STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES' PERCEPTIONS AND EXPERIENCES OF THE DISABILITY UNIT AT THE UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL: HOWARD COLLEGE CAMPUS

BY

AVANYA NAIDOO

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTERS OF SOCIAL SCIENCE (INDUSTRIAL PSYCHOLOGY)

In the School of Psychology
in the Faculty of Humanities, Development, and Social Sciences
at the University of KwaZulu-Natal

Supervisor: Ms. Shaida Bobat
Date submitted: March 2010

DECLARATION

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Social Science, in the Graduate Programme of Industrial Psychology, University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.

I declare that this dissertation is my own unaided work. All citations, references and borrowed ideas have been duly acknowledged. I confirm that an external editor was used and that my supervisor was informed of the identity and details of my editor. It is being submitted for the degree of Master of Social Science (Industrial Psychology) in the Faculty of Humanities, Development and Social Science, University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. None of the present work has been submitted previously for any degree or examination in any other University.

Signed: ....   **Date: ....**
Avanya Naidoo

Signed: ....   **Date: ....**
Editor: S. Naicker

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my supervisor, Ms. S. Bobat, for being there for me throughout the duration of my research study. She was a real motivating force behind this study. She openly offered her time, help and support to me and for that I am most grateful.

Thank you, Shaida.

Table of contents

1. Abstract

Although significant progress has been made to increase the throughput rate of students with disabilities in tertiary education, there is still much to be done as many disabled students face discrimination and difficulty in acquiring and receiving support. Moreover, disability policy often does not lead to practice at tertiary level. Many students with disabilities still need an ally for basic accommodations.

The focus of this research study was on the perceptions and experiences of the students with disabilities at the University of KwaZulu-Natal: Howard College Campus regarding the University's Disability Unit. This is in terms of the facilities and services offered by the Disability Unit as well as how effective it is in its functioning and meeting its students' needs. This study was designed to explore the Disability Unit from the perspectives of students', their experiences and responses to it.

This research study was conducted with students with disabilities from the University of KwaZulu-Natal: Howard College Campus. The sample population included six participants from the major categories of disability at the University: visual and physical impairments. Of the six participants selected, two were without sight, two were partially sighted, and two were physically disabled. Furthermore, participants comprised both males and females and were studying at different levels at the University (i.e. first year, second year, fourth year and fifth year students). This research study aimed to explore the effectiveness of the Disability Unit at the University of KwaZulu-Natal: Howard College Campus in meeting the academic needs of its students with disabilities, from the perspective of the students with disabilities.

Results from the current research study revealed that inadequate staff, resources and funding, poor coordination and communication between significant role players, substandard relationships, and insufficient awareness (around disabled students' academic and social needs) among the entire University population represent major barriers to success for students with disabilities. Moreover, although student support services play a crucial role in supporting students with disabilities, the entire institution and university population, staff and students alike, is

responsible for creating an inclusive environment where students with disabilities can experience a sense of community and attitudes of embracing diversity and accommodating differences. Responsibility, thus, lies with all relevant role players of the University of KwaZulu-Natal: Howard College Campus who must work together to overcome institutional as well as social barriers; accommodate for the students with disabilities, endeavour to meet their academic, emotional and social needs, and help them develop academically.

In the future, progress can be made through the increased coordination of disability support services and programmes to educate faculties and peers about support, accommodations and rights of individuals with disabilities.

2. Introduction

2.1. Background and Outline of Research Problem

Since 1994 the South African government has been committed to the transformation of the education system, including higher education. Higher education institutions have been encouraged to embrace individuals representing groups that had been excluded on the grounds of age, race, gender and, more specifically, students with disabilities. Within this transformation process some of the biggest challenges higher education institutions face includes policy changes (Pahad, 2001). Although policy development is an important stepping-stone, the reality is that appropriate practice, sufficient awareness, and positive attitudes are required to successfully support and accommodate the diverse needs of students with disabilities.

According to Kerr and Chaane (2008) in the Census 2001, a total of 2,255,982 people reported that they had some kind of disability that prevented them from full participation in life activities. This number represented 5% of the total population listed in the census, with the majority of disabilities being physical and sight disabilities. Thirty percent of the respondents reported having no schooling, and only 18% were employed, compared with the 35% of employed, able-bodied respondents. According to Kerr and Chaane (2008) the 2001 Census reveals that there is a definite need for relevant and reliable information on the prevalence of disabilities, as informed policy decision-making and the improvement of the welfare of disabled persons remains a key challenge in South Africa. The findings from Kerr and Chaane's (2008) research study highlighted the disadvantaged position disabled persons are experiencing as far as access to basic services and employment opportunities are concerned. As a result, Kerr and Chaane (2008) report that the role of awareness and accessibility in all institutions is extremely important; and with the transformation of the educational landscape in South Africa in recent years, these issues have become increasingly prominent.

The focus of this research study, therefore, was on the perceptions and experiences of students with disabilities at the University of KwaZulu-Natal: Howard College Campus regarding the University's Disability Unit. This is in terms of the facilities and services offered by the Disability Unit as well as how effective it is in its functioning and in meeting its students' needs.

This study was designed to explore the Disability Unit from the perspectives of students' responses to it.

2.2. Aim/Rationale for Research

The underlying principle behind this research study is the present lack of research of this nature in South Africa. The current study, therefore, aimed to provide a foundation from which future studies can build in order to comprehensively grasp the position of students with disabilities within the South African context.

Transformation in higher education has in many instances been a complex task, especially in light of recent mergers (such as that of the University of Natal and the University of Durban Westville now known as the University of KwaZulu-Natal). This, according to the outcomes of the Disability Conference on "Erasing the Margins: Researching Disability in Higher Education", co-hosted by the Foundation of Tertiary Institutions of the Northern Metropolis and the Witwatersrand University Disabled Students Programme (Lawton-Misra, 2005), has allowed issues such as disability to become trivialized by what appears to be more significant and major concerns. While diversity is being continually addressed, the focus has been primarily on race and gender issues, and 'people with disabilities' are unfortunately often overlooked. This highlights another driving force behind this research study; the need for higher education institutions to realise their role in preventing social inequality and exclusion, and creating learning environments that are truly inclusive.

This research study specifically explored the perceptions and experiences of students with disabilities with regard to support in learning within the context of the Disability Unit at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Howard College Campus.

2.3. Research Problems and Objectives: Key questions to be asked

1. What are the perceptions and experiences of the disabled students at the University of KwaZulu-Natal: Howard College Campus regarding the University's Disability Unit?
2. What are the disabled students' perceptions and experiences of the Disability Unit's effectiveness in meeting their academic needs?

3. What are the disabled students' experiences of (financial, academic and social) support in learning at the University of KwaZulu-Natal: Howard College Campus?

3. Literature Review

3.1. Models of Disability

How we view disability will influence the way in which society, institutions and systems are structured and organised to accommodate students with disabilities to ensure equal participation and non-discrimination. Models of disability are tools for defining impairment and for providing a basis upon which government and society can devise strategies for meeting the needs of disabled people. These models of disability are often treated with scepticism as it is thought that they do not reflect a real world, are often incomplete and encourage narrow thinking, and rarely offer detailed direction for action. However, they are a useful framework in which to achieve an understanding of disability issues, and also of the perspective held by those creating and applying the models (Kaplan, 2000). We should not see these models as a series of exclusive options with one superior to or replacing previous sets. Their development and popularity provides us with a continuum on changing social attitudes to disability and where they are at a given time; they complement one another in offering attention to alternate dimensions within the analysis and conceptualisation of disability and impairment. Ultimately, these models change as society changes.

3.1.1. The Medical Model

Under this model, disabled people are defined by their illness or medical condition. They are disempowered as medical diagnoses are used to regulate and control access to social benefits, housing, education, leisure, and employment. Additionally, the problems that are associated with disability are deemed to reside with the individual. The medical model promotes the view of a disabled person as dependent and needing to be cured or cared for, and it justifies the way in which disabled people have been systematically excluded from society. In other words, the person is the problem, not society. Furthermore, society has no underlying responsibility to make a 'place' for persons with disabilities, since they live in an outsider role waiting to be cured (Kaplan, 2000).

Indeed this model, in relation to the current research study, does not aid policy development, appropriate practice, sufficient awareness, and positive attitudes required to successfully support and accommodate the diverse needs of students with disabilities. It is sometimes referred to as the 'individual model' because it promotes the notion that it is the individual disabled person who must adapt to the way in which society is constructed and organised (The Open University, 2006). As such, there would be no need to develop disability support units or structures at universities in order to aid disabled students in their experience of university life.

This way of looking at disability has contributed to ongoing discrimination and marginalisation of people with disabilities. On the contrary, when the focus is on the impairment and the degree to which a person cannot undertake activities in the 'normal' way, less attention is given to issues of discrimination and the rights of people with disabilities. In this way, according to the South African Human Rights Commission, disability becomes something that is imposed by society when a person with an impairment is denied access to full economic and social participation (South African Human Rights Commission, 2002, cited in the Council on Higher Education, 2005).

3.1.2. The Social Model

The alternative way of viewing disability is informed by the social model. The social model was developed by disabled people in response to the medical model and the impact it has had on their lives. The social model serves not only to critique but also to complement and extend the existing medical model of disability. Under the social model, disability is understood as socially produced by systematic patterns of exclusion that have been built into the social fabric of our society (Hughes & Paterson, 1997). Disability is caused by the society in which we live and is not the fault of an individual disabled person, or an inevitable consequence of their limitations. According to this model, disability is the product of the physical, organisational, and attitudinal barriers present within society, which lead to discrimination. The removal of discrimination requires a change of approach and thinking in the way in which society is organised. The social model takes account of disabled people as part of our economic, environmental, and cultural

society. The barriers that prevent any individual playing a part in society are the problem, and not the individual.

It terms of the current research study, it would be a university's inability to adequately provide for the needs of its students with disabilities (in terms of appropriate policy, awareness, and positive attitudes to provide the support and accommodation required by the diverse range of disabled students) that would represent the social exclusion of disabled students as well as the discrimination that results. Ultimately, the university along with the barriers it creates for students with disabilities is at fault; the problem lies here and not within the disabled student.

Both the South African disability movement and the South African government approach disability from a social model perspective. A social model perspective turns the attention away from classifying people with disabilities to identifying and addressing the barriers in society that restrict their full participation in everyday life. Thus, from this perspective, disability can be understood by paying attention to the relationship between persons with impairments and the society or environment of which they are part.

The social model was developed with the aim of removing barriers within society so that disabled people have the same opportunities as everyone else to determine their own lifestyles. The strength of this model of disability lies in its placing the onus upon society and not the individual. The onus would thus lie with universities to adequately provide for students with disabilities and meet their diverse needs.

At the same time the social model focuses on the needs of the individual, whereas the medical model uses diagnoses to produce categories of disability and assumes that people with the same impairment have identical needs and abilities. Therefore, the necessary reaction to disability is the restructuring of society for it to be able to deal appropriately with people with disabilities. In the higher education context this refers to the relationship between the student with a disability and the process of teaching, learning and support. Consequently, it is important to determine whether any barriers in universities or society are hindering the emergence of conditions that create an opportunity for full participation in higher education. This implies that certain systems need to be put in place to create an environment where all students, including

students with disabilities, can participate equally in the process of teaching and learning; systems such as disability units and/or support services.

The social model of disability has fundamentally changed the way in which disability is regarded and has had a major impact on anti-discrimination legislation. However, despite these advancements, some disabled people and academics are involved in a re-evaluation of the social model and they argue that the time has come to move beyond this basic position (The Open University, 2006). The social model has been criticised for offering a disembodied view of disability (Freund, 2001; Hughes & Paterson, 1997; Shakespeare & Watson, 1997; 2002). Strong critique has been levelled at the social model's attempt to disregard the body, and its neglect of the experience of impairment as important to an understanding of disability.
According to French (1993), the recognition that disability is socially produced is not to deny the importance of addressing the pain or chronic illness experienced by some disabled people. Instead, the consequences of the impairment itself are viewed as distinct from the physical barriers of the built environment and the prejudices and negative attitudes of non-disabled people (French, 1993). Theses discriminatory barriers and societal attitudes are seen as the focus of attention within the social model of disability.

3.1.3. The Renewed Social Model

Much opposition to the medical model is as a result of it being defined solely on the basis of impairment, or having clinicians rule disabled peoples' lives. Yet, according to Shakespeare and Watson (2002) it is possible to challenge these processes without having to resort to the equally crude determinism of the social model. Disability should not be reduced to a mental condition. It should not be overlaid with negative cultural meanings. Neither should it be reduced to an outcome of social barriers alone, however important these might be in people's lives. According to Crow (1996) we need to take a fresh look at the social model of disability and learn to integrate all its complexities. It is critical that we recognise the ways in which impairment and disability work together. The social model has never suggested that disability represents the total explanation of impairment or that impairment doesn't count – that has simply been the impression we have given by keeping our experiences of impairment private and failing to incorporate them into our public, political analysis (Crow, 1996). According to Crow (1996), we

need to focus on impairment and disability: on the internal and external elements they bring to our experiences.

According to Crow (1996), impairment is about our bodies' ways of working and any implication that holds for our lives. Disability, on the other hand, is about the reaction and impact of the outside world on our practical bodies. One cannot be fully understood without attention to the other, because whilst they can exist independently of each other, there are also circumstances where they interact. And even as there are common strands to the way they operate, the balance between impairment and disability, their impact and the explanations of their cause and effect will vary according to each individual's situation and from time to time.

The social model is based primarily on the idea that once the struggle against disability is complete, only the impairment will remain for the individual and there will be no disadvantage associated with it. In other words, when disability comes to an end there will be no socially-created barriers for people with impairments. In this non-disabling society, however, impairment may well be unaffected and some individuals will find that disadvantages remain. Removal of disability does not necessarily mean the removal of restricted opportunities. Impairment in itself can be a negative, painful experience. Additionally, whilst an end to disability means people with impairments will no longer be discriminated against on those grounds, they may remain disadvantaged in their social and economic opportunities by the long-term effects of previous discrimination. Furthermore, the current interpretation of the social model also tends to assume that if impairment ceases, then the individual will no longer experience disability. In practice, however, they may continue to be disabled, albeit to a lesser degree than before.
Future employment opportunities for university graduates, for example, are likely to be affected by past discrimination in education even when impairment no longer exists.

According to Crow (1996), what the proposed renewed social model of disability does is broaden and strengthen the social model, taking it beyond grand theory and into real life, because it allows disabled people to incorporate a holistic understanding of their experiences and potential for change. Disability is still socially created, still unacceptable, and still there to be changed; but by bringing impairment into our total understanding, by fully recognising our subjective experiences, we will achieve the best route to that change.

As such, the current research study has realised the significance of the subjective experience of disabled students, and has focused on this in order to potentially bring about change to the lived experience of university life for the students with disabilities at the University of KwaZulu-Natal: Howard College Campus.

3.1.4. A Psychosocial Conceptualisation of Disability

Psychology offers an elaborate interpretive language and conceptual toolbox with which to make sense of the life worlds and subjective experiences of individuals with disabilities. For instance, such theoretical constructs as embodiment, autonomy, self-esteem, self-concept, and identity as well as positive emotions such as interest and pride for example, are noteworthy here. In addition, psychosocially derived concepts such as stigma, prejudice, and oppression also form part of the rich and meaningful conceptual toolbox that psychology delivers to the study of disability and impairment.

In light of the current research study's attention to the psychosocial experience of individuals with disabilities, the work of Deborah Marks (1999a; 1999b) has been drawn on for the purposes of a definition. Marks has argued for the importance of developing a dynamic understanding of disability which recognises the significance of examining the interrelationship between embodied subjects, and complex social and psychic relationships. Her all-encompassing, psychosocially-orientated conceptualisation is noted for its avoidance of the usual individual/social binary that has beset much theorising of disability. She defines disability as *"the complex relationship between the environment, body, and psyche, which serves to exclude certain individuals from becoming full participants in interpersonal, social, cultural, economic, and political affairs"* (Marks, 1999b: 611). Marks (1999a) further argues that disability is not inherent in a particular body or environment, but rather is an embodied relationship. Such a conceptualisation raises the issue of the ways in which our selves are known to us through our bodies. The body, thus, constitutes an entity that is bound up with innovative meanings and contexts in complex ways.

Hughes and Paterson (1997) have adopted this position that disability is experienced in, on and through the body, just as impairment is experienced in terms of the personal and cultural

narratives that help to constitute its meaning. In their view, disability is therefore experienced from the perspective of impairment (Hughes & Paterson, 1997: 334-335). Indeed by assuming the stance that our bodies constitute our portholes on the world, Hughes and Paterson (1997) conceptualise impairment as the vantage point from which disabled people perceive the world and how the world reacts to them. Additionally, their assertion that *"the impaired body is a lived body"* (Hughes & Paterson, 1997: 334-335), is grounded in the phenomenological position in which the body is a lived body or state that provides people with their perspectives on the world. Overall, Hughes and Paterson hold that *"impairment is simultaneously experienced and embodied, and so, too, is disability"* (Hughes & Paterson, 1997: 335).

3.2. Disability within the Context of South Africa

Throughout history people with disabilities have been discriminated against. According to Seirlis (2008) of the Quadpara Association of South Africa a possible reason for this is that the education system in South Africa is not integrated. Children do not go to school with disabled children (disabled children usually attend separate schools that cater for their needs), and consequently they are not exposed to being around people with disabilities. These circumstances have caused segregation, and have thus resulted in a majority of people being ignorant and prejudiced towards people with disabilities (Seirlis, 2008).

The 1994 first democratically elected government in South Africa has long held the position that all shall enjoy equal human rights (Pahad, 2001). This has special reference to eradicating the inequalities based on race, gender, religion and disability experienced under the dreadful system of apartheid. The positions that the South African government has taken since 1994, espoused in our new Constitution, outlaws discrimination based on race, gender, sex and disability.

The approach that the South African government in consultation with disabled persons took to move toward a barrier free society has been to advance the concerns of disabled persons based on the principle of the fundamental human rights of people. There was a deliberate move away from the medical model of disability. It was considered that the restoration of the dignity and the right to determine one's own future to be cornerstones of the process of integrating people with disabilities into society (Pahad, 2001).

3.3. The History

In South Africa, before 1994, the South African Education Department was divided into eighteen racially divided education departments. Each department had its own policy regarding learners with diverse educational needs and not all departments made provision for these learners. Disadvantaged communities were entirely marginalised. Special schools for learners with impairments, such as hearing, visual, cognitive or physical impairments, were established in the more advantaged education departments. The move towards improving education for learners with special needs became apparent when a democracy was established in 1994 and a progression of education transformation began.

The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa recognises that people with disabilities have been discriminated against on the basis of their disability and that the establishment of equity for them requires redressing past inequity. In addition, the overall policy framework that informs equity of access and participation for students with disabilities in South African higher education draws on the fundamental principles of equity and non-discrimination to create a more just society that values and respects every member, as outlined in the Constitution (Council on Higher Education, 2005). These values and principles are well-established in various policy documents relevant to people with disabilities, such as The Integrated National Disability Strategy (Office of the Deputy President, 1997), The Education White Paper 3 on the transformation of the higher education system (Department of Education, 1997a), The Education White Paper 6 (Department of Education, 2001a) and The National Plan for Higher Education (Department of Education, 2001b).

Both the South African disability movement and the South African government approach disability from a social model. This model sees the position of people with disabilities and the discrimination they face as a socially constructed phenomenon which is not related to the impairment of a person with a disability. Furthermore, these policy documents firmly state that institutions need to accommodate students with diverse learning needs and remove the barriers that hinder the development of all learners. As a result, adequate systems need to be put in place to make certain that institutional and appropriate curriculum transformation occurs and support is provided. While legislation requires higher education institutions to include students with

disabilities, on ground level appropriate practice is necessary to make sure that students in fact get the support and accommodations they need in order to participate equally.

Fuller, Healey, Bradley and Hall (2004) warn us against talking of students with disabilities as though they are a homogenous group. Students with disabilities have diverse support needs. Fuller, Healey, Bradley and Hall (2004) argue that unless we recognise the difficulty in understanding disabled students' needs and display willingness and ability to accommodate to these needs, it would be easy to think that legislation will in itself create, or have created, a higher education environment that can accommodate the support needs of students with disabilities. Thus, legislation does not necessarily lead to suitable practice and action, and consideration should be given to support individual needs and the transformation of institution barriers. Moreover, an integrated support service is crucial to register and address individual students' support needs.

In accordance with Greyling (2008), although units or divisions for student support services are crucial in providing individual support and addressing institutional barriers, they should not be seen as the exclusive providers of support to students with disabilities. Not only does the institution as a whole remain responsible for transformation, but all relevant role players are responsible for creating an inclusive environment of embracing differences, rather than just accepting or tolerating students with disabilities.

3.4. Disability within the Context of Higher Education in South Africa

Few investigations of higher education provision for people with disabilities have been carried out in South Africa (Council on Higher Education, 2005). What is more, the Council on Higher Education (Council on Higher Education, 2005) recognises that disability involves an important and often overlooked part of the definition of equity of access to higher education. In 1997 the White Paper on an Integrated National Disability Strategy remarked on the dismal lack of data on disability in South Africa; data that would allow government and relevant organisations to design, plan, and implement strategies for people with disabilities as well as to evaluate and measure impact. According to The Integrated National Disability Strategy, there is a serious lack of reliable information on the nature and prevalence of disability in South Africa (Office of the Deputy President, 1997). They claim that this is because, in the past, disability

issues were viewed primarily within the health and welfare framework. This led to a failure to integrate disability into mainstream government statistical processes (Office of the Deputy President, 1997).

According to the Council on Higher Education (2005), the lack of data on disability reveals the ineffective role that management information systems have had up to now, at different levels of both government departments and institutions that deal with disability. Higher education institutions are not obliged to provide data on students with disabilities as part of their compliance to the Department of Education. They also have a very irregular capability to gather reliable data on disability in their own campuses in a systematic way. As a result no systematic fundamental monitoring of disability in higher education has been in place. This situation weakens attempts to assess policy implementation in relation to students with disabilities.

The Council on Higher Education (2005) acknowledged that it was necessary to take a different route, and called for quantitative and qualitative research in the field of disability in order to investigate support and accommodation practices for students with disabilities in higher education institutions and to analyse how these relate to the enabling or constraining circumstances found at institutions (Council on Higher Education, 2005). Furthermore, the attention now focused on the difficulty experienced by people with disabilities in South Africa, especially black people with disabilities, who had been historically disadvantaged in a number of ways under the apartheid system, including exclusion from all levels of education (Council on Higher Education, 2005). People with disabilities had been marginalised by the way the apartheid system and the government of the time understood and responded to disability. While the majority of white people with disabilities were disempowered by a system that saw them as a health and welfare problem, black people with disabilities were even more disempowered as a result of poverty and violence consequential of the apartheid system. The Council on Higher Education (2005) pointed out that research findings suggested that institutions needed to develop internal systems to identify students with disabilities, to understand their needs, and to monitor the extent to which their individual needs were being met. Additionally, it stressed the need to develop support mechanisms for academic staff and students with disabilities in order to facilitate teaching and learning.

The South African Integrated National Disability Strategy recognises and makes clear the principle of self-representation. This principle has been central to the disability rights movement in South Africa. This means that the collective determination of people with disabilities must be used to bring up to date the strategies of the government. Additionally, when the principle of self-representation is recognised, the government accepts the advisory role of organisations of people with disabilities and their representatives in decision-making processes. Since people with disabilities are best equipped to change perceptions of, and attitudes to, disability, they should play a fundamental role in the development of strategies and projects (Office of the Deputy President, 1997). Consequently, it is vital to hear the voices of students with disabilities in higher education in view of the lack of reliable data on disability in South Africa. Furthermore, it is essential for people with disabilities to communicate their experiences and needs through self-representation.

3.5. Disability Unit

3.5.1. Definition of a Disability Unit

For many students with disabilities, the Disability Service Unit or Disability Support Service is the first point of contact. These units work to facilitate access and ensure participation in the university for students with disabilities. This involves making 'reasonable adjustments' and to provide support for students with disabilities to ensure full participation and equal opportunities.

Students with disabilities that will need support and alternative arrangements range from students with a hearing impairment, visual impairment, physical impairment, health impairment (such as chronic illness), learning impairment, or psychiatric disability. Although universities, both locally and internationally, may systematise support in slightly different ways, many universities follow similar trends in order to accommodate and support students with a specific disability according to their needs.

According to Shevlin, Kenny and McNeela (2004), appropriate support systems are vital in ensuring equal access for students with disabilities in teaching and learning. The commitment of the institution to facilitating support and participation depends on its willingness to change

admission, curricular, and assessment procedures as well as the physical accessibility of the institution.

According to Dowrick, Anderson, Heyer and Acosta (2005), students with disabilities struggle with issues from attaining basic alternative arrangements such as rescheduling classes to accessible buildings for wheelchair users and providing Braille or electronic text for students with visual impairments. These authors caution that institutions should coordinate disability support services and programmes to educate faculty, peers, and employers about support systems, accommodation and the rights of individuals with disabilities. Furthermore, barriers, like the attitudes and willingness of the academic staff to provide arrangements, affect the progress of students with disabilities in higher education (Dowrick, Anderson, Heyer & Acosta, 2005).

As such, a disability unit should offer ongoing training and awareness workshops to staff and students regarding disability. In order to make any attempt to support a student with a disability, a collaborative community effort is required and not just the exclusive responsibility of the disability unit, disability advisor or disability liaison officer.

For instance at the international university, Northumbria University (2006) additional services rendered, by the disability service unit, to students with disabilities include the following:

- Advice and support in the application of Disabled Students' Allowance;
- Information and advice about services in the university and local community;
- Advice on the use of the Support Worker Service or alternative;
- Ongoing individual support;
- Support and guidance for study related issues;
- Support and advice for academic and support staff.

One such university in South Africa, which seems to be doing a good job at this, is the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg. With regard to the Disability Unit at the University of the Witwatersrand (2010), apart from their outstanding assistive technology services, some of their best practices include: continual quality checks of scanned or edited student material, continually looking at adding or improving their services and technology or adaptive devices, and annual evaluation forms to be filled out by their Disability Unit students. Moreover, what is quite impressive is the sensitisation and empowering of their students. For

instance, the Disability Unit hosts teaching workshops to sensitise and educate university lecturers about teaching disabled students, organises a disability awareness week to create awareness among the University population, encourages Disability Unit students to introduce themselves to and liaise with their lecturers (using a letter of accommodation as a starting tool) and encourages Disability Unit students to attend various university workshops to aid in their personal development (e.g. CV writing workshops).

Similarly, at the University of Cape Town (2010), the Disability Service supports academic access for disabled students in the following ways, for example: advocacy and advice on any issues related to the disabled student's disability, consultative and counselling support for students with disabilities, a resource centre with literature and material relating to disability studies and disability research, physical access, assistive technology, technical assistance, parking for disabled students, and facilitation of extra time and other exam accommodations for disabled students.

Considering these commendable but not fully exhausted efforts, it is no wonder that the University of Cape Town is ranked the top university in Africa and the University of the Witwatersrand falls in fifth place (South African Survey 2008/2009). This suggests that the level and quality of support provided for disabled students in a university may be associated with that university's overall success and distinction. Although this should not be the main reason for efforts to improve disability services at universities, it is a positive and welcomed by-product of these efforts and this should act as an encouragement to universities and other higher education institutions.

Many institutions in South Africa have been surveyed in order to ascertain trends in the provision of support to students with disabilities. According to the Council on Higher Education (2005), the levels of provision range from well-resourced units or programmes with large staff to one-person offices that struggle to provide support to students with disabilities. Moreover, according to the Council on Higher Education (2005), the position of the support for students with disabilities in the structure of an institution suggests its significance to the institution as well as the institution's level of awareness about disability, ability and willingness to commit resources to its support structure. Sufficient financial resources are a key element in creating an enabling learning environment for students with disabilities. Therefore, the supply of financing from the

main budget reflects an institution's willingness to facilitate access and affirm equity for students with disabilities.

3.5.2. The University of KwaZulu-Natal's (Howard College Campus) Disability Unit

The Disability Unit at the University of KwaZulu-Natal: Howard College Campus, which is linked to the Student Counselling Centre, is a unit dedicated to making campus life a lot easier and accessible to students with disabilities by offering specialised facilities and services to the students with disabilities.

The facilities at the Disability Unit include: a dedicated LAN for the students with disabilities, with specialised software such as the screen reader JAWS; specially equipped study rooms around the campus which facilitate accessible venues to study; Pac mates, Perkin Braillers, Merlin Magnifiers, Amigo Portable Magnifiers – all used to aid visually impaired students in their academic pursuits.

The services offered at the Disability Unit include: liaison with Faculty on behalf of students – negotiation of accessible test, exam and lecture venues, and meeting the needs of students with disabilities; converting study material into a more accessible format – scanning and editing of material and conversion into Braille and electronic format, enlargement of study material, and voice recording of notes which are recorded on tape; counselling – assessment of individual needs, assistance in financial aid matters, exclusions and residence accommodation, and personal and career counselling; assistance with registration and all academic affairs; specialised training and orientation programmes; and networking with on- and off-campus organisations around the needs of students.

The goals of the Disability Unit include: ensuring adequate resources and facilities are available to students; training and helping students adapt and participate in every aspect of university life; providing support and training to the university community around disability issues to ensure equitable services to students with disabilities; and ensuring facilities and structures are present throughout campus to allow for accessibility to all.

3.6. Prior Research Findings

According to Shevlin, Kenny and McNeela (2004), appropriate support systems are vital in ensuring equal access for students with disabilities in teaching and learning. The commitment

of the institution to facilitating support and participation depends on its willingness to change admission, curricular and assessment procedures as well as the physical accessibility of the institution (Shevlin, Kenny & McNeela, 2004). Many students with disabilities experience barriers to learning and development. A barrier is described as any aspect, either internal or external to the student, which causes an obstacle or impediment to their learning, development or participation in higher education (Greyling, 2008). According to Dowrick, Anderson, Heyer and Acosta (2005), students with disabilities struggle with attaining alternative arrangements such as rescheduling classes to accessible buildings for wheelchair users and providing Braille or electronic text for students with visual impairments. These authors caution that institutions should coordinate disability support services and programmes to educate faculty, peers and employees about support systems, accommodation and the rights of individuals with disabilities (Anderson, Heyer & Acosta, 2005).

Moreover, it is widely noted that barriers like negative attitudes and unwillingness of the academic staff to provide arrangements, affect the progress of students with disabilities in higher education. According to research conducted by Fuller, Healey, Bradley and Hall (2004) at a single higher education institution in the United Kingdom, students with disabilities reported that their disabilities impacted on their learning in lectures. Furthermore, they experienced difficulty as a result of lecturers' unwillingness to allow their lectures to be tape-recorded, failing to provide user-friendly handouts, and unrealistic expectations of reading work. Many students encountered barriers with regard to assessment such as examinations, and particularly oral presentations. Furthermore, students wanted clarity as to what services were available for their support within the institution. Some students noted that it was difficult to find available advice and assistance for learning and assessment.

This research shows that various support and barrier factors exist in the learning environment of students with disabilities and that these barriers impact on their development.

In a study conducted by Greyling (2008) at the Stellenbosch University in South Africa, participants reported that support services at the University are largely provided by divisions such as Humarga, the Examinations Department, and the Centre for Student Counselling and Development specifically, the Office for Students with Special Needs, Student Affairs, the Centre

for Teaching and Learning and Dis-Maties. Support services at the University include, for example, the Brailling service at Humarga (Greyling, 2008). The participants stated that they experienced the support services positively and that these services enhanced their development.

Additionally, the need to improve coordination across support services emerged in the study's findings. According to Greyling (2008), the participants stated that although support structures were in place, poor communication can slow down service delivery and create gaps between policy and practice. Furthermore, a participant with a visual impairment expressed the importance of internal and external support and of continuous interaction (Greyling, 2008). According to Greyling (2008), although the university provides support services such as the Brailling service, further student-lecturer interaction and communication is necessary.
All the participants in the study spoke highly of the Centre for Student Counselling and Development as well as the staff that are committed to serving students with special needs.
In addition, the participants reported that the staff at the Office for Students with Special Needs provide students with a precious link to the University's services, the faculty and lecturers (Greyling, 2008). Moreover, one participant even spoke of the good communication between the Centre for Student Counselling and Development and faculty and departments. The participants felt that support services should focus on each individual's needs, rather than on a formula according to the individual's disability (Greyling, 2008). For this reason, Greyling (2008) reports that individualised support services are provided by the Centre for Student Counselling and Development when students approach them for help. Additionally, Greyling (2008) reported that it seems that the Office for Students with Special Needs plays an advocacy and mediation role when supporting students with disabilities. Furthermore, support was considered important for the success and development of students with disabilities and the participants found it comforting to know that there were support structures in place (Greyling, 2008). However, it is important to note that a participant in Greyling's (2008) study felt that the onus is on them to make a success of their studies even though support services provide a safety net. Additionally, another participant felt that support services are an important safety net. However, the same participant expressed her concern that such services could become overcompensating and that some people may feel obligated to provide assistance even though it is not asked for.

3.7. Conclusion to Literature Review

Even though noteworthy progress has been made to increase the throughput rate of students with disabilities in tertiary education, there is still much to be done as many disabled students face discrimination and difficulty in acquiring and receiving support. Moreover, disability policy often does not lead to practice at tertiary level. Many students with disabilities still need an advocate for basic accommodations. Negative attitudes, communication and information problems, physical barriers, unsatisfactory curriculum delivery and inadequate educational support systems are still major barriers to success for students with disabilities. Further progress can be made through the increased coordination of disability support services and programmes to educate faculty, peers and future employers about support, accommodations and rights of individuals with disabilities. And, though student support services play a vital role in supporting students with disabilities, the whole institution is responsible for creating an inclusive environment where they can experience community and attitudes of embracing diversity and accommodating differences.

4. Research Design and Methodology

4.1. Research Design

A research design is necessary to execute any research study. The research design is, thus, the framework of how the researcher intends to carry out the research study. It serves as the connection between the research question and the implementation of the research. According to Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999), the purpose of the research study as well as the paradigm of the research study, the methodology, and the context in which the study took place should be cohesive.

The purpose of the present research study was to explore and describe the perceptions and experiences of the students with disabilities at the University of KwaZulu-Natal: Howard College Campus regarding the University's Disability Unit. The type of research question, therefore, required that this study followed an interpretive paradigm within a qualitative research methodology framework, since the reality to be studied consisted of participants' subjective experiences of the external world (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999).

According to Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999), paradigms act as perspectives that provide a rationale for the research, and commit the researcher to particular methods of data collection, observation, and interpretation. Moreover, paradigms represent the epistemological, the ontological, and the methodological premises of the researcher (Neuman, 2000). Ontology refers to the question, 'what is the nature of reality?' A fundamental assumption of the interpretive paradigm is that subjective experience constitutes reality. The present research study explored the subjective experiences of the students with disabilities at the University of KwaZulu-Natal: Howard College Campus. The aim was to discover the many perspectives of the participants from the point of view of their unique experiences.

Epistemology specifies the nature of knowledge. Epistemology within an interpretive paradigm refers to a concern in exploring and understanding the social world using both the participants' and the researcher's understandings (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003); it warrants a consideration of the role of the researcher within the research process. Knowledge is thus multiple, subjective constructions of meaning. In interpretive research, the assumption is that it is the researcher who is the primary instrument for the collection and analysis of data (Banister, Burman, Parker, Taylor, & Tindall, 1994; Maree, 2007; Terre Blanche, Durrheim, & Painter, 2006). In the present research study the researcher was concerned with the different ways in which students with disabilities subjectively constructed their experiences of support (and barriers) to their development and needs. The researcher was therefore involved in an interactive meaning-making process with participants, each influencing the other.

Methodology specifies how the researcher may go about practically constructing and co-constructing knowledge and insight (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999). The researcher that works from the interpretive paradigm prefers to use personal and interactive means and methods to gather data (Mertens, 1998). In the present research study the qualitative method of semi-structured interviews was used to capture the many meanings of participants.

Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999) report that the interpretive research paradigm assumes that people's subjective experiences are real, that we can understand others' experiences by interacting with them, and that qualitative techniques are best suited for this goal. The present research study, therefore, assumed an interpretive paradigm since the reality to be studied consisted of participant's subjective experiences of support (and barriers) regarding the Disability

Unit at the University of KwaZulu-Natal: Howard College Campus. The research goal was to understand how the students with disabilities at the University constructed their own meaning of the experiences they had within the context of the University's Disability Unit. As such, the researcher was involved in an active meaning-making process with the participants and used the qualitative method of data collection known as the semi-structured interview.

4.2. Research Methodology

The methods used by qualitative researchers represent a common belief that they can provide a deeper understanding of the social phenomenon under investigation (Silverman, 2000). A qualitative research methodology was chosen for the current research study so as to allow the researcher to interact directly with the students with disabilities by means of dialogue. Through the use of interviews the researcher in this study was able to enter the world of the students with disabilities in order to understand their perceptions and experiences of the Disability Unit. As such, the researcher was able to attain an insider perspective of the meanings and experiences of the participants.

The unique qualities of qualitative research, which were appropriately applied in the current research study, include: a concern with meaning that people construct from their world and their experiences (Merriam, 2002). During qualitative research, as noted above, the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and data analysis (Banister, Burman, Parker, Taylor, & Tindall, 1994; Maree, 2007; Terre Blanche, Durrheim, & Painter, 2006). Additionally, qualitative research involves fieldwork, which means that the researcher must go to the setting or institution to observe behaviour, experiences, and perspectives in their natural settings. Qualitative research findings are typically in the form of themes and categories; it focuses on process, meaning, and understanding; and the product of qualitative research, according to Merriam (1998), is richly descriptive. Overall, qualitative research provides the researcher with rich, descriptive data regarding the topic at hand. Furthermore, Henning, Van Rensburg and Smit (2005), explain that the interpretive researcher constructs meaning from the data by seeing the bigger picture and by translating the raw empirical data into what is known as thick description. The purpose of the present research study was descriptive and interpretive in nature. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews, and analysed in order to generate themes and categories rich in meaning.

4.2.1. Selection of Participants

Qualitative researchers usually work with small groups of participants. The individuals who are included in the group of participants should provide in-depth knowledge and insight of the phenomenon being studied. Purposive sampling was used in the present research study. Merriam (1998) clarifies that purposive sampling is based on the assumption that the researcher wants to understand a phenomenon and must, therefore, purposefully select participants who are rich in information regarding the phenomenon. Therefore, participants included should be knowledgeable, willing to participate, and readily available (Greyling, 2008). Furthermore, purposive sampling takes place when the group of participants is homogenous, sharing the experience of a particular situation (Willing, 2001).

With reference to the present research study, although the participants formed a homogenous group in terms of the context and label of disability they share at the University of KwaZulu-Natal: Howard College Campus, they were individuals with unique experiences and perspectives; voices. In the present research study, students with disabilities were viewed as a heterogeneous group and included participants from the major categories of disability at the University of KwaZulu-Natal: Howard College Campus: visual and physical impairments. Of the six participants selected, two were without sight, two were partially sighted, and two were physically disabled. Furthermore, participants comprised both males and females, and were studying at different levels at the University (i.e. first year, second year, fourth year, and fifth year students). As such, students with disabilities selected from these categories of disabilities represented the broader population of students with disabilities at the University of KwaZulu-Natal: Howard College Campus.

The University of KwaZulu-Natal: Howard College Campus has a population of approximately one hundred and twenty students with disabilities in different categories of disabilities. Through information obtained from the University's Disability Unit, approximately thirty selected students were notified of the research study and given details of its purpose and then asked to register their willingness to participate. Of these, six students agreed and were willing to participate in the present research study. Appointments to conduct the semi-structured interviews were then set up with these students and a convenient venue in the Disability Unit was booked to conduct the interviews.

4.2.2. Semi-structured Interviews

In the context of the current research study it was important to provide a framework within which respondents could express their own understandings, perspectives, and experiences in their own terms. Interviews allow for such expression to occur as they provide the researcher with the opportunity to hear participants express their views and opinions in their own words (Kvale, 1996). According to Kvale (1996) the purpose of the qualitative research interview has been depicted as the description and interpretation of themes in the subjects' lived world. The subject of the qualitative research interview, thus, is the life-world of the interviewee and his or her relation to it (Kvale, 1983). Overall, Kvale (1983) reports that the qualitative research interview seeks to describe and understand the meaning of central themes in the life-world of the interviewee; aims to obtain as many nuanced descriptions from the different qualitative aspects of the interviewee's life-world as possible. Furthermore, the interviewee describes as precisely as possible what he or she experiences and feels, and how he or she acts (Kvale, 1983).

In the current research study, interviews were used to understand how students with disabilities experience their world and to hear them express this in their own words in order to create contextually bounded accounts.

The semi-structured interview was chosen for the current research study and was conducted by making use of an interview guide that was developed before the scheduled interviews. The semi-structured interview guide provided a framework to make sure all relevant topics regarding the research study's focus were covered during the interview session (Patton, 2002), but also allowed for greater flexibility in exploring certain topic areas in more depth as they arose. The topics were based on the Disability Unit's effectiveness in providing for students' academic needs in terms of its support structures, services, and facilities, as well as its (perceived) advantages and disadvantages (see interview guide provided in Appendix C). The interview guide approach was used to cover particular topics and issues that were specified in advance, and the sequence and wording of questions were decided upon during the course of the interviews. The outline of the interview guide, according to Patton (2002), increases the comprehensiveness of the data and makes the data systematic for each participant. Moreover, logical gaps can be anticipated and can then be covered. However, Patton (2002) does point out that some weaknesses of the interview guide approach include the fact that important and

significant topics may be missed, as well as the flexibility of the interviewer in the sequencing of questions can result in substantially different responses from different perspectives, thus reducing the comparability of responses.

All six semi-structured interviews were approximately thirty minutes in length, were tape-recorded with the permission of the participants, and were later transcribed verbatim in order to capture the verbal data for use during later data analysis.

A transcribed semi-structured interview is attached as Appendix D to demonstrate the process of data transformation (see Appendix D).

4.3. Method of Data Analysis

Data analysis is the systematic search for meaning; it is the process that involves making sense of data (Merriam, 1998). Data analysis involves the process of transforming data to answer the initial research question (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999). Within a qualitative framework, data analysis begins by bringing together and organising all the information about the case at hand, for example the interview transcripts (Patton, 2002). The qualitative researcher's focus thereafter will be on interpreting and understanding the social world of the participants. Furthermore, the aim of analysis is to understand the various elements of the data and to identify patterns or themes (Mouton, 2001). The method of data analysis chosen for the present research study was that of interpretive phenomenology.

4.3.1. Interpretive Phenomenology

Even though interpretive phenomenological analysis aims to explore the research participant's experience from his or her perspective, it recognises that such an exploration must necessarily implicate the researcher's own view of the world as well as the nature of the interaction between the researcher and the participant (Willing, 2001). As such, the phenomenological analysis produced by the researcher is always an interpretation of the participant's experience.

Interpretive phenomenological analysis works with the transcripts of semi-structured interviews; the texts generated by participants. These are analysed one by one. According to Willing (2001) interpretive phenomenological analysis takes an idiographic approach whereby

insights produced as a result of intensive and detailed engagements with individual cases (e.g. transcripts, texts) are integrated only in the later stages of the research.

Willing (2001) proposes a four stage process of analysis. The first stage involves the reading and re-reading of the texts. At this stage the researcher produces wide-ranging and unfocused notes that reflect the initial thoughts and observations he or she may wish to record (Willing, 2001). During the data analysis process of the present research study the researcher worked case-by case, line-by-line with individual transcripts and documented issues, notes, and comments in the margin.

The second stage of analysis, according to Willing (2001), requires the researcher to identify and label themes that characterise each section of the texts. At this stage the researcher reviewed the notes and comments in the margins of each transcript and jotted down emerging theme titles. Theme titles are conceptual and they should capture something about the essential quality of what is represented by the texts (Willing, 2001).

The third stage of data analysis involves an attempt to introduce structure into the analysis process. Here the researcher listed the themes identified in stage two and thought about them in relation to one another. Some of the themes formed natural clusters of concepts that share meaning, while others were characterised by hierarchical relationships with one another. Clusters of themes were then given labels that captured their essence.

The fourth stage of data analysis involves the production of a summary table of the structured themes, together with quotations that illustrate each theme. According to Willing (2001) the summary table should only include those themes that capture something about the quality of the participant's experiences of the phenomenon under investigation. This means that some of the themes generated during stage two will have to be excluded. At this stage the researcher produced a table of themes for each case (participant), ordered these coherently (repetitions and irrelevant elements were cut out), and noted which themes followed questions on the interview schedule and which were new. These summary tables included the cluster labels, brief quotations and references to where relevant extracts may be found in the interview transcripts (i.e. page and line numbers).

Ultimately, according to Wilbraham (2008), each case should be written up separately in its own right, and then the researcher should move on to produce a composite thematic picture of all cases. The researcher should look for master-themes across cases, linked to empirical evidence of patterning (e.g. how many times did X appear?) or use literature to interpret trends.

At this stage in the analysis process the researcher in the current research study used the summary table for the first participant in the analysis of subsequent cases. Here, the original list of themes was used to code the other interviews, adding to or elaborating themes in the process. A cyclical movement was required so that themes which emerged in later transcripts could be checked against earlier transcripts (Willing, 2001).

An example depicting the identification of themes (stage two) can be found in Appendix E. An example of the clustering of themes (stage three) can be found in Appendix F. An example of the production of a summary table (stage four) can be found in Appendix G. This is to show how themes were identified and clustered to produce a summary table. Appendix F shows an example of a master theme and its constituent themes (drawn from multiple participants' responses).

4.4. Standards of Quality and Verification

Qualitative researchers strive for understanding; a deep structure of knowledge that comes from visiting personally with participants, spending extensive time in the field, and probing to find detailed meaning (Creswell, 1998). During or after a study, qualitative researchers ask if they got it right. For Creswell (1998), verification of a study is viewed as a process that occurs throughout the data collection, analysis, and report writing phases of a study; this verification follows from standards and criteria which are imposed by the researcher and others during and after a study is completed.

Multiple perspectives exist regarding the importance of verification in qualitative research, the definition of it, and procedures for establishing it. For example, writers search for and find qualitative equivalents that parallel traditional quantitative approaches to validity. For instance, Lincoln and Guba (1985, cited in Creswell, 1998) use alternative terms that they argue adhere more to naturalistic axioms. To establish the trustworthiness of a study, Lincoln and Guba (1985, cited in Creswell, 1998) use the terms credibility, transferability, dependability, and

confirmability as naturalist equivalents for internal validity, external validity, reliability and objectivity. In order to operationalise these new terms, they propose techniques such as prolonged engagement in the field and triangulation of data of sources, methods, and investigators to establish credibility. To make sure that the findings are transferable between the researcher and those being studied, thick description is necessary. Rather than reliability, one seeks dependability that the results will not be subject to change and instability. And, the naturalistic researcher looks to confirmability rather than objectivity in establishing the value of the data. Both dependability and confirmability are established through an auditing of the research process.

Moreover, these alternative terms, credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, form umbrella terms of trustworthiness and authenticity for Creswell's (1998) verification techniques. These verification techniques include: prolonged engagement, triangulation, peer review, negative case analysis, clarifying researcher perspectives, member checks and respondent validation, thick description, and external audits. Creswell (1998) recommends using at least two of these techniques in the verifications of descriptive findings.

In terms of the current research study's transferability (i.e. the ability of findings to be generalised), the context, design, and selection of participants have been made clear to the reader. As such, the reader is able to make informed decisions regarding the transferability of the data to his or her specific context. Moreover, the selection of diverse participants as well as the rich in-depth descriptions (thick description) of the research findings contributes to the transferability of the present research study. Mertens (1998) states that in order to enhance the dependability (i.e. the stability and consistency of data) of a qualitative study the researcher must use clearly defined guidelines for data collection and data analysis. This allows for a clearly defined trace of evidence during data collection and data analysis to enable any individual to evaluate the quality of the study. In the current research study both the data collection and data analysis methods were described in detail in order to show the process of data transformation and to leave a trail of evidence per se. Confirmability refers to the value of the research (i.e. is enough evidence provided?), and in the current research study's instance, is linked to thick description (as noted above).

4.5. Ethical Considerations

In qualitative research ensuring that standards of quality and verification are met involves conducting the research in an ethical manner. Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999) emphasise the need to consider the following ethical considerations: informed consent, voluntary participation, accurate information, and confidentiality.

In the present research study individuals who agreed to participate in the study were fully informed about the nature of the research study as well as the research procedure. They were also made aware of what their participation in the study would entail. Additionally, these individuals were informed that their participation in the study would be voluntary [i.e. they were free to choose whether they wanted to participate or to withdraw, and that choosing to withdraw would not result in any adverse impact (see Appendix A)].

Moreover, prior to the research interviews, participants were alerted to the fact that any information gleaned during the research process would remain completely confidential. Also, any and all personal information would be kept anonymous; their identities would not be divulged in any discussion or presentation of the present research study (see Appendix B).

In terms of accuracy of information, the researcher shall not falsify or fabricate any results in any publication of research findings.

5. Data Analysis and Interpretation of Findings

5.1. Introduction

The aim of this research study was to explore the perceptions and experiences of the students with disabilities at the University of KwaZulu-Natal: Howard College Campus regarding the University's Disability Unit. Accordingly, the aim of this study was to answer the following questions: What are the students with disabilities' perceptions and experiences of the University's Disability Unit in meeting their academic needs? And, what are the students with disabilities experiences of support (or a lack thereof) to their academic development at the University of KwaZulu-Natal? In order to do this the findings from six individual semi-structured interviews were integrated to provide a holistic understanding of this phenomenon. Using the data elicited

from the participants the researcher clearly identified three master themes through the data analysis process: interpretive phenomenology. The three master themes identified include: the factors affecting the academic development of students with disabilities; the aspects of coordination and communication; and the idea of creating awareness. In order to make it clear to the reader what these master themes (and the constituent themes) entail as well as to explore the phenomenon under investigation, these master themes (and the constituent themes) will now be discussed. Each of the six participants in this research study will be referred to as Participant 1 – 6 throughout the following text. Any quotes used are written in italics to indicate that these are not the words of the researcher but the words of the participants. Their responses have all been quoted verbatim.

5.2. Master Themes

5.2.1. The Factors Affecting the Academic Development of Students with Disabilities

The factors of the University and the University's Disability Unit that were found to affect the academic success and development of the participants include: the lack of staff and the disproportionate ratio of staff to students, the lack of resources, the lack of funding from the University and the importance of University lecturers. All these constituent factors contribute to making it difficult for the students with disabilities to progress academically at the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

5.2.1.1 The lack of staff and the disproportionate ratio of staff to students

With regard to the lack of staff at the Disability Unit and the disproportionate ratio of staff to students, findings show that these have a major impact on the academic life of students with disabilities. All participants raised the issue of a lack of permanent staff at the University's Disability Unit. They reported that this affected their academic development in that there aren't enough staff members to provide adequate support to the large number of students with disabilities at the University. That is, the ratio of staff to students is disproportionate, with students significantly outnumbering staff. As one participant stated…

Participant 3: …*more than a hundred students and three permanent staff members. It's just chaotic.*

Moreover, this lack of permanent staff means that there are not enough people helping with the scanning and editing of students' study materials. This results in a delay in students receiving study materials as well as errors in these study materials. Consequently, students cannot prepare for tests and examinations adequately and this, participants report, can result in failure. Additionally, students sometimes hand in assignments late and as a result are penalised by their lecturers. When appealing for these failures and/or late submissions the participants also report that they receive no form of support from the University's Disability Unit, and that they are left to deal with disappointed lecturers on their own; taking full responsibility for their failures and/or late submissions. Moreover, some students find themselves having to repeat certain courses and blame this on the lack of staff available to aid them in the scanning and editing of their study materials. As reported by the following participants…

Participant 2: *…the staff is lacking. We need more student assistance.*

Participant 3: *Employ just a little bit more…*

Participant 4: *I've given work to be scanned and edited and it was not even edited.*

Participant 5: *So that's my biggest issue with them in terms of their services that they need to get permanent staff to actually do the work for us.*

Participant 6: *…and then sometimes they cannot do things on time.*

Participant 3: *They're not always there. Sometimes you ask for your work… you ask them for your work to be edited… and you're not the only one that is disabled and the paid staff… they've got other work from other students to edit, books to scan, and so you end up submitting late, much later, and that actually is a bad representation of yourself to the lecturer. You appear as this okay, disabled and unable to submit on time… meanwhile it's actually; you did your work on time, but editing and everything else…*

Participant 4: *Well obviously you are postponing tests. You are postponing assignments. That means you're going to be behind with your work and I don't think anybody likes to have things postponed and postponed when they are ready to do something. I personally would not like that at all. And lectures themselves get frustrated as well because every time they've got to keep postponing and maybe they have to reset a different paper for the student also so it makes extra work for them.*

Participant 5: *That's how long it took them to give me my work. As a result I even ended up failing a few courses…*

This lack of staff also means that the staff currently available has to play numerous roles in order to try and meet the students with disabilities' needs. However, due to the massively disproportionate ratio (something like 3 members of staff to 100 students, as reported by participant 3), staff are not able to provide sufficient support to the students with disabilities. This has negative impacts on their academic success as well as the personal aspects of their University experience.

Participant 3: *We only have one person… who is both there for psychological assessment, and she also plays the role of being a social worker, and also the role of being an academic or career advisor…as soon as you speak to her about your academic…it actually cuts you off from talking to her about your personal stuff where you need counselling.*

The above participant voiced her concern that the lack of staff is such a great problem and results in students with disabilities not receiving proper access to facilities (such as counselling). This, as Participant 1 and Participant 3 report, can have harmful effects on the emotional state of students with disabilities.

Participant 1: *…one thing I was just not impressed about, lately I was trying to get a hold of the social worker and she was telling me that she was busy writing reports that are important, and I started to wonder whose important, us or the reports.*

Participant 3: *So in other words, us disabled people, we do not have proper access to counselling facilities and as a result we get to walk around; push around campus carrying all these different emotions… how involved are they* (students counselling services) *in terms of actually ensuring that we do get the counselling. Just look around, you know we bottle feelings. Some of us don't get to talk about our disabilities. Who will we talk to?*

5.2.1.2. The lack of resources

Similarly, all participants in the current research study reported on the lack of resources at the Disability Unit as well as the effects these have on their academic development. Moreover, the lack of resources coupled with the lack of staff makes it even more difficult for students to cope academically. The lack of resources means that the available staff do not have the necessary equipment to adequately cope with the large number of students with disabilities and meet their academic needs. Participants reported of the limited number of scanners and printers at the Disability Unit that are used to scan and edit the study materials of all the students with disabilities. Participants argue that these are insufficient to deal with the workload of staff, and as a result students do not get study materials in time to prepare for tests and examinations, or hand in assignments. Consequently, they are yet again faced with failures and late submissions. The above can be observed through the comments of the following participants.

Participant 1: *We still have a shortage of computers. We don't have the software… Have more computers; get more gadgets that they can use to scan and so on. You know, have more devices. That's what they need to do.*

Participant 2: *The staff is not enough and the machines there are not enough, because I think there's only one scanner and the scanner is used for photocopying. Like if they'll have many other machines it would be easier to get notes on time and everything in time.*

Participant 5: *…not enough computers and scanners to scan… they need more computers and scanners and they need to employ more people.*

5.2.1.3. The lack of funding from the University

The lack of funding received from the University leaves the Disability Unit in a very weak position to overcome the abovementioned aspects that impact on the students with disabilities' academic development, that is, the lack of staff and the lack of resources. A lack of funding to run the Disability Unit means that the Disability Unit is unable to employ an appropriate number of staff, as well as invest in resources necessary to cope with the large number of students with disabilities and meet their academic needs. According to the participants, the lack of suitable staff and resources stems from the lack of funding the Disability Unit receives from the University.

Participant 1: *I think sometimes the reason that the support lacks is because the University does not provide sufficient… I would say that they do not provide sufficient funding for the Disability Unit under student counselling as it should be.*

Participant 2: *The University cannot be ignorant on the fact that they have disabled people. So, we need to be first in terms of allocating finances and the amount that is allocated to the Disability Unit needs to be readjusted according to the number of students.*

Participant 2: *So they need to increase the money and employ more permanent staff. You can't just have…okay its only 3 people who are permanent, can you believe it? And, how many disabled students do we have? A lot, more than 100 if I'm not exaggerating…*

Participant 4: *…they* (the Disability Unit) *get a limited amount of funding from student counselling, which affects their ability to help us because they cannot get permanent people and that kind of thing to come and do the work, to scan and edit and so on. So that's another problem, they* (the Disability Unit) *need to actually be a department on their own who gets their own budget to do the work for us because that also impairs their ability to help us… They* (the University) *need to give them* (the Disability Unit) *a bigger budget. And they* (the University) *need to give them* (the Disability Unit) *permanent staff so that they can function properly.*

Participant 5: *The University could give us more financial support and they could employ more people to work there* (at the Disability Unit) *and buy more computers and scanners.*

Participant 5: *University does not give us sufficient funds… The disability LAN was asked for basically by the Disability Unit and eventually after three years of asking the University agreed. Then they* (the University) *give us second hand computers, second hand screens and second hand CPUs that don't really work properly. They are not very compatible with our software, restart by themselves, which just tells you that they* (the University) *are not even willing to spend any money on disabled students yet they say that they are disability friendly… People who work there don't get paid very much. They don't give us any resources, no scanners etc… And also they* (the Disability Unit) *don't get very much money to pay the people who are working there. Thus you get people finding better work and quitting on us, and there is no one to scan our books.*

Overall, the lack of funding received from the University compromises the Disability Unit's effectiveness in meeting its students with disabilities' needs. Because they do not receive adequate funds, proportionate to the number of students with disabilities they have to care for, the Disability Unit seems unable to provide its students with the necessary staff and resources to meet their academic and personal needs, or support their academic development at university.

5.2.1.4. The importance of university lecturers

From the research participants' perceptions, lecturers (in conjunction with the Disability Unit) have an important role to play in meeting the students with disabilities' academic needs. Participants voiced their concern that lecturers need to be aware of the students with disabilities in their classes; ensure that their lecture notes are made available to these students well in advance in order for them to be appropriately scanned and edited in time for classes, form a relationship with the Disability Unit and learn how the support service operates. Failure on the part of lecturers to adhere to this results in grave disadvantages to the academic development of the students with disabilities, as Participants 1 reports.

Participant 1: *…it is a disadvantage where you writing a test and you get your notes late because the lecturer has not sent it and it becomes really problematic where you have to get an extension to write a test.*

In a sense, just as these students rely on the Disability Unit to meet their academic needs, they also need the support of concerned lecturers, who can make all the difference to their academic success. Lecturers who show concern for their students with disabilities and make an extra effort to accommodate them can be a great help to these students, their academic needs, and can even enhance their academic development.

Participant 1: *Some lecturers would give you your notes well in advance before they start, or they give you in a sequence - as they finish a section they send the notes or before they start the section they send notes so in class you keep at the same pace with them.*

Participant 5: *So for me, because my lecturers managed to give me some stuff early, I got it to them* (the Disability Unit) *early and they were able to give me most of my stuff on time* (scanned and edited)*.*

Participant 5: *I think they* (the Disability Unit) *can do more in terms of educating lecturers especially on how the disability unit actually works and what we as disabled students actually need to make our education better here; to put us on a level with the rest of the sighted students. And I don't think the Disability Unit is doing that because I've been in encounters with lecturers who feel that I am not their responsibility. I am the responsibility of the Disability Unit. And they* (the lecturers) *just have this notion that if the Disability Unit comes and picks up the course pack then that's it. As a lecturer they don't have to do anything for me. And if the Disability Unit had to come forth and actually make the lecturers more aware – do something – put it up on the University website, put up pamphlets; do something to educate the lecturers then I think it would be much better and disabled people would not be so isolated. The lecturers would take more of an interest in us.*

As Participant 5 reports, there is a vital need for some form of communication and coordination between the Disability Unit and the lecturers at the University. Such a link between the two could be greatly advantageous to the students with disabilities; lessen their difficulties (such as not receiving notes in time) and advance their academic development.

This leads us to the second master theme identified in the data analysis process: the aspects of coordination and communication.

5.2.2. The Aspects of Coordination and Communication

With regard to the aspects of coordination and communication some of the participants in the current research study reported that there is a lack of coordination and communication between the different faculties and/or departments at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, as well as the different levels of management.

Analyses of the semi-structured interviews revealed the participants' perception that there is no connection between the different faculties and/or departments at the University. Participants commented on the lack of coordination between the financial aid office and the Disability Unit for example, which often leaves them in a disadvantaged position, having to register late, etc. They also commented on the lack of communication between their subject faculties and the Disability Unit, which results in them not receiving lecture notes and course packs, etc. in advance to be scanned and edited. This lack of coordination and communication means that there are a lot of people at the University who are unaware of the students with disabilities and their specific needs. Consequently, this leaves the students with disabilities with all the responsibility to strive and link up the different faculties and/or departments necessary to their academic success. For instance, a student with a disability would have to make his or her lecturers aware of his or her disability in order to receive appropriate lecture notes in good time.

Participant 6: *Like, the English department, they know about disability unit. They can take notes; their CDs and give it to the Disability Unit, but the foreign language department, they don't know anything, so you as a student it's your responsibility to contact them and put them together…*

Participant 1: *It's the sole responsibility of a student with the disability unit to communicate… with a lecturer and say this is my disability and I therefore need this and this.*

Participant 6: *I think the disability unit is sort of isolated from other offices. Like, they have to work together with student fees, financial aid and other faculties. It's like if I'm doing law, I have to consult with my lecturer and bring them* (the Disability Unit and the lecturer) *together. We have to put them* (the Disability Unit) *together with other departments and stuff and so sometimes, some of us we have to do some things on our own. I think that they're just not communicating with most of the departments. Say for example the language department, most of them they don't know anything about the disability unit… so you as a student it's your responsibility to contact them and put them together. So you'll be the messenger sort of… Like they* (the Disability Unit) *have to find out how are the students performing and how can they help, because they have to consult with lecturers themselves so that they would know that this student has this problem. I think they* (the Disability Unit) *will know what will help that student if they communicate directly with the lecturer or that department.*

On the other hand, when there is effective coordination between the Disability Unit and lecturers, and communication is active, students with disabilities are in a much more advantageous position in terms of their academic development and success, as Participant 5 reports.

Participant 5: *…they* (lecturers) *actually get to communicate with the Disability Unit a lot more and it is an advantage because the Disability Unit's people there go up to the lecturers and explain what we need and in return the lecturers actually help us more and give us their overhead notes in class and try to make us a bit more comfortable.*

Participant 3 reported a lack of communication between members from different levels of management at the University. This results in students with disabilities feeling as though their voices are not being heard, because the problems they communicate to the Student Representative Council (SRC) are not taken into consideration by the SRC and nothing gets done.

Participant 3: *We have our little committee. It's just a little group of disabled students with different disabilities where all of us are represented and we try and take the matters up… to the*

SRC. But still it's almost as if they only represent the able bodied people only. You see there's this gap between them and us… there is this huge gap.

Ultimately, this gap that students with disabilities are experiencing at the University may be seen as a result of the lack of coordination and communication between necessary faculties and/or departments; relevant role players, as well as the fact that most of the University population is unaware of the students with disabilities and their needs. This directs us to the third theme uncovered during the data analysis process: the idea of creating awareness. Participants highlighted that this is a very important and crucial aspect that should be initiated by the Disability Unit.

5.2.3. The Idea of Creating Awareness

This theme appeared as important to all the participants of the current research study. For instance, if lecturers are made aware of the students with disabilities attending their lectures then they can give students lecture notes in advance. Students would then be able to prepare adequately for tests, examinations, and assignments.

Participant 1: *You get different departments if you're doing different modules. Some departments are very strict when it comes to issuing notes. Some just give you notes. Some just know that they have to do it because I remember when I was doing social module last semester, when we registered the lecturer told us that he had sent the course book to the Disability Unit 2 weeks before registration so that was well in advance…*

So for the students with disabilities getting their notes in time depends, to a certain extent, on the different faculties' and/or departments' awareness of their disabilities and their specific needs as well as their awareness of and link to the Disability Unit. Here, again, coordination and communication is crucial in order for students to receive their study materials in good time.

Participants further highlighted the importance of creating disability awareness around the entire University. They felt that there are not many people around the University who know much

about students with disabilities and their specific needs, and as such students with disabilities' social life at campus is affected. As Participant 2 advises…

Participant 2: …*a course on disability, teaching the first years and the second years. That's where it should be emphasised. What is disability? What are the social stigmas attached? The challenges in terms of transportation? Social life? … Exactly, the entire student population… it should be compulsory… that they* (all students) *take a course on disability…*

Raising awareness about students with disabilities was uncovered as a very serious and urgent matter with the participants of this study. Many advised on the importance of creating awareness among the entire University population (staff and students included) and even reported on how this would be a great advantage to students with disabilities.

Participant 2: *It will have a tremendous impact on the students because then students will stop asking us stupid questions like "Oh, so you're on a wheelchair, can you park yourself?" Or, "So how do you dress yourself?" Or, "Can you get in and out of the toilet on your own?" Or "Can you have sex as well?" They won't think like that. They would know, yes, we are normal human beings, we have boyfriends and girlfriends. It's just that we are unable to use legs and we are unable to see. That's all.*

Participant 2: *It should be put on the university calendar that once a year we're going to have disability awareness. Not day, our disability awareness week. Just one week would not hurt.*

Participant 5: *I think that the Disability Unit needs to provide more awareness to the rest of the University… they can do more in terms of educating lecturers especially on how the disability unit actually works and what we as disabled students actually need to make our education better here… if the Disability Unit had to come forth and actually make the lecturers more aware, do something, put it up on the University website, put up pamphlets, do something to educate the lecturers then I think it would be much better and disabled people would not be so isolated. The lecturers would take more of an interest in us.*

6. Discussion of Findings

6.1. Introduction

The discussion that follows summarises the current research study's significant findings as revealed in the previous chapter, and contextualises them against existing bodies of literature.

6.2. Master Themes

6.2.1. The Factors Affecting the Academic Development of Students with Disabilities

The factors affecting the academic development of the students with disabilities at the University of KwaZulu-Natal: Howard College Campus that were gleaned from the current research study and that stood out as significant to this study's research participants include: the lack of staff and the disproportionate ratio of staff to students; the lack of resources; the lack of funding from the University; and the importance of University lecturers. These constituent factors will now be discussed.

Both the South African disability movement and the South African government approach disability from a social model. As such their policy documents firmly state that institutions need to accommodate students with diverse learning needs and remove the barriers that hinder the development of all learners. Therefore, adequate systems need to be put in place to ensure that institutional and appropriate curricula transformation occurs and support is provided. Although legislation requires higher education institutions to include students with disabilities, on ground level, appropriate practice is necessary to ensure that students in fact get the support and accommodation they need in order to participate equally.

Ultimately, there is no sense in claiming to be an institution that embraces diversity, respects students with disabilities and has legislation in place to accommodate such students if these ideals are not put into practice and experienced by students with disabilities. With the constituent themes: the lack of staff and the disproportionate ratio of staff to students, the lack of resources, and the lack of funding from the University, the issue of failing to put legislation into practice can be observed.

Participants from the current research study voiced their perception of the lack of funding received from the University, which they reported, put the Disability Unit at great disadvantage in terms of the Disability Unit providing adequate support to students with disabilities and meeting their academic as well as emotional and social needs. The lack of funding or the insufficient funding received by the University leaves the Disability Unit in a weak position to meet these students' needs. The Disability Unit is left unable to employ the necessary number of staff to cater to the all the students with disabilities. Additionally, they are left unable to purchase the necessary equipment in order to keep at pace with the workload they encounter. As such, students are disadvantaged to the extent that certain academic and/or emotional and social needs are sacrificed, and their study materials are not received in due course for them to adequately prepare for classes, tests, examinations, and assignments. Consequently their academic development is hindered; they walk around campuses carrying heavy emotions, they hand in work late, have to postpone tests, and sometimes even end up failing courses.

Moreover, these perceptions of the participants of the current research study are somewhat on par with the objective facts. In consultation with a member of the Disability Unit, the researcher of this study was able to glean that indeed the Disability Unit lacks permanent staff as well as sufficient funding for resources. The Disability Unit at the University of KwaZulu-Natal: Howard College Campus has a total of six staff members, only one of which is permanent and the remaining five are contract. Additionally, the Disability Unit, despite there being a disability policy for staff and students (as the informant reports), does not receive a dedicated budget from the University. In the words of the informant, *"I know this is scary, but it is true."* As the informant reported, The Disability Unit acquires its resources through the Student Counselling Centre's budget.

In light of the above, and importantly, Fuller, Healey, Bradley and Hall (2004) caution us against talking of students with disabilities as though they are a homogenous group. Students with disabilities have diverse support needs. Fuller, Healey, Bradley and Hall (2004) argue that unless we recognise the difficulty in understanding disabled students' needs, display willingness and ability to accommodate to those needs, it would be easy to think that legislation will in itself create, or have created, a higher education environment that can accommodate the support needs of students with disabilities.

The lack of staff and the disproportionate ratio of staff to students, the lack of resources, and the lack of funding from the University, collectively, can be described as an institutional barrier that hinders the support provided to the students with disabilities at the University of KwaZulu-Natal: Howard College Campus. Legislation does not necessarily lead to suitable practice and action, and consideration should be given to support individual needs and the transformation of institutional barriers.

Furthermore, with regards to the lack of funding the Disability Unit at the University of KwaZulu-Natal: Howard College Campus receives from the University, according to the Council on Higher Education (2005), the location of the support for students with disabilities in the structure of an institution suggests its importance to the institution as well as the institution's level of awareness about disability, ability, and willingness to commit resources to its support structure. Sufficient financial resources are a key element in creating an enabling learning environment for students with disabilities. Therefore, the supply of financing from the main budget reflects an institution's willingness to facilitate access and affirm equity for students with disabilities. Unfortunately, the present lack of funding received from the University, as reported by the participants of the current research study, and as affirmed by the informant, does not reflect this; but rather a negative image for the University as a whole.

6.2.2. The importance of university lecturers

Barriers such as the attitudes and willingness of the academic staff to provide arrangements affect the progress of students with disabilities in higher education (Fuller, Healey, Bradley & Hall, 2004). According to Fuller, Healey, Bradley and Hall (2004), students with disabilities reported that their disabilities impacted on their learning in lectures. Furthermore, they experienced difficulty as a result of lecturers' unwillingness to allow their lectures to be tape-recorded, failing to provide user-friendly handouts and unrealistic expectations of reading work. Many students encountered barriers with regard to assessments such as examinations, and particularly oral presentations. Fuller, Healey, Bradley and Hall's (2004) research study shows that university lecturers can represent a potential barrier to the learning environment of students with disabilities and impact on their academic development. Similarly, in the current research study participants reported that failure on the part of lecturers to provide study materials to them

in advance results in insufficient preparation for classes, tests, examinations, and assignments. Moreover, this sometimes leads to late submissions and/or failure, which negatively affects their academic development.

According to Fuller, Healey, Bradley and Hall, (2004) an integrated support service is essential to register and address individual students' support needs. Additionally, Greyling (2008) argues that although units or divisions for student support services are crucial in providing individual support and addressing institutional barriers, they should not be seen as the exclusive providers of support to students with disabilities. Not only does the institution as a whole remain responsible for transformation, but all relevant role players are responsible for creating an inclusive environment of embracing differences, rather than just accepting or tolerating students with disabilities (Greyling, 2008). The above is in accordance with the perceptions of the participants of the current research study. They reported that not only does the Disability Unit have a role to play in meeting their academic needs, but so do the lecturers at the University. They voiced their opinion that lecturers need to be aware of them and their needs in order to adequately provide support to them. Additionally, and in agreement with Fuller, Healey, Bradley and Hall (2004), participants voiced their concern that an integrated support service is vital to meeting their needs and providing effective support; coordination and communication between the Disability Unit and lecturers is of the essence.

Ultimately, it is the University as a whole that shares the responsibility to work together in meeting students with disabilities' needs and to create an inclusive and non-discriminatory environment for these students. That is, responsibility lies with the entire University population, not the Disability Unit alone, but staff and students alike. Moreover, concerned lecturers who are aware of and take an interest in their students with disabilities make an effort to learn about the University's Disability Unit and how it operates. Providing the necessary support to their students with disabilities can make all the difference to the academic development of these students.

6.2.3. *The Aspects of Coordination and Communication*

Findings from Greyling's (2008) research study revealed the need to improve coordination across support services. According to Greyling (2008), participants in her study

stated that although support structures were in place, poor communication can slow down service delivery and create gaps between policy and practice. Additionally, a participant with a visual impairment from her study expressed the importance of internal and external support and of continuous interaction (Greyling, 2008). According to Greyling (2008), although the university provides support services such as the Brailling service, further student-lecturer interaction and communication is necessary. These findings gleaned from Greyling's (2008) research study highlight the significance of effective coordination and communication between all relevant role players in the lives of students with disabilities.

In order to make effective the coordination and communication between the relevant role players at the University of KwaZulu-Natal: Howard College Campus, and according to the perceptions voiced by the participants of the current research study, the University's Disability Unit needs to liaise with necessary faculties and departments; inform them of the number of disabled students they should be providing support to, inform them about who these students are and what their disabilities are, ensure proper procedures are in place in order to meet these students' individual needs, e.g. lecture notes and course packs should be made available to these students in advance, and guidelines for lecturers regarding tests and submissions should be made available to lecturers.

Additionally, according to Dowrick, Anderson, Heyer and Acosta (2005), students with disabilities struggle with obtaining alternative arrangements from rescheduling classes to negotiating accessible buildings for wheelchair users and providing Braille or electronic text for students with visual impairments. These authors advise that institutions should coordinate disability support services and programmes to educate faculties, peers and employees about support systems, accommodation and the rights of individuals with disabilities (Anderson, Heyer & Acosta, 2005). This, once again, emphasises the importance of the aspect of coordination between all relevant role players in the lives of students with disabilities. Of course, without communication no such coordination could take place. Therefore, coordination in conjunction with communication appear as vital aspects to meeting the needs of students with disabilities as well as providing adequate support; as the students of the current research study have expressed.

Furthermore, we can draw on the works Fuller, Healey, Bradley and Hall (2004) to stress the aspects of coordination and communication. As mentioned previously, according to these authors, an integrated support service is essential to attend to individual students with disabilities' support needs. In order for this to take place and be successful, one can imagine that the different departments and faculties around the university would need to be linked in some manner. It would be necessary to communicate with each on a regular basis in order to be up-to-date with the needs of the students with disabilities, and to provide the required support. The above is in accordance with the perceptions voiced by the participants of the current research study. They highlighted the reality that a lack of integration between all relevant role players throughout the University results in key players being unaware of the students with disabilities' support needs; subsequently students must resort to taking on all the responsibility to link up different departments and faculties necessary to their academic success. Furthermore, participants are aware of the fact, and have revealed, that when there is coordination and communication between significant role players, true integration, they are in an advantageous position in terms of their academic development.

Overall, effective coordination and communication between all relevant role players in the lives of the students with disabilities is imperative. This linkage creates much needed awareness among the university population and consequently can result in improvements to the academic development of students with disabilities. For instance, a relationship between the Disability Unit and students with disabilities' lecturers means that these lecturers can become aware of students' individual needs and can try to provide necessary support to the academic development of these students; provide study materials in advance, et cetera.

6.2.4. The Idea of Creating Awareness

Following on from the previous theme, the idea of creating awareness entails creating awareness among the university's lecturers. That is, lecturers need to be made aware of the students with disabilities who attend their classes. This would allow them to provide the necessary support to such students and attempt to meet their individual academic needs. It is essential that the Disability Unit approaches these lecturers and builds relationships with them.

As such, perhaps the Disability Unit should coordinate programmes to educate staff about support systems, accommodation and the rights of individuals with disabilities, as Anderson, Heyer and Acosta (2005) similarly advise.

Participants of the current research study also highlighted the need for creating awareness among the entire University population. They raised the concern that, in addition to lecturers, there are not a lot of able-bodied students around the campus who are unaware of the students with disabilities.

Creating awareness among the entire University population (staff and students, departments and faculties), educating the University population about students with disabilities and their academic as well as emotional and social needs, is essential to the development of these individuals.

6.3. Models of Disability

How we view disability will influence the way in which society, institutions and systems are structured and organised to accommodate students with disabilities to ensure equal participation and non-discrimination. Models of disability are tools for defining impairment and for providing a basis upon which government and society can devise strategies for meeting the needs of disabled people.

Much opposition to the medical model is an opposition to being defined solely on the basis of impairment. Yet, according to Shakespeare and Watson (2002) it is possible to challenge these processes without having to resort to the equally crude determinism of the social model. Disability should not be reduced to a mental condition. It should not be overlaid with negative cultural meanings. Neither should it be reduced to an outcome of social barriers alone, however important these might be in people's lives.

According to Crow (1996) we need to take a fresh look at the social model of disability and learn to integrate all its complexities. It is critical that we recognise the ways in which impairment and disability work together. We need to focus on impairment and disability: on the internal and external elements they bring to our experiences. Impairment is about our bodies' ways of working and any implication that holds for our lives (Crow, 1996). Disability, on the other hand, is about the reaction and impact of the outside world on our practical bodies. One

cannot be fully understood without attention to the other, because whilst they can exist independently of each other, there are also circumstances where they interact.

What the proposed renewed social model of disability does is broaden and strengthen the social model, taking it beyond grand theory and into real life, because it allows disabled people to incorporate a holistic understanding of their experiences and potential for change (Crow, 1996). Disability is still socially created, still unacceptable, and still there to be changed; but by bringing impairment into our total understanding, by fully recognising our subjective experiences, we will achieve the best route to that change. As such, the current research study has realised the significance of the subjective experience of disabled students.

The findings from the current research study revealed that there are numerous barriers experienced by the students with disabilities at the University of KwaZulu-Natal: Howard College Campus. The factors affecting the academic success of the students with disabilities at the University include: the lack of staff and the disproportionate ratio of staff to students, the lack of resources, the lack of funding from the University, the lack of coordination and communication among relevant role players and the lack of awareness among the University's able-bodied population (all of which have been discussed above). As such, the University can be seen as unconsciously perpetuating the discrimination felt by these students. Certainly, disability is 'real,' it is lived and experienced by the students with disabilities, however it does not have to be disempowering as is the case at the University. The barriers present at the University aid in excluding the students with disabilities from fully participating in university life and experiencing it as do the able-bodied students. Students with disabilities are left walking around campus with heavy burdens and feelings of alienation. And, they have to put in more effort and take on greater responsibilities, in comparison to the able-bodied students, in order to keep up at university and ensure that they persevere.

In conducting this research study and giving voice to the students with disabilities at the University of KwaZulu-Natal: Howard College Campus, the researcher was able to identify these barriers that hinder the success of the students with disabilities and put them at a disadvantage to excel academically as well as grow socially and emotionally. Furthermore, in focusing on impairment and disability: on the internal and external elements they bring to the students with disabilities' experiences, the researcher was able to discover that which the University can

undertake in order to overcome these barriers and build an all-inclusive environment that values and respects all its students; overcome past inequality and discrimination; empower its students with disabilities to triumph over the marginalisation and alienation they currently experience. (These are discussed further on in the *Conclusion to Discussion of Findings* section).

In hearing the voices of the participants of the current research study, the researcher hopes that positive change is able to be made through the findings from this study in order to overcome the barriers expressed by the participants, and experienced by the students with disabilities at the University of KwaZulu-Natal: Howard College Campus.

Likewise, according to Marks' (1999a) definition, disability is seen as a complex relationship between the environment, body, and psyche. For Marks there is an importance in developing a dynamic understanding of disability which recognises the significance of examining the interrelationship between embodied subjects, and complex social and psychic relationships. Additionally, Marks (1999a) argues that this relationship serves to exclude certain individuals from becoming full participants in interpersonal, social, cultural, economic, and political affairs. Her all-encompassing, psychosocially-orientated conceptualisation is noted for its avoidance of the usual individual/social binary that has beset much theorising of disability.

As expressed by the participants of the current research study, the factors affecting the academic success of the students with disabilities at the University of KwaZulu-Natal: Howard College Campus include: the lack of staff and the disproportionate ratio of staff to students, the lack of resources, the lack of funding from the University, the lack of coordination and communication among relevant role players and the lack of awareness among the University's able-bodied population. These embody barriers which serve to exclude these students from fully participating in the interpersonal, social, and cultural experience of university. Such barriers prevent the students with disabilities from experiencing university life in the same manner as able-bodied students do. The environment created by such barriers means that these students (the students with disabilities) are not receiving adequate support, which results in their academic, social, and emotional needs not being appropriately met. For example, and as reported by the participants of the current research study, students with disabilities have to have tests and assignments postponed due to delays in receiving relevant study materials, and which sometimes results in failure. Also, the present lack of staff at the Disability Unit at the University of

KwaZulu-Natal: Howard College Campus means that academic and emotional needs of students with disabilities cannot simultaneously be met; rather one is neglected in order to provide for the other. And, because the majority of the able-bodied population on campus are unaware of the needs of the students with disabilities, they are unable to provide the necessary support to these students. Ultimately, the interrelationships students with disabilities share with the entire University population, their surrounding environment, impacts on the way they experience their disability at university. When inadequate support is provided, students with disabilities report negative experiences. However, if this is addressed, when their academic, social, and emotional needs are appropriately met, these students can begin to experience university in a more positive light.

6.4. Conclusion to Discussion of Findings

The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa recognises that people with disabilities have been discriminated against on the basis of their disability and that the establishment of equity for them requires redressing past inequity. In addition, the overall policy framework that informs equity of access and participation for students with disabilities in South African higher education draws on the fundamental principles of equity and non-discrimination to create a more just society that values and respects every member, as outlined in the Constitution (Council on Higher Education, 2005). These values and principles are well-established in various policy documents relevant to people with disabilities, such as The Integrated National Disability Strategy (Office of the Deputy President, 1997), The Education White Paper 3 on the transformation of the higher education system (Department of Education, 1997a), The Education White Paper 6 (Department of Education, 2001a) and The National Plan for Higher Education (Department of Education, 2001b).

Moreover, According to Shevlin, Kenny and McNeela (2004), appropriate support systems are crucial in ensuring equal access for students with disabilities in teaching and learning. The commitment of the institution to facilitating support and participation depends on its willingness to change admission, curricular and assessment procedures as well as the physical accessibility of the institution (Shevlin, Kenny & McNeela, 2004).

However, it is crucial to note that any disability policy must be joined by appropriate practice if any initiative to aid students with disabilities is to be successful; to ensure that students

in fact get the support and accommodations they need in order to participate equally. As can be noted from the analysis and discussion of the current research study's findings, the above is crucial for students with disabilities experiencing university in a positive light, good-quality academic development and having their academic as well as emotional and social needs met.

Although the University of KwaZulu-Natal: Howard College Campus may have certain policies in place in accordance with Government standards; policies to overcome past discrimination against students with disabilities and to create an all-inclusive environment, which values and respects all students, these do not seem to be accompanied by any appropriate practice. Ultimately, the University appears to be unconsciously perpetuating discrimination against students with disabilities. In a sense, it is all talk but no action. Though there is a Disability Unit; support service in place for students with disabilities, the University does not adequately fund the Disability Unit in order for it to be able to effectively provide for the students with disabilities; meet their academic, emotional, and social needs; put them at the same level as the able-bodied students.

Additionally, the results gleaned from the current research study point to the possibility that key role players are, firstly, not even made aware of the students with disabilities and their unique requirements, and secondly, those aware do not seem to be doing their best to aid these students in meeting their needs. Though separate faculties and departments; administrators and staff may be aware of the students with disabilities, none appear to be taking the initiative to coordinate and communicate with other relevant role players to make the university experience pleasant and successful for these students. As a result, the students with disabilities are marginalised; walk around campus with heavy burdens and feelings of alienation. In addition, they must work harder and take on greater responsibilities, in comparison to the able-bodied students, in order to keep up at university and ensure that they persevere.

Ultimately, it seems as though the University's Disability Unit as a support structure for the students with disabilities isn't living up to its fundamental function and responsibility. That is, to ensure that students with disabilities get the support and accommodations they need in order to participate equally, and to aid students with disabilities in meeting their individual needs. However, it is important to note that although student support services play a crucial role in supporting students with disabilities, the entire institution; university population of staff and

students alike is responsible for creating an inclusive environment where students with disabilities can experience community and attitudes of embracing diversity and accommodating differences. Responsibility, thus, lies with all relevant role players of the University of KwaZulu-Natal: Howard College Campus who must work together to overcome institutional as well as social barriers, accommodate for the students with disabilities, endeavour to meet their academic, emotional and social needs, help them develop academically, and create an all-inclusive environment that values and respects all students and allows for the students with disabilities to operate at the same level as the able-bodied students; experiencing university life as they do.

Overall, although significant progress has been made to increase the throughput rate of students with disabilities in tertiary education, there is still much to be done as many disabled students face discrimination and difficulty in acquiring and receiving support. Moreover, it is imperative to take note that disability policy often does not lead to practice at tertiary level. Many students with disabilities still need an ally for basic accommodations. Failure to grasp this concept may result in institutions unconsciously perpetuating the status quo; discrimination against students with disabilities.

As the current research study revealed, inadequate staff, resources and funding, poor coordination and communication between significant role players; substandard relationships, and insufficient awareness represent major barriers to success for students with disabilities. Furthermore, progress can be made through the increased coordination of disability support services and programmes to educate faculty and peers about support, accommodations and rights of individuals with disabilities.

7. Conclusion and Recommendations

According to the Council on Higher Education (2005), few investigations of higher education provision for people with disabilities have been undertaken in South Africa. It is hoped that the current research study has made inroads to eliminate the present lack of research of this nature in South Africa, and perhaps, provided a foundation from which future studies can be put together in order to comprehensively grasp the position of students with disabilities within the South African context.

Overall, the perceptions and experiences of the students with disabilities at the University of KwaZulu-Natal: Howard College Campus regarding the University's Disability Unit was found to be consistent with one another. Participants of the current research study reported that the factors affecting their academic success include: the lack of staff and the disproportionate ratio of staff to students, the lack of resources, the lack of funding from the University, and the importance of University lecturers. The findings gleaned from this study appear consistent with the research findings from similar studies, including those conducted by Greyling (2008), Dowrick, Anderson, Heyer and Acosta (2005), Shevlin, Kenny and McNeela (2004), and Fuller, Healey, Bradley and Hall (2004). Factors such as inadequate staff, resources and funding, poor coordination and communication between significant role players at university, substandard relationships, and insufficient awareness among the university population (staff and students alike) represent major barriers to success for students with disabilities. If the University of KwaZulu-Natal: Howard Colleges Campus' Disability Unit is to be effective in aiding its students and working towards meeting their academic needs, it is necessary that the Unit addresses and aims to remove such barriers that are hindering students with disabilities.

An aspect gleaned from the data analysis process, and which appears significant to the researcher, is the fact that some participants voiced their opinion that the University's Disability Unit should engage with other successful support services and learn from them how to operate effectively and beneficially for students with disabilities. Two of the participants from the current research study named the support services at the Universities of the Witwatersrand and Cape Town as good models to learn from.

At the University of the Witwatersrand, apart from their outstanding assistive technology services, some of their best practices include: continual quality checks of scanned or edited student material, continually looking at adding or improving their services and technology or adaptive devices, and annual evaluation forms to be filled out by their Disability Unit students. Moreover, what is quite impressive is the sensitisation and empowering of their students. For instance, the Disability Unit hosts teaching workshops to sensitise and educate University lecturers about teaching disabled students, organises a disability awareness week to create awareness among the University population, encourages Disability Unit students to introduce themselves to and liaise with their lecturers (using a letter of accommodation as a starting tool),

and encourages Disability Unit students to attend various University workshops to aid in their personal development (e.g. CV writing workshops) (University of the Witwatersrand).

Similarly, at the University of Cape Town, the Disability Service supports academic access for disabled students in the following ways, for example: advocacy and advice on any issues related to the disabled students' disability; consultative and counselling support for students with disabilities; a resource centre with literature and material relating to disability studies and disability research; physical access; assistive technology; technical assistance; parking for disabled students; and facilitation of extra time and other exam accommodations for disabled students (University of Cape Town).

These participants voiced their opinions that the Disability Unit at the University of KwaZulu-Natal: Howard College Campus could improve itself by engaging with such universities who have disability support services in place for students with disabilities which are efficient and effective in meeting their needs.

Participant 1: *... the only way that they can improve is to work... check with other universities throughout the country and see how education for a student with disability in a higher learning institute have developed. You know network with Wits University and stuff like that.*

Participant 3: *... the university needs to put, you know how they have in other universities, like UCT, accordingly to my knowledge, they have a course on disability which is actually almost compulsory and I was actually wondering why don't we have that here at UKZN and Howard College.*

As such, there appears to be a great need at the University of KwaZulu-Natal: Howard College Campus to start networking with successful support services in order to advance the University's Disability Unit and improve the support it provides to its students with disabilities as well as its ability to meet these students' needs.

In the future, progress can be made through the increased coordination of disability support services and programmes to educate university populations about support, accommodations and the rights of individuals with disabilities.

The aim of this study was to specifically address the perceptions and experiences of the students with disabilities at the University of KwaZulu-Natal: Howard College Campus regarding the University's Disability Unit. This is in terms of the facilities and services offered as well as the Disability Unit's effectiveness in meeting its students' needs. This study was designed to explore the Disability Unit from the perspectives of students' responses to it.

In this study the researcher relied on the students' willingness and therefore, students' availability and time constraints influenced their participation. As such, although a larger amount of students with disabilities were approached to participate in this study, only six students were willing and able to participate. As a result, findings from this study cannot be generalised. However, qualitative research implies an in-depth description of the meaning that people construct from their experiences. With this in mind, the aim therefore, was not to generalise the research findings in a probabilistic sense. Therefore, the researcher explained the context, design, and method so that the reader could make a decision about the transferability to their context. Additionally, due to the limited scope of the current research study, the researcher only focused on the students with disabilities. Ideally, supplementary systems can contribute to a richer, deeper understanding of the issue under investigation. This opens up new opportunities for future researchers.

Prospective research possibilities could include conducting systematic evaluation at the University of KwaZulu-Natal: Howard College Campus. By increasing the sample size of students with disabilities to be more representative of the larger student population at the University and including for example, staff, peers, and other relevant role players, the current situation regarding students with disabilities and the Disability Unit can be evaluated accurately and comprehensively; and this is the first step to improve the experiences of disabled students.

8. References

Banister, P., Burman, E., Parker, I., Taylor, M., & Tindall, C. (1994). *Qualitative methods in psychology: A research guide.* Buckingham: Open University Press.

Council for Higher Education. (2005). South African higher education responses to students with disabilities. Equity of access and opportunity? *Higher Education Monitor*, 3.

Crow, L. (1996). *Including all of our lives: Renewing the social model of disability* In J. Morris (Ed.) (1996). Encounters with strangers: Feminism and disability. London: The Women's Press.

Creswell, J.W. (1998). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: choosing among five traditions.* Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications.

[a]Department of Education. (1997). *Education White Paper 3: A program for the transformation of higher education.* Pretoria: Government Printers.

[a]Department of Education. (2001). *Education White Paper 6: Special Needs Education: Building an Inclusive Education and Training System.* Pretoria: Government Printers.

[b]Department of Education. (2001). *National Plan for Higher Education.* Pretoria: Government Printers.

Dowrick, P.W., Anderson, J., Heyer, K., & Acosta, J. (2005). Postsecondary education across the USA: Experiences of adults with disabilities. *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*, *22*(1), 41-47. Retrieved on 11 August, 2009 from EBSCOHost database.

French, S. (1993). Disability, impairment or something in between? In J. Swain, V. Finkelstein, S. French, & M. Oliver (Eds.). *Disabling barriers – Enabling environments*, 17-25. London: Sage.

Freund, P. (2001). Bodies, disability and spaces: The social model and disabling spatial organisations. *Disability and Society*, *16*(5), 689-706.

Fuller, M., Healey, M., Bradley, A., & Hall, T. (2004). Barriers to learning: A systematic study of the experience of disabled students at one university. *Studies in Higher Education*, *29*(3), 303-318. Retrieved on 11 August, 2009 from EBSCOHost database.

Greyling, E. (2008). *Students with disabilities' experiences of support and barriers to their development at Stellenbosch University.* Thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the

requirements for the degree of Master of Educational Psychology at Stellenbosch University.

Henning, E., Van Rensburg, W., & Smit, B. (2005). *Finding your way in qualitative research.* Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers.

Hughes, B., & Paterson, K. (1997). The social model of disability and the disappearing body: Towards a sociology of impairment. *Disability and Society*, *12*(3), 325-340.

Kaplan, D. (2000). *The Definition of Disability.* The Center for an Accessible Society. Retrieved on 20 February, 2009 from www.accessiblesociety.org/topics/demographics-identity/dkaplanpaper.htm

Kerr, D., & Chaane, T. (2008). Research: Disability Charter week ending 11 April 2008. Retrieved on 20 February, 2009 from www.siyakha.co.za/.../**2008**/.../disability-charter-week-ending-114.pdf

Kvale, S. (1983). The Qualitative research interview: A phenomenological and a hermeneutical mode of understanding. *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology*, *14*, 171-196. Retrieved on 16 November, 2009 from EBSCOHost Database.

Kvale, S. (1996). *Interviews: An introduction to qualitative research interviewing.* London: Sage Publications.

Lawton-Misra, N. (2005). *Conference Report.* Retrieved on 23 February, 2009 from www.fotim.ac.za/fotim_conferences/disability/report.html

Maree, L. (2007). *First steps in research.* Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers.

Merriam, S.B. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Merriam, S.B. (2002). *Qualitative research in practice. Examples for discussion and analysis.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Mertens, D. (1998). *Research methods in education and psychology. Integrating diversity with quantitative and qualitative approaches.* Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications.

N/A. (2010). University of Cape Town. *Services and Operations: Disability Service*. Available at http://www.uct.ac.za/services/disability/

N/A. (2010). University of the Witwatersrand. *Student Services: Disability Unit*. Available at http://web.wits.ac.za/Prospective/StudentServices/DisabledStudents/

Neuman, W.L. (2000). *Social research methods. Qualitative and quantitative approaches.* (4th edition). Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Northumbria University. (2006). *Disabilities team sessions on disability awareness, specifically Deaf and Hard - of hearing awareness training.* Retrieved on 11 August, 2009 from http://www.nhb.ac.uk/dss

Office of the Deputy President. (1997). *White Paper on an Integrated National Disability Strategy.* Pretoria: Office of the Deputy President.

Pahad, E. G. (2001). Address at the "Towards a barrier free Europe for citizens with disabilities" expert meeting. Sweden: Linkoping Hall. Retrieved on 19 March, 2009 from http://www.thepresidency.gov.za/show.asp?type=sp&include=minister/sp/2001/sp0425.htm&ID=51

Patton, M.Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods.* (3rd edition). Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications.

Ritchie, J., & Lewis, J. (2003). *Qualitative research practice. A guide for social science students and researchers.* Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications.

Seirlis, A. (2008). *The QuadPara Association of South Africa.*

Shakespeare, T., & Watson, N. (1997). Defending the social model. *Disability and Society*, *12*(2), 293-300.

Shakespeare, T., & Watson, N. (2002). The social model of disability: An outdated ideology? *Research in Social Science and Disability*, *2*, 9-28.

Shevlin, M., Kenny, M., & McNeela, E. (2004). Participation in higher education for students with disabilities: An Irish perspective. *Disability and Society, 19*(1), 15-30. Retrieved on 11 August, 2009 from EBSCOHost database.

Silverman, D. (2000). *Doing qualitative research. A practical handbook.* London UK: Sage Publications.

South African Survey 2008/2009. The South African Institute of Race Relations. Retrieved on November 13, 2009 from http://www.sairr.org.za/research-and-publications/south-africa-survey-2008-2009

Terre Blanche, M., & Durrheim, K. (1999). *Research in practice: Applied methods for the social sciences.* Cape Town: Cape Town University Press.

Terre Blanche, M., Durrheim, K., & Painter, D. (2006). First steps in qualitative research. In M. Terre Blanche, K. Durrheim, & D. Painter (Eds.). *Research in practice: Applied methods for the social sciences*, 320-344. Cape Town: Cape Town University Press.

The Open University (2006). *Models of disability.* Retrieved on 20 February, 2009 from www.open.ac.uk/inclusiveteaching/pages/understanding-and-awareness/models-of-disability.php

Wilbraham, L. (2008). *Analysis of qualitative material: thematic analysis.* Handout for Honours Research Fundamentals module. School of Psychology, University of KwaZulu-Natal.

Willing, C. (2001). *Introducing qualitative research in psychology: Adventures in theory and method.* Buckingham: Open University Press.

9. Appendices

Appendix A: Consent form

Working title of proposed research study:

Disabled students' perceptions and experiences of the Disability Unit at the University of KwaZulu-Natal: Howard College Campus

Volunteering for the study involves participation in an interview. The interview will be approximately 30 minutes in duration.

Consent Form for Participants:

I _____ (participant) understand that my participation in this research project is completely voluntary and that I may withdraw from this project at any time. I have been informed that there will be no adverse consequences should I choose to withdraw from the study. I understand that I will not be obliged to answer any questions which I do not feel comfortable in answering. I have been informed that my responses will be kept confidential and that I will not be named in the report.

Signature: _____

Researcher:
Ms. Avanya Naidoo
083 790 0602

Research Supervisor:
Ms. Shaida Bobat
The School of Psychology
University of KwaZulu-Natal
(031) 260 2648

Appendix B: Letter to students

Dear Student

Re: Research study on the perceptions and experiences of students with disabilities

I am a Psychology Masters student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (Howard College). For the purpose of completing my degree, I am conducting research on the perceptions and experiences of the students with disabilities at the University of KwaZulu-Natal: Howard College Campus regarding the University's Disability Unit in order to understand more about this phenomenon. I am being supervised by Ms. Shaida Bobat.

The research will be conducted during the months of September and October 2009, before the University's examination period. You are kindly asked to volunteer your participation in this research study. In the event that you agree to participate, I would appreciate it if you could sign the attached consent form. Your participation in the study consists of taking part in an interview which will be administered in a venue at the Disability Unit at campus, and at a time that is most suited to you. The interview will be approximately 30 minutes in duration. Information provided by you will remain confidential and used only for the purposes of this research study. Additionally, your name will not be mentioned in any report of this research study. All participation in the study is voluntary and no adverse effects will result from discontinuing your participation.

Yours faithfully,   Research Supervisor:

                                                                   Ms. Shaida Bobat

_____   The School of Psychology

Researcher: University of KwaZulu-Natal

Ms. Avanya Naidoo   (031) 260 2648

083 790 0602

Appendix C: Interview guide

Potential questions to be raised; areas of focus in the semi-structured interviews with participants (in no particular order):

- What do you think about the Disability Unit at campus?
- How has the Disability Unit at campus been effective in providing for your needs?
- OR Why do you think that it has been ineffective?
- What are some of the advantages and disadvantages of the Disability Unit at campus?
- In what ways do you think the Disability Unit at campus can improve and be better for students like yourself?
- What do you intend doing once you have graduated?
- How you think that the Disability Unit at campus has prepared you for the working environment?
- OR Why do you think that it has not been effective in this way?

Appendix D: Example of a transcribed semi- structured interview

Interviewer: What do you think about the disability unit at the campus?

Participant: I think that it's a great help to a lot of our disabled students although it could be better.

Interviewer: You say it could be better and you also say that it is a great help. In what way would you say it's a great help and then also in what way could it be better?

Participant: It's a great help because we get all our books scanned and edited for us and in that way we can read up for tests and exams and have all our work accessible to us but it could be better because there is not many staff. There are not many people employed there to help scan and edit our books and as a result we get our stuff late, we don't submit our assignments on time because the disability unit has not prepared our material on time because there's just too many of us and very little of them and plus there's not much computers and scanners. That's why I say it could be better. The University could give us more financial support and they could employ more people to work there and buy more computers and scanners.

Interviewer: Ok. Thank you. Personally for you has the disability unit been effective in providing for your academic needs?

Participant: Over the years… I can say yes and I can say no because over the years they had no staff. At one stage all the staff went on strike. The work study went on strike because they were not getting paid and they went on strike and there was no one to do our stuff and we suffered badly because I was submitting assignments on the study leave week. During study leave week I was still submitting assignments. That's how long it took them to give me my work. As a result I even ended up failing a few courses and then this year being my final year, I think began to get better. They started getting a bit organised and they were allowed a bit more staff. So for me, because my lecturers managed to give me some stuff early, I got it to them early and they were able to give me most of my stuff on time. But over the years it has not been very effective for me.

Interviewer: Thank you. What do you think is the greatest problem then in the disability unit being ineffective to you as a student in meeting your academic needs? What's the problem?

Participant: Like what challenges do they face?

Interviewer: Yes, what do you think?

Participant: I think it's not enough computers and scanners to scan because if you look at it there are over 100 totally blind students and there's only about 12 people working there. Now, can you imagine if 100 students do like 4 courses each? That's like 4 manuals, 4 course packs from each student and there's only 12 people working there probably like 6 a shift. So I think that they need more computers and scanners and they need to employ more people. Also a bigger venue would be much better because the venue that they're working in right now – the student union – is a bit too small because even if we buy more computers, where do we put them?

Interviewer: Ok again, this might sound like a repeat but can you think of, or can you name some advantages and disadvantages of the disability unit at campus.

Participant: Advantages of the disability unit is, it makes our lecturers – they actually get to communicate with the disability unit a lot more and it is an advantage because the disability unit's people there go up to the lecturers and explain what we need and in return the lecturers actually help us more and give us their overhead notes in class and try to make us a bit more comfortable. Also, if the disability unit was not around there'd be no… how do I explain … our tests and exams would not be set up properly because examiners do not take much of a responsibility. It's the disability unit that sets up all our test and exams and if they were not there then we would surely be neglected by the exams department or probably people would try and set things up but because they have very little knowledge of our situation it would not be very useful. And disadvantages ….

Interviewer: Before we go on to the disadvantages, do you want to tell me in more detail what it is that the disability unit does for you in terms of your exams and tests. What is it that they set up and what is it that they do for you that you don't think could be done without them?

Participant: Well, firstly a venue. The disability unit has to go around getting a venue and then they have to go and put screen reading software onto a computer so that I could go in and type out my exam. Then they have to make sure that these computers are in perfect working order and obviously a person who does that has to know about the screen reading software and has to know how things work. And then they also have to make sure that the format of my paper is in Microsoft Word format. There are no tables. There's nothing that screen reader would not be able to read. They have to convert it to a format that the screen reader can read. I'm not saying that people outside the disability unit cannot do that but obviously people outside would not know what our screen readers would be able to recognise, what formats it would be able to recognise and what it would not. So that's the difference I suppose.

Interviewer: Ok. Thank you and then the disadvantages?

Participant: There are many disadvantages for me to tell you about. Disadvantages, you want to know about the disability unit specifically?

Interviewer: Yes, anything that has hindered you in your academic needs or in terms of support from the disability unit. Things that you think are a disadvantage.

Participant: Well, like I told you about the delay of giving us our reading materials, studying material, also the fact that they don't have very much staff. Also, with regard to getting our stuff late, sometimes the lecturers actually make a bit of a fuss about it and no one blames them because no one wants to mark assignments on the week of study leave. They need that time to prepare for their examination papers which are going to be written. You know, getting things finalised and organised and stuff. And then sometimes because the disability unit gives us our work late, we have to submit assignments late. And you find that they don't back us up in this regard. They don't come with you to the lecturer and say, listen this is actually our fault, this is

why the student is submitting an assignment late and thus sometimes when you're submitting an assignment late, the lecturer refuses to give you marks. You loose your DP and when you appeal to the appeals committee to give you your DP back, you write in your appeal that this is what happened with the disability unit and then you find that the disability does not give you a supporting letter to back that up. That happened to me personally with the law course. I was supposed to be writing a test and submitting an assignment. They did not give me my work on time. I was forced to write the test. I failed. I lost my DP as s result. I wrote to the committee and I went to the head of the disability unit to actually give me a letter to say you know what this is also their fault because if I had the material I would have passed the test and it just never happened I had to lose my DP just like that and it was refused and I had to come back and repeat the course the following year.

Interviewer: Ok. Thank you. Are there any other major disadvantages at the disability unit that you can think of?

Participant: Not that I know of. Basically it all revolves around the material that we give to them to scan and edit. Also another thing is because the disability unit, like I told you, there's so many of us and so few of them, they tend to rush in the scanning and edit of our work because every student is coming to them. Because, I don't know if you've noticed when you on campus, everyone writes tests all at once and all the work just piles up so there are a whole lot of students going in and asking them for the work and then they tend to rush which means when they're editing our work there are errors in the documents that are not edited properly. Then our screen readers cannot read it properly for us in return. So it all becomes disastrous. So if I get a document like a course manual. I get my manual. They rush through it because they've got 50 other students waiting for their manuals and then I have to go back a day before the test and say listen I can't read this, because I've only got my manual two days before that and I managed to look at it and say you know what I can't read this. I'm writing a test tomorrow and then they take it back. They rush with my work and then another person's work gets neglected. It's like this cycle, it does not end. That's one of the disadvantages. They tend to rush because there are so few of them.

Interviewer: In what ways do you think the disability unit at campus can improve and be better for students like yourself?

Participant: I think, firstly, if I may say that the University does not give us sufficient funds. If I can just bring something in which has probably nothing to do with the disability unit, but just to prove my point, it's our disability lan. The disability lan was asked for basically by the disability unit and eventually after three years of asking the University agreed. Then they give us second hand computers, second hand screens and second hand CPUs that don't really work properly – they are not very compatible with our software. Restart by themselves, which just tells you that they are not even willing to spend any money on disabled students yet they say that they are disability friendly. The same goes with the disability unit. We don't get any funding from the disability unit. People who work there don't get paid very much. They don't give us any resources, no scanners etc. We have to make do basically with what we have and if the disability unit requests something, they are always getting second hand stuff from other lans which does not really help the course very much because when you're getting second hand stuff, it works but it does not work very well. You may as well have your old stuff back. That's how it is. And also they don't get very much money to pay the people who are working there. Thus you get people finding better work and quitting on us, and there is no one to scan our books. And also in the disability unit itself, they need to be organised. I find that there is no organisation. They don't prioritise who needs what first. Now they are getting a bit better at it but before it was just disorganised. A work study just comes and grabs a book and starts scanning. No one knows what they are doing. So I feel they could improve that way. Also they should get us a bigger venue. And you know … a big way in which the disability unit can improve is if they get a bigger venue and they get separate people for scanning and separate people for editing. Because it's pointless a person scanning a book and then editing the same book; whereas a person can scan one book, pass it onto someone to edit and carry on with the next book. I think that would help much but they just don't have the financial support and enough recourses to do that.

Interviewer: What is it that you intend doing once you have graduated?

Participant: I am graduating from this University next year and at the end of that I would like to do my honours but I don't think I'm coming to do them here because with the way the disability unit is running I cannot bring my work and do them here at honours level because I'm afraid I would not get my books on time and besides I think that if I get my books all at once later on in the year I would not be able to cope with the work load. Plus I cannot do my honours here because it requires 65% and over which I haven't got in most of my courses due to getting my books late.

Interviewer: Once you've graduated what are your employment expectations – going out there into the working world. What is it that you think its going to be like for you when you step out into the working world?

Participant: I think its going to be really, really, really difficult because of my disability and things that I need accessible to me but I think that because of the employment equity act it now caters for disabled people such as myself and I think that basically I'm not too worried because jobs these days are mainly with computers and stuff like that and I've got a lot of skill in that. So I'm not too worried in that regard because I know I can cope with that kind of workload. I'm just worried about getting around orientation and mobility and being in the workplace with people who don't really understand my needs.

Interviewer: Do you think that the disability unit at campus has prepared you well to cope in your future career and work environment? Has there been anything that's been done that you think?

Participant: No, there's been nothing that's been done for me because all the computer skills that I just told you about I had to learn on my own because the disability unit did not provide anyone to tutor me in computers when I came to this campus and when I came here I had no knowledge of anything of the sort. I did not even know how to turn one on. And the … with orientation and mobility, we never had an orientation and mobility instructor. There was someone. She came for two days and then she left so the disability unit did not do anything to help any … I can speak for myself and for a lot of others. And they did not do anything to really help me to prepare me for the working world. Everything was done by friends who were willing to help me and by myself

who had to use landmarks to get around campus and I have to assume that I'll have to use landmarks to get around the working environment as well.

Interviewer: So in terms of providing any kind of support or coping skills, the disability unit has provided you with none?

Participant: None, none at all.

Interviewer: Why do you think that it has been ineffective in this way? What do you think should be done?

Participant: What I think should be done and has been done from this semester onwards, unfortunately, because I'm leaving here, I would not get the opportunity to see how good it actually is, or if the disability unit are eventually delivering on their promises. What I think should be done is, I think a full time person who is qualified to help disabled students with these kind of skills – you know skills such as orientation and mobility, computers, you know all other skills that will assist us in the work place. I think someone should be employed on a full time basis to assist the students with this, especially third year students who are leaving this campus at the end of the year. I think someone should be employed to actually do something like this for them.

Interviewer: And what is it that the campus or the disability unit has said they are going to do?

Participant: They have employed a social worker. It's only this semester that I think she has got a full time contract. Other than that she was here part time and basically she is helping students to walk with the cane, teach them the campus, teach them skills that they need to cope in the outside world as a whole not necessarily in the working environment. But she is helping. She is doing something. At least it's better than nothing. I also think though it brings me back to the point that there's only one of her and there's so many of us. I don't think that she will be able to assist all the students.

Interviewer: Is there anything else that we have not discussed that you would like to bring up about the disability unit in terms of its support and meeting your academic needs or anything else that you would like to discuss?

Participant: I think that the disability unit needs to provide more awareness to the rest of the University. Ok, yes, indeed they are but I think they can do more in terms of educating lecturers especially on how the disability unit actually works and what we as disabled students actually need to make our education better here; to put us on a level with the rest of the sighted students. And I don't think the disability unit is doing that because I've been in encounters with lecturers who feel that I am not their responsibility. I am the responsibility of the disability unit and they just have this notion that if the disability unit comes and picks up the course pack then that's it. As a lecturer they don't have to do anything for me and if the disability unit had to come forth and actually make the lecturers more aware – do something – put it up on the University website, put up pamphlets; do something to educate the lecturers then I think it would be mush better and disabled people would not be so isolated. The lecturers would take more of an interest in us.

Interviewer: That's a very good point. Is there anything you would like to share?

Participant: No. Not that I know of.

Interviewer: Thank you very much.

Appendix E: Example of identification of themes

Themes:

1. Lack of staff and the disproportionate ratio of staff to students

2. Lack of resources

3. Lack of funding from the University

4. Importance of University lecturers

5. Aspects of coordination and communication

6. Creating awareness

Appendix F: Example of clustering of themes into master themes

Cluster 1: The factors affecting the academic development of students with disabilities (themes 1, 2, 3 and 4).

Cluster 2: The aspects of coordination and communication (theme 5).

Cluster 3: The idea of creating awareness (theme 6).

Appendix G: Example of a summary table

Cluster 1: The factors affecting the academic development of students with disabilities

Constituent Themes	Keywords	Location
• Lack of staff and the disproportionate ratio of staff to students	"not many people employed" "too many of us and very little of them"	line 17 lines 23-24
• Lack of resources	"there's not much computers and scanners"	line 25
• Lack of funding from the University	"University does not give us sufficient funds"	line 43-44
• Importance of University lecturers	"educate the lecturers…lecturers would take more of an interest in us"	lines 48-49 and lines 51-52

Master Theme 1: The factors affecting the academic development of students with disabilities

Constituent Themes	Participant 1	Participant 2	Participant 3
• Lack of staff and the disproportionate ratio of staff to students	page 3/ lines 52-53	page 4/ lines 38-40	page 6/ lines 2-6
• Lack of resources	page 1/ line 11	page 5/ lines 10-11	page 7/ lines 5-6
• Lack of funding from the University	page 6/ lines 54-55	page 5/ line 21	page 3/ lines 16-21
• Importance of University lecturers	page 2/ lines 37-39	page 5/ lines 26-29	page 8/ line 53

Constituent Themes	Participant 4	Participant 5	Participant 6
• Lack of staff and the disproportionate ratio of staff to students	page 1/ lines 22-23	page 1/ line 17 and lines 23-24	page 1/ line 25
• Lack of resources	page 3/ line 51	page1/ line 25	page 2/ lines 56-58
• Lack of funding from the University	page 11/ line 25	page 5/ lines 43-44	page 5/ line 43
• Importance of University lecturers	page 6/ lines 111-112	page 9/ lines 48-49 and lines 51-52	page 4/ line 38