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Title: Improving library instruction and services for students with special needs

Academic librarians teach students information literacy and library research skills in various formal and informal situations. Because of the reliance upon web technology, using library resources can be a complex process. Students with all types of disabilities, but most specifically intellectual disabilities, may face frustration when attempting to access library materials both online and in person. Because Hofstra librarians reach thousands of diverse students each year, through different venues, it is essential for academic librarians to adapt their instructional strategies in order to meet the needs of all students. Failure to make adaptations to learning environments and lessons may cause students with disabilities to become disenfranchised and unable to effectively achieve their academic goals. Toward that end, this research involved several projects to meet the larger goal of improving library instruction and services for students with disabilities.

First, in order to assess current student perceptions of library accessibility, students registered with Services for Students with Disabilities were asked to complete a survey about barriers to using the library. Second, a libguide (online library guide) was created to direct library faculty to best practices and sources in teaching students with special needs. This guide also includes an adapted curriculum for assignment-based classes (“one-shot” classes), accessible handouts and tutorials. Third, Axinn’s one-credit distance education library research course was adapted and made accessible based upon a review of the literature, best practices in distance education, and the principles of Universal Design for Learning. Students with special

needs were then invited to evaluate the course and share their assessments with the researcher via structured interviews. Lastly, the results of this research will culminate in the creation of a library policy for serving students with disabilities. In addition to improving library services, this research has implications for improving distance education and instruction, in general and across all disciplines, for students with special needs.