Diversity and Inclusion Programme

Table of contents

1. Introduction

The University must promote social transformation as well as aspire towards inclusive policies and practices based on the ethical and legal imperatives of equality, equal opportunities, non-discrimination, and human plurality. To carry out the aforementioned actions, as a higher education organisation, we have created an action plan for diversity and inclusion both of which fall under the responsibility of the Mid Atlantic University and its Department of Attention to Diversity and Inclusion.

The measures adopted are transferred and integrated into all the bodies of the University community (Management, Deans, degree coordinators, teaching and research staff, administration and services staff, other workers, and students). Likewise, achieving the removal of all barriers and making resources available to guarantee equality to regularise and promote full participation in the academic and organisational life of the University of all its members. The objectives pursued by the action plan are listed below:

- Creation of department to support students (Department of Attention to Diversity and Inclusion).
- Development and management of measures to attend to diversity and inclusion.
- Accessibility to the online education model for students (reduction of the digital barrier).
- Teacher training courses in diversity and inclusion.
- Development of awareness-raising actions or measures for members of the educational community on diversity and specific educational needs.

2. Department of Attention to Diversity and Inclusion

The Department of Attention to Diversity and Inclusion, also known as the Department of Psychopedagogical Orientation, is made up of a team of two lecturers and two administrators from the University with training in psychopedagogy. The department's aim is to guarantee equal opportunities for students and other members of the University community who have limiting conditions, eliminating any form of discrimination, and establishing positive action measures that ensure their full and effective participation in the University by providing:

- Availability of the means, support and resources that ensure real and effective equality of opportunities in relation to the other components of the University community.

- Accessibility of University environment in accordance with the conditions of equality. The buildings, facilities, including virtual spaces, as well as services, procedures and the provision of information, must be accessible to all people, so that no members are prevented, because of a disability, their right to enter, move, stay, communicate, obtain information, or others.

- That all the study plans proposed by the University must consider that educating in any professional activity must be carried out from the respect and promotion of human rights and the principles of universal accessibility and design for all.

The Department of Psychopedagogical Orientation promotes individualised attention to students with physical and / or learning difficulties; and provides students with the possibility of having a mentor / tutor as offering academic support with the following objectives:

1. Supporting students with disabilities and special educational needs through the Department of Psychopedagogical Orientation.
2. Developing and managing of action measures to attend to diversity and inclusion.
3. Supporting students with disabilities and special educational needs who show difficulties in accessing technological infrastructures (digital barrier) with the help of the Department of Educational Technology.
4. Offering specialised teacher training in attention to diversity and inclusive education.
5. Developing actions or measures to raise awareness in the classroom such as: visual impairment, hearing impairment, physical-motor disability, autism spectrum disorder, attention deficit disorder or dyslexia.

3. Action measures for attention to diversity and inclusion

As a main measure, the University seeks to regulate accessibility, such as the creation of accessible physical environments, programmes, and educational tools regardless of abilities and towards personal development and autonomy.

Considering the fact that our University is characterised for using technologies and digital skills in the classroom, it is necessary to suppress or reduce any type of digital barrier that may prevent access to training for students with disabilities to avoid their exclusion. With regards diversity and inclusion and promoting the inclusion of all people who wish to learn online, the World Federation of the Deaf and the Spanish Federation of Sports for the Blind established a series of guidelines and recommendations on good practices for online lessons. These guidelines have been expanded and are considered in the inclusion plan of the Department of Psychopedagogical Orientation of Mid Atlantic University.

4. Online educational model for accessibility for Mid Atlantic University students

- Creation of the Department of Educational Technology and its Online Learning Programme
- Implementation of online learning and communication tools
- Development of courses and training plans in e-Learning skills for lecturers and students
- Providing technological tools to students, such as an online library.
- Permanent tutoring.
- Specialised attention for students (support in the operation of the platform, resolving doubts, checking of synchronous classes.)
- Specialised attention for teachers (support in the operation of the platform and the adoption of measures to facilitate access to students with special needs).

4.1. Educational Technology Department

The Educational Technology Department is made up of online learning specialists. They act as online tutors-trainers for both University lecturers and students and their main objectives are the successful implementation of ICTs in the teaching-learning process for lecturers and students. With the aim of promoting an online learning model (e-Learning), Mid Atlantic University has chosen a communication medium made up of a series of online resources such as email, forums, chats and videoconferences. These resources are integrated into an online environment called Virtual Campus, with support in the LMS Blackboard Academy Suite.

Likewise, the University website has a public section called Aula 3.0., where both students and lecturers have access to explanatory tutorials on how the platform works.

This virtual space is periodically updated and improved and is always available.

The training courses, with workshops and specific courses, are available on the platform itself to make correct use of the Virtual Campus tools, as well as indications on the teaching strategies in terms of diversity and inclusion of students.

Each lecturer guide of the modules taught online must have a certificate stating the competence of using and coordinating online activities in virtual environments.

5. Teacher training for attention to diversity and inclusive education

Lecturers must adapt the curriculum to the educational needs of the classroom, making different didactic options to promote individual student learning in relation to their characteristics and needs, considering those in vulnerable situations, and with any type of disability. In addition, students must be included in their own learning, as well as in the common learning of the classroom itself, thus fostering cooperation and direct participation among students (collaborative work). Planning in a heterogeneous classroom is a key element to understanding diversity and inclusion. Students with physical and / or learning difficulties will receive readjustments in their assessment methods (postponement of tests and / or extension of deadlines), format of teaching materials, preference of tools and educational resources. The lecturer, with the prior consensus from the University Department of Attention to Diversity and Inclusion, will adapt the curriculum as far as possible to provide facilities to the student with special educational needs.

Specific plan of attention to diversity and inclusion for lecturers at Mid Atlantic University

General module

- Attention to diversity and inclusion. Types of pathologies. Characteristics and needs.

- Introduction to the specific needs of educational support (SEND).

- Alternative communication systems and other resources.

- Approach to sensory integration in the educational field both in e-Learning and face- to-face training.

- Accessibility: ICT tools as a resource for students with disabilities (visual and non-visual)

- Curricular adaptation / programming for the needs of students with disabilities in online training.

- Planning of the evaluation and deadlines.

- Active methodologies that promote educational inclusion

Specific modules
1.　Students with hearing disabilities or limitations
- Speech techniques. Articulation of speech and intonation. - Training in the use of sound recording and amplification devices in the classroom.
2.　Students with visual disabilities or limitations
- Speech techniques. Structure and verbalisation. - Technological accessibility tools (computer assistance). - Techniques for preparing written materials: criteria for optical character recognition for screen readers.
3.　Students with cognitive or neurodevelopmental difficulties or limitations
- Adaptation of materials to the needs of the student: visual materials. - Visual strategies and communication skills. - Simple speech techniques: precision and concreteness - Speech articulation and simple speech techniques.

3.3.　Actions and measures to raise awareness on and inclusion and specific educational needs for members of the educational community

3.3.1.　Students with physical disabilities

The classrooms and the environment of the University are adapted so that students with physical limitations can move independently and without any inconvenience: spaces with ramps, elevators, and suitable furniture, as well as having available qualified and trained personnel to attend to students with disabilities.

3.3.2.　Students with hearing impairment

Regarding the measures adopted to improve the integration and inclusion of students with hearing impairment, some of them are listed below:

- Face-to-Face: a sound amplification system (wireless microphone) will be provided for the lecturer. This device will be synchronised with the classroom sound system (speakers).

- Online: encourage the use of chats for students and carry out activities in pairs or small groups that promote inclusion among classmates and record the classes for subsequent subtitling.

3.3.3. Students with visual impairment

With regards the measures adopted to improve the integration and inclusion of students with visual disabilities, some of them are listed below:

- Verbalise all the situations using a specific and simple language.

- Address the student by name.

- Verbally anticipate some events to avoid surprises and provide additional information in cases where the student cannot perceive important information (avoid dependence on visual material).

- Make the texts with a structure composed of headings, titles, paragraphs, etc., determining the uniformity of the document and with OCR (optical character recognition) criteria so that screen readers can read them, facilitating their use by people with a visual impairment.

3.3.4. Students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD)

Regarding the measures adopted to improve the integration and inclusion of students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), some of them are listed below:

- Do not wear a beard, moustache or patterned and colourful clothes for the virtual classes.

- The session must be taught in a quiet environment with good lighting, Preferably the background of the classroom is white or a light colour to avoid distractions for the student.

- Promote small group work to encourage sociability and inclusion.

- Use a soft tone of voice and simple language avoiding the use of figurative language.

- Respect the student's learning times.

- Make greater use of visual support content (images, videos, news, etc.)

- Anticipate what will be done during the class at the beginning and what can be implemented in the next class.

- Adapt the assessments.

3.3.5. Students with attention deficit disorder (ADHD)

Regarding the measures adopted to improve the integration and inclusion of students with attention deficit disorder, the following are recommended:

- The session must be taught in an environment with good lighting and preferably with background colours being white or light-coloured.

- Transmission of simple, specific and precise information, avoiding the use of figurative language.

- Give short and precise instructions.

- Promote small group work to encourage sociability and inclusion.

- Respect the student's learning times.

- Make greater use of visual or auditory support content to stimulate the student (images, videos, news, etc.). The use of digital resources is recommended.

- Prioritise the planning and organisation of the student (through the use of physical or electronic agendas).

- Anticipate what will be done during the class at the beginning and what can be implemented in the next class.

- Respect the start and end times of the class.

- Adapt the assessments.

3.3.6. Students with dyslexia

Regarding the measures adopted to improve the integration and inclusion of students with dyslexia (oral, reading and / or writing) it is recommended:

- Transmission of simple, concrete and precise information, avoiding more complex explanations and synonyms.

- Give short and precise instructions. Avoid long sentences.

- Promote small group work to encourage sociability and inclusion.

- Respect the student's learning times.

- Make greater use of visual and audio-visual support content to stimulate the student (images, videos, news, etc.). The use of digital resources is recommended.

- Adapt the legibility of the materials. The use of pale background colours for the text (pale yellow, for example), text in pale colours that are legible (sharp letters, with little contrast), and fonts such as Arial or Comic Sans size 12 pt.

- Prioritise the planning and organisation of the student (through the use of physical or electronic agendas).

- Anticipate what will be done during the class at the beginning and what can be implemented in the next class.

- Adapt the assessments and provide guidance during the same.

- Use devices such as voice recorders to record the sessions (face-to-face).

- Agree on the additional time you will need to complete the entire evaluation (attendance at synchronous sessions, activities, forums, exams

6. Conclusions

The initiatives developed and the results obtained will be subject to an annual evaluation by the head of the department, in terms of internal validation, and by organisations specialised in the inclusion of people with disabilities, social councils of Universities, representatives of University students and alumni, experts as external evaluators.

In addition, the University will work with specialised institutions, participating in research and improvement programmes such as "Project for the creation of a framework for self- evaluation of Spanish universities in improving their actions in the field of inclusion of people with disabilities" created by ANECA (National Agency for Quality and Accreditation) of which we are members.