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2024

# A Picture Worth a Thousand Words: Factors Influencing Disability Accommodations

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### Recommended Citation

Martin, Alicia; Solorzano, Matias; and Sanchez, Mari, "A Picture Worth a Thousand Words: Factors Influencing Disability Accommodations" (2024). *IdeaFest 2024*. 89.  
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### Background

- 1 billion people worldwide live with a disability (approx. 1 in 7 people). U.N report, 2011
  - 20% of all Americans are disabled and make up the largest minority group
  - These values may be under-reported (Nario-Redmond & Oleson, 2016).

#### Recognizable v. Unrecognizable Disabilities

- Recognizable** — commonly associated with and stereotyped as disabilities (i.e. physical, learning, or sensory disabilities) (Bogart & Dunn, 2019).
  - Can be perceived readily** (i.e., a person who uses a wheelchair).
  - Faculty:** positive attitudes towards recognizable disabilities (Snaitecki, Perry & Snell, 2015)
    - Students with recognizable disabilities accommodated more (Vasek, 2005)
- Unrecognizable** — non-stereotypic and not commonly recognized as disabilities (Bogart & Dunn, 2019).
  - Cannot be perceived readily** (i.e., a person with ADHD, conditions such as cognitive impairments; brain injuries; Autism; chronic illnesses (e.g. multiple sclerosis); chronic fatigue and chronic pain; fibromyalgia; hearing and vision impairments; and mental illnesses (Disrupting the silence, 2021)
  - Faculty:** negative attitudes towards unrecognizable disabilities (Snaitecki et al., 2015)
    - Students with unrecognizable disabilities accommodated less (Vasek, 2005)
- U.S. colleges and universities must provide reasonable accommodations to qualified disabled students. (ADA, 1990; Rehabilitation Act of 1973)
  - Campus Disability Offices determines accommodations via student's medical proof
  - The problem: It is up to faulty to determine whether an accommodation is "reasonable" and how to implement accommodations**

### Purpose

- Identify the perception of professors on the topics of disabilities, institutional support for professors in administering accommodations for those with disabilities, and what constitutes reasonable accommodations for those with disabilities
- Determine whether knowledge and attitudes related to disabilities influence professors' willingness to provide accommodations and perceived reasonableness of accommodations, specifically when the disability is recognizable compared to unrecognizable, and
- Identify the role of the professor's demographic composition and whether it plays a role in their attitudes and willingness to provide accommodations for disabled populations.

### Method

#### Participants

- N=35 faculty members (7.1% female, 8.6% non-binary/third gender/ prefer not to say; 44 y.o.; 8.6% Spanish, Hispanic, or Latino origin, 91.4% white; 42.9% non-tenure, 91.4% previous experience teaching SWD; and 57% identified as PWD).
- Convenience & snowball sampling; No compensation was given.
  - Calls for participants in teaching and academic conference forums.
  - Emails: department administrators and disability resource centers with monthly reminders
  - Data collected from December, 2022 through April, 2023.

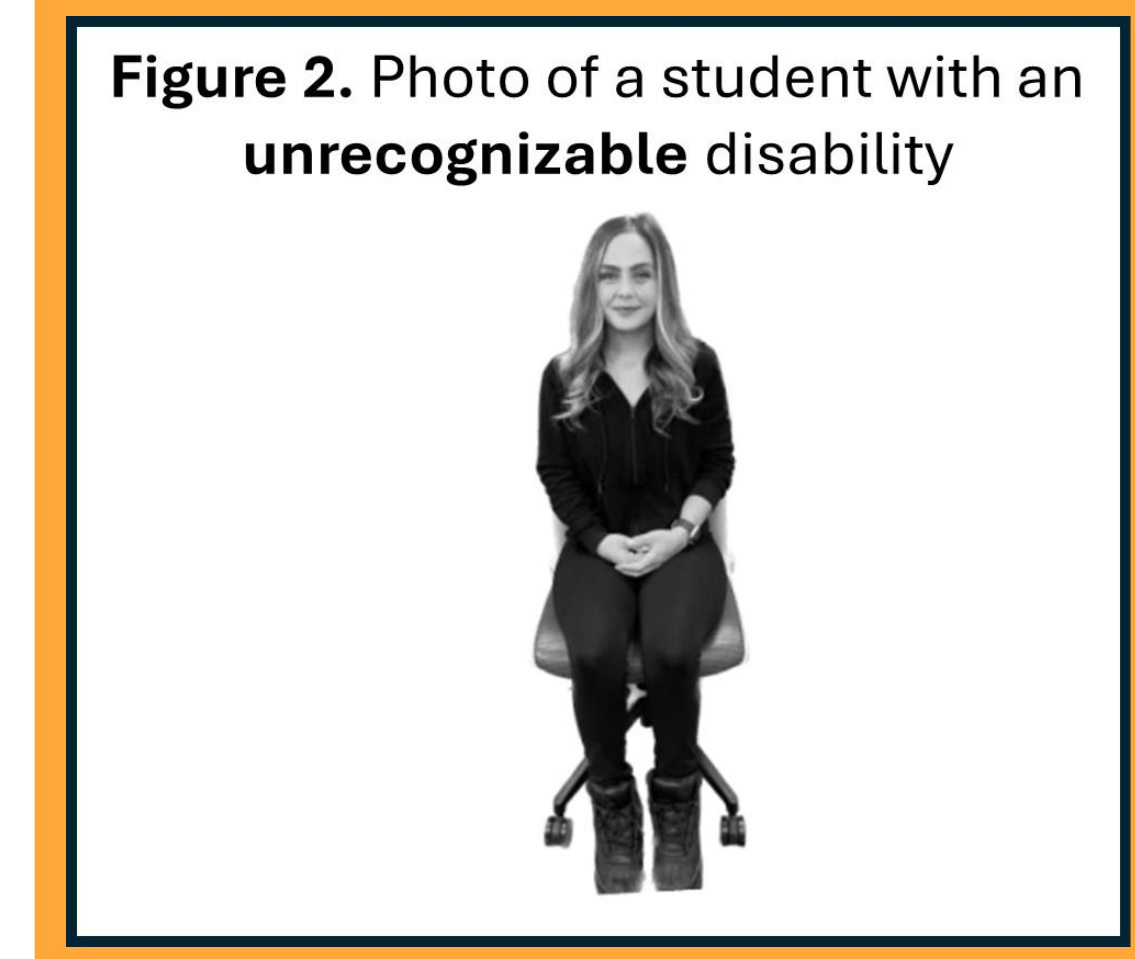
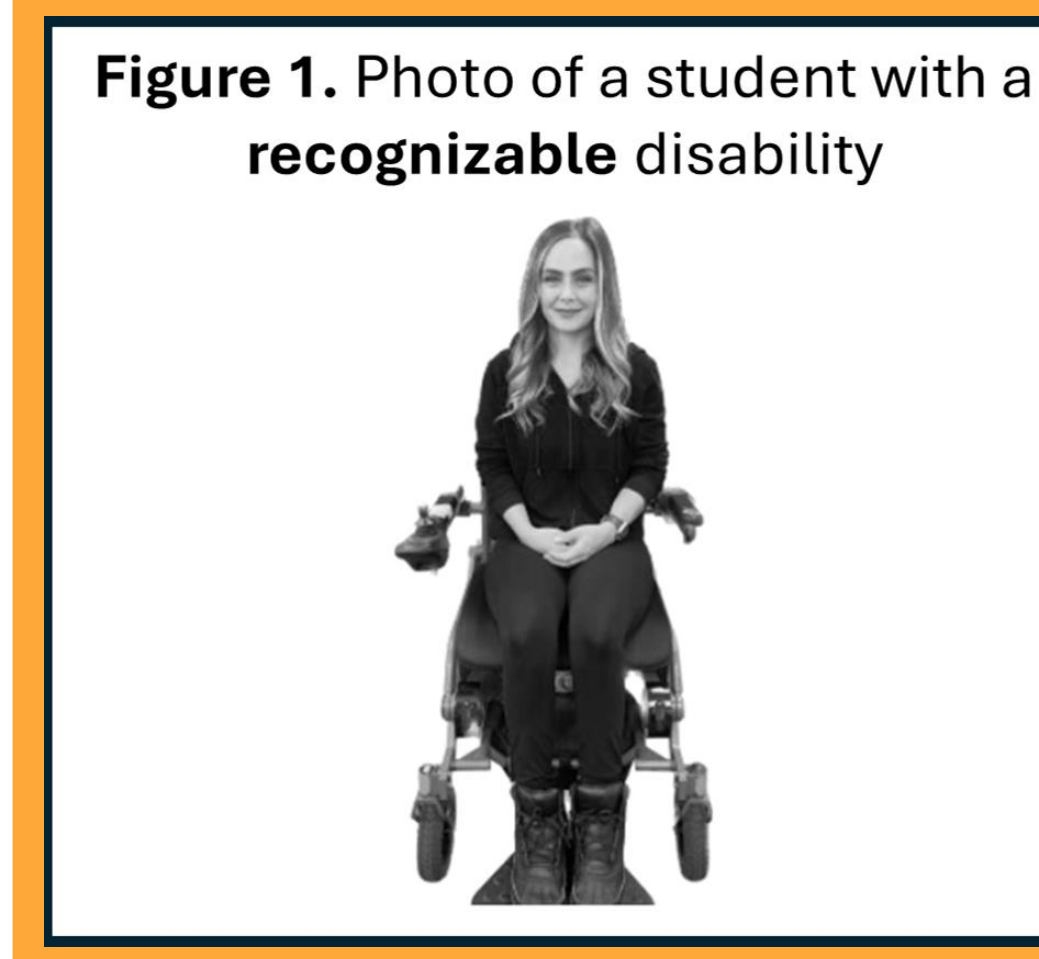
#### Materials

- 1) Knowledge of Legal Responsibilities** (Zhang et al., 2010)
  - Reflects general disability knowledge and included a true or false knowledge component.
  - "I receive adequate support from the administrators of the college in working with students who have disabilities."
- 2) ADA Faculty Survey** (Stevens et al., 2018)
  - Assess faculty knowledge about disability legislation
  - "How familiar are you of the meaning of 'disabilities' and on how to address people with a disability?"
- 3) Faculty Attitudes and Knowledge Regarding College Students with Disabilities Survey** (Snaitecki, Perry, & Snell, 2015)
  - Measures the attitudes and knowledge of faculty towards students with disabilities
  - "Students with disabilities attend postsecondary schools at rates proportionate to the rates of postsecondary attendance among students who do not have disabilities."
- 4) Attitudes Toward Disabled People Scale - form O (ATDP-O)** (Yuker, Block, and Young, 1970)
  - Assesses cognitive component of disability attitudes
  - "Most people with physical disabilities have a chip on their shoulder."
- 5) Willingness to Provide Accommodations** (Rao, 2003)
  - Measured willingness of faculty to provide disability accommodations
  - "Allow student extra time to complete class tests."

### Method (cont.)

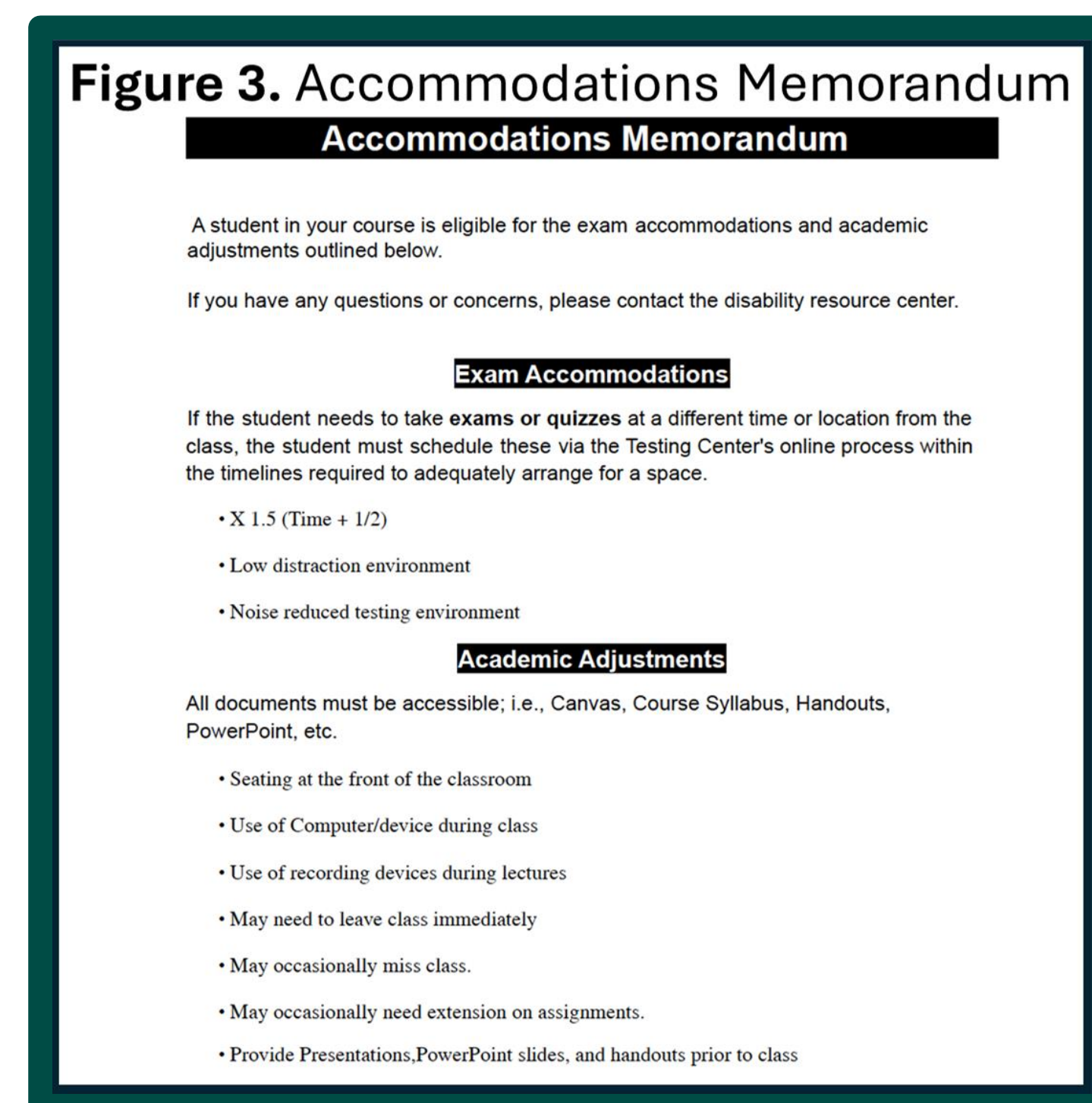
#### Photographs

- Recognizable:** Depicted a student in a wheelchair, **see Figure 1.**
- Unrecognizable:** Depicted a student in a chair, **see Figure 2.**
- No Photo Condition:** only an accommodation memorandum was provided



#### Accommodation memorandum

- Replicated from the disability resource center at Cal Poly Humboldt. And included:
  - Exam accommodations:** i.e., "Time + ½" and "Low distraction environment".
  - Academic adjustments:** i.e., "May occasionally need extension on assignments." "Provide Presentations, PowerPoint slides, and handouts prior to class". **See Figure 3.**



#### Procedure

- Participants completed surveys 1-4 (see materials) in Qualtrics, then viewed an accommodation memorandum with either a photo of a student with a recognizable or unrecognizable disability, or were in the no picture condition (between-subjects).
- After indicating that they read the content of the memorandum, P's addressed questions concerning perceptions of reasonableness for each accommodation and survey 5 with the accommodation memorandum present.
- After completing the surveys participants were asked whether they recognized the student. If yes, responses were removed.

### Results

- No significant effect of disability recognizability on disability-related attitudes; willingness to provide accommodations; or perceptions of accommodation reasonableness was found.
- No significant differences in attitudes related to knowledge scores.
- No significant differences in willingness to provide accommodations related to institutional support.

### Results (cont.)

#### Open ended responses

##### Institutional support

- "I need the disability services (and other) office at our university to **do better**, to **help more**, and to **actually do their jobs**. I need to know that they are doing their jobs, so I (and my students) don't have to do their jobs for them - which seems to be what we're having to do a great deal of the time right now."

##### Knowledge

- "More training on universal design. I have become aware of that through personal drive rather than as a faculty member."

##### Miscellaneous

- "I often wonder if I should disclose my disability to student to help them better understand me and my approach."
- "**How to encourage students** who i suspect need formal accommodations to seek the help without alienating the student"

#### Limitations

- Unclear whether faculty perceived the student as having a disability in the photo
- Possible social desirability effects
- Low participation rate. No incentives offered.
- Faculty members with disabilities might not be receiving accommodations to participate the study

#### Implications and Future Directions

- Promotes social justice and inclusion on behalf of people with disabilities to better assist and accommodate students with disabilities
- Suggests reallocating resources to improve faculty's disability-related attitudes and knowledge

### Conclusion

- More research is needed to understand the relationship between recognizability of a disability and the attitudes, perceptions, and willingness of faculty toward disability-related accommodations.
- Furthermore, this study would have benefited from funding to incentivize faculty participation.

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