

Postsecondary Transition: Experiences and Perceptions of College Students with Learning Disabilities



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Rationale

Learning Disabilities & Post-Secondary Outcomes

- In general, only 9% of students with disabilities attend a 4-year college for any period of time versus 70% of their peers (Wagner, Newman, Cameto, Garza, & Levine, 2005).
- Students with learning disabilities (LD) are showing higher rates of high school completion and an increase in postsecondary enrollment.
- For example, surveys show that 54% of students with LD have the goal to enroll in a post-secondary program, 67% of students actually enroll, while only 41% complete a postsecondary program (Cortiella & Horowitz, 2014).
- Individuals with disabilities without a post-secondary degree will earn \$1,000,000 less over the course of their lives than individuals without disabilities (U.S. Dept. of Labor, 2012).

Challenges Students Face

- Although they may have added unique challenges, students with LD face the same challenges as their typically-developing peers when entering college.
- Currently students with LD are entering college without the skills to successfully adapt to life in college (Harris & Robertson, 2001); and a large survey of post-secondary service providers (Janiga & Costenbader, 2002) showed 74 institutions felt students were not prepared to enter college, citing self advocacy skills as most crucial (Morningstar et al., 2010).
- Reported barriers to success include: (a) organization, (b) comprehension, (c) verbal communication, (d) being unaware of their rights and responsibilities, and (e) lack of access to adequate evaluation documentation.

Post-Secondary Disability Accommodations

- For students with LD, the most frequently used accommodations in college settings are:
 - Extended time for tests
 - Distraction free locations
 - Early access to syllabi and/or assignments
 - Note takers
 - Audio- or video-recorded lectures
- Of concern is that only 24% of students who received special education services in high school report their disability in order to receive services in college.
- Overwhelmingly, students report feeling unprepared and that their professors were expecting more than anticipated (Hadley et al., 2013). In addition, they had minimal understanding of what their accommodations did or did not permit (Baker & Scanlon, 2016).

Research Objectives

The purpose of this study is to explore student perceptions of their transition into college, as well as their current experiences within post-secondary school.

We pose the following three research questions:

1. What are students' experiences with and perceptions of support services and transition programming during high school?
2. What are students' experiences with and perceptions of the period of transition from high school to postsecondary education?
3. What do students report about the current supports and accommodations they are receiving in postsecondary settings?

Participants and Design

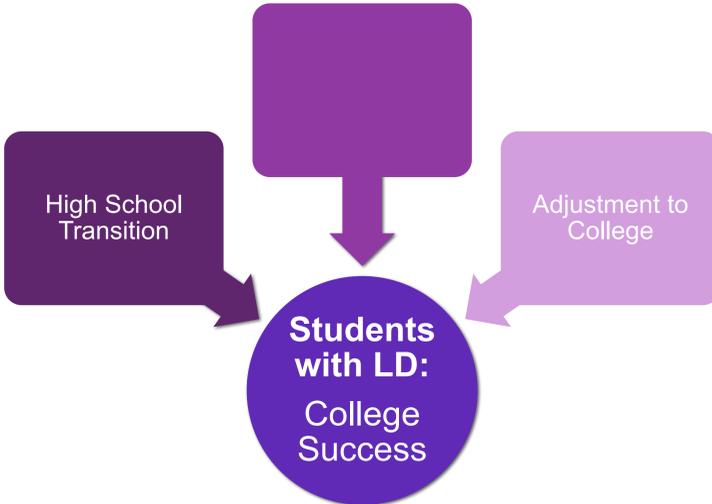
Participants will include:

- Students identified with LD (e.g., specific learning disability, dyslexia)
- Attending high school in the US, where they received special education or 504 services
- Currently enrolled in undergraduate courses

Focus Groups

A focus group design was selected for this research to provide students opportunities discuss their experiences in an open manner which may lead to more information than expected. This format allows the researchers to expand their perspectives on a given topic to examine whether these opinions and experiences are individualized or shared by multiple students (Baker & Scanlon, 2016).

Focus Group Questions



Background

- ◆ What is your current program or major?
- ◆ How many years do you expect for you to complete your current degree?
- ◆ Did you attend college directly after high school?
- ◆ Did you consider possibilities other than college for post-graduation?
- ◆ What does success mean to you?
- ◆ What do you think you need to do to be successful in college?

High School Transition

- ◆ Did you have an educational plan in high school?
- ◆ Did you attend IEP meetings? Did you feel involved?
- ◆ Did you set goals for yourself either before or during your IEP meeting?
- ◆ Did you have a transition plan with your school? What was included?
- ◆ Did you feel that your transition plan was helpful?
- ◆ Did your transition plan prepare you for the start of college?
- ◆ What support system did you have after high school that helped you start college?
- ◆ Who do you think was the most influential in preparing you for transition? Why?

College Accommodations

- ◆ When applying to college(s), did you indicate that you have a disability?
- ◆ Are you currently registered with the office for students with disabilities on your college campus?
- ◆ Did you register your freshman year?
- ◆ Do you currently receive accommodations?
- ◆ Did you face any barriers while accessing services?
- ◆ What do you wish you would have known before applying for accommodations?

Adjustment to College

- ◆ Do you find that there are differing expectations between high school and college?
- ◆ What was the biggest change from high school to college?
- ◆ Do you have any recommendations of what teachers in high school could have done differently to better prepare you?

COLLEGE STUDENTS WANTED



Are you interested in participating in research about postsecondary transition?

We are looking for college students to participate in a focus group about transition from high school to college.

- Previously identified with a learning disability (e.g., LD/SLD, dyslexia, dysgraphia, dyscalculia)
 - 18 - 23 years of age
- Enrolled in a postsecondary education program

Recruitment & Data Collection

Participant Recruitment

- Participants were recruited through local universities and community college.
- Posters were placed in offices and student spaces, and emails were distributed by offices that support special education services.
- Anticipated number of participants for the study $n = 40-50$.

Data Collection

- Each focus group interview will transcribed and analyzed through the six phases of thematic Analysis (Braun & Clark, 2006).
- Thematic analysis is commonly used for its flexibility, accessibility of researchers, and ability to generate new insights that can influence future hypothesis generation
- Identified themes that align with each of our research questions will be presented

Data collection is currently underway.

Contributions to Knowledge

- What are the biggest challenges students face when transitioning into postsecondary education?
- What prevents students from using disability services and/or asking for accommodations previously received?
- What do students feel they need in order to be successful after high school?
- What supports are schools providing that are the most beneficial to students?

Implications

This study has the potential to improve the understanding of:

- The current state of transition programming
- Students' perceptions of how these programs benefit them and the skills they were lacking when they began post-secondary education

The findings from this study also have the potential to inform future research:

- Studying the efficacy of transition programs in high schools
- Improving support services within postsecondary schools for students with LD

References

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