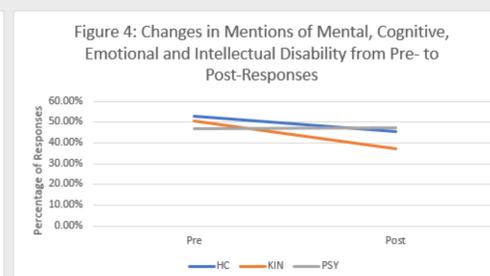
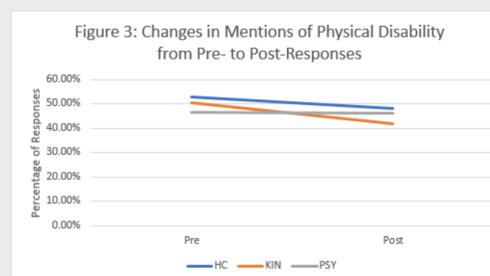
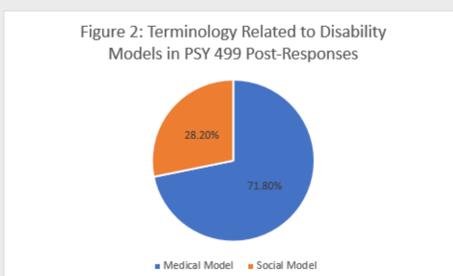
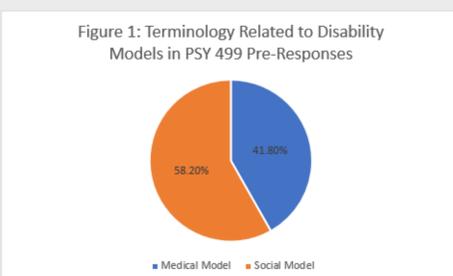


# Undergraduate Students Define Disability

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Figures 1 and 2 (above) show how undergraduates shifted their use of terminology related to disability models after taking PSY 499. Percentages correspond to percentage of language pertaining either disability model.

Figures 3 and 4 (above) show how undergraduates shifted their mentions of different types of disabilities before and after the courses from which responses were taken.

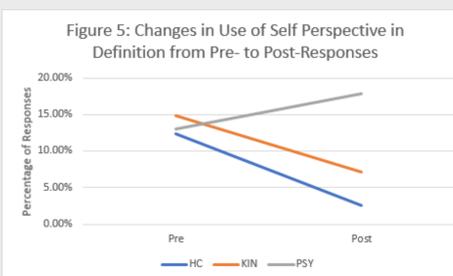


Figure 5 (left) shows changes in use of a self-perspective when defining disability before and after each course.

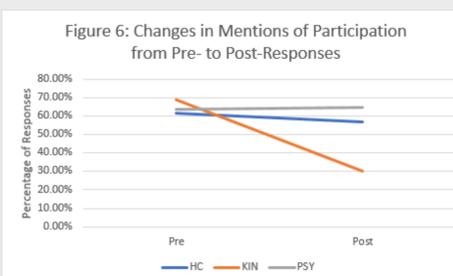


Figure 6 (right) shows the change of mentions of participation (function, activities, etc.) from pre-response to post-response for each course.

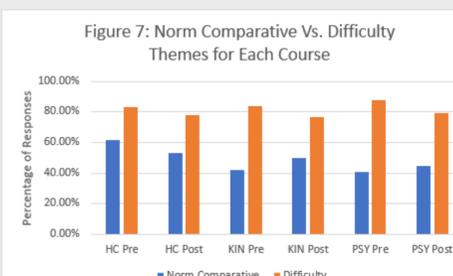


Figure 7 (above) shows how the percentage of responses coded as norm comparative or mentioning difficulty compare to each other for each course's pre- and post-responses.

## INTRODUCTION

People with disabilities are a large part of American society. In fact, a recent study accounting for the prevalence of disabilities in the United States has reported that 10.6% of younger adults (18-44 years) have a cognitive disability, and mobility disabilities were found in middle-aged (45-64 years) and older (65 years and up) adults at rates of 18.1% and 26.9%, respectively (Okoro et al., 2018). As such, the way individuals conceptualize and understand disability matters greatly.

While there is no single formal definition of disability, there are many cultural, social, and legal definitions that may influence the way individuals perceive disability. The purpose of this study is to quantitatively measure how undergraduate students perceive disability, and to determine how different undergraduate courses may have an impact on this perception. The following results are preliminary and should thus be further discussed and analyzed before drawing concrete conclusions and/or considering future directions of research and implementation.

## METHODS

A quantitative content analysis was performed on student open response data regarding how students define disability. The survey asked students, "according to your own personal opinion, how would you define disability?" The responses came from students in 3 different undergraduate courses, each with responses at the beginning of the term and the end of the term. These courses were Toy Based Technology for Children with Disabilities (HC 407), Motor Behavior (KIN 311), and Psychology of Disability (PSY 499). This analysis allowed researchers to measure differences in responses across courses and across time.

Thirteen themes were studied when analyzing responses. Some of the themes taken into account when analyzing responses include type of disability mentioned (emotional/mental/cognitive/intellectual or physical), consideration of assistance needs, comparison to a societal "norm" or "standard," disability models emerging from the response (social, medical), mention of difficulty versus difference, and more.

## RESULTS

- For students completing responses before taking PSY 499, 58.2% of occurrences of language related to disability models pertained to the social model, while 41.8% pertained to the medical model. After taking the course, these values changed to 28.2% pertaining to social model and 71.8% pertaining to medical model.
- Mentions of physical disabilities decreased from 52.8% of pre-responses to 48.1% of post-responses for the HC course, 50.4% to 41.8% in the KIN course, and 46.7% to 46.2% for the PSY course.
- Mentions of mental, cognitive, emotional, intellectual disabilities decreased from 52.8% of pre-responses to 45.5% of post-responses for the HC course, 50.7% to 37.2% for the KIN course, and slightly increased from 46.7% to 46.4% for the PSY course.
- Use of a self-perspective when defining disability decreased by over half for both the HC and KIN students, but increased for the PSY students from pre- to post-response.
- Mentions of participation (function, activities, etc.) remained almost the same for PSY and HC students but decreased for KIN students.
- There were greater mentions of difficulty than norm-comparison in both the pre- and post-responses for each course. There does not seem to be a pattern of these two themes increasing or decreasing with one another.

## DISCUSSION

Data concerning some themes of disability reflect a dramatic shift in perspectives after taking a course. Notably, tendencies to view disability through a specific model lens (such as a medical model or social model lens) may change dramatically after taking a course, as it did for the psychology students in this study. Conversely, some data reflect little to no significant changes in perspective. This reflects the multi-faceted nature of disability perception.

There is also a possibility for some courses to change disability perception in a direction opposite that of other courses. The data suggesting that the psychology course was the only to increase prevalence of the Self Perspective theme demonstrates this. There is also a demonstration from the data regarding participation that some courses may have a stronger effect on perceptions than others.

Lastly, from this preliminary data, a conclusion that some themes that may seem to be strongly related to each other may not actually be. For example, the Norm-Comparative and Difficulty themes have the potential to appear as often as each other, but did not.

## CONCLUSION

This brief observation of data regarding disability definitions offers insight into how undergraduate students perceive disability. Focusing on themes which seem to change after a course, in the presence of other themes which remain stagnant, there is a clear importance of considering disability perception and definition as multi-faceted. Certain themes may be more open to change than others and thus may be a potential target for interventions in changing one's perception. Additionally, while some results suggest that there may be a change in disability perception in some facets after a course, it is important to consider the nature of this study as a survey. Perception change are unlikely to be pinned to a single course's content and instruction styles.

This study supports the notion that disability perception is multi-faceted, and change should be considered as such. An undergraduate course may potentially have the influence on a student's perceptions, especially with regards to certain themes.

## REFERENCES

- Okoro, C. A., Hollis, N. D., Cyrus, A. C., & Griffin-Blake, S. (2018). Prevalence of disabilities and health care access by disability status and type among adults – United States, 2016. *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, 67(32), 882-887. <https://doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm6732a3>