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Barriers for all?: Disabled and nondisabled student learning and assessment experiences at one UK University

Widening Participation Policy Unit (WPPU)

Delivered by Manny Madriaga

17 April 2009



**Sheffield
Hallam University**

SHARPENS YOUR THINKING

all about the evidence

- identify an evidence base, through the provision of statistical information to inform policy change
- DIUS - suggests commissioning research into comparative progression rates for disabled and nondisabled students



Students' Experiences of LTA

- Investigate the learning, teaching and assessment (LTA) experiences of students - wanting to know whether there are differences between students in their perceptions of their LTA experiences by disability status



Students' Experiences of LTA

- Analysis of quantitative data – student achievement within the year (institutional data)
- Analysis of quantitative and qualitative data – the student experience of LTA survey* (done) and individual interviews (done)
 - * amended version of ESRC award RES-139-25-0135: see Healey *et al.* 2006; Fuller *et al.* forthcoming, RoutledgeFalmer)



Students' Experiences of LTA

- In keeping with the requirement to analyse both quantitative and qualitative data a matched participant sample of students both with and with no known impairments were sent a postal questionnaire.



Students' Experiences of LTA

Survey Participants

Randomly selected 50% of disabled students.

Matched by:

- age (under 21, 21-30, 31+),
- ethnicity (White, BME),
- year of study (first year, continuing),
- and gender (male, female)

with 2 non-disabled students.

(668 disabled and 1336 non-disabled students)



Students' Experiences of LTA

Survey respondents

- So survey sent to just over 2000 undergraduate students (Spring 2008)
- 484 completed questionnaires (172 from disabled students and 312 from students with no known disability)
- No major differences between the 'perfect match responses' and 'all' responses – so all responses used.
- Recorded responses on 'Teleform' and analysed in SPSS / NVivo.



Students' Experiences of LTA

Attainment Results

- An average mark was created for each student in the sample using individual module marks and taking into consideration the module credit weight.
- Analysed using a Univariate ANOVA
- Disability status being the independent variable and average mark the dependant variable



Students' Experiences of LTA

<u>Disability Status</u>	<u>Average Mark</u>
No known disability	59.35*
Disabled with support	57.67
SLDs with support	56.45
Declared disability or SLD with no support	54.22*

- Only the difference between the mean results of students with no known disability and those who declared disability or SLD but had no learning contract is significant ($p < .05$)



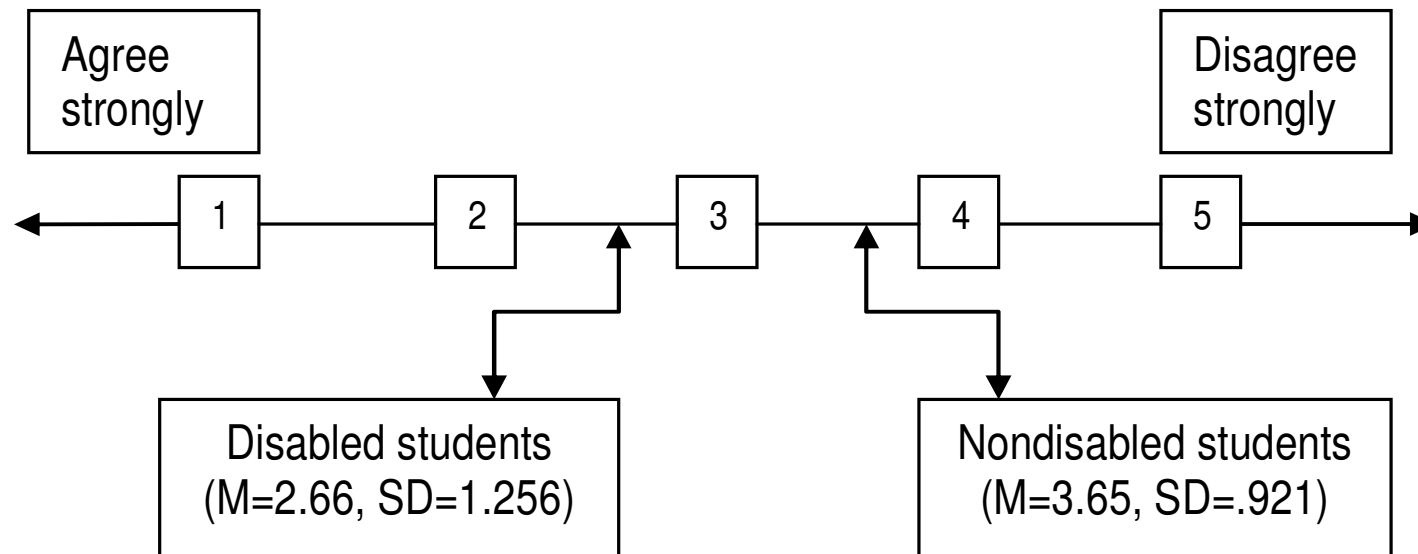
Students' Experiences of LTA

Number and percentage of disabled students returning questionnaires by disability type		
	No. of students	% of disabled participants
specific learning difficulties, (e.g. dyslexia)	81	47.1
unseen disabilities e.g., (e.g. diabetes, epilepsy, asthma)	25	14.5
mental health difficulties	16	9.3
Deaf/hearing impairments,	11	6.4
Blind/partially sighted	6	3.5
multiple disabilities	6	3.5
Autistic spectrum disorder/ Asperger syndrome	5	2.9
Wheelchair users/mobility problems	2	1.2
other disabilities	19	11
Unrecorded disability	1	0.6
Total	172	100



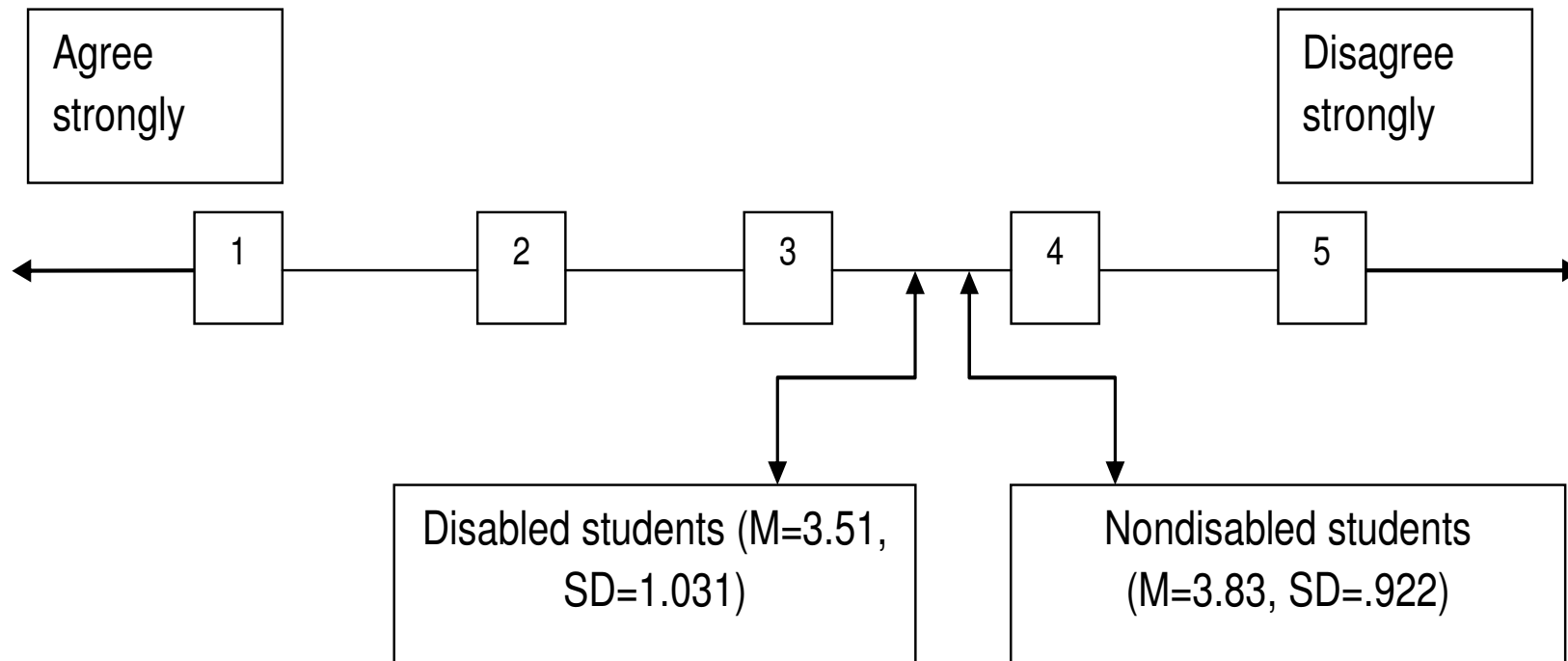
Students' Experiences of LTA

I frequently have difficulties in taking notes



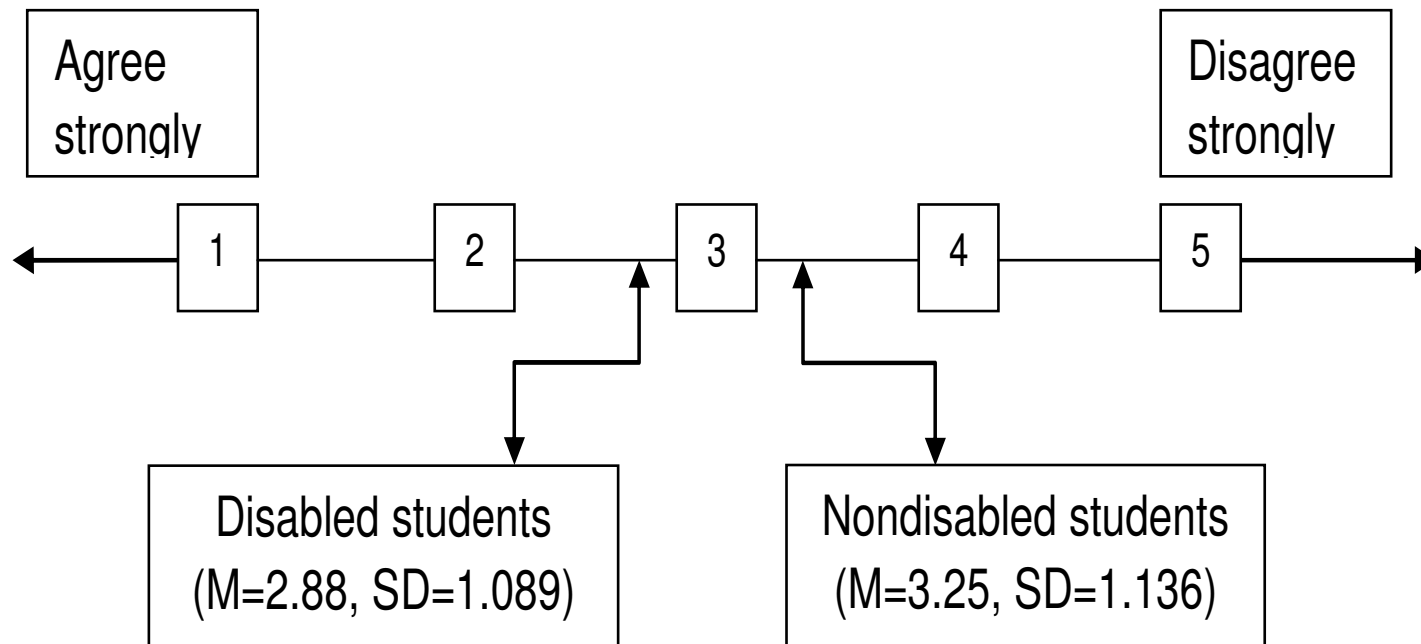
Students' Experiences of LTA

I frequently have difficulties hearing the lecturer



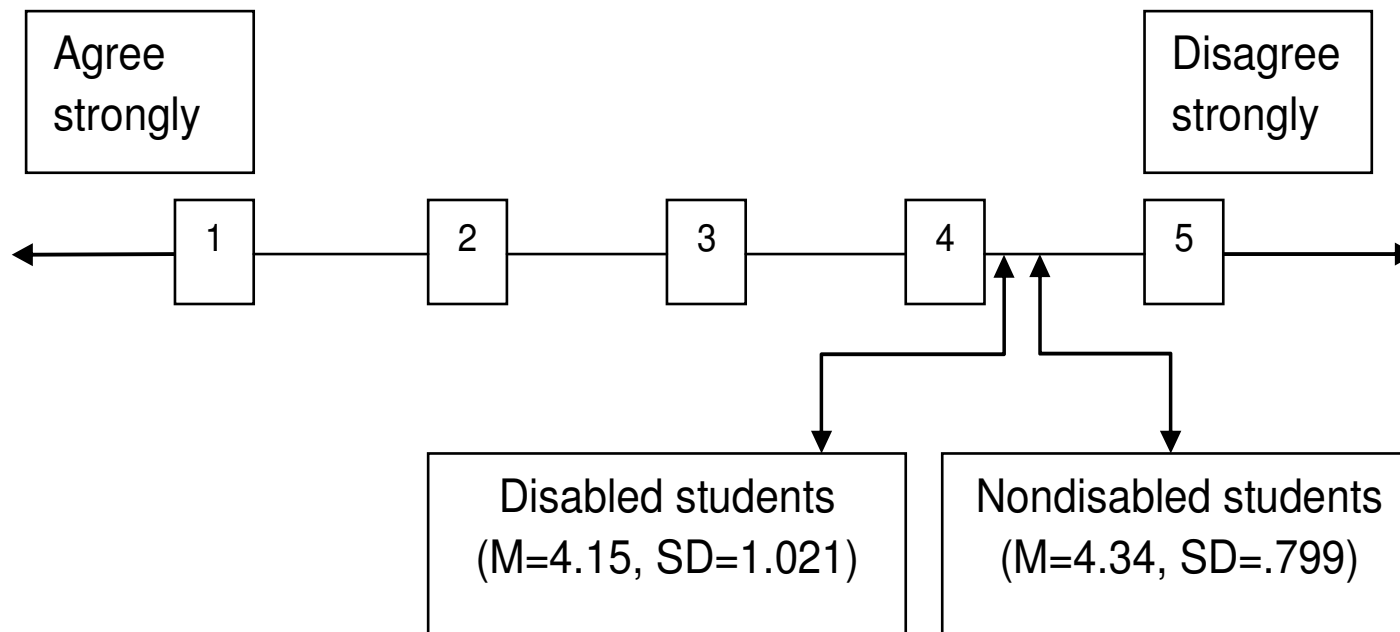
Students' Experiences of LTA

I have experienced difficulty reading course materials because we are not given enough time



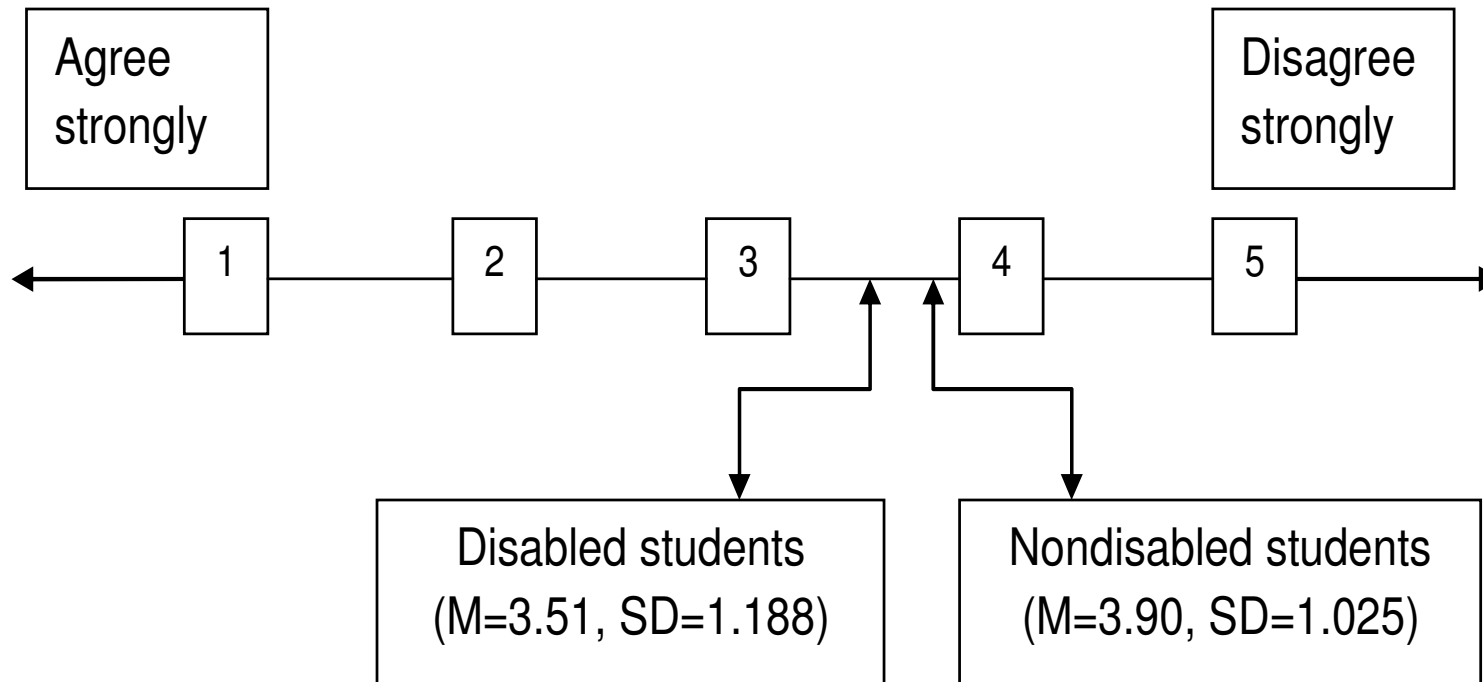
Students' Experiences of LTA

I have experienced some difficulty with physical access to the building



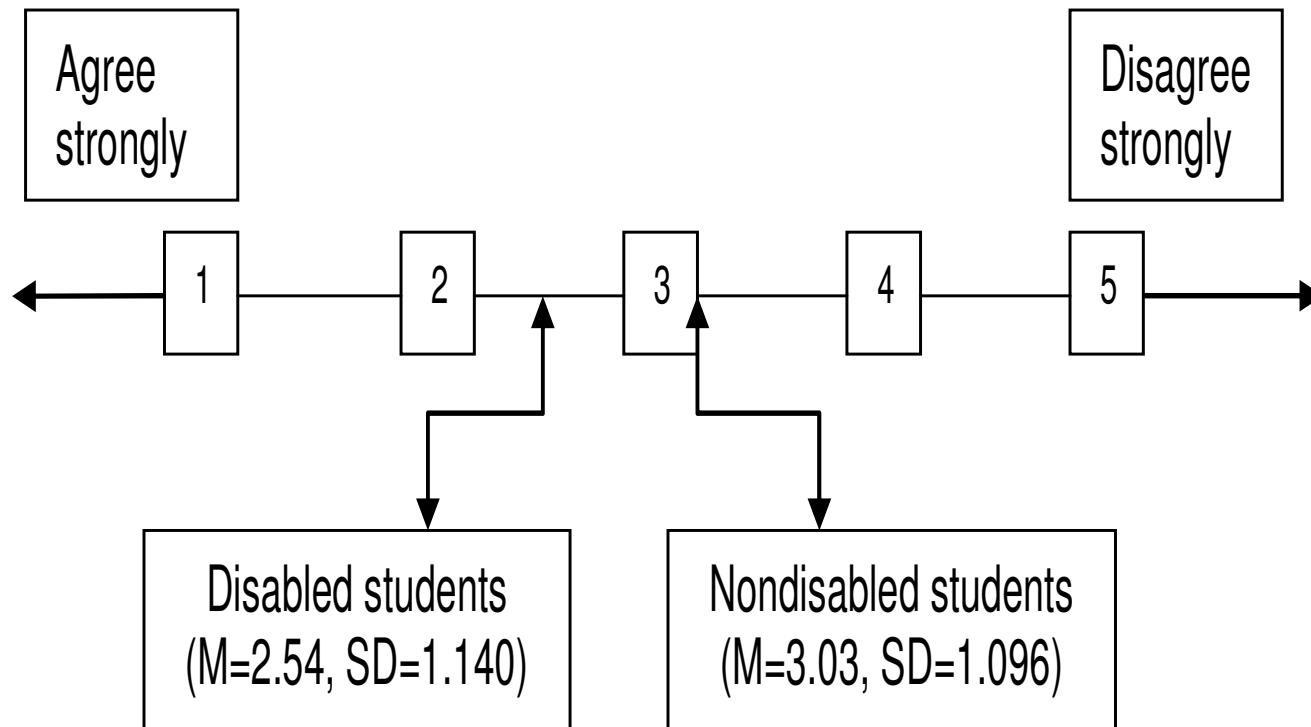
Students' Experiences of LTA

I have experienced some difficulty with handouts and other materials not being in an appropriate format



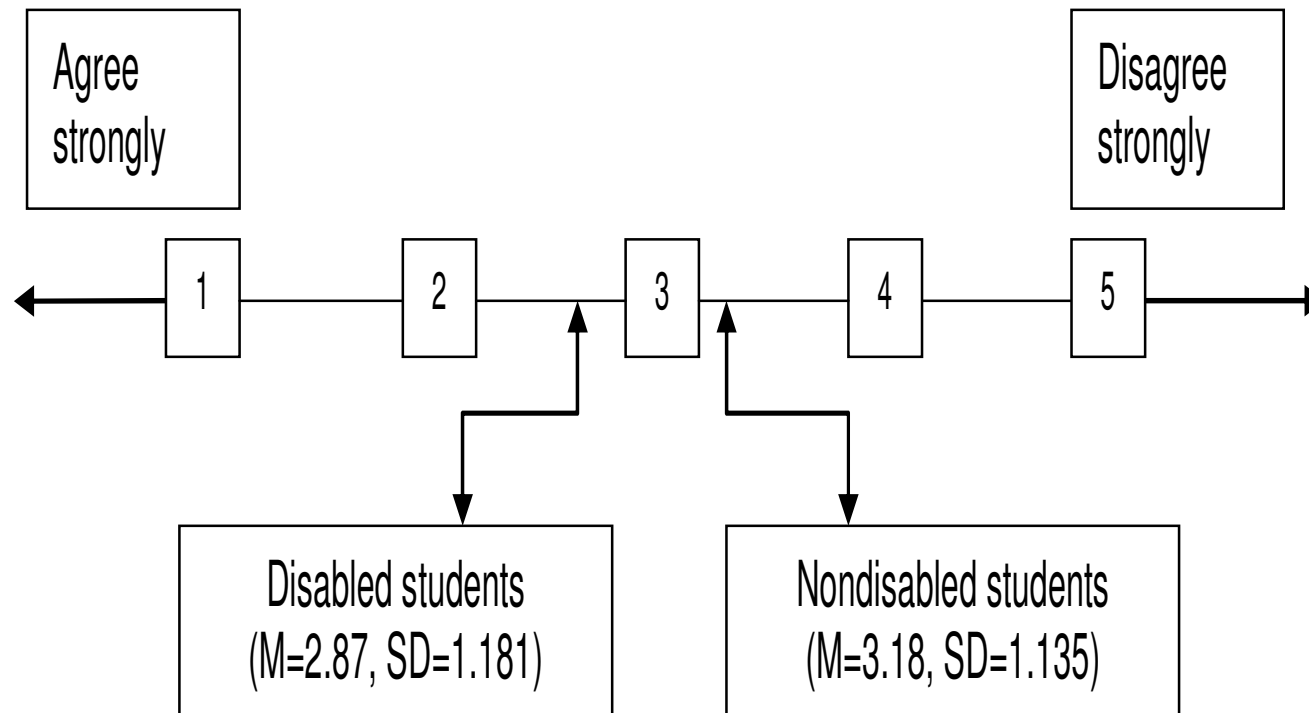
Students' Experiences of LTA

I have problems writing continuously in exams



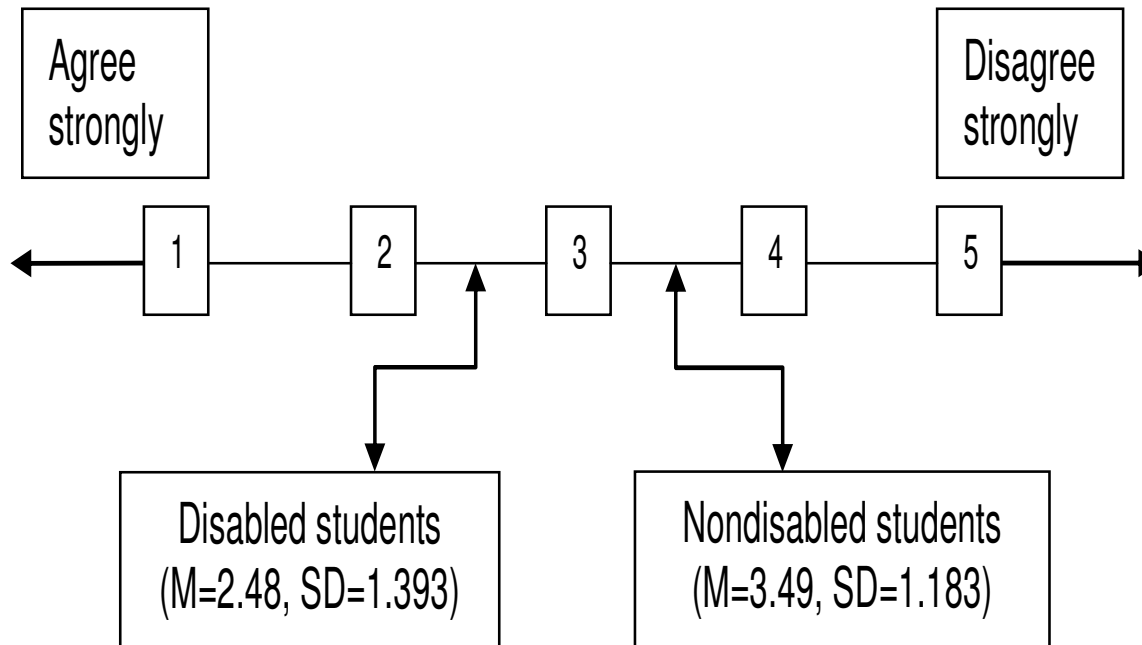
Students' Experiences of LTA

I have had some difficulties when giving oral presentations



Students' Experiences of LTA

I sometimes experience difficulty with my literacy skills
(spelling, grammar, etc.).



Students' Experiences of LTA

Table 4. Means scores for disabled and nondisabled students for the following statements ranked by eta squared (from least to most)*

Questionnaire statement (5=Disagree strongly ↔ 1=Agree strongly)	Disabled sample group	Nondisabled sample group	Eta²
The feedback on my work helps to clarify things that I haven't fully understood	3.46 (SD = .959)	3.47 (SD = .970)	.00003
My lecturers make a real effort to understand difficulties I may be having with my work	3.32 (SD = .985)	3.30 (SD = .917)	.00005
I have had difficulty due to lectures, seminars, workshops interfering with meal times**	3.67 (SD = 1.039)	3.69 (SD = 1.060)	.00007
My lecturers give me helpful feedback on my progress	3.35 (SD = .959)	3.33 (SD = .931)	.00011
The feedback on my work helps me to improve my ways of learning and studying	3.66 (SD = .848)	3.63 (SD = .910)	.0003
My lecturers have been helpful when I have approached them about difficulties with my studies	3.83 (SD = .892)	3.78 (SD = .913)	.0005
I find some teaching staff uncooperative**	3.25 (SD = 1.226)	3.18 (SD = 1.168)	.00067
My lecturers make it clear, right from the start, what they expect from me	3.26 (SD = .916)	3.31 (SD = .926)	.00068
My lecturers normally give me useful comments on my work	3.42 (SD = .995)	3.35 (SD = .941)	.001
My lecturers give me plenty of examples and illustrations to help with my understanding	3.42 (SD = .924)	3.50 (SD = .847)	.00157



Students' Experiences of LTA

- 'Missed first semester exams and occasional lectures and seminars in second semester due to medical reasons' (1st year history nondisabled student).



Students' Experiences of LTA

- 'I find it hard to read and keep log of information that I'm reading. I may have to read the documents over and over again' (1st year business and marketing nondisabled student).
- 'I find it really difficult to write to the expected level and find I struggle as I don't understand what I am reading and had to read over and over and over again and there isn't enough time' (*sic*) (2nd year nursing nondisabled student).



Students' Experiences of LTA

Concluding thoughts:

- We found evidence to suggest that disabled students who disclose and get learning support do just as well as academically as nondisabled students.
- At the same time, there is a significant statistical difference in attainment between nondisabled students and disabled students without support.



Students' Experiences of LTA

Concluding thoughts:

- ... not just the responsibility of student services, particularly disabled student support teams
- Using this kind of evidence is 'ammo' to influence institutional change



Students' Experiences of LTA

Also...

By contrasting the two student experiences, we wanted to show that difficulties and challenges in learning and assessment are not only the reserve of a 'disabled student support' agenda. *All students* will benefit from a disabled student support, or inclusive practice, agenda that does not necessitate discriminating between disabled and nondisabled students (Waterfield et al. 2006).





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