**Title**: Feasibility & Acceptability of UC Leadership Academy for Emerging Disability Rights Leaders: Review of Pilot Program

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**Introduction**: Recent appeals for targeted research and training in self-advocacy and policy skills underscore the necessity of elevating the voices of individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IWIDD) as required by the Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act of 2000 (DD Act; Public Law 106-402, 106th Congress). In response to this need, UCLA Tarjan Center UCEDD and UC-LEND held their inaugural UC Leadership Academy for Emerging Disability Rights Leaders (“Leadership Academy”) in Spring 2024. This study assessed the feasibility and acceptability of a novel Leadership Academy to teach IWIDD skills related to disability policy and self-advocacy.

**Method**: The Leadership Academy was a 10-week program in which 10 IWIDD met virtually for two-hour weekly sessions. Based on a previous needs assessment and feedback from IWIDD, curriculum focused on disability policy (e.g., history of disability rights in America, introduction to government) and self-advocacy skills (e.g., advocacy and testifying, storytelling). The program culminated in a leadership showcase in which fellows presented on their advocacy topic. Upon completion of the program, participants answered questions related to each session’s curriculum and provided ratings for the content and skills taught. Feasibility was evaluated based on retention rates, attendance, and survey completion. Acceptability was measured through participant satisfaction surveys and qualitative responses in their application and showcase presentation.

**Results**: Nine fellows graduated the program (mean age=26, SD=7.4). Results indicated high levels of feasibility, with a 90% retention rate and 66% survey response rate. Moreover, 77% of participants attended greater than 80% of the sessions. Participants reported positive experiences with the program, with 100% of respondents indicating they agreed or strongly agreed that they gained knowledge about relevant advocacy topics, improved in their introductory self-advocacy skills, and that the structure and presentations of the program were effective and helpful.

Additionally, qualitative review of the fellow’s applications suggested that 45% of respondents were interested in self-advocacy in the workplace or classroom and 36% of respondents were interested in learning leadership skills as a means of supporting their community. In survey responses, 33% of graduates expressed interest in learning more about current disability rights activities and opportunities and 33% reported interest in self-advocacy in the workplace or classroom. Moreover, the session Advocacy in Practice was ranked “most helpful” by 83% of respondents.

**Discussion:** Findings suggest that the pilot Leadership Academy is both feasible and acceptable, providing a strong foundation for future programming. Results highlight the importance of teaching IWIDD skills related to disability policy and self-advocacy. Future programs should consider including additional topics related to current/ongoing advocacy events and/or advocacy in practice: self-advocacy in the workplace and classroom which may enhance the program's effectiveness in meeting self-advocates’ needs.

**References:**

U.S. Congress. (2000). Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act of 2000, Public Law 106-402, 106th Congress.

https://www.congress.gov/bill/106th-congress/house-bill/4920

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