

Community Needs Assessment – Kinkel Center

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Executive Summary

The social work student research team conducted a campus-wide survey to better understand how the Kinkel Center for Student Success, Academic Advising and Engagement supports students needing academic accommodations and academic support at Fontbonne University. After reviewing the campus-wide survey, an interview with the director of the Kinkel Center, and post-appointment surveys from the services offered by the Kinkel Center (writing support, academic accommodations, professional and peer academic coaching, tutoring, and proctored examinations), the student research team found that the Kinkel Center sufficiently meets the needs of the Fontbonne Community, but will have to continue to grow to meet the needs of the rising population of students with learning disabilities in post-secondary education. We recommend that the Kinkel Center hires more professional tutors, enhances their peer academic coaching program, and that they advocate for additional technology resources to be used in the classroom and outside of the Kinkel Center.

Organization Description

Fontbonne University (FBU) is a private, Catholic university that was founded by the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet in 1923. FBU is located in Clayton, Missouri and accommodates about 1000 graduate and undergraduate students. The mission of FBU is to serve the dear neighbor without distinction and to provide transformative education committed to the common good, inspiring students to become global citizens who think critically and act ethically to create a more just world.

The Kinkel Center for Student Success, Academic Advising and Engagement is located on the third floor of Ryan Hall at FBU and supports students throughout their academic journey. The Kinkel Center provides a comprehensive support system that helps students get the help they

need inside and outside of the classroom. The academic support staff offers students writing support, academic accommodations, professional and peer academic coaching, tutoring, proctored examinations, and many other engagement resources to support students throughout their journey.

Fontbonne University Demographics

Fontbonne University currently has 682 undergraduate students and 262 graduate students enrolled. Out of the 944 students, 59% identify as female and 41% identify as male. FBU only collects demographics within the gender binary, so this data may not be entirely representative of the community. White students make up the majority of the Fontbonne population with 59%, Black or African American students represent 21% of the population, multi-race makes up 4%, International 3%, Asian 2%, Hispanic 1%, Native Asian/Pacific Islander and American Indian/Alaska Native make up less than 1%. The remaining 9% is unknown. 44% of the student population is Low-income and Pell Eligible. There are currently 61 full-time professional faculty members.

Academic Accommodations in Post-Secondary Education

Academic accommodations are needed at every level of the education system, but rarely students in need can receive these accommodations without facing new challenges in post-secondary education. In elementary and secondary school, students are protected under the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and school districts are required to provide a free appropriate public education (FAPE) to each child with a disability in their district. However, post-secondary schools are not required to provide FAPE to students, which leaves students having to advocate for their own academic needs (“Students with Disabilities,” 2020). The number of students with disabilities in need of academic support pursuing post-secondary education has continued to

increase over the past few decades (Francis et al., 2019). The graduation rate of students pursuing post-secondary education with a disability is consistently lower than students without disabilities (Francis et al., 2019).

While there are often resources for students with disabilities sometimes they are not able to access these resources or choose not to ask for accommodations because of fear of stigma, wanting independence in their education, or wanting to overcome their disability on their own (Squires et al., 2018). Students with disabilities also receive a lot of input and judgment from outside voices that keep them from reaching their goals and one student shared that an advisor thought they needed to “figure out personal problems before I could continue in this track” (Squires et al., 2018). Students with disabilities should not be limited in what they want to accomplish, and accessing resources should not something to be ashamed of, but rather something that allows for students to learn in an equitable, fair environment that meets their unique needs.

Students with disabilities need to be supported in whatever way they need. While some students will not feel comfortable receiving help due to personal preference or because of a social stigma that comes from receiving different help, institutions must work to remove barriers that keep these students from success. Collaborating with students through K-12 grade, addressing financial barriers of students outside of tuition, identifying students’ strengths, increasing student knowledge on resources, and advocating for more affordable college education for every student will help bridge the gap for students with disabilities in post-secondary education (Millet et al., 2022).

The Kinkel Center at Fontbonne University should be aware of the different challenges and barriers that students with disabilities may face during their time in post-secondary education

and work to eliminate these barriers for all students to create an equitable learning experience for every individual on campus. 19% of undergraduate and 11% of graduate students report having a disability in higher education, and this does not include the students who do not feel comfortable identifying themselves with a disability and/or students who cannot afford to obtain paperwork for their disability (Millet et al., 2022). Universities can grow to meet the needs of students with learning disabilities by changing financial aid policies to provide clauses that allow for reduced course loads without aid cuts, advocate for more funding for disability awareness and accommodation training for staff, and by providing more support for first-year students in accessing accommodation resources on campus (Millet et al., 2022). Ensuring that students with disabilities are given a fair chance at being successful in higher education will allow for more representation for future students who may be facing the same barriers.

Introduction to the Community Needs Assessment

As the national population of students in need of academic accommodations continues to rise, the Kinkel Center at Fontbonne University will need to work to support and meet the different needs of many students. We conducted a Community Needs Assessment to better understand what academic support the Fontbonne community needs and to learn more about the resources that are currently in place to meet these needs. The questions asked by the community assessment:

1. What are the academic needs of the Fontbonne Community?
2. How is the Kinkel Center meeting the needs of the Fontbonne Community?
3. Does the Kinkel Center have the resources to meet the needs of the Fontbonne Community?

Methodology

The social work student research team conducted a campus-wide survey through convenience sampling to hear directly from the students at Fontbonne University. The survey was adapted from the national Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) from the United States Census Bureau to measure housing insecurity (HI) (Robins et al., 2021), the 2-item Hunger Vital sign to measure food insecurity (Robins et al., 2021), and the EDUCAUSE student survey to measure the Kinkel Center support services. The survey was distributed through social media, personal contacts, previous professors, and an email was sent out to the Social Work Club. To participate in the study participants needed to be over 18, be able to read English, be an undergraduate student at Fontbonne University, and have access to a computer/mobile device with internet access to complete the survey.

The goal of the community assessment was “to learn more about how the programs at Fontbonne University are meeting the needs of students.” The survey was 44 questions long and took students about 15 minutes to complete. They had the option to skip any questions that they were not comfortable answering or did not know how to answer. Forty-nine surveys were completed and reviewed. Students in the research group also took part in the assessment since we are members of the community in which we are doing the assessment and wanted to gather as much information as possible.

The community assessment also included an interview with the Director of the Kinkel Center, Regina Wade Johnson. The academic accommodations research team conducted an interview that took about 30 minutes. Johnson has worked with the Kinkel Center for over 5 years and was interviewed on the role of the Kinkel Center at Fontbonne, the different services

that the Kinkel Center provides, and what resources are needed for the continued development of the department. The interview was recorded and analyzed by the research team.

The Kinkel Center conducts post-service surveys after every appointment that is made through the department. Johnson was able to provide the research team with this survey data dating back to 2019. When a student makes an appointment for accommodations, testing, writing, math, or peer coaching they receive a short, post-survey that allows them to share their experience using the services. The Kinkel Center uses this data to ensure they are meeting the needs of students and to gain understanding of what is working well in the department and what they can improve on. The research team was given these surveys during the interview with Regina and analyzed them alongside the campus-wide survey to learn more about the services provided through the Kinkel Center.

Results

Overall, we found that the Kinkel Center is doing a sufficient job of meeting the needs of the Fontbonne Community, but will have to continue to grow with the population to ensure this trend continues upwards and adapts to the growing population in need of support.

Forty-nine students completed the campus wide survey. 77% of the respondents identified as White/Caucasian, 12.5% identified as Hispanic/Latinx, 8.33% identified as African American/Black, 4.17% identified as Asian, 2.08% identified as Other, and one respondent did not identify their race. 83.33% of respondents identified as female, 12.50% identified as male, 2.08% identified as non-binary, 2.08% identified as still exploring, and one respondent did not identify their gender. 77.1% of respondents work full or part-time and 16.67% are unemployed. 91.67% of respondents are full time students. 64.58% of respondents live on campus and 35.42% live off campus.

The team recognizes that the demographics of our campus-wide survey does not align with the demographics of the entire Fontbonne population, and therefore weakens our results. To get a more accurate representation of the community's needs, we would need to have more students participate in the survey.

The campus wide-survey results showed the possibility of barriers from registering with the Kinkel Center for accommodations. Sixteen out of the forty-nine respondents identified having a disability or impairment. 68.75% identified having a mental health diagnosis, 25% having a learning disability, 12.50% having a mobility impairment, and 6.25% having a sensory impairment. Of these students, 87.50% identify as White, 6.25% identify as Hispanic/Latinx, and 6.25% identify as African American/Black. Ten of the respondents identify as female, five as male, and one as non-binary. Fifteen students are full-time, and one student is a part-time student.

Nine of the sixteen students who identified having some form of disability or impairment are not currently registered with the Kinkel Center, and seven of these students are not registered due to external factors, (unable to obtain paperwork, didn't have time to complete the application, didn't believe the Kinkel Center could help them, or had a negative experience with another disability office or service provider). Johnson identified that students are not able to receive accommodations without paperwork and that they must meet with Johnson to have access to services that the Kinkel Center provides. If students do not have paperwork, Johnson connects them with Madison Schneider, the case manager at Fontbonne, to help them get connected with service providers that could provide them with the proper paperwork.

Johnson acknowledged in our interview that everyone has a different learning style, and that some of these learning styles are not being accommodated to their fullest potential through

student tutors. Johnson believes that the student workers do a great job, and the post-appointment surveys support this claim as the Kinkel Center received a 92% satisfaction rate last year for all of their services. Johnson, however, would like to hire more professional tutors to help students with unique academic needs that the student workers may not be able to fully assist.

On the campus wide survey, 7 students identified requiring accessible content, accessible technologies, and/or technology accommodations in order to effectively participate in their courses. Johnson spoke to the lack of technology that the Kinkel Center is able to provide for students who need accommodations. The Kinkel Center has a computer lab, but it is only open during regular business hours (8:30-4:30). The Kinkel Center currently does not have the funding to provide laptops for check out and Johnson said that many students she works with must use their smart phone to take notes and complete all homework assignments.

When reviewing the post-appointment surveys from the Kinkel Center, we found that the least amount of people utilize the peer coaching program. Only 24 students utilized this program this past year, but 100% of the students rated their appointments positively. The majority of appointments made for coaching are made at the beginning of the fall semester and the end of the fall semester. During the spring, the number of appointments were significantly lower with less than half of the appointments taking place in the spring semesters from 2019-2023.

Recommendations

The research team recommends that more professional tutors should be hired to better serve and accommodate the students in the Kinkel Center. Johnson mentioned that student tutors are currently used in the Kinkel Center, but these tutors are not fully equipped and do not have the resources to properly serve every student's needs. Accommodation training for staff has been proven to be effective when working with students with unique learning disabilities, but students

don't always receive this training (Millet et al., 2022). Hiring more professional tutors will increase the scope of practice and provide a more structured tutoring schedule.

The peer academic coaching program should continue to be developed and used more often for students. When students move on to post-secondary education they are often learning to advocate for their needs for the first time (Millet et al., 2022). Peer academic coaching allows for students to receive support from someone their own age, and allows for students to get organizational help, test taking help, and other support during their transition into higher education. The post-appointment surveys from the peer academic coaching meetings show a 100% satisfaction rate, yet the program is the least used intervention through the Kinkel Center. If more professional tutors are hired, student tutors could focus more on non-subject related assistance for students seeking services, and help support students through the transition into higher education.

Accessible technology should continue to be added to the Kinkel Center to break down barriers for students who do not have access to laptops and other resources. Students needing academic accommodations often do not have a voice to speak up about places where their needs are not being met (Squires et al., 2018). Johnson has noticed many students who she works with having to use their phones to take notes in class and complete homework assignments when the Kinkel Center is not open. Some teachers do not allow for phones to be used in the classroom, and some teachers are not aware of the barrier that many of their students are facing outside of their classroom. Having access to laptops you can check-out or other note taking/accessible technology could help take away an extra barrier for students facing learning disabilities.

After analyzing the data, the research team recommends that more professional tutors should be hired, the peer academic coaching program should continue to be strengthened, and

that more funding should be used to offer technology for students to use outside of the Kinkel Center. We found that all of the Kinkel Center programs are successful in the eyes of the students receiving services, but there is always room to grow and there are always more students who need help. Johnson recognized the need that will come with the expected growth in population of students, and taking these recommendations will ensure every student can find success in the classroom.

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