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*Invisible Disabilities*

*"I don't know if she really even has a disability"*

*"Everyone has anxiety in college. Why is he any different?"*

*"She just needs to try harder"*

*"If she would just focus, she would be fine"*

These are all comments I have heard over the past six months in regard to students with invisible disabilities. When people think of disabilities, they often describe a person in a wheelchair, a guide dog or someone who is deaf. On the contrary, disabilities can span across all areas. Many of these disabilities are apparent in some situations, while not in

others. It is because of this inconsistency that people make statements such as those in the beginning of this story. People with invisible disabilities often face more discrimination because of lack of understanding.

In this issue, we will try to help our readers understand the validity of invisible disabilities (ID) and how some of them are characterized.

The Federation of Invisible Disabilities define ID as a condition that is not readily visible to the eye but does affect the individuals' ability to learn, interact with others, be a contributing member of society and otherwise participate fully

in life. Behavioral and emotional difficulties often follow and may become the focus of attention. Some of these disabilities include but are not limited to ADD/HD, Learning Disabilities, Psychiatric Disabilities, Aspergers Syndrome, Tourette's Syndrome and Chronic Pain. Although Invisible Disabilities range in classification, they all have one thing in common. They are very real to the people trying to live with them.



**Breaking Down Barriers:**

- 7-10% of all incoming college freshmen have a qualified disability of some kind
- Only 20% of those students with disabilities disclose them and seek accommodations due to their fear of discrimination

*Campus Improvements*

There are so many things going on around campus that it is difficult to highlight just one for this issue. Several people from a variety of departments have joined the campus wide initiative to increase disability awareness at UTC. One of these collaborative projects that focuses primarily on students with invisible disabilities is the Academic Coaching partnership. Academic coaching is a service similar to tutoring, but not based on content areas. While tutoring focuses on math, writing or science; academic coaching focuses on learning how to learn. Some topics covered by coaches might include time management, note taking skills, test preparation and reading comprehension. This is the first semester we have attempted this program in partnership with another department. Dr. Janetta Bradley from the Teacher Prep. Academy teaches a 400 level Education course and was gracious in welcoming this challenge. In the beginning of

the course, the staff from the Office for Students with Disabilities spoke to her students and explained, in somewhat overwhelming terms, what academic coaching entails. Dr. Bradley then made coaching hours a requirement for the course. Students from the ED 400 course were paired up with students registered with our office who volunteered for this project. Other than telling the ED 400 students the required number of hours and writing expectations, we left the expectations open. We have been so pleasantly surprised at the level of professionalism and commitment shown by these students. After the initial hesitation of having so much freedom, they took this challenge and made it a huge success.

Both parts of the partnership realized how individualized academic coaching needs to

be. There is not a cookie-cutter approach to this which made this project an incredible learning experience for everyone involved.

The coaches took an active interest in the lives of some students living with disabilities in their college community. They did not only meet with them once a week, but also voiced concerns about academic progress, mental health issues and accessibility problems. These students developed their own curriculum based on their students' needs, reflected on their sessions and made changes when needed.

This project had a positive impact on all people involved. If you would be interested in taking part in this program in the future, please contact us at 4006.