of the group, but had not attended meetings, there seemed to be a general perception that the group is for students with obvious physical disabilities. Comments from students illustrate this, "My disability isn't very severe so I don't think it is very valuable to me" and "I have no obvious physical disability I'd have as much presence as a white ant amongst all the black ants." An interview respondent remarked that the group didn't have much of a central goal which meant that students who could benefit from the group did not attend.

Commitment to legal obligations

The majority of respondents (53%) think that the University of Canterbury meets its legal obligation of equal educational opportunity under the Human Rights Act 1993 and the Education Act 1989.

Does Meet Legal Obligations

This student's comment reflects the tone of many of the respondents in this category;

> I would have thought it impossible and only enrolled at Canterbury out of sheer bloody minded determination. I did not expect to succeed and the fact that I did is due to the wonderful attitude of the people at Canterbury University.

A number of students (nine percent) stated, in their instance, their needs were met but suggested this may not be the case for all students. For example, "They seem to meet such obligations in my view however other people might think differently." Two students wrote positive statements about alternative academic assessment procedures such as extra exam time. Several students (three) commented on the difficulty of catering for the needs of students who are disabled in a varied range of ways, for example, "Disabilities come in so many forms - it would be easy to miss providing for someone inadvertedly, or because of lack of information."

Does Not Meet Legal Obligations

Although the majority of students think the University does meet the legal requirements of equal educational opportunity a number of students (20%) disagree. Some students wrote short statements such as "it needs to try a bit harder" and "they don't." Other students explained how the University doesn't meet its obligations, "I don't think the

University judges each case on its merits." Two students mentioned user pays and questioned whether they were getting value for money.

A common theme that emerged from these students' responses was that more emphasis needs to be placed on the uniqueness of each disability. As one student stated: "What works for one disability and one person may not even work for another person with the same disability. So just keep listening and ask the disabled students."

Mixed Response

A group of students (11%) gave mixed responses when asked whether they thought that the University met its legal obligations, that is, they stated that in some ways the University does meet its legal obligations and in other ways it does not. In these replies the theme of provision for physical disabilities and lack of provision for less visible disabilities emerged. For example, "The University is responsive to those with physical disabilities but is not aware that it needs to be aware of psychiatric disability." Although another student noted that:

> I feel that I have experienced equal educational opportunity under the Human Rights Act (1993). So I guess they meet the legal requirements! I am aware that some parts of the University must still be really difficult for a person with mobility problems however.

Procedures

Pre-enrolment/Enrolment

Over half of respondents (57%) said that prior to pre-enrolment/enrolment they had sufficient knowledge of the support

available at the University of Canterbury. The remaining 43% of students said that they did not. A group of students (17%) thought that there was no support available for them at the University.

As Figure 3 illustrates, of those students who did know about the availability of support systems at pre-enrolment/enrolment the majority mentioned either resources such as equipment, information or support programs (e.g. the writing and study skills program - WASS) or specific personnel such as staff members in departments available to assist students with disabilities. Students who knew about support services mostly found out about these through 'official sources' such as published information or University employees, for example, a student health doctor.
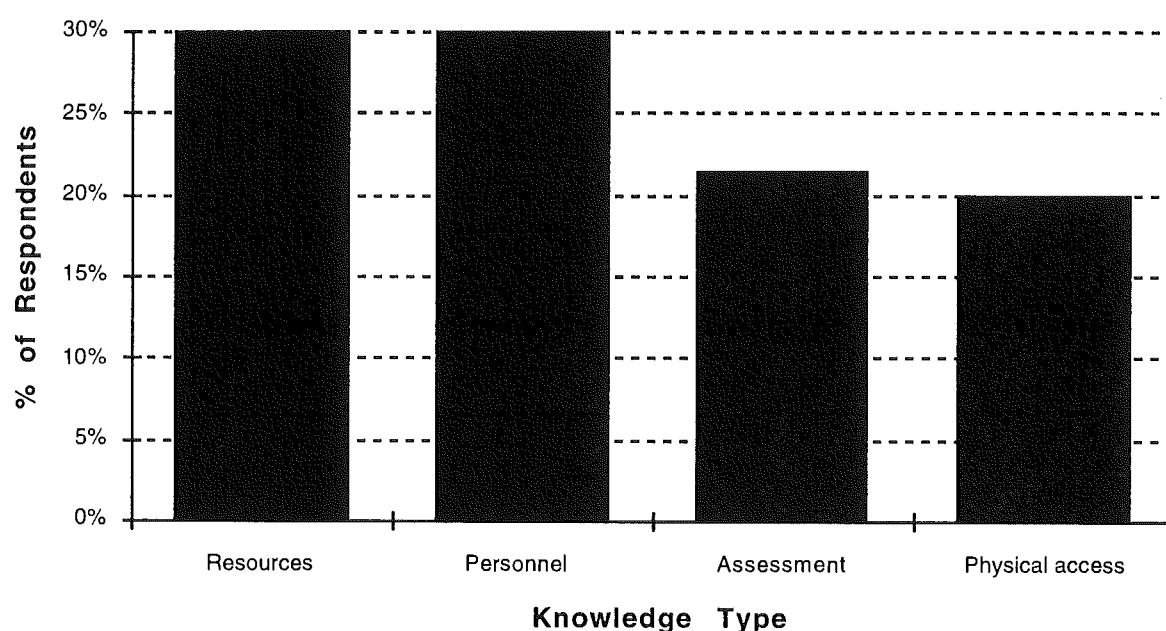

Figure 3. Percentage of students and the types of support they knew were available at pre-enrolment/enrolment.

Students suggestions regarding pre-enrolment/enrolment are outlined in Chapter Five.

Getting Assistance

When students were asked what way/s they can indicate they require assistance, other than through the current main means of pre-enrolment, there were two distinctly different sets of responses. Forty six percent of respondents suggested that although the University is required to have systems in place so that the needs of students with disabilities are met, it is the students' responsibility to ask for whatever assistance they may require. For example, "We ourselves have to make the decision to ask or not to ask." The minority of responses suggested that it was more the University's responsibility to ensure students were asked what their needs were and how it could ensure these were met.

Student's Responsibility

The most common suggestion put forward by students was for the student to approach lecturers, student health staff, heads of departments and library staff to advise them of his/her needs and how that person could support them. This student's comment was typical of many, "By informing the registry and the departments in which they are taking their course."

Although the majority of respondents suggested that it was each student's responsibility to inform the University of their needs, one student highlighted that students didn't always have the confidence to approach people and advise them of their needs. He/she commented that students can get assistance, "Through the main department they will study in. BUT they need encouragement to do so. Maybe they could be asked if they would like their departments informed on their disability and how they would appreciate being helped."

University's Responsibility

Of those students who suggested was the University's responsibility to ensure the needs of students with disabilities were met, the necessity for a central location and/or Co-ordinator specifically for students with disabilities was commonly mentioned (13%). The Liaison Officer at school was suggested as a possible avenue where prior to beginning at a tertiary educational institution students with disabilities could find out about what support was available.

Several students (five) suggested that staff at the University should make themselves available at the beginning of the year so students can outline what their needs are. The need for staff to be aware of different disabilities and the resources available on campus was emphasised by a number of respondents (five). Two students who enrolled later in the year highlighted that the system needs to cater for this eventuality. Some students (five) said that present enrolment procedures should be changed so students can supply staff with more detail about their disability and support can then be set up accordingly. Three respondents emphasised the diversity of disability and said that they did not want to be overtly identified as disabled. Two students commented that information needs to made available regardless of the type of disability. One student suggested that the University needs to "Make it clear that the box on the enrolment form is not just for people with physical disabilities." This was consistent with the idea expressed earlier that students with less visible disabilities are not catered for as well as those with visible disabilities. An interview respondent confirmed that this was his/her experience "...I mean people are very good usually in enrolment. I mean obviously people can see my disability and they are usually very good."

Assessment

Sixty two students (89%) commented on whether academic assessment systems adequately measure their skill level. The majority of students (63%) replied that current assessment systems are adequate.

Assessment is Adequate

Nine percent of respondents expanded on why they think assessment is adequate. Three students made reference to the extra exam time. For example, "The extra time in exams allows me to organise the structure of my essays, thus better reflect my knowledge."

Other students (three) made reference to staff attitudes, "I can still think the same - sometimes it takes a bit longer for me to assignments. Lecturers are always good about this." Another student was pleased with the attitude of the staff in the department he/she was currently studying in, but this had not always been the case, "The lecturers are very aware that my grades and performance could be affected by my disability. All that I am currently studying under are good but one lecturer at the beginning of the year was unhelpful."

Assessment not Adequate

Of those students who did not think that current assessment methods measure their skill level, there were a wide variety of responses. Examinations were mentioned by 13% of respondents. They were not considered an effective way of assessing, "exams don't measure intelligence they just make it easier for the marker. It's a medieval archaic system." Similarly an interview respondent remarked, "...tests I always did atrociously in because you know I can't, I'm not very good at rote learning and stuff like that and so tests were you know like...I never got high marks in any tests." However, a student with agoraphobia

highlighted that some forms of internal assessment were not always suitable either, "Oral assessment - group work - IMPOSSIBLE."

Three respondents commented that due to the nature of their respective disabilities, examination marks do not reflect their actual ability. As one student stated, "A problem in finals is that I can lose the ability to write simple words such as 'the' 'to' 'be' etc. or basic sentence structure. Basically written gibberish occurs. This doesn't happen in internal assessment." Examinations were also criticised because they can place too much emphasis on the importance of memory work, "Rote learning is something heavily relied on in assessment & this is something I have difficulty with. I still believe I have a sound grasp of legal principles & assessment which focused on correctly memorising statutes didn't manifest this."

Two physically disabled students who use a writer in exams commented that dictating essays is very difficult, as one student explained, "It's hard to write essays using a writer - you lose your train of thought. Don't know what the answer is though."

Alternative Assessment

A number of respondents (23%) had at some stage been assessed in an alternative way to non-disabled students. Six students had completed exams with extra time and/or with a writer. Four of these students thought this was a fair means of assessment and their comments reflected this, "The exam situation has been WONDERFUL for my confidence" whilst the other two students thought this was not a fair means of assessment. One student who had tried to get longer hours for examinations recounted her experience, "I did try to get longer hours for sitting exams-the whole process was awful. I felt like I was holding out a beggar bowl. Never did it again."

Five students had completed various forms of alternative assessment which included doing a research paper instead of exams or doing a take home test. Three of these students thought this was not a fair means of assessment for various reasons including, "because the writer is not sometimes a fast writer" whilst three thought this was fair because as one student commented: "It puts people with spelling and reading disorders on a level playing field - proves that you actually know the course as well and can tackle the issues surrounding the topic/course."

Six respondents had received extensions for assessment or impaired performance. All but one of these students considered that this was fair.

<u>Emergency Procedures</u>

When asked whether they were aware of the emergency procedures in the building which they spent the most time, the majority of students (64%) said that they were. The majority of students (85%) also thought that emergency procedures were sufficient to ensure their safety. Although the majority of students considered themselves safe in an emergency situation, most students (64%) put forward recommendations on how emergency evacuation systems could be improved. These are outlined in the next chapter on suggested improvements.

Attitudes of University Personnel

<u>Staff Attitude and Awareness</u>

As can be seen from Figure 4, the majority of students made positive comments about staff attitude towards and awareness of disabled students.
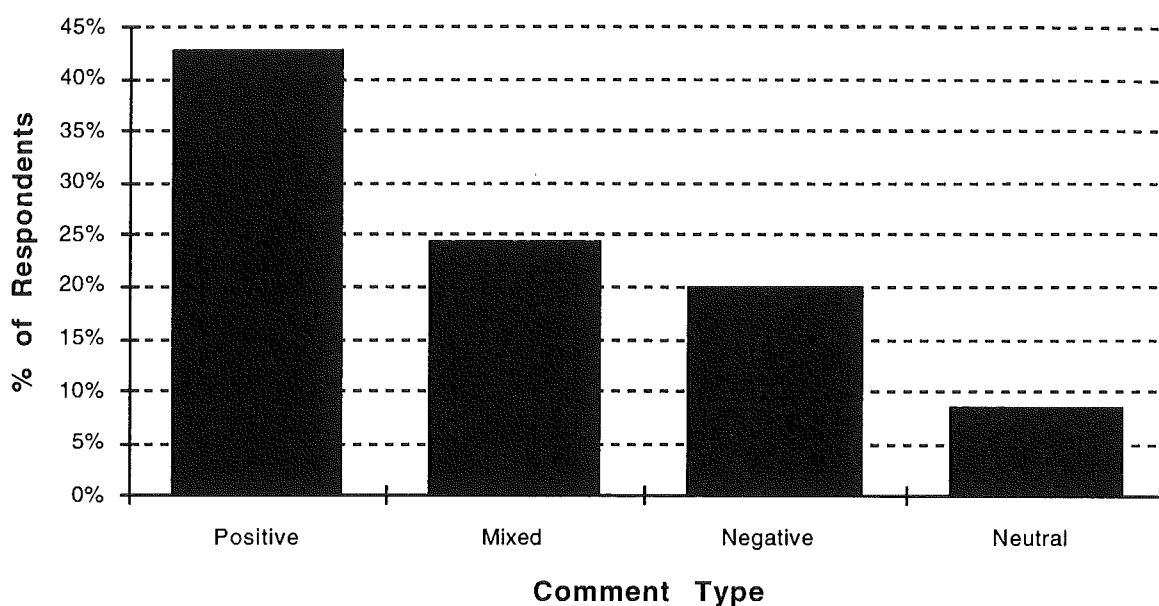
Figure 4. The percentage of students and the types of comments they made on staff attitude and awareness towards students with disabilities.

Positive Comments

Most of the positive comments about staff attitude and awareness were brief - simply stating that staff were "mostly good" or "very understanding." Several respondents mentioned areas or departments, such as, the Library, Languages and Linguistics, Education, Sociology, History and Geography, where staff were very good. Some students commented on the qualities of staff, for example, "Helpful and accommodating and caring and sincere" and another student commented "They are unfailingly understanding and helpful. I can't speak too highly of staff attitudes."

Mixed Comments

Twenty four percent of students who responded that, although sometimes the attitudes of staff are very favourable, this is not always the case were classified as 'mixed comments'. One student stated that, "Most staff are really good but I find some staff give the feeling that it is

your problem you fix it. I realise they probably don't mean it that way though." Similarly, another student commented, "Varied. Some sympathetic, some uncaring."

Several students with hearing impairments referred to the importance of staff using microphones, "Mostly quite supportive however, lecturers can sometimes forget their clip on microphones & the microphones on the podium are not adequate when the lecturer tends to pace about the room." An interview respondent thought that staff awareness improved at postgraduate level but suggested that this may be related to students being more confident at postgraduate level and therefore being more comfortable telling staff what their needs are. Some students (three) commented that students with visible disabilities are more often better catered for. "Some are helpful, but more towards those people with physical disabilities because it is more noticeable than a learning disability."

Negative Comments

Twenty percent of students made negative comments about staff attitudes. Several students mentioned specific areas such as the Registry or faculties ,such as Law, where they had experienced problems. One student commented that a staff member in the Law faculty had told him/her to, "Think of another profession - law really isn't for a person with a disability." Comments were made by several students (three) with dyslexia regarding staff reaction to their disability. For example,

> I find many associate dyslexia with stupidity and fail to be tolerant of it - if I raise my disability lecturers almost invariably tell me my problems are the sort of thing everyone faces and not an issue (as if they'd know! I'd love to have them walk in my skin).

Comparing the University of Canterbury to other TEIs

Just under a quarter of all respondents (24%) knew of support specifically available for students with disabilities at other TEIs. Of those that did all but one thought that the University of Canterbury did not compare well. The students who thought Canterbury was poor in comparison to the other TEIs mentioned a number of areas including enrolment, disability liaison officer, and financial support. The other TEIs mentioned because of their superior support provisions were: Otago University, Massey University, Christchurch Polytechnic and Victoria University.

Otago and Massey Universities

The enrolment process was mentioned as being unsatisfactory at Canterbury in comparison to Otago and Massey Universities. One student stated that "I find the enrolment practices less gruesome at both Otago and Massey. Is there any alternative to standing in line for ages? I find the wait quite a painful experience." Otago and Massey were also praised for having a heightened level of disability awareness and understanding, for example, "Otago has a good disability awareness" and "Massey are more accepting - directions to easy access very visible you don't have to ask."

Christchurch Polytechnic

The Christchurch Polytechnic was mentioned by three respondents, for example,

> Polytechnic provides trained note-takers and interpreters for its deaf and hearing impaired students. Polytechnic has a true advocate in their "tutor-special assistance" provider who provides students with encouragement and the maximum funds

she can access. In contrast Canterbury's liaison is an overseas admission officer who does not have time for his duties as liaison.

Another student when asked how well the University of Canterbury rated in relation to other TEIs commented, "Not very well. My younger brother at Ch-Ch Polytechnic is well catered for with ramps and close parking."

Victoria University

The support available at Victoria was considered better than what students experience at Canterbury. A student remarked "Well, Vic university does have a kind of peer/buddy support system: here at Canterbury, very much a sense of being left entirely on one's own - going beyond sense of responsibility for own varsity life."

One student spoke very strongly about his/her experiences at Canterbury

> Very poorly - the system is far too beaurecratic - I felt extremely hesitant in asking for help-other institution was very helpful - didn't make me feel bad - here it is like you are trying to pull 'wisdom teeth' from the university. It feels like "how dare you think you're entitled to extra time - are you dumb or something. I really felt dumb asking.

Chapter Summary

This Chapter outlined disabled students' experiences of the academic and personal support systems at the University of Canterbury. It was found that students adopted a wide range of strategies to cope with the barriers that faced them at the University. The majority of

respondents commented positively or commented that they had not experienced any problems with the resources on campus, such as lecture theatres and tutorial rooms, the procedures such as pre-enrolment/enrolment, and the attitudes of University personnel. Thus overall, students with disabilities reported positively on the academic and personal support services at the University.

Given this finding we would expect that students would have few suggestions for changes to the University of Canterbury environment. The next Chapter investigates whether this is the case.

Chapter Five
STUDENTS' SUGGESTIONS FOR CHANGE

In this chapter, I address the second research question, 'if students suggest changes have to be made to ensure their needs are better met, what are these changes?', are presented.

The results are presented in four sections. Firstly, suggestions for change that students made regarding resources such as lecture theatres and tutorial rooms, toilets and car parking are presented. This is followed by students' suggestions for change regarding procedures. Procedures include pre-enrolment and enrolment, assessment and emergency procedures. Thirdly, students' suggestions for how staff attitude and awareness could be improved are outlined. In the final section the results from this chapter are summarised and the Discussion and Conclusion Chapter is introduced.

Resources

Lecture theatres and tutorial rooms

When asked whether they would like to make any improvements to lecture theatres and tutorial rooms students put forward a wide range of suggested improvements. Figure 5 indicates the number and range of suggestions that students put forward. The three most common types of suggestions that students made and examples of their comments are presented here.
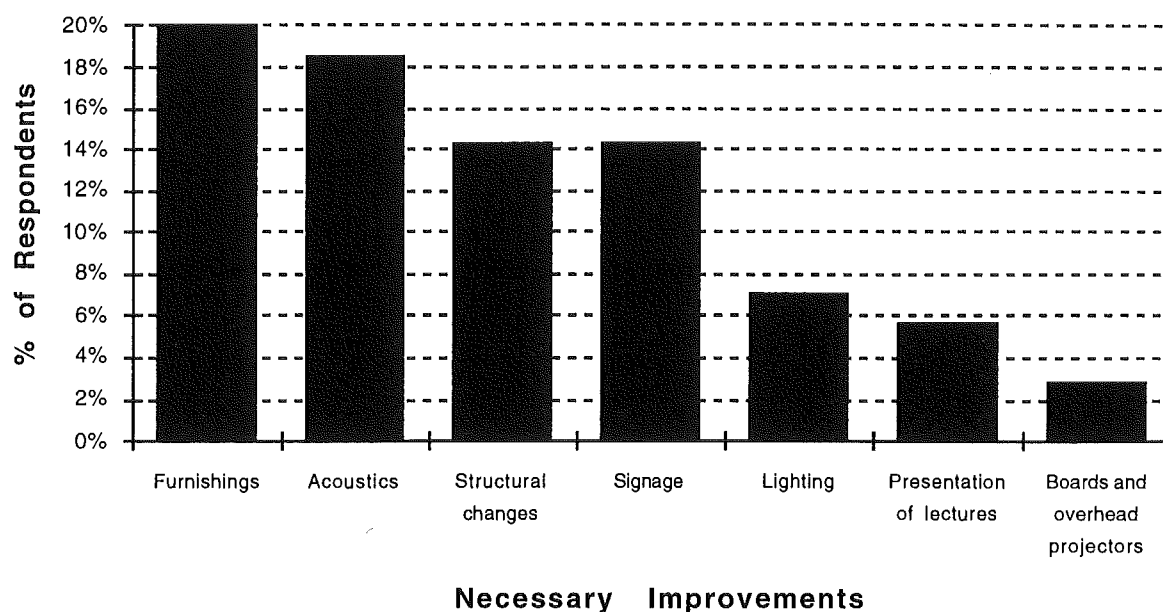
Figure 5. The percentage of students and the types of improvements they would like made to lecture theatres and tutorial rooms.

Furnishings

As Figure 5 shows, 20% of students suggested that changes need to be made to furnishings to ensure that their learning needs are fully met. Several students commented that desks should be wider and less angled than they are. For instance, "To cause as little aggravation to the RSI wrist problem one needs to have support for the elbow at a comfortable angle. The narrowness prevents the elbow from resting on the desk without being at an uncomfortable angle."

A number of students (four), put forward suggestions as to how the problem of students having to sit separately could be addressed. One student noted, "For others who have wheelchairs (I don't) I've noticed how difficult it is for them to move from the wheelchair to seats. Perhaps tables where they can roll in behind would help." Another student proposed, "Front row of desks should be a lot wider so can get wheelchair in-this could be for people with temporary disabilities too." A student

suggested that, students with disabilities would feel more comfortable if they were sitting with other students, "Maybe the seats could be taken from the front row so students in wheelchairs can sit with everyone else." Two students suggested ways in which chairs could be improved, for instance, "Bigger seats with more leg room in lecture theatres would be a huge improvement."

Acoustics

Another area which students indicated could be improved is acoustics. Students' comments mostly referred to the need for all lecturers to wear microphones all of the time. For instance, "In lecture theatres make the lecturers use microphones and show them how to use the light switches. And tell them not to use red or green pen on OHP's [overhead projectors]." Nine percent of students put forward suggestions to address the acoustics problem such as, "Care needed at design stages for acoustics" and "A microphone for student enquiries during lecture." However, another student highlighted that solutions to the problem were certainly not simple:

> I take music and in my lectures I am constantly taking my hearing aids out then putting them back in: when music is played it is absolutely painful so I take them out, then cannot hear what the lecturer is saying (put them in again). I'm open to suggestions - I don't know what can be done to rectify this.

Structural Changes

Figure 5 shows that 14% of students referred to structural changes which, if made, would ensure their needs were better met. Five of these comments related to either doors or doorways. One student suggested that the solution was, "automatic doors into lecture theatres." A student with a visual impairment highlighted that a problem with lifts could be

rectified if, "Lifts should say what floor they are at so I don't have to rely on asking people all the time, also it is hard if everyone gets out of the lift as I don't know what floor I am always left at." One student suggested that "Some steps could be better marked."

Improvements to University's physical environment

When asked whether there were any changes they would like to make to the University's physical environment the majority of students (61%) said that there were. As figure 6 shows, the majority of students want to make the University more physically accessible. The second most commonly mentioned area where students would like to make changes is to acoustics or noise levels.
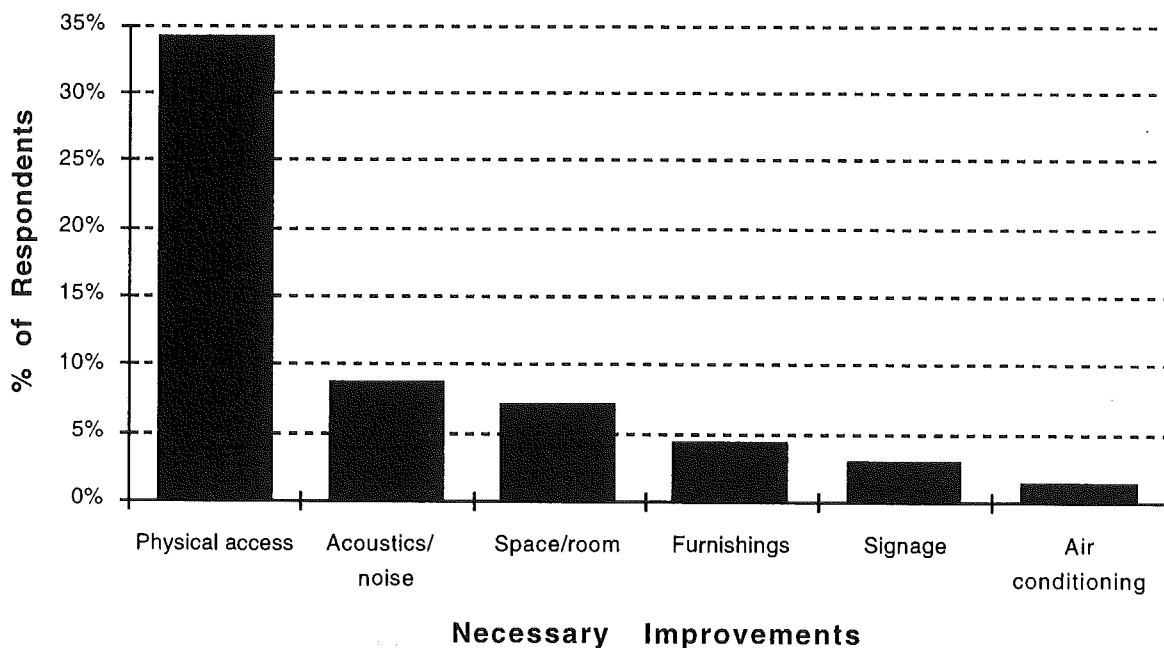

Necessary Improvements

Figure 6. The percentage of students and the types of improvements they would like made to the University's physical environment.

Physical Access

Consistent with students' comments in Chapter Four regarding the inaccessibility of buildings, most students (19%) who commented on physical access referred to doors. Students commented that all doors should be automated or made lighter than they are at present. For instance, "Any doors that a disabled student may go through to get to their dept of study should be sliding and/or automatic not just the main doors into departmental buildings." Three students commented that car parking should be closer to main buildings, such as the library, than it is at present. Three students stated that walkways needed to be covered or made smoother as these pose a hazard for students in wheelchairs, especially when it is raining. It was apparent from some students' comments that provisions should be inclusive so that students with disabilities are not singled out as requiring separate treatment. One student commented, "Make access for disabled students accessible for all - so it isn't a big deal to use different facilities. I don't want to wave a big flag saying 'look I'm different."

Acoustics/Noise

Five students put forward suggested changes regarding acoustics or noise. Some comments (three) related to teaching rooms, "Implement microphones and speaker systems in all large lecture rooms" whilst other students found the noise level in general needed to be addressed, "Manage and/or limit background noise."

Photocopying

As presented in Chapter Four, the majority of students with disabilities were not aware that they were entitled to free photocopying if their disability was such that this was warranted. When asked what would have been the best way to be informed about this 70% of

respondents suggested that it would have been best to have read published material about this. A number of students (30%) stated that it would have been best if they were personally informed of this information via an Inclusive Education Co-ordinator or staff at the department in which they were studying.

Published Information

The majority of students suggested that published information should be made freely available for students with disabilities to find out about services such as the photocopying. For example, "Information could be published on the notice boards at photocopy centres." The beginning of the year or pre-enrolment and enrolment were commonly mentioned as ideal opportunities for students to find out this information.

Personalised Information

Some students (three) commented that when they requested other services they should have been advised of the photocopying resource, "Maybe when I requested a reader/writer this could have been brought to my attention." They questioned why they were not told: "Actually bother to tell me; I've never seen it mentioned anywhere." Two students suggested that a full-time Disability or Inclusive Education Co-ordinator should be employed to advise students with disabilities what support is available. Four students stated that a personal interview or letter which outlined resources and what conditions were attached to these should be available for all students with disabilities.

Parking

Some students mentioned they did not know until recently that if there were no other disabled car parks, they were allowed to park in staff car parks . Students with other than physical disabilities reported that it

would be a great help if they could park in disabled car parks. For example an interview respondent who was emotionally disabled commented:

> Car parking is such a hassle. It would be good if there was something to cater for people who are not physically disabled. I don't know how it would work but...sometimes I come here and the thought of walking 2 or 3 blocks is just too much.

Three students suggested that car parks be patrolled more regularly so that disabled car parks could be freed up. Two students commented the two hour car parks needed to be increased to three hours because many lectures were two hours. The need for a car parking building was highlighted by two students for example, "There needs to be a parking building (charging fees if necessary) to accommodate every car likely to come to varsity - this would allow landscaping of the ridiculous proportion of the campus devoted to car parking." One student suggested that car parks could be created if "...they put car parks for staff under the new buildings for staff and free up more spaces."

Commitment to Legal obligations

A small number of students proposed ways in which the University could work towards meeting their legal obligations under the Education Act 1989 and the Human Rights Act 1993. These suggestions included, "informing people about what the acts say. If the University has a legal obligation to enforce this policy they need to inform people." One respondent commented that the University needed to "...ask the disabled students." Another student's list of suggested improvements included:

> 1) full-time disability liaison officer must be employed with sole responsibility being to work for with/for students with disabilities. 2) increase baseline funding for meeting resource

needs of SWD's and 3) improve liaison outreach to students-provide info on what resources are available for that student's needs.

Procedures

Assessment

As reported in Chapter Four, the majority of students with disabilities state that academic assessment systems are adequate however, as Fig 7 illustrates many students (46%) also put forward suggestions as to how assessment can be improved. As Figure 7 illustrates, the most common suggested improvement is that each student's individual disability should be recognised and taken into consideration in the assessment process. Students suggested that another improvement to assessment could involve the University reducing the emphasis placed on examinations and adopting more internal assessment practices.

Individual Assessment Dependent on the Disability:

These comments mainly referred to the uniqueness of each disability and the need for assessment to take this into consideration. One student simply stated that assessment should be, "dependent upon individual students." Another student expanded on this by stating, "Perhaps an individual case by case scenario with each case being considered individually with no set guidelines that may impede a student with disabilities from a just assessment of skill." One student highlighted the importance of fairness by commenting

depends on the disability-assessment must be fair to all so the system must be appropriate for the specific disability. For

example, the assessment for a student with writing problems should be different from someone who has a visual problem and so on.

A student with epilepsy noted how his/her positive experience with the sociology department involving individual treatment could serve as an example for other departments,

My experience has been on an individual basis, perhaps other students have not been so fortunate to be treated as individuals and given the same opportunity by departmental staff. I can only suggest that other departments follow the lead taken by sociology and show flexibility and an open mind towards meeting the needs of their students with disabilities.
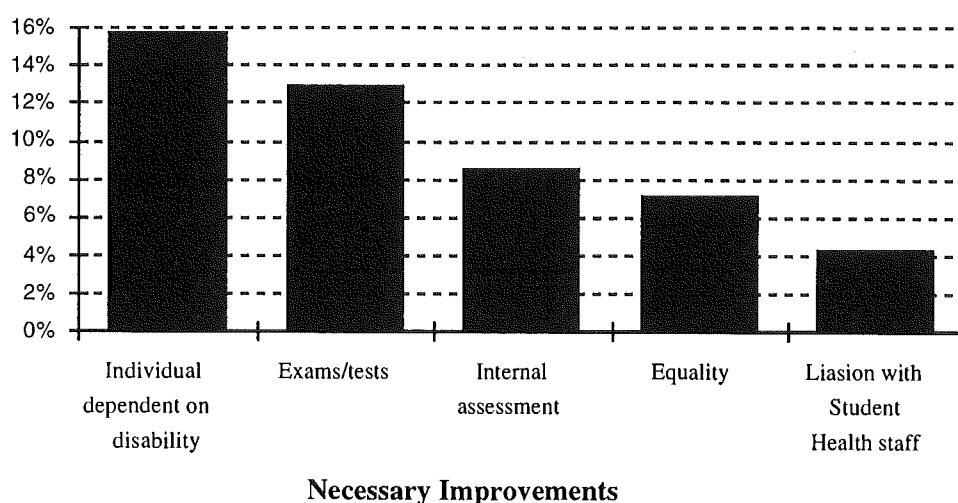

Necessary Improvements

Figure 7. The percentage of students and the types of improvements they would like made to assessment.

Examinations/Tests

As Figure 7 shows, 13% of students suggested improvements to assessment relating to exams and tests. Most of these comments (9%) referred to the extra time some students with disabilities are allowed for exams, for example, "Increase exam time for students with disabilities when necessary. 10 mins extra exam time is not sufficient for all students with disabilities and must be increased to ensure reasonable accommodation." One student highlighted that

> If students with writing problems are given extra time for a three hour exam, I think it is only fair that they be given extra time for one-two hour tests. They still have the same conditions, still have to stop and rest their hands or stretch them in tests as they do in exams.

Another student commented that assessment should "Ensure that students achieve the required level of understanding, not parroting". A student with a hearing impairment suggested, "Exam supervisors should have clip on microphones because, although I know the drill, I feel I could be missing out on something important."

Although respondents highlighted what needed to be done to ensure that they were fairly assessed, two students commented that nothing could be done for them to improve assessment. As one of the students stated: "I do not think changing the assessment would help. What needs changing is the way information is transferred from lecturer and book to my brain".

Emergency Procedures

As described in Chapter Four, the majority of students felt that they were safe if an emergency situation had arisen. However, the majority of

students (64%) also put forward suggestions regarding how safety can be improved for students with disabilities. The most common suggestion was for students to be advised in lectures at the beginning of each year and throughout the year of the emergency procedures.

A range of other improvements were suggested including the need for more fire drill practices and the need for an individual staff member or office specifically for disabled students where students could obtain information regarding emergency procedures.

Informed via Lectures

Nineteen percent of students suggested that everyone should be informed of the emergency procedures at the beginning of the year or half yearly for half year courses. For example, "Each first class of every lecture and/or tutorial should cover emergency procedures." Three of these students stated that once yearly was not enough and that students should be reminded either twice yearly or at the beginning of every term.

Some students indicated that they had been informed of emergency procedures at the beginning of their courses, "Students are advised at the start of the year & start of the third term what the procedures are", whilst for other students this was clearly not the case, "It should be covered on the first lectures with a handout available for those that miss the lecture. Instead you have one practice fire drill - & just because we all seem to get to the right place - it is okay."

Some students seemed aware of the inconsistency regarding the amount of information students receive about emergency procedures as one student recommended, "Covering all of the details in the first lecture/tutorials is sufficient as long as all of the lecturers and tutors cover this and don't bypass it."

<u>Enrolment</u>

Five students mentioned that pre-enrolment or enrolment is an ideal way of informing students about emergency procedures. For example: "An emergency familiarisation procedure at enrolment." One student hinted of a possible disadvantage of using enrolment as a means of informing students with disabilities about emergency procedures, "I seem to remember that there was something in the enrolment package but as I am so seldom on campus I did not take much notice of it."

<u>Other Issues</u>

Improvements to emergency procedures included recommendations such as that fire drill charts should be at wheelchair height, more frequent testing of fire alarms and conducting fire drills when everyone is not aware that testing will be carried out. Two students recommended that the Students with Disabilities Society should inform and educate students with disabilities about emergency procedures. Four students stated that more wall posters and plans should be used to inform students about emergency procedures. For example, "Clear posters, materials on each floor describing procedures."

Attitudes of University Personnel

<u>How staff can improve to meet needs of students with disabilities</u>

When they were asked if there were ways in which staff could improve to ensure the learning needs of students were met, the majority of students (93%) put forward suggestions. As Table 2 illustrates, the majority of students suggest staff can improve the learning needs of students by increasing their awareness and level of understanding of disability. The second most necessary improvement to staff attitude and

awareness relates to teaching issues, which includes lecturers making slight changes to the way that they lecture, such as writing important terms on the board and providing more information, such as increasing the amount of lecture notes and copies of overheads given to students.

Improvement	% of Students
Increase Awareness	3 6
Information	1 1
Teaching Issues	1 1
General Support	1 0
Total	6 8 %

Table 2. How staff can improve

Increase Awareness and Understanding

Thirty six percent of students referred to the uniqueness of each disability and the need for understanding and informed staff. This student's response was similar to many others, "Staff need to be more understanding and recognise that each person has a unique situation and should be more accepting and understanding."

Seventeen students mentioned staff training, for example: "We need more staff education in this area" and "general training disability awareness". Thirteen percent of students stressed the importance of recognising both visible and invisible disabilities, for instance: "Just get to know us, we are all individuals and don't assume how they can help -

we are all different and so are our disabilities - seen and unseen". Another student commented that: "I do not have an obvious disability but I do have a disability which sometimes effects my ability to meet deadlines, more understanding would be good."

Two students commented that they didn't know how much staff members should know about their disability and if they didn't whose responsibility it was to inform them. "Is it up to me to make lecturers aware of my disability or should they know from my academic record."

One student suggested that a solution to this problem could involve "...at the beginning of the year all tutors and lecturers /course co-ordinators should make themselves available to talk about their needs with the dept concerned not just the department contact person."

Teaching Issues

Half of the comments concerning teaching issues were made by students with hearing impairments. One student commented that staff could ensure students with hearing impairments hear the maximum amount possible,

By paraphrasing anything said to them by students during the tut or lecture. I hear next to nothing said by students; when they are asking questions etc. I am potentially missing out on relevant info. Before directly answering lecturer or tutor could paraphrase e.g. for the benefit of those that didn't hear...Staff can insist that students speak clearly and (hopefully) loudly.

Another student highlighted that the current system of borrowing tapes at the library is not suitable: "I cannot hear the tapes on the restricted loans tape players. I need to hear them without ear phones."

Other issues mentioned by students which were categorised under 'teaching issues' were "clear writing on the boards to help with reading and spelling", assessment procedures and lighting.

More Information

Eleven percent of students mentioned that they require more information from staff in order to ensure their learning needs are fully met. Most of these comments related to the need for students, due to their disability, to get additional handouts. A student with a chronic illness raised some particularly interesting points:

> Chronic illness means you miss a lot of lectures. I need to be able to get the information. Generally I am expected to get it off other students. This is unacceptable, note-taking is a personal skill. Not everyone gets the same points from a lecture. To get the information myself is very time consuming and has a flow on effect with all your work especially when you may have missed several lectures.

An interview respondent suggested that this problem could be addressed by "lecturers providing students with disabilities with a copy of the formatted lecture and sometimes additional notes which can be quite useful."

Responsibility for Monitoring Staff Attitudes

To the question who should be responsible for monitoring staff attitude and awareness toward students with disabilities almost all (81%) of the students replied. Thirty one percent of the total 70 respondents thought that this was the staff's responsibility.

Staff Responsibility

Many students from this group of respondents suggested that a Disability Co-ordinator or Officer should be made available either for their specific disability or for all students with disabilities on campus. One student explained how the Disability Co-ordinator could monitor staff attitude and awareness, "Disability liaison - should survey staff and students with disabilities on a periodic basis to assess staff awareness and student performance/satisfaction - could have a 'suggestion box technique' too." Another group of students saw the monitoring of staff attitude and awareness as a responsibility of each Head of Department. Similarly a interview respondent remarked that "...the Department should be addressing the lecturers. The Department should be holding courses in lecturing. It should be saying 'okay how's the lecturing going, can we improve in this area' and so on." Three students commented that the current system whereby designated staff in each department/faculty act as a contact person for students with disabilities works well.

Student Responsibility

Twenty percent of respondents commented that monitoring staff attitude and awareness should be the responsibility of students. As one student commented, "The 'disabled students'. In this day of community presence and integration, self responsibility is called for. But they do need to be made aware of their options." The majority of respondents who suggested students should be responsible for monitoring staff attitude mentioned the importance of students communicating their needs to staff, "Disabled students can speak with staff re any problems/concerns." And another student commented, "It's up to each student to let staff know what they need". Class representatives were also mentioned several times.

Team

Thirteen percent of respondents stated that the monitoring of staff attitude and awareness should be the responsibility of a team. Members mentioned as part of the team included students with disabilities; student representatives; Disability Co-ordinator; a group of students; lecturers and the Student Union.

Chapter Summary

This Chapter outlined students' suggestions for changes to the academic and personal support systems at the University of Canterbury. It was found that the majority of students suggested changes to the resources at the University such as emergency procedures. The majority of students also put forward suggestions for change regarding the attitudes of University personnel.

Chapter Four found that the majority of students reported positive experiences of the academic and personal support services at the University.

Why then has this report found contradictory findings, that is, although the majority of students report positively on the academic and personal support services at the University, many students also suggested changes they would like made to the University environment?

In the final and concluding Chapter of this report I interpret these findings in light of the medical and social models of disability that I discussed in the Introductory Chapter. I argue that the strategies students with disabilities used in order to cope with the environment at the University provide an explanation as to why these contradictory research findings have emerged.

Chapter Six
DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This research found that most of the respondents' have had positive experiences with the academic and personal support services at the University of Canterbury. However, the large number of suggestions and wide range of recommendations put forward by students regarding how academic and personal support systems at the University of Canterbury could be changed to ensure their needs were better met illustrated that a wide range of barriers confronted students with disabilities which affected their participation at the University.

Areas students mentioned that required improvement were lecture theatres and tutorial rooms, the physical environment, the photocopying service, parking, academic assessment, emergency procedures and staff attitudes and awareness.

How do we explain these contradictory findings? In this Chapter I argue that these research results indicate that the disabled students felt an individual sense of responsibility to ensure that their academic and personal needs were met at the University. This is evidenced by the strategies students use to address the barriers that they encountered and also the suggestion by the majority of students that it was their responsibility rather than the University's to ensure that their needs were met.

I will argue that the sense of responsibility that the students portrayed towards the barriers that confronted them, such as the need for students with hearing impairments to plan ahead in order to get to a seat in a lecture theatre where they could see and lip-read best, was a result of the University not fully accepting responsibility for removing these

barriers. These research findings will be related to disability theory and to previous literature pertaining to students with disabilities which were outlined in Chapter One. I will conclude that until the University recognises the contribution of social factors to the experience of disability and whilst the adherence to the medical model continues to underlie resource provision at the University of Canterbury, students with disabilities will continue to be significantly disadvantaged and under-represented.

Comparing this research with other studies

Sample

Before we make generalisations from these research results we have to remind ourselves of the characteristics of the sample. The majority of the students in this research were physically disabled. This has also been the case in a number of previous studies (Alexander and Bridgeman, 1982; Kirkland, 1990; Lang, 1993). This is interesting in that it suggests that either more students with physical rather than other kinds of disabilities study at TEIs or that more students with physical disabilities take part in research than students with other types of disabilities. Students who took part in the research were those who chose to identify as disabled on the pre-enrolment form. Thus, not all students with disabilities at the University of Canterbury were invited to take part in the research.

The views expressed in this study are those of a quarter of all students who identified as disabled at the University of Canterbury in 1997. Previous attempts to survey students with disabilities have also resulted in low response rates (personal communication, J. Carson,

February 9, 1997). I suggest that given the social stigma attached to disability and the possibility of discrimination, students with disabilities may have reason to avoid identifying as disabled.

Methodological Issues

A strength of the method employed in this research was the breadth and richness of the data and the insight into the lives of the students with disabilities as a result of combining quantitative and qualitative research methods. This also proved to be a limitation in that the sheer wealth of information and the complexity of this meant that I was unable to portray all of the information gathered.

There was evidence that the key tenets of emancipatory research of reciprocity, gain and empowerment were fulfilled in that this research contributed to the establishment of a full-time Inclusive Education Co-ordinator position at the University, one of the key recommendations for change that students mentioned. By sharing their experiences in this research, students have contributed towards establishing a beneficial resource. Students who took part in this research, who requested a summary of the research findings, will discover that their involvement contributed towards establishing this position. It is hoped that further improvements to conditions for disabled students will occur as a result of this research after the findings have been presented to the University.

Results

Resources

Problems with the physical environment including lecture and tutorial rooms, toilets and car parks were mentioned frequently by students. This is consistent with a major finding from Lang's (1993) research at Victoria University that generally students found it difficult

to access many parts of the University. A similar finding was reported by McKay et al. (1995) who recommended that "The institutions need to create a barrier free physical environment..." (p.217).

Procedures

Consistent with previous research findings this study found that not only were physical access barriers a major obstruction affecting students with disabilities but lack of access to information about resources, often as a result of poor procedures was also a source of frustration for students, particularly those with invisible disabilities. The present study also adds to previous research findings in that students with invisible disabilities reported they thought that resources detailed in the promotional material available for all students with disabilities were not for them.

For example a large number of students with invisible disabilities, were not aware that, if their disability was such that they required extra photocopying, they were entitled to apply to the students with disabilities fund held by Student Health to be reimbursed for this. Also, students were often not aware of scholarships that were available to ease financial pressure on them. Although the financial position of students with disabilities' was not ascertained in this study, Lang (1993) reported that one of the major barriers confronting students with disabilities at Victoria University was lack of finance.

Staff

In contrast to previous research findings regarding the lack of staff awareness towards students with disabilities, the majority of students in this research reported that the attitude and the awareness of staff were good. However, the majority of students also put forward recommendations regarding how staff awareness could be improved

suggesting that this area warranted further attention. The most common recommendation was for staff to increase awareness and understanding of disability. This is consistent with research by others (Alexander and Bridgeman, 1982; Lang, 1993; McKay et al., 1995).

Another key theme that emerged from the survey and interview data was that students wanted the diversity of disability to be recognised. This is consistent with the argument presented in Chapter One regarding the complexity of disability. Thus this research confirmed the importance of recognising diversity and not simplifying and individualising disability as the next section suggests the University does.

The Medical Model and University Culture

This section argues that the medical model currently dominates resource provision at the University of Canterbury. In order for the responsibility for barriers, which students experience as discrimination, to be shifted from each student's individual responsibility to the institution's responsibility, a social model of disability has to underlie resource provision.

Recall from the introduction that the medical model is the idea that, although some people do have medical issues related to their disability, these are often exaggerated and used to define the individual in an all encompassing way (Cahill, 1991). These research findings illustrate the pervasiveness of the medical model. They support Finklestein's (1994) statement that "The medical model still provides the main criteria for defining categories of people who shall have access to services and benefits" (p.15).

This was apparent across the spectrum of resource allocation at the University. For example, the budget specifically for students with disabilities was administered by Student Health. This meant that if, due to the nature of their disability, students required extra photocopying for course work, they had to apply to the Student Health Service for this. As one student summarised: "Very medically focused when giving any 'concessions' for exams, access etc....".

This study found evidence that the medical model underlies the provision of resources at the University of Canterbury. Each student's medical background is one aspect of their disability. The University needs to recognise that the tendency to focus on this one dimension and allocate resources according to this has potentially detrimental consequences. For example, it perpetuates the belief that disability is only and always an individual condition which a person has. This further reduces the University's responsibility to change because the under-representation of disabled students is seen as a natural consequence of students being disabled and not a result of the University failing to meet the needs of students with disabilities. This is consistent with the ideas I raised in Chapter One; that disability is individualised and the education system is absolved of responsibility as a result of the dominance of the medical model.

Aligned to the medical model is the professionalisation of services. Oliver highlights the effects of this, "This is at best patronising and at worst it disables people further; they become passive recipients of the services other people think they ought to have" (Oliver, 1988, p.23). Professionals such as Student Health staff at the University are presumed to know best.

Limitations

A key limitation of this research was identified by several students who contacted me personally or who remarked to me or noted in the margin of the questionnaire that the questionnaire focused predominantly on the issues affecting students with physical disabilities. The results reflect this in that many of the findings involve the experiences of students with physical disabilities. Many students who were other than physically disabled commented that was a common problem they encountered in the University system, that is, the lack of recognition of disabilities which are other than physical ones, often also meaning the lack of acknowledgement of invisible disabilities. Thus, whilst attempting to ensure issues concerning students who were disabled in a variety of ways were covered in the questionnaire, I unwittingly, perhaps by being a part of the culture of the University, focused on the experiences of students with physical disabilities.

Cahill (1991) explains that this is a common problem. He states:

The international sign for people with disabilities is a wheelchair so people with disabilities who don't fit this are not considered to be disabled. . . A person with a head injury comments "society doesn't recognise my disability because it can't see it. Can't see my loss of memory, my epileptic seizures, can't see my tolerance level has dropped and I can't work because of that". (p.13)

The title of this study "Students with Disabilities: Experiences and Recommendations for Change" could have meant that students who wanted to make changes to provisions for students with disabilities may have taken part in this research whilst the majority of disabled students who

are happy with the University of Canterbury environment may not have taken part in this research. Thus the results in this report may portray a negative account of the University of Canterbury. It must be noted that there were many positive aspects of the University campus as reported in Chapter Four that students focused on.

Conclusion

This research found that the University fails to provide equal educational opportunity for all students with disabilities. As I argued in the Introduction, other factors such as the influence of New right policies and the flexibility of legislation contribute to this problem. However, as this research found, the problems resulting from the lack of equal opportunity experienced by students with disabilities are compounded, because the students are made to feel responsible for the barriers that they are confronted with. This is largely because resources for students with disabilities are contingent on medical definitions of disability.

The situation for disabled students at the University of Canterbury is aptly summarised by Issacs (1996)

> The most obvious social mechanism of constraint is that of exclusion, denying certain persons access to participation in a social practice. Such discrimination may be direct in that clear rules of exclusion exist or it may be indirect in that exclusion results as a denial of access to those resources which serve as a prerequisite for entry. (p.36)

There was evidence that students experienced "Hobson's choice" in accepting responsibility for the barriers that confronted them at the University of Canterbury. That is, they could either confront the

University about the barrier and complain about this which resulted in it being *their* problem, because *they* were experiencing it and they were complaining about it, or they could ignore it as much as possible and adopt strategies, which still resulted in it being their problem. They owned the experience of coping with the barriers, and the University was absolved of responsibility for removing the barriers because it was construed as the students' problem.

In this study students identifying as disabled made up two and a half percent of the student population at the University of Canterbury. Despite the many positive experiences that individual students reported in their interactions with individual staff, many students felt that it was their personal responsibility to obtain the resources they needed to successfully participate in University life. Provisions and resources provided by the University were based upon medicalised rather than social definitions of disability therefore they were not always effective in meeting students needs.

Further Research

The findings of this research provide direction for future research. That is, now that a major factor contributing to the under representation of students with disabilities has been identified, research which takes into consideration the social factors which contribute to the experience of students with disabilities needs to be undertaken.

The recognition that social forces contribute to the experience of disability will contribute to the removal of barriers that confront students with disabilities at TEIs throughout New Zealand. The funding from the government in 1998 to reduce the under-representation of disabled students at TEIs provides an indication that ideas are changing.

Only when these ideas are a part of the policy making process for students with disabilities at a State and institutional level will the representation and retention of students with disabilities at TEIs increase thus enhancing their employment and life opportunities.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Questionnaire

(The layout of this questionnaire has been condensed to save space)

Questionnaire

Dear Participant,

- This survey will be used to generate recommendations for change at the University of Canterbury. Your input is crucial and very much appreciated.

- Please complete each section with as much detail as possible. The sections are: Pre-enrolment/enrolment process; Environment; Provision of services; Staff; Assessment; General; Personal details.

- The questions relate to your experiences at the University of Canterbury.

- If necessary, note the question number and use the extra blank sheet at the back of this questionnaire to expand on your answers.

- All information will be kept strictly confidential.

- If you would like a summary of the findings of this research please supply your name and address at the end.

• This is an anonymous questionnaire. However, by completing and returning the questionnaire, it will be understood that you have consented to participate in the project and that you consent to publication of the results of the project with the understanding that your anonymity will be preserved.

• After you have completed this questionnaire, please return it in the enclosed postage paid envelope as soon as possible but by September 12 at the latest.

Section A: PRE-ENROLMENT/ENROLMENT PROCESS

1) **Prior to this year's pre-enrolment or enrolment did you have sufficient knowledge of the support available to assist you?**

YES   NO

-    What support systems did you know about (please list).

-    How did you find out about each of these?

2) **What support systems did you not know about prior to pre-enrolment/enrolment but have subsequently found out about?**

3) **What would have been the best way to inform you about the support systems available?**

4) Did the information on the support available influence your decision to study at the University of Canterbury?

YES   NO

- How?

5) Did you pre-enrol this year?

YES   NO

- If YES, did you gain sufficient information at that stage on the available support systems?

YES   NO

6) The main way for students with disabilities to indicate they require assistance is through the pre-enrolment process. In what other ways can students indicate that they require assistance?

Section B: PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

1) Are lecture theatres and tutorial rooms suitable for your specific needs? (i.e. lighting, access, acoustics)

YES   NO

\-   What improvements need to be made?

2)   Are there any issues regarding specific buildings (e.g. libraries, registry, student union, commerce building) that you would like to comment on?

YES   NO

\-   If YES, Please expand.

3)   Are you aware of the emergency procedures in the building in which you spend the most time?

YES   NO

\-   If YES, are these sufficient to ensure your safety?

YES   NO

4)   What sort of system needs to be in place to ensure that all students are familiar with the procedures and are covered in an emergency situation?

5)   What changes would you make to the university's physical environment that would better address your specific needs?

Section C: PROVISION OF SERVICES

<u>**Car parks**</u>

1) Do you have any difficulties or concerns with car parking?

YES   NO

-     If YES, please comment.

-     If there is a shortage, how often does this occur (per week)?

2) Any other comments regarding car parking? (e.g. location, width, gradient).

3) Do you have any difficulties or concerns with the toilets on campus? (i.e. size, cleanliness, location)

YES   NO

-     If YES please expand

Cafeterias

4) Is access an issue for you in the cafeteria which you use the most?

YES   NO

-     If YES how?

5) What factors other than access affect you in the cafeteria?

Photocopying

6) Are you aware that students whose disabilities are such that they are liable to require extra photocopying are entitled to free photocopying?

YES   NO

- If YES, how did you find out about this?

- What are your views on this service?

- If NO, what would have been the best way to inform you about this service?

Comparing the University of Canterbury with other tertiary institutions

7) Are you aware of support specifically available for students with disabilities at other institutions?

YES   NO

- If YES, how does the University of Canterbury compare?

Section D: STAFF

---

1) What are your experiences regarding staff attitudes and awareness towards students with disabilities? (Including lecturers, tutors, library staff, registry staff).

2) Is there any way that staff can improve to ensure that your learning needs are met?

YES NO

- If YES, how?

3) Who should be responsible for monitoring staff attitude and awareness towards disabled students?

4) Are you aware that there are specific staff at the University registry building to assist you?

YES NO

- How can these staff assist you?

- Any comments?

- What do you think is the best way to inform students about this resource?

Section E: ASSESSMENT

1) Do you think that the present systems of assessment adequately measure your skill level?

YES NO

- Please comment

2) Have you ever had any alternative assessment at the University?

YES NO

- If YES, please list

- Do you consider that this was a fair assessment?

YES NO

- Why?

3) What improvements can be made to the system of assessing students with disabilities?

Section F: GENERAL

1) Do you use any specific strategies to deal with the demands at University?

YES NO

- Please expand

2) Are you aware that there is a "Students with Disabilities Group" on Campus?

YES NO (If NO, please see page 14)

- If YES, how did you find out about the group?

- Have you ever attended a meeting?
  YES NO
- What are your thoughts?

3) Some students have recently noted some positive changes students with disabilities on campus, such as, improved alternative examination provisions. Please comment on any positive changes you have seen occur at the University of Canterbury?

Section G: PERSONAL DETAILS
(All information you provide is confidential)

---

1) What department are you studying in?

2) Which of the following adjectives fully describe your disability? (Please tick)

...... Emotional disability

...... Hearing impairment

...... Physical disability

...... Learning disability

...... Vision impairment

...... Epilepsy

...... Mobility disability

...... Chronic pain

...... Other

3) How many years have you studied at Canterbury University? (Please tick - include this year)

...... 1 year

...... 2 years

...... 3 years

...... 4 years

...... 5 years

...... more than 5 years

4) Students with disabilities are entitled to equal educational opportunity under the Human Rights Act (1993) and the Education Act (1989). Please comment on how well you think the University of Canterbury meets its legal obligations in terms of these acts?

5) Please comment on any aspects of your experiences at the University of Canterbury which have not been covered in this questionnaire

Thank you for your time filling out this questionnaire. Please return in the enclosed envelope as soon as possible but by September 12 at the latest.

Please use this page to expand on any of your answers

- **Would you like a summary of the findings of this research?**

  YES   NO

- If YES, please provide your name and address

- **Would you like any information regarding the Students with Disabilities Group?**

  YES   NO

- If YES, please provide your name and address

Appendix B: Presentation to Students with Disabilities Society

Kia ora koutou, my name is Tui Summers I'm a Masters student interested in improving conditions for students with disabilities at Canterbury University.

I would like to learn firstly, what students experiences of the academic and personal support services at the University of Canterbury and secondly if students would like changes made to the environment at the University I would like to know what these changes are.

There are several problems with this research and I would really appreciate peoples ideas. These are firstly, who should the audience be for the research report which summarises the results of this project? and secondly, how can we ensure that the recommendations that emerge from this project are put into action?

If people would like to be involved in this project they can do this in a number of ways:

- Be involved in observations, for example, if students are going to the library or lectures or any everyday university activity and they are willing for me to come along and observe please give me a ring. I can learn a lot from this.

- Come for an informal chat with me about your experiences as a student with a disability at the University and whether you think any academic and personal support services on campus can be adjusted to meet your needs.

- Write a story or an account of some or one of your experiences at University.

All information that is gathered will be kept strictly confidential. Some of you may be interested in my background and why I am interested in disability issues. I have had a keen interest in equal opportunity issues for several years now. Last year I studied at Otago University and did a post graduate diploma in Education. I studied a paper which involved exploring the relationship between disability and community and critically examined disability research. This fostered the interest I already had in equal opportunity issues and lead to my decision to undertake a thesis in this area. Also, as a student on campus I encounter various problems and I suspect that you do too. I would like to learn about these so that we can work together to achieve positive change.

Anyone interested in working towards improving conditions for students with disabilities can contact me either after this meeting or at subsequent meetings or at home. This project has University of Canterbury ethics committee approval. Thanks for listening.

Appendix C: Information Form

University Of Canterbury

Education Department

Students With Disabilities at the University of Canterbury: Experiences and Recommendations for Change

INFORMATION

Introduction

You are invited to take part in the research project- Students with Disabilities at the University of Canterbury: Experiences and Recommendations for Change. For information please contact Tui Summers ph 341-1120. This project is being supervised by Missy Morton, Baljit Kaur and Judi Miller at the University of Canterbury Education Department ph 366-7001.

Aim

This aim of this research is to discover what sorts of experiences students with disabilities at the University of Canterbury have during 1997. I wish to learn about these experiences and what can be done to make positive changes for students with disabilities on campus. I plan to observe, interview, question and gain written accounts from students and staff to find out about their experiences, ideas and recommendations for change.

Your Involvement

Your involvement in this research will involve one or more of the following exercises: be observed, take part in an interview, fill out a questionnaire or provide a written account of your experiences. Each of these activities will take an hour of your time.

Your Rights

Your participation in this research is voluntary. If you choose to be involved the information that you provide will be used for 2 purposes:

1) For a research project for the paper Research Methods in Education (Course code 659 option B).

2) For the research thesis Students with disabilities at the University of Canterbury: Experiences and Recommendations for Change.

Unless you would like your name to be used it will not be in the research report. Although quotes and comments will be used in the report these will not be linked to the particular person that made the comment.

Please indicate on the attached consent form whether you would like to be involved and if so in what capacity.

Please post your consent form in the enclosed addressed envelope or deliver them back to Tui Summers

Thank you for your time your contribution is really appreciated

This research is being conducted by Tui Summers who can be contacted at the following address: University of Canterbury, Education Department, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch or via email at <tms34@student.canterbury.ac.nz>. This project is being supervised by Missy Morton, Baljit Kaur and Judi Miller at the University of Canterbury Education Department, address as above, or email <M.Morton@educ.canterbury.ac.nz>, <B.Kaur@educ.canterbury.ac.nz> or <J.Miller@educ.canterbury.ac.nz>. Please contact Tui, Missy, Baljit or Judi if you have any queries about this research.

Appendix D: Consent Form

**Students With Disabilities at the University of Canterbury.:
Experiences and Recommendations for Change**

CONSENT FORM

I have read and understood the information sheet on the above-named project. On this basis I agree to take part as a participant in the project and I consent to the publication of the results of the project with the understanding that anonymity will be preserved. I understand also that I may at any time withdraw from the project, including withdrawal of any information that I have provided

Signed: ....   Date: ....

Please indicate below in what way you would like to be involved in this research:

I would like to be involved in an observation exercise   _____

I would like to be interviewed-I understand that this may be taped on an audio recorder   _____

I would like to fill out a questionnaire   _____

I would like to provide a written account of my experiences   _____

I would like to remain anonymous _____ or I would like my name used in the report_____

Appendix E: Coding Categories for Questionnaire

1) Library staff

2) Lecturers awareness and attitude regarding disability

3) Tutors awareness and attitude regarding disability

4) Staff training

5) Registry building and Registry Staff

6) Improvements lecturers can make for students with disabilities

7) Strategies students use to cope

8) Visibility of disability

9) Disability legislation

10) Course structure

11) Financial issues

12) Participants ideas regarding disability

13) Methodological issues

14) Exam provisions/assessment

15) Sports and recreation

16) Free photocopying service

17) Positive changes students have seen occur

18) Car parking

19) Students with disabilities budget

20) Knowledge of availability of provisions prior to/on arrival at University

21) Disability Officer

22) Library

23) Experiences and/or awareness of provisions for students with disabilities at other institutions

24) Other students awareness regarding disability

25) Public awareness regarding disability

26) Student Health

27) Access to buildings

28) Lecture theatres

29) Emergency procedures in buildings

30) Tutorial rooms

31) Participants awareness of rights

32) Academic committees

33) Students with disabilities group

34) Pre-enrolment/enrolment process

35) Lighting

36) Cafeterias

37) Toilets

<u>Appendix F: Questionnaire Cover Letter</u>

University of Canterbury
Education Department

<u>Students with Disabilities at the University of Canterbury:</u> <u>Experiences and Recommendations for Change</u>

August 20 1997

Kia ora

Please find attached a questionnaire which you are invited to fill out as part of the research project *"Students with Disabilities at the University of Canterbury: Experiences and Recommendations for Change"*. The aims of this research are to discover the experiences of students with disabilities and to make change at the University of Canterbury.

I am interested in representing your experiences and actively contributing towards making a change. I would really appreciate your contribution and time.

Your participation in this research is voluntary. If you choose to be involved, the information that you provide will be used for two purposes:

1) For the research thesis *"Students with Disabilities at the University of Canterbury: Experiences and Recommendations for Change"*.

2) To advise the management at the University of Canterbury of changes that can be made so that the needs of students are met.

For further information about this project please contact Tui Summers ph. 341-1120. This project is being supervised by Missy Morton and Baljit Kaur at the University of Canterbury Education department, ph. 366-7001.

Thank you

Tui Summers