The Bridge to Postsecondary Education for Students with Disabilities: Perceptions of Emerging Best Practice in Preparation to Access Accommodations and Communication across Systems

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THE BRIDGE TO POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION FOR STUDENTS WITH
DISABILITIES: PERCEPTIONS OF EMERGING BEST PRACTICE IN
PREPARATION TO ACCESS ACCOMMODATIONS AND COMMUNICATION
ACROSS SYSTEMS

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Ph.D in Special Education at Virginia Commonwealth University.

by

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Acknowledgments

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Abstract

THE BRIDGE TO POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES: PERCEPTIONS OF EMERGING BEST PRACTICE IN PREPARATION TO ACCESS ACCOMMODATIONS AND COMMUNICATION ACROSS SYSTEMS

By Sandra Coffman Fritton, Ph.D.

A Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of Education at Virginia Commonwealth University.

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Perceptions of college Disability Support Services (DSS) and school system personnel regarding emerging best practices, adequacy of preparation of students with disabilities to access accommodations in college, and communication across systems were examined in this study.

Once in college, students with disabilities have a lower rate of completion/success than their peers. Accommodations promote success in college, yet students with disabilities are not accessing them, thereby reducing their success. Adequacy of student
preparation to access accommodations and communication across systems affects the access of accommodations by college students with disabilities.

This study is qualitative, with 43 participants. It includes DSS personnel from five, four-year and five, two-year colleges/universities and transition personnel from five public school divisions in Virginia. Snowball sampling and a guided interview format were used. Rigor was addressed through triangulation, including document and web review.

Results indicate that differences between the ADA and IDEA require students, teachers, and parents of students with disabilities to have knowledge of students’ rights and responsibilities under the ADA to prepare them for accessing accommodations in college. Students were more likely to be prepared when they had knowledgeable and supportive parents, transition teams, and teachers/case managers. Characteristics of individual students also help determine the effectiveness of student preparation.

School system participants feel they have lack of access to students with disabilities transitioning to college to effectively prepare them for accessing accommodations in college. They also lack feedback about preparation effectiveness.

Participants believe additional communication is needed. Existing communication is directional with school system staff making requests of DSS staff. There is also need for additional college outreach to school systems and a structure for ongoing communication is desired.

It is recommended that best practices in preparation and communication be identified, knowledge of transition teams/parents be improved, and usefulness of the Summary of Performance be determined. Development of a system for students with less
severe disabilities for transition preparation and a system for increased feedback and communication between systems personnel is needed. The VDOE and SCHEV should work to improve avenues for joint preparation and develop goals and an action plan for implementation.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Background and Legislation

The twentieth century marked the beginning of students with disabilities access to higher education in significant numbers (Ryan, 1993). While the early part of the century saw only occasional reports of individuals with disabilities graduating from college (Jarrow, 1987), after World War II the Disabled Veterans Vocational Rehabilitation Act (P.L. 78-16) and the Serviceman’s Readjustment Act of 1944 (the G.I. Bill of Rights) (P.L. 78-346) “increased [the] presence of students with disabilities on college campuses” (Ryan, 1993). The impact of this legislation as well as subsequent federal legislation, including Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Section 504) (P.L. 93-112) and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (P.L. 101-336) (ADA) created the opportunity for this postschool path for students with disabilities.

Section 504 and the ADA are the two pieces of legislation with the most direct impact on higher education for students with disabilities. They are based on the civil rights of individuals with disabilities and are an outgrowth of the civil rights movement which saw education as “a right which must be available to all on equal terms” (Brown v. Board of Education, 1954).

According to Weintraub (1976), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 marked a major shift in the disability rights movement to a declaration of rights from one of charity. The Act stated that “no otherwise qualified individual could be excluded by
sole reason of his or her handicap from participation in or benefit of any program receiving Federal funding” (Section 504, 29 U. S. C. § 794 (a)). The law also prohibited discrimination based on disability. Further extending the rights of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 was the ADA. This legislation provided coverage regardless of federal funding and also covered private entities. The ADA mandates non-discrimination and equal access, including reasonable accommodations, modifications and auxiliary aids, and services, for individuals that meet eligibility requirements, in a variety of life domains (42 U.S.C. 12101 (201, 202)).

The Education for All Handicapped Children Act, (P.L. 94-142) (EAHCA), signed into law on November 29, 1975 by President Gerald Ford, provided for “a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment (LRE) for all students regardless of disability”. Inclusion of students with disabilities through LRE became the law. Through the mandate of LRE, students that had been educated in self-contained classrooms were now required to be educated in integrated settings with their peers, including those settings that prepared students for postsecondary education. This had an indirect impact on higher education for students with disabilities by creating full secondary educational opportunity that included the “college track” (Jarrow, 1991).

Subsequent amendments and reauthorizations of the EAHCA, The Individuals with Disabilities Act Amendments of 1997 (P.L. 105-17) (IDEA) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (P.L. 108-446) (IDEA, 2004) added focus on the preparation of youth for postschool environments including higher education. This was accomplished through
mandated transition services at the secondary level (34 CFR 300.43 (A); 20 U.S.C. 1412 (a) (15) (A) (iii)).

Transition as defined by the dictionary.com (Transition, n.d.) is a “movement, passage, or change from one position, state, stage, subject, concept, etc., to another; change: the transition from adolescence to adulthood”. This definition is also used by NICHCY (National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities) (Dragoo, 2006) indicating that the areas that need to be considered for coordinated transition planning requirements under IDEA include “postsecondary education or vocational training, employment, independent living, and community participation”.

The confluence of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the ADA, and IDEA served to open the door to higher education in increasing numbers for students with disabilities. Evidence of this can be found in the results from waves one and two of the National Longitudinal Transition Study: Part II (Wagner, Newman, Cameto, & Levine, 2005). Between wave one (1987) and wave two (2003) of the study, the rate of participation in postsecondary education for students with disabilities increased by 17%. However, once in the postsecondary education setting students with disabilities do not have comparable rates of success when compared with their non-disabled peers (Murray, Goldstein, Nourse, & Edgar 2000). This negatively impacts their future employment and earnings (Jones, 2002) and quality of life (Day & Newburger, 2002; Madaus, Foley, McGuire, & Ruban, 2002).
Overview of the Study

Given the impact of lower success rates in postsecondary education for students with disabilities (Murray et al., 2000) it is necessary to understand if students with disabilities are adequately prepared for successful outcomes in postsecondary education. Access to accommodations in postsecondary education has been shown to facilitate success (Fitchen, Jorgensen, Havel & Barile, 2006) in that setting. Understanding emerging best practices in and the adequacy of student preparation to access those accommodations is vital to promoting the success of students with disabilities in higher education. Are students with disabilities prepared to access accommodations in college? The answer to this question may be perceived differently by the different stakeholders of secondary education and postsecondary education.

This study will explore perceptions of emerging best practices in the preparation of students with disabilities to access reasonable accommodations in the postsecondary setting from the perspectives of public school transition personnel and Disability Support Services (DSS) personnel in the college setting. Public school transition personnel prepare students with disabilities to access accommodations in postsecondary settings while DSS personnel in college settings see the result of the preparation to access accommodations. The comparison of these two perspectives will have utility to inform and improve the future preparation of students for accessing accommodations in the postsecondary settings.

In addition, communication between secondary and postsecondary education personnel to facilitate transition from high school to postsecondary education has been a recurring theme over the last two decades (National Joint Commission on Learning
Disabilities (NJCLD), 1994; NJCLD, 2007; Norlander, Shaw, & McGuire, 1990; Rothstein, 2003; Stodden & Jones, 2002). The need of personnel in both settings to understand the needs and perspectives of the other and to communicate between settings to promote better service in improving outcomes for students with disabilities has been delineated (Eckes & Ochoa, 2005; NJCLD, 2007).

Despite this ongoing need, the current state of communication between DSS personnel and high school transition personnel is unknown. It is necessary to understand if this communication has an impact on the perceived ability of students with disabilities to access reasonable accommodations in the postsecondary education setting. This will have utility to inform student preparation to access accommodations.

Overview of the Literature

*American Society and Education*

In his enduring work, *Democracy and Education*, John Dewey (1944) states that “The conception of education as a social process and function has no definite meaning until we define the kind of society we have in mind” (p. 97). American society defined itself as democratic, supporting equal rights and opportunity for all its citizens (The Constitution of the United States, 1787; United States Declaration of Independence, 1776). In theory, there would be no class differentials in American Society. All citizens would have equal rights and opportunities. A society that understands that “stratification into separate classes would be fatal, must see to it that intellectual opportunities are accessible to all on equable and easy terms” (Dewey, 1944, p. 88).
As such the American society saw the need to provide education for its citizens to be contributors and participants in the democratic process. This education was designed to produce a new society and depended upon the actions of the state to support it. Education in a democratic society “inevitably became a movement for publicly conducted and administered schools” (Dewey, 1944, p. 93).

Education in America was seen as the pathway to equal opportunity in life. Tyack (1974) notes that, for gaining desirable employment, schooling became critical. This was also echoed in the landmark civil right case of Brown vs. the Board of Education (1954). In support of equal and inclusive schools for all students through equal protection under the 14th amendment, Judge Warren wrote,

Compulsory school attendance laws and the great expenditures for education both demonstrate our recognition of the importance of education to our democratic society. It is required in the performance of our most basic public responsibilities, even service in the armed forces. It is the very foundation of good citizenship. Today it is a principle instrument in awakening the child to cultural values, in preparing him for later professional training, and in helping him to adjust normally to his environment. In these days, it is doubtful that any child may reasonably be expected to succeed in life if he is denied the opportunity of an education” (Brown v. Board of Education, 234, U. S 483, 1954).
Societal Demands of the Twenty-first Century

Throughout the 1980s and the early 1990s several reports pointed out that the United States was falling behind other nations in the preparation of youth for the current and future labor market. The Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce, *America’s Choice: High Skills or Low Wages!* (Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce, 1990) and *A Nation at Risk* (1983) were two of the most visible of these reports. *America’s Choice: High Skills or Low Wages!* (1990) pointed out that the United States competitive position and productivity needed to be improved to ensure a more prosperous future. This necessitated a fundamental change in the education and preparation of youth for the future labor market. *A Nation at Risk* (1983) reported “a rising tide of mediocrity” that threatened the future and economic health of the United States.

Educational quality and content were seen as the solution to this problem. Education was thereby tied to economic competitiveness and the workforce, creating alternative framings of the problem (Olson, 1997).

The educational model of the previous Industrial Age, with its stress on repetitive skills-based tasks, was not meeting the current or future needs of the economy for workers who could continue to learn over their working lifetime. The development of critical thinking skills, transferable to a multitude of job placements, was essential for the emerging workforce (Holtzer, 1997).

Thus, college education became increasingly necessary for competitive employment in the post industrial economy. Desrochers (n.d.) noted that “Economic restructuring has created most of the new jobs in occupations dominated by highly skilled
managerial or professional workers.” This increasingly necessitated a college education and the percentages of individuals attending college increased. Between 1970 and 1995, college attendance in the United States grew by 18% from 44% to 62% (American Society of Professional Estimators, n.d.).

College Education and Disability

Students with disabilities have the same desires and needs for a college education as non-disabled students (Wehman & Yasuda, 2005). They perceive that their educational level directly impacts their lifelong earnings and quality of life (Stodden, 2003; Wagner et al., 2005; Wehman & Yasuda, 2005).

A college education is seen as the way to improve employment outcomes. As Milsom and Hartley (2005) note, “Successful transition to college opens the door for future economic success, social power, and personal well-being” (p. 436). In addition, inability to complete postsecondary education negatively impacts the future employment and earnings of students with disabilities. Others (The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), 2000; Murray et al., 2000) indicate that individuals with disabilities are less likely to obtain a postsecondary degree and thus are less likely to be employed or to have a similar income as individuals without disabilities.

The EAHCA (1975), passed to address the education of students with disabilities, sought to “level the educational playing field” for these students in K-12 education. Since its passage and the subsequent amendments (IDEA, 1997) and reauthorization (IDEA, 2004), students with disabilities continue to access FAPE and LRE, including
accommodations, modifications, and services, to support their success during K-12 education.

In addition to these laws, the amendment of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (Pub. Law 89-10) (ESEA), renamed the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (Pub. Law 107-110) (NCLB), mandated the opportunity for all students, including those with disabilities, to participate in the general curriculum and statewide standards of achievement. This increased the opportunity for all students to meet state standards for graduation from high school.

The result of these legislative mandates was a dramatic increase in the number of students with disabilities graduating high school. There has been a 17% increase in students with disabilities graduating from high school between 1987 and 2003 and these increasing numbers of students with disabilities that graduate are now gaining access to post secondary education in increasing numbers (Wagner et al., 2005). Wagner et al. found that 39% of youth with disabilities that completed high school enrolled in postsecondary education in a two-year or four-year college.

High school graduation creates the possibility for enrollment in a postsecondary education institution. Open enrollment policies in the Virginia Community College System (VCCS), stipulate that anyone that has graduated from high school cannot be denied entrance to a community college in Virginia (VCCS, n.d., b). This increases the ability of students with marginal grades and low scores on college entrance exams to access a college education in Virginia. Articulation agreements in effect between the VCCS and Virginia’s public four-year institutions of higher education guarantee that individuals with
and without disabilities that successfully complete community college programs of education have easy access for acceptance into four-year public colleges and universities in Virginia (VCCS, n.d., a). The door is thereby opened for students with disabilities to complete a two-year or four-year degree after graduation from high school.

Once entering college, students with disabilities have difficulty completing postsecondary education programs (Milsom & Hartley, 2005; Murray, et al., 2000). Despite increased enrollment in postsecondary education by students with disabilities, attainment of a degree lags behind students without disabilities (Murray et al., 2000). According to the U.S. Department of Education (2003) only 53% of students with disabilities that enrolled in postsecondary degree programs had completed their programs of study or were still enrolled in college. This percentage was 64% for students that were not disabled.

In the postsecondary education setting students with disabilities do not have the comparable rates of success that students without disabilities are experiencing (Wagner et al., 2005). This, in part, may be a result of differing laws and policies between the K-12 and postsecondary education setting.

Students with disabilities in postsecondary settings are governed by laws focused on equal opportunity to gain benefit from the educational experience. Instead of providing for FAPE and LRE as under IDEA, the ADA and Section 504, the two main laws governing students with disabilities in postsecondary education, provide freedom from discrimination and equal opportunity. This is a significant change from entitlement to one
of eligibility under the law. This change in legal status is often difficult for students with disabilities to negotiate (Scott, 1991).

Accommodations to support success during K-12 education under IDEA (2004) may not be available under the ADA and Section 504. Accommodations are an “adjustment of differences” or “a process of mutual adaptation between persons or groups, usually achieved by eliminating or reducing hostility, as by compromise or arbitration” (accommodations, n.d.). In the field of education, accommodations have been defined as a “change in teaching methods and materials for students working toward the same goals and standards as the rest of the students in the general education classroom” (Spence-Cochran & Pearl, 2006, p. 15) or as practices and procedures in the areas of presentation, response, setting, and timing/scheduling that provide equitable access during instruction and assessment for students with disabilities…. They are intended to reduce or even eliminate the effects of a student’s disability; they do not reduce learning expectations. (Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), 2005, p. 14)

Students wishing to receive accommodations in postsecondary education must self-disclose their disability and provide documentation of disability to meet eligibility requirements (Madaus & Shaw, 2004; Frank & Wade, 1993). Reasonable accommodations in the postsecondary setting are then provided on a case-by-case basis as students’ needs based on their disability require (Frank & Wade, 1993).

Accessing accommodations in postsecondary education has been shown to be a facilitator of success in postsecondary education for students with disabilities (Fichten, et
Accommodations have a “considerable impact on who participates in higher education” and they “are important tools for desegregating institutions and extending equal educational opportunity to the disability community” (Grossman, 2001, p. 42). Fitchen et al. (2006) found that “…Individuals with disabilities who were registered to receive disability related services [from their postsecondary education institution] … overwhelmingly, indicated that disability related accommodations were among the most important facilitators [of their education]” (p. 9).

Yet students with disabilities are not accessing accommodations at the same rate as their enrollment in postsecondary education. The U. S. Department of Education reported that 32% of students with learning disabilities indicated that at the postsecondary level, they did not receive the accommodations and services needed (2003).

Research has identified barriers to accessing accommodations in postsecondary education. Barriers to accessing accommodations can include knowledge of the differing rights and responsibilities between secondary and postsecondary education (Grossman, 2001; National Council on Disability, 2004; Stodden, 2003) including meeting the differing requirements for definition of disability, the documentation of that disability as required by the postsecondary education institution, and differences in what is considered a reasonable accommodation in the postsecondary setting. Students with disabilities must also choose to self-disclose their disability in order to become eligible for reasonable accommodations in the postsecondary setting (Gamble, 2000; Rothstein, 2003) and, after eligibility has been determined, have self-determination and self-advocacy skills to follow
through and request these accommodations from individual faculty members (Hicks-Coolick & Kutrz, 1997; Lock & Layton, 2001).

**Self-Determination and Self Advocacy**

Self-determination is needed to negotiate the changes and barriers faced by students with disabilities in postsecondary education. Characteristics of people who are self-determined were set forth by Martin and Marshall (1995). They found that self-determined people:

…know how to choose – they know what they want and how to get it. From an awareness of personal needs, self-determined individuals choose goals, then doggedly pursue them. This involves asserting an individual’s presence, making his or her needs known, evaluating progress toward meeting goals, adjusting performance, and creating unique approaches to solve problems (p. 147).

Wehmeyer (1996) defined self-determination as “volitional actions that enable one to act as the primary causal agent in one’s life and to maintain or improve one’s quality of life” (p. 24). Self-determination has four essential characteristics at its core, including the ability to act autonomously, the ability to act in a self-regulated manner, the ability to initiate and respond to events, and the ability to act in a self-realizing manner. Self-determined behavior is further made up of many elements, including self-advocacy.

Self-advocacy is defined by *Wikipedia*, an online encyclopedia, to include any action, verbal or written, which is intended to outline and describe a particular problem an individual is encountering, and intended to create the interest and action by another person to assist that person in resolving the specific problem (Self-advocacy, n.d.). In the field of
education, Wehmeyer (1996) indicated that self-advocacy is the ability to be assertive about what is needed or desired, to effectively communicate those needs, and to negotiate and compromise to reach the desired effect.

Instruction in self-determination and self-advocacy skills is a method of preparing students for postsecondary success (Durlack, Rose, & Bursuck, 1994; Lock & Layton, 2001; Stodden & Jones, 2002). Several studies suggest that students who are self-determined have greater levels of success (Jameson, 2007; Field, Martin, Miller, Ward & Wehmeyer, 1998; Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 1997). Lock and Layton (2001) indicated that skills in self-advocacy, one of the elements of self-determination, are critical at the postsecondary level.

Curricula and methods have been developed to teach self-determination and self-advocacy to students with disabilities in both high school and the postsecondary education setting (Wood, Browder, Algozzine, & Karvonen, 2000; Halpern, Herr, Doren, & Wolf, 1997; Aune, 1991; Brinkerhoff, 1996; Durlack et al., 1994; Lamb, Brown, Hodges & Foy, 2004; Palmer and Roessler, 2000). Yet it seems that students entering postsecondary education do not have adequate self-advocacy skills (Janiga & Costenbader, 2002).

Roles and Responsibilities of School Personnel

School personnel in both the K-12 and postsecondary settings have an impact on students with disabilities consideration of postsecondary education and their success or failure in that pursuit. According to the NJCLD (1994), “...many students with learning disabilities do not consider postsecondary education options (two-year and four-year colleges and vocational schools) because they are not encouraged, assisted, or prepared to
do so” (p.1). DeFur, Getzel, and Trossi (1996) note that preparation is a determining factor in successful postsecondary outcomes. “Attempting to adapt to a postsecondary environment without adequate preparation can leave students feeling overwhelmed and unable to complete their program” (p. 234).

This preparation is a joint responsibility across the two differing educational settings (Kirst & Venezia, 2006). Norlander, et al. (1990) found that DSS personnel wanted “more knowledge of high school special education programs and personnel… [relating to]…the collaboration that will need to take place between high school and postsecondary personnel” (p. 431) for successful transition of students with disabilities to postsecondary education. This need of collaboration between the two educational settings was included in the 1997 IDEA amendments through the mandate of transition planning teams and continues under IDEA, 2004.

Also taking place across the two settings of K-12 and postsecondary education is the preparation of students with disabilities to access accommodations in the postsecondary education environment (Brinkerhoff et al., 1996; deFur, et al., 1996; Fitchen et al, 2006). “Faculty and administrators in both settings [secondary and postsecondary] must hold high expectations for students with disabilities and ensure that their institution provides the necessary accommodations to facilitate academic success” (Lamb et al., 2004).

The NJCLD (1994) identified responsibilities for secondary school personnel in the preparation of students in the transition process. Included in these responsibilities were tasks that relate to the ability to access accommodations in postsecondary education.
According to the NJCLD (1994) secondary personnel, through transition planning, should help students with disabilities use their academic accommodations and evaluate dependence on these supports, develop communication, social skills, and self-advocacy skills, and inform students and parents about requirements and services available in postsecondary education settings.

Others have indicated that secondary educators must be able to prepare students to initiate and self-identify, describe strengths and weaknesses, and advocate for needed accommodations in the postsecondary setting (Brinkerhoff, 1996; Stodden & Jones, 2002). Under IDEA special education teachers, transition personnel, and counselors have a responsibility to involve students in transition planning that reflects their needs and desires, including postsecondary education.

The NJCLD (1994) also identified responsibilities for postsecondary personnel. “Postsecondary personnel must network with, and disseminate information to, secondary educators, parents, and prospective students to realistically frame the expectations for the rigors of the postsecondary environment” (p. 4) by creating links with high schools and providing information about the prerequisites and expectations for students with disabilities in postsecondary education. They should help students with disabilities negotiate postsecondary requirements and systems, gain the self-advocacy skills needed, and ensure their rights are protected. In addition, postsecondary personnel must also negotiate “reasonable academic adjustments” (p. 5) with students.

The requirement of postsecondary education personnel to support students with disabilities in the postsecondary education setting is evident. Gambel (2000) noted that
they must “…ensure that qualified students with disabilities have the opportunity for full and equal participation and benefit at post-secondary institutions…” (p. 7). In addition, “Disability service personnel must determine a student’s eligibility for protection under the ADA/Section 504, analyze documentation to ensure that it reasonably supports the claim of disability, decide the nature of reasonable accommodations on a case-by-case basis and develop institutional policies and procedures” (p. 5).

Ability to access accommodations is included in this process. Dukes and Shaw (1998) indicated that postsecondary personnel are responsible for ensuring equal educational opportunity for students with disabilities through accommodations documented as necessary for equal access under the law.

*Communication*

Communication across secondary and postsecondary education settings is necessary and also an issue of concern in the preparation of students with disabilities to access accommodations in the postsecondary setting (NJCLD, 1994; NJCLD, 2007; Norlander, et al., 1990; Rothstein, 2003; Stodden & Jones, 2002). As cited above, there has been a call for increased communication between personnel in these two environments to facilitate transition from high school to postsecondary education for students with disabilities. This suggests that communication across settings is in need of improvement and that improvement in this area will facilitate transition results.

*Rational for the Study*

Currently, there is a paucity of research comparing the perceptions of the preparation of students with disabilities for accessing reasonable accommodations in postsecondary
education and the communication between and among DSS personnel and public school transition personnel. This study will add to the literature base about students with disabilities ability to access accommodations in the postsecondary education setting and the communication that currently exists between and among DSS personnel and public school transition personnel, about students with disabilities ability to access accommodations in postsecondary education.

The perceptions of college DSS personnel and public school transition personnel about emerging best practices in and the adequacy of preparation of students with disabilities to access reasonable accommodations in a four-year or two-year college/university for credit, degree seeking program of education were examined. The study looked at the consistency of perceptions across settings and where they were similar or where they diverged. This information impacts the future preparation of students with disabilities to access reasonable accommodations in the postsecondary setting. It also informs the roles and responsibilities of DSS and public school transition personnel in this process. With the call for increased communication between secondary and postsecondary personnel (NJCLD, 1994; NJCLD, 2007; Norlander et al., 1990; Rothstein, 2003), exploring the existing communication between the groups concerning the ability of students with disabilities to access accommodations in postsecondary education was needed. Results inform areas of communication that need to be addressed in the future between these groups.

Statement of the Problem

As a result of legislative mandates during the latter half of the 20th century, students with disabilities are graduating from high school and accessing postsecondary education in
increasing numbers (Wagner et al, 2005). Once in college students with disabilities do not have the same rate of completion or success as students without disabilities (Janiga & Costenbader, 2002; Milsom & Hartley, 2005; Murray, et al., 2000).

Accommodations are known to promote success in postsecondary education for students with disabilities (Grossman, 2001; Fitchen et al., 2006) yet students with disabilities are not accessing the accommodations available to them in numbers that reflect their enrollment rate (USDOE, 2003; Wagner et al., 2005). This, in effect, reduces their success.

What emerging best practices in student preparation for accessing accommodations in postsecondary education are being used by public school transition personnel and postsecondary education personnel, and do they believe that students are adequately prepared to access accommodations in four-year/two-year for credit, degree seeking postsecondary education programs? The answer to this question may be perceived differently by the different stakeholders of secondary education and postsecondary education.

Differences and similarities in perceptions about students with disabilities preparation and ability to access accommodations in postsecondary education across the two education settings were undocumented. High school transition personnel prepare students with disabilities to access accommodations while DSS personnel in the college setting see the result of student preparation to access accommodations. This comparison of perceptions was needed to inform and improve future preparation of students in the high school setting for accessing accommodations in the postsecondary setting.
If public school transition personnel believe that students are adequately prepared to access accommodations yet DSS personnel do not believe the same, there is a disconnect that students with disabilities will ultimately have to negotiate. The ability to successfully negotiate this disconnect impacts the students success in the postsecondary setting and has lifelong consequences.

In addition, the current state of communication between DSS personnel and high school transition personnel was unknown even though there has been an ongoing call for increased communication to facilitate transition from high school to postsecondary education (NJCLD, 1994; NJCLD, 2007; Norlander, et al., 1990; Rothstein, 2003; Stodden & Jones, 2002). It was necessary to understand if this communication had an impact on the perceived ability of student with disabilities to access reasonable accommodations in the postsecondary education setting. This affects student preparation to access accommodations.

Research Questions

To find out what emerging best practices, strategies and resources are being used in the preparation of students with disabilities to access accommodations in postsecondary education and if the perceptions of DSS personnel and public school transition personnel vary about the adequacy of preparation for accessing reasonable accommodations in the postsecondary education setting the following research questions were explored:

1. What are the preparation strategies/resources used by successful public school transition programs and postsecondary disability services programs in the
preparation of students with disabilities for accessing accommodations in postsecondary education? How are they being implemented?

2. Do public school transition personnel and postsecondary DSS personnel believe that students with disabilities exiting high school are prepared to access accommodations in postsecondary education? Why or why not?

3. What are the differences and similarities in the perceptions of DSS personnel and public school transition personnel about the preparation of students with disabilities exiting high school to access accommodations in postsecondary education?

To find out what communication exists between DSS personnel and public school transition personnel and the perceived impact of the communication on the preparation of students to access reasonable accommodations in postsecondary education, the following research questions were explored:

4. What are the communication/collaboration strategies and resources used by successful public school transition programs and postsecondary disability services programs between personnel across systems about the preparation of students with disabilities to access accommodations in postsecondary education? How are these strategies/resources implemented or used?

5. Do public school transition personnel and postsecondary DSS personnel believe there is adequate communication/collaboration between personnel across systems about the preparation of students with disabilities to access accommodations in postsecondary education? Why or why not?
6. Do DSS personnel and public school transition personnel believe that communication between secondary and postsecondary personnel impacts the preparation of students with disabilities to access reasonable accommodations in postsecondary education?

7. What are the differences and similarities in the perceptions of DSS personnel and public school transition personnel about the communication/collaboration of these personnel across systems and the impact of this communication?

Design and Methods

This study is qualitative and phenomenological in nature and is located in the interpretive paradigm. Participants included DSS personnel from four-year colleges or universities, two-year colleges, and transition personnel from public school divisions in Virginia.

Snowball sampling (Patton, 2002) that is purposive to include information rich informants was used. It began with DSS personnel from five geographically dispersed four-year public colleges and universities within the Commonwealth of Virginia. These individuals see the result of student preparation to access accommodations in postsecondary education and were asked to suggest one two-year college and one or two local public school divisions (division transition coordinator or comparable personnel) for participation in the study. Division level participants were then asked to recommend one or two high schools within their division for participation. High school personnel that were asked to participate included one guidance counselor, the special education transition
coordinator, and a special education teacher familiar with transition to college for students with disabilities. The total number of participants for this study was 43.

This study employed a guided interview format with open-ended questions. This allowed the researcher to gain a holistic understanding of a particular participant’s experiences (Patton, 2002).

Rigor, in this study, was addressed through the design of the study to include triangulation. This study includes multiple informants’ perceptions about use of emerging best practice strategies and resources in preparing students with disabilities to access accommodations in postsecondary education. It also included a documentation review and a web review to support emerging interview themes, and communication/collaboration of personnel across systems. A comparison with the literature base surrounding the access of accommodations in postsecondary education by students with disabilities was also done.
Participation in Postsecondary Education

The latter quarter of the twentieth century saw college attendance rates in the United States soar. Between 1970 and 1995 these numbers grew from 44% to 62%, an increase of 18% during this span of time (American Society of Professional Estimators, n.d.).

These figures can be found for students with disabilities through the U. S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education, National Longitudinal Transition Study 2 (NLTS2) which documents changes in special education and student outcomes. This study compares differences in the school experiences of students with disabilities between 1987 (wave 1) and 2003 (wave 2) to document change through interviews and surveys of parents and youth with disabilities. The National Longitudinal Study (NLTS) and the NLTS2 consisted of a national stratified random sample of 10,369 and 11,276 students with disabilities respectively (Wagner et al., 2005).

Results of NLTS2 data indicate that between 1987 and 2003, there was a 17% increase in students with disabilities enrolling in postsecondary education. This rate of postsecondary enrollment by students with disabilities resulted in a figure more than double what it was in 1987, with approximately one-third of students with disabilities
that were out-of-school enrolling in postsecondary school. Although a marked increase, this figure is well below the approximate 75% of students with disabilities who expressed goals of postsecondary education while in high school. It is also about half the rate of youth in the general population of the same age. This data indicates that there is a continuing lag between students with disabilities and their non-disabled counterparts in postsecondary education enrollment despite laws designed to improve transition and increase access to postsecondary education (Wagner et al., 2005).

Wehman and Yasuda (2005) noted that students with disabilities have the same desires and needs for a college education as their non-disabled peers. These factors include better lifelong earnings, increased likelihood of receiving employment benefits, career advancement, perceived status, and marketability. In addition, having the college experience, socialization opportunities, and establishment of personal networks were also delineated as reasons why students desire to attend college.

Wilson (2004) indicated that society in general would benefit from increased participation and success in education by individuals with disabilities. In a survey and follow-up qualitative study designed to capture the experiences and aspirations of 305 participants with disabilities age 16 to 24, key issues emerged. One of these findings was that young people with disabilities “want to be regarded and treated as equal to their peers, with the same rights of access and educational opportunity [as their non-disabled peers]” (p.164).
Changes in the labor market and a College Education

Increasingly limited employment options for individuals without a postsecondary education were noted by Desrochers (n.d.). She posited that changes in the skill level of the work force were necessitated by the structural changes of work. These changes were the result of technology advances and widespread globalization of the marketplace. In the new emerging workforce, a majority of newly created jobs required workers that were skilled managers and professionals. She noted that,

Economic restructuring has created most of the new jobs in occupations dominated by highly skilled managerial or professional workers….Well paid manufacturing jobs that once provided a middle-class lifestyle for high-school-educated workers …[declined] from 32% to 17% of all jobs between 1959 and 2003.

Coupled with the rising skill requirement within existing jobs, an increased demand for college-educated workers increasingly created the need of a college level education for all individuals, including those with disabilities. Obtaining a degree became critical for adults to compete in the global economy and the percentages of individuals attending college increased.

These changes had an impact on the national capacity. According to Gerber (2007), “parallel understandings of the link between national economic well-being and investment in education” (p. 216) became apparent. “The view that education had economic consequences was not new”, however as the global market place emerged “the social stake in such an investment” (p.216) became greater and the high cost of
educational underachievement was increasingly revealed. Educational learning opportunities produced not only individual gains, but increased national capacity as well.

Several reports during the 1980s and 1990s indicated that the United States preparation of youth for the present and future labor market was falling behind other nations. *America’s Choice: High Skills or Low Wages!* (Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce, 1990) and *A Nation at Risk* (1983) were two of the most visible of these reports.

*America’s Choice: High Skills or Low Wages!* (Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce, 1990) pointed out that the United States was falling behind other nations in the preparation of its workers for entry into the competitive workforce. United States children were ranked low or at the bottom on international tests when compared with children in Europe, East Asia, and other developing industrialized nations. They were ill prepared for success in the workforce. The Commission stated that “America may have the worst school-to-work transition system of any advanced industrial country” (p. 4). The competitive position and productivity of the United States workforce needed to be improved to ensure a more prosperous future for the country. This necessitated a fundamental change in the education and preparation of youth for the future labor market focusing on “demonstrated achievements and high standards” (p. 91).

*A Nation at Risk* (A Nation at Risk, 1983) reported that worldwide competitors were taking over the preeminence of the United States in science, industry, commerce and technological innovation. This was due to many causes, but education was at the foundation of this slide from supremacy. The authors stated that “… the educational
foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very nature as a Nation and a people”. In the present and increasing global economy, international competition relies on the capability of workers. “Knowledge, learning information, and skilled intelligence are the new raw materials of international commerce…[and]…learning is the indispensable investment for success in the ‘information age’ we are entering.” Thus, a high quality education and the capacity to continue to learn over a lifetime were seen as essential for national prosperity in the global marketplace and the individual’s quality of life as well.

Holtzer (1997) indicated that the educational system’s ability to supply workers that were highly skilled was not keeping pace with the increasing demand of these workers in the shifting labor market. The educational model of the previous Industrial Age, with its stress on repetitive skills-based tasks, was not meeting the current or future needs of the economy for workers who could continue to learn over their working lifetime. The development of critical thinking skills, transferable to a multitude of job placements, was essential for the emerging workforce.

**Benefits of a College Degree**

Level of education can be tied to personal economic success and was termed “The Big Payoff” by the United States Census Bureau (Day & Newberger, 2002). The bureau reports that the individual who completes a bachelor’s degree can garner almost an additional million in earnings during their lifetime over those not completing a bachelor’s degree (United States Census Bureau, 2004). Based on synthetic work-life earnings estimates for full-time year round workers, in 1999, the ratio of earnings of college
graduates to those with a high school diploma was 1.8 percent compared with 1.5 percent in 1975. This equates to earnings of “about one-third more than workers who did not finish college, and nearly twice as much as workers with only a high school diploma.”

Educational level directly impacts the lifelong earnings and quality of life of students with disabilities. The National Council on Disability indicated that education is a key factor in attaining employment and thereby better quality of life.

the quality of life for individuals with disabilities is improved dramatically through increased participation in meaningful employment, community involvement and social acceptance. However, for individuals who do not obtain a degree in a postsecondary education program, prospects for finding meaningful and remunerative employment are increasingly limited” (Stodden, 2003).

In this National Council on Disability paper, Stodden (2003) noted that the power of education to “transform the lives of the people and sustain the life of democracy” is recognized. “Americans of every historical era and demographic group have recognized the power of education to transform the lives of people and sustain the life of democracy”. Education is seen as the key factor in attaining employment for individuals with disabilities. Employment in turn creates an enhanced quality of life for individuals with disabilities. “Without access to higher education, youth with disabilities find restricted opportunities for meaningful employment and are therefore denied the higher standard of living that greater numbers of their non-disabled peers enjoy.”
The employment rate for individuals with disabilities lags far behind that of their non-disabled peers. Between the ages of 18 and 64, thirty-two percent of individuals with disabilities are employed as compared with 81% of their peers. These statistics represent approximately one-third the rate of employment for individuals with disabilities when compared with their non-disabled peers (Wagner et al., 2005). This is consistent with findings from the NCES (2000) and the National Council on Disability (2003).

The NCES (2000) analyzed students with disabilities experiences in postsecondary education. The authors found that there were similar full time employment rates for students with disabilities (67%) that graduated from college and their non-disabled peers (73%). They also found that annual salaries of these individuals were similar when compared ($26,988 and $25,219 respectively). Thus, completion of a college education has the power to create equity in earnings for individuals with disabilities and their non-disabled counterparts.

Legislative Mandates and Postsecondary Education

Legislative mandates have made increased participation in post secondary education possible for students with disabilities. Stodden (2005) notes that federal legislation has resulted in increased accessibility to postsecondary education for youth with disabilities. Postsecondary interest and participation by students with disabilities has grown with as many as 17% of students in postsecondary education identified as having a disability (National Council on Disability, 2000).

Proctor (2001) reviewed social policy and it application to higher education students with learning disabilities. In his examination of the legal rights of children and
adults with learning disabilities, he states that the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1990 (IDEA) (P.L. 101-476), including its 1997 amendments (P.L. 105-17) and reauthorization (IDEA, 2004, P. L. 108-446), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (P.L. 93-112), and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) (P.L. 101-336) are the three pieces of legislation that encompass most of the legal issues affecting these individuals.

The impact of civil rights laws on equal access is delineated in a report from the Office for Civil Rights (2003). It is noted that with Section 504 and the ADA prohibiting disability discrimination by public entities receiving Federal financial assistance, the majority of 15,000 school districts and 41,000 colleges and universities mandate equal access in education for individuals with disabilities. Combined with the NCLB (P.L.107-110), which comprehensively reforms federal K-12 education programs by promoting “access to high quality education regardless of race, ethnicity, sex, disability or socio-economic status” (p.1) and IDEA, these laws ensure that the doors to equal educational opportunity are increasingly open to all. The report goes on to state that “The civil rights laws represent a national commitment to end discrimination in educational programs and activities” (p. 2).

In reviewing legal protection for college students with disabilities, Thomas (2000) noted that:

Prior to 1973, the only federal law that provided extensive protection for persons with disabilities was the Fourteenth amendment. That law requires states to provide for the equal protection for persons within their respective jurisdictions
and to give due process any time state action could adversely affect life, liberty, or property….However, these laws failed to provide persons with disabilities with specific protection, as had already been done for persons claiming race, gender, and many other forms of discrimination (p. 248).

Laws Governing K-12 Education

The Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (EAHCA) (P.L. 94-142) was passed to address the education of students with disabilities in the public school system. It sought to level the playing field for these students in K-12 education. The EAHCA was later renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1990 (IDEA). Its subsequent amendments (IDEA, 1997) and reauthorization (IDEA, 2004) have mandated access to FAPE in the LRE for students with disabilities. It also mandates an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) for each student with a disability and includes accommodations, modifications, and services to support their educational success.

According to the Act, the purpose of the IDEA (2004) is to “ensure that all children with disabilities have available to them a free and appropriate public education that emphasizes special education and related services designed to meet their unique needs and prepare them for further education, employment, and independent living”. The Act is also intended “to ensure that the rights of children with disabilities and parents of such children are protected…” (20 U. S. C. § 1400 (d) (1).

Exploring the legal issues for students with disabilities in postsecondary education Simon (2001) examined differences between IDEA and Section 504/ADA. He found that
services under IDEA are broad, but an individual with a disability is defined narrowly as one of 13 specific categories under the law. Students with disabilities are entitled to supplemental aids and services, including accommodations, to ensure meaningful benefit from education. The IDEA has a “zero reject” principle which entitles all children, including those with severe disabilities, to the benefit of public education.

_Laws Governing Postsecondary Education_

“Unlike the IDEA, Section 504 and the ADA define disability broadly and in functional terms” (Simon, 2001, p. 6). These laws have a three pronged criteria for meeting the definition of disability that is “(1) has a physical or mental impairment which substantially limits a major life activity, (2) has a record of having such an impairment, or (3) is regarded as having such an impairment” (p.6). Thus the criterion for who is an individual with a disability is defined more broadly than under IDEA, and is also open to varying interpretations. Under these laws postsecondary students are eligible for “reasonable accommodations in the form of academic adjustments or auxiliary aids and services” (p. 3).

According to Proctor (2001),

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 is a broad civil rights law that protects the rights of individuals with disabilities in programs and activities that receive financial assistance from the U.S. Federal Government (e.g. most colleges and universities) and any program that conducts business with the Federal Government” (p. 41).
There must be a substantial limitation to a major life activity such as learning and the individual must be otherwise qualified to perform essential functions of the activity. If these conditions are met, the individual may not be “denied the participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance” (Section 504, 29 U.S.C. § 794(a)).

In 1990, Congress enacted the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) (P. L. 101-336) to ensure equal opportunity for individuals with disabilities. Congress stated “It is the purpose of this Act— (1) to provide a clear and comprehensive national mandate for the elimination of discrimination against individuals with disabilities…” (42 USC 1202 (2) (b) (1)).

In a review of disability law and college students, Thomas (2000) stated that,

In addition to section 504, Title II of the ADA prohibits public entities (e.g. state government, public schools, public colleges) from denying qualified persons with disabilities the right to participate in or benefit from the services, programs, or activities that they provide, and from subjecting such individuals to discrimination if the exclusion or discrimination is due to the person having a disability (42 U.S.C. § 12132)….Title III of the act further prohibits entities that operate places of public accommodation from discriminating against persons with disabilities by denying them full and equal enjoyment of the goods, services, facilities, privileges, advantages, or accommodations they provide (42 U.S.C. § 121829a)(p. 249).
Interpretation of the law by the United States Department of Justice (DOJ) (2005), in a guide to disability rights laws, indicates that Title II of the ADA prohibits discrimination based on disability in all facets of public life, including education. It provides for equal opportunity to benefit from programs, services and activities, including education, and requires “reasonable accommodations” to known physical or mental limitations, of individuals that are otherwise qualified, unless these accommodations present an undue hardship for the institution or would fundamentally alter the essential nature of the activity, program or service.

In addition to these laws, the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) (P.L. 89-10), renamed the NCLB (P.L. 107-110), created higher expectations for all students. It mandated that all students, including those with disabilities, have the opportunity to participate in the general curriculum and statewide standards of achievement.

The design and intent of NCLB, is to promote high expectations for all students, including students with disabilities. Congress found, in the reauthorization of IDEA (2004), that the education of students with disabilities had been impeded by low expectations. Cortiella (2006), in a paper by the National Center on Educational Outcomes (2004), observed that, to combat low expectations, students with disabilities are mandated access to the general curriculum, in the general education setting, to the greatest extent possible, in order to meet the challenging expectations for all children under the NCLB.
In a report delineating how special education students do under the NCLB, Cortiella (2007) notes that the NCLB holds schools accountable for students with disabilities progress and performance whereas IDEA does not. She stated that, “Without participation, there is no accountability nor will attention be paid to needed improvements in the achievement of these students” (p. 7).

Through the requirement of 95% participation in statewide standards testing for all students, students with disabilities, their schools and teachers will be held accountable and they will garner the needed attention for improving achievement. Through this mandate, states have been motivated to include students with disabilities in the general education setting, to the greatest extent possible, so that they will be prepared to participate in the testing requirements under the law. This increased the opportunity for students with disabilities to meet state standards for graduation from high school as well as entry requirements for postsecondary education.

Effect of Legislative Mandates

These legislative mandates resulted in increases in the graduation of students with disabilities from high school. Between 1987 and 2003 there was a 17% increase in graduation from high school by students with disabilities. High school leavers with disabilities that either received a certificate of completion or a diploma increased from 53.5% to 70.3% while the dropout rate declined from 46.5% to 29.7% (Wagner et al., 2005).

High school graduation creates the possibility for enrollment in a postsecondary education institution. Open enrollment policies in the VCCS, stipulate that anyone that
has graduated from high school cannot be denied entrance to a community college in
Virginia (VCCS, n.d., b). This increases the ability of students with marginal grades and
low scores on college entrance exams to access a college education in Virginia.
Articulation agreements in effect between the VCCS and Virginia’s public four-year
institutions of higher education guarantee that individuals with and without disabilities
that successfully complete community college programs of education have easy access to
acceptance into four-year public colleges and universities in Virginia (VCCS, n.d., a).
The door is thereby opened for students with disabilities to complete a two-year or four-
year degree after graduation from high school.

Fairweather and Sarver (1991) found that “Graduation from high school does not
reduce the discrepancy in participation rates between youth with disabilities and
nondisabled youth” (p. 267). They conducted a telephone survey, with a nationally
representative sample of 1,242 youth with disabilities who had exited school at least one
year prior and were 17 or older at the time they exited high school, to determine their
participation in postsecondary education. The percentage of participation in
postsecondary education for youth with disabilities was found to be about one third of the
rate of their non-disabled counterparts, 21.2% compared to 64.3 percent.

Success in Postsecondary Education

Once enrolled in postsecondary education students with disabilities do not have
similar rates of success in completing their degree programs as their non-disabled peers.
In a profile of postsecondary students with disabilities the NCES (2000) reported that for
students with disabilities initially enrolling in postsecondary degree programs in 1989-90,
only 53% had completed their programs of study or were still enrolled in college. This percentage was 64% for students that were not disabled.

In the same vein, Murray et al. (2000) studied the status of two cohorts of high school graduates with learning disabilities five years after their graduation, and each subsequent year for five years, so that a picture of postsecondary school attendance and rates of completion could be examined over a period of ten years. Telephone interviews of high school graduates (168) with learning disabilities from three large northwestern school districts were compared with those of a gender stratified sample of high school graduates without disabilities (315). Results indicated that both five and 10 years after graduation students with LD were significantly less likely to have enrolled in postsecondary education. When graduation rates for year five were examined it was found that only 3.6% of students with LD had graduated from a two-year or four-year college program. This rate was 11.8% for students without disabilities. Ten years after high school graduation, college graduation rates had increased to 14.3% for students with LD with an additional 29.8% graduated from training programs. The percentage of non-disabled students that graduated from two-year or four-year college programs for this same period of time was 55.9%. This indicates that overall youth with disabilities were graduated less often from postsecondary school than their non-disabled counterparts. The authors indicate that, “One interpretation of this picture is that youth with LD are not being adequately prepared in high school for postsecondary school experiences” (p. 126).

Reasons for Lack of Participation and Success in Postsecondary Education
Reasons for lack of participation and success in postsecondary education by students with disabilities include a lack of consideration of postsecondary school as an option and lack of knowledge of their rights and responsibilities as individuals with disabilities after high school. Also included is a lack of knowledge of the demands of the postsecondary education environment.

*Lack of Consideration of Postsecondary Education as an Option*

Secondary and postsecondary personnel have a direct impact on students with disabilities consideration of postsecondary education and their success or failure in that pursuit. The NJCLD (1994) noted that “…many students with learning disabilities do not consider postsecondary education options (2-year and 4-year colleges and vocational schools) because they are not encouraged, assisted, or prepared to do so” (p.1). Early involvement in the transition process, careful transition planning that is student centered, collaborative, and has a focus on post high school needs is necessary for consideration of and preparation for success in postsecondary education by students with disabilities. Support and encouragement for the student to reach educational goals and develop independent decision making, self-advocacy skills, and knowledge of postsecondary expectations is also essential to successful transition to postsecondary education.

*Access to Testing Accommodations on the College Entrance Exams*

High stakes testing, and the process for requesting and receiving accommodations on these tests, has an impact on postsecondary education participation by students with disabilities. Brinkerhoff and Banerjee (2007) state that high stakes tests, including the SAT and ACT “have become the means for determining admission to a competitive
school or college, to a given program of study, and even for determining who will graduate from high school with a diploma” (p. 246).

With protocols for determining eligibility for test accommodations varying across testing agencies, “The accommodations process is complicated and even daunting to some test takers, because having a history of accommodations on a high-stakes test in high school or college does not guarantee that the same accommodation will be granted on another high-stakes test” (Brinkerhoff & Banerjee, 2007, p. 253). Guided by the ADA, testing agencies must ensure equal access while also safeguarding fair testing practices. In essence, they must balance both the perspective of the test taker and the testing agency.

Describing ways to enhance performance on standardized college entrance exams through the identification of testing accommodations by students with disabilities, Fuller and Wehman (2003) indicate that

The ACT and SAT are two college entrance exams used by most colleges in the U.S. to make decisions about who will and who won’t be accepted for admission. The tests invariably are time limited, multiple choice style instruments that require considerable reading. For many people with disabilities these exams are a real roadblock to gaining entrance to college despite other positive credentials” (p. 191).

The accommodation process for these tests is seen as an additional hurdle that students with disabilities must negotiate. Use of accommodations on these tests, however, can result in substantial score differences. Strategies to help students with
disabilities navigate this process include recent documentation, individual understanding of the disability and its functional impact, careful assessment of testing accommodations that may offer the best support on a test, familiarity with the testing format, and knowing what to expect (Fuller & Wehman, 2003).

**Misperceptions Regarding Success in Postsecondary Education**

One reason for the lag in educational attainment by students with disabilities may be a misperception that students with disabilities will not have successful outcomes in postsecondary education. Jorgensen et al. (2005) looked at academic outcomes of students with and without disabilities over a 12 year period at a large college in Quebec. In this archival study they found that students with and without disabilities had “virtually identical grades and graduation outcomes” (p. 101). They also found that students with disabilities took approximately one semester longer to graduate because of enrollment in lighter course loads than students without disabilities. It is suggested by the authors that...

...high school students with disabilities need to be encouraged to pursue postsecondary education... Faculty, both at the high school and at the post-secondary level need to be made aware that students with disabilities are capable students who need to be suitably challenged. (p. 115)

**Knowledge of Rights and Responsibilities**

Wolanin and Steele (2004), in a primer for policy makers, indicate that “a critical dimension of transition services is to prepare students with disabilities and their parents for the dramatically different rights and responsibilities they will have in higher education compared to those they experience in secondary school” (p. 26). Parents and
students with disabilities mistakenly believe that the same legal framework that is used for secondary education is also used in postsecondary education. They find that “secondary education and higher education are different planets for students with disabilities” (p. 26). This is consistent with Wagner et al. (2005) who indicated that the difference in the governing laws between secondary education and postsecondary education may contribute to lower rates of postsecondary success by students with disabilities.

Scott (1991) examined the change in legal status for students with disabilities transitioning to postsecondary education. Students with disabilities in postsecondary settings are governed by laws focused on equal opportunity to gain benefit from the educational experience. Instead of providing for FAPE and LRE as under IDEA, the ADA and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the two laws governing students with disabilities in postsecondary education, provide freedom from discrimination and equal opportunity. This is a significant change from entitlement to one of eligibility under the law. This change in legal status is often difficult for students with disabilities to negotiate. With it comes a change in rights and responsibilities for the individual with disabilities in postsecondary education. The author identified four new areas of responsibility that students must be prepared to handle. These include:

1. Identifying and gaining entrance to postsecondary education programs that are appropriate and include support services for the individual needs of students with disabilities (knowledge of strengths and weaknesses as well as needed accommodations is necessary for this area);
(2) Understanding that “otherwise qualified” means that the individual, with accommodations, must meet essential requirements of the course or program;

(3) Gaining accommodation through meeting eligibility requirements and requesting accommodation in a timely manner; and

(4) Establishing a network of personal support in the postsecondary education institution.

This is consistent with Latham (2001), who indicated that the ADA and Section 504 do not create entitlement to postsecondary education. The student must meet the institutions eligibility requirements and, upon admission, be prepared to document their disability, describe its functional impact, and suggest the necessary accommodations to help them succeed in the postsecondary learning environment.

Demands of Postsecondary Education

Stodden and Jones (2002 a.) indicate that “As youth with disabilities transition from lower education to higher education, they are significantly impacted by movement form the guidance of one federal policy (IDEA) to policy that is much less prescriptive and focused upon participation in normal adult community roles (ADA; Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act)” (p. 15). These differing laws translate into differing modes of provision for accommodations and supports between the secondary education environment, postsecondary education, and employment which “significantly affects an individual’s transition across these three environments” (p. 12). Proceedings from the National Capacity Building Institute on supporting individuals with disabilities throughout secondary education, postsecondary education, and employment (Stodden &
Jones, 2002 a.) revealed a consensus among participants that as a result of policy and practice in the secondary environment youth with disabilities are not prepared for the expectations of the postsecondary education environment. They also noted that communication between agencies was lacking, and that roles and responsibilities of the different agencies involved in the transition of youth with disabilities to postsecondary education were unclear.

*Eligibility*

The establishment of eligibility for services in postsecondary education requires students with disabilities to self-identify as a student with a disability, provide the required documentation of disability, and have the self-advocacy skills to request the accommodations needed (Frank & Wade, 1993; Madaus & Shaw, 2004). These procedures are different than those under IDEA where the school has the responsibility to identify students with disabilities and provide for documentation of the disability (20 U.S.C. § 1412 (a)(10)(A)(ii).

*Preparation*

DeFur, Getzel, and Trossi (1996) note that preparation is a determining factor in successful postsecondary outcomes. They stated that, “Attempting to adapt to a postsecondary environment without adequate preparation can leave students feeling overwhelmed and unable to complete their program” (p. 234). They posit that the negative discrepancy between success rates of students with disabilities and their non-disabled peers necessitates that transition teams specifically prepare students with
disabilities for success in postsecondary education with “increasing emphasis on student independence and accountability as part of the preparation process” (p. 239).

*Academic preparation.*

Hitchens et al. (2005) assessed the preparation of high school students with disabilities for postsecondary education through review of transition planning information from 110 students that had graduated from two high schools. They were identified with a variety of disabilities including learning disabilities, behavioral and emotional disabilities, health and physical disabilities, hearing disabilities, and speech-language disabilities. Postsecondary interests of the students and level of rigor in preparation and attendance at final IEP meetings were examined. Results indicated that in 10th grade 77% of participants indicated a desire to continue their education after high school. That percentage dropped to 48% by grade 11 and 35% by grade 12. The authors also found that rigorous four-year plans of study may not have been developed for students who indicated postsecondary education as a goal and that “…none of the IEP teams included individuals from postsecondary institutions” (p. 30) in their planning process. An observed result was that “Students who initially expressed an interest in continuing their education after high school and selected college preparatory classes for ninth grade changed to less rigorous, noncollege-bound courses over 4 years” (p. 29) which may force alteration of career goals.

Wolanin and Steele (2004) looked at the K-12 preparation of students with disabilities for opportunities in higher education. They stated that strong academic preparation is a necessity for students with disabilities wishing to enter postsecondary
education. Although “significant gains in the academic preparation of students with disabilities in elementary and secondary education” (p. 21) have been made, barriers still exist for academic achievement during K-12 education. These include (1) residual attitudes and practices that limit full participation in education with some teachers “writing off students with disabilities potential for college level education” (p. 22); (2) lack of ability to qualify for higher education because of limited intellectual capacity; (3) deficiency of elementary and secondary education to become academically qualified for college; and (4) curriculum content of courses not meeting the same standards or the full core academic curriculum that is a basic precondition for participation in higher education.

Under IDEA, “the emphasis is on an individual program related to ‘meeting the child’s needs…to enable the child to be involved in and progress in the general curriculum; and…meeting each of the child’s other educational needs….’ the focus clearly is not on achievement in the general curriculum” (Wolanin & Steele, 2004, p. 23). This individualization results in differing curriculum that may be less academically rigorous than that of their peers and “…therefore, not only do these students less frequently graduate from high school than their peers, but those that do graduate are often less prepared for higher education” (p. 23).

In addition to academic preparation, Wolanin and Steele (2004) also indicate that facilitating transition to postsecondary education includes other skills that enable the student to be successful. These skills should be developed while in high school and include self-determination and self-advocacy among others.
Self-advocacy and self-determination.

Students do not leave high school with the critical skills of self-advocacy and self-determination necessary for success in postsecondary education. Widely believed to be a promising practice, the teaching of self-advocacy skills to students with disabilities in secondary education is not implemented to a great extent. Students leave secondary education without understanding their disability and its impact or how to access services in postsecondary education. “While federal law requires a full array of supports and services for students with disabilities through their high school years, there is little that has prepared them for the barriers and lack of adequate disability related supports and services they will face in university systems” (Stodden, 2003).

College students with disabilities were asked by Getzel and Thoma (2008) about what effective self-advocates in college see as essential for staying in college. They indicated that effective self-advocates needed skills in problem solving, self-awareness, goal setting, and self-management. When asked to identify the self-advocacy or self-determination skills they believed were essential for persisting in college and accessing supports, they indicated that seeking services on campus, forming relationships with professors and instructors, and developing support systems on campus were essential. They also saw self-awareness of disability as essential.

Participation in the IEP process during secondary school is one way for students with disabilities to develop both an understanding of their disability and their service needs after high school (Shaw, Madaus, & Banerjee, 2009; Stodden & Jones, 2002a). Stodden and Jones (2002 a) noted that,
The IEP process requires the input of service providers and parents or their advocates into decisions concerning the types and levels of assistance to be received by the child, but does little to model or prepare youth with disabilities for what to expect after leaving secondary school…. most youth with disabilities leave the IEP process with a complete lack of awareness or understanding of their own disability and/or the assistance needs they might have in order to successfully function in post school environments. Further most youth with disabilities leave the IEP process with few or no advocacy skills, or little understanding of how to advocate for their assistance needs in post-school environments. (p. 17)

Thus, they are inadequately prepared for the changes they will encounter after high school in the provision of disability accommodations and services.

*Not accessing accommodations and services.*

Another reason for the lag may be students with disabilities ability to access supports and accommodations in the postsecondary learning environment. Tagayuna, Stodden, Chang, Zeleznik, and Whelley (2005) conducted a large national survey to look at the provision of support services for individuals with disabilities in higher education. Responses were collected in 1999 and 2001 to determine change over time. Results showed a national increase in postsecondary accommodations, services, and support provided for postsecondary students with disabilities. They indicated that “Access to essential educational accommodations, supports, and services is critical to the success of students with disabilities in accessing, persisting in, and completing postsecondary education” (p. 13).
Yet, many students in postsecondary education are not accessing the accommodations that they need. The United States Department of Education (U. S. DOE, 2003) reported that many students (32%) with LD did not receive needed accommodations during postsecondary education.

Wagner et al. (2005) found that approximately two-thirds of students with disabilities in postsecondary education do not receive accommodations compared with 10% of those in secondary school that do not receive accommodations (Newman, Marder, & Wagner, 2003). This is mostly due to the fact that students have decided not to disclose their disability to their postsecondary school. Approximately half do not acknowledge having a disability with an additional 7% considering themselves to have a disability but choosing not to disclose it to their schools. Less than half (40%) of students with disabilities in postsecondary school have disclosed their disability to their school (Wagner et al, 2005).

Deciding not to access accommodations through self-identification of a disability was also found by Litner, Mann-Feder, and Guerard (2005). In a qualitative study that recruited sixteen volunteers through an office of disabled student services at a large urban university, participants indicated, in an individual interview with open-ended questions, that students chose not to self-identify for several reasons. These reasons included not wanting to be labeled, a perception that the services offered were not adequate, and the belief that individual professors had a trivialized view of accommodations and regarded them with skepticism. The top reason for not seeking help was cited as disability related
stigma. In addition, participants noted that a balance must be struck between self-reliance and help seeking.

*Communication between Systems*

There is an ongoing call for communication between the two systems of K-12 education and postsecondary education about the transition of individuals with disabilities to postsecondary education (NJCLD, 1994; NJCLD, 2007; Norlander, et al., 1990; Rothstein, 2003; Stodden & Jones, 2002). Although this call is ongoing, no research could be found to document the current state of communication between the two systems or the impact that communication between these two settings plays in postsecondary educational success for students with disabilities.

One of the more recent calls for communication came from the National Joint Commission on Learning Disabilities (NJCLD) (2007) in their report on documentation and improving access to disability supports and services in postsecondary education. They state that all stakeholders must collaborate and compromise to facilitate successful transition for students with LD to postsecondary education. The NJCLD “urges new ways of thinking, increased flexibility, and active collaboration from both secondary and postsecondary educators.”

*The Overall Problem*

As a result of legislative mandates during the latter half of the 20th century, students with disabilities are graduating from high school and accessing postsecondary education in increasing numbers, but they still lag behind their non-disabled peers (Wagner et al, 2005). Once in college students with disabilities do not have the same rate
of completion or success as students without disabilities (NCES, 2000; Murray, et al., 2000). This may be due to lack of consideration of postsecondary education as an option (NJCLD, 1994), lack of knowledge of rights and responsibilities in the postsecondary education setting (Scott, 1991; Wolanin & Steele, 2004), lack of knowledge of and preparation for the demands of postsecondary education (deFur et al., 1996; Hitchens et al., 2003; Wolanin & Steele, 2004), and lack of communication between professionals in secondary and postsecondary education (NJCLD, 1994; NJCLD, 2007; Norlander, et al., 1990; Rothstein, 2003; Stodden & Jones, 2002). Specifically, inability to access needed accommodations (Tagayuna et al., 2005) in postsecondary education is one factor that may impact students with disabilities participation and success in postsecondary education.

**Accommodations**

**Accommodations under the IDEA**

Under the IDEA, individual appropriate accommodations “necessary to measure the academic achievement and functional performance of the child on State and districtwide assessments” (20 U. S. C. § 1414 (d) (1) (A) (i) (VI) are required. According to Stodden and Jones (2002 a) “Accommodations at the secondary level can be defined as ‘changes in materials or procedures that provide access to instruction and assessments for students with disabilities’” (p.14).

**Accommodations under the ADA**

The ADA requires “reasonable accommodation” of individuals with disabilities. This includes making facilities accessible for use by individuals with disabilities and
adjustments and accommodations that allow meaningful availability of the activity (42 USC 1211 (9)(A)(B). The purpose of the accommodation, for postsecondary education, is to allow the individual with disabilities equal access and opportunity to enroll in and benefit from their educational program. However, academic standards and expectations remain the same for students with disabilities and their non-disabled peers (Wolanin & Steele, 2004).

*Accommodations and Success in Postsecondary Education*

Individuals receiving accommodations in postsecondary education find them a helpful facilitator of their academic success. When asked to rate how helpful accommodations were in “helping them stay in school and do their best” (Wagner et al., 2005, p. 4-15), 29% of students with disabilities indicated that they were “very useful”, 64% of found that they were “somewhat useful”, and a total of 7% believed that they were “not very useful” or “not at all useful”.

Reasonable accommodations in postsecondary education have been instrumental in facilitating successful outcomes for students with disabilities. Fitchen et al. (2006) conducted a study of disability service providers and students with disabilities, using multiple questionnaires designed to measure facilitators and obstacles to success of students with disabilities in postsecondary education. They also sought to discover similarities and differences of graduates with and without disabilities. Results indicated that approximately 90% of students that self-identified as having a disability did not register to receive disability related accommodations. The authors also found that “Individuals who were registered to receive disability related services…overwhelmingly
indicated that disability related accommodations were among the most important facilitators [of their education]” (p. 9).

Receipt of accommodations in postsecondary education has an impact on grades for students with disabilities in postsecondary education. Citing little evidence available to “confirm that an increase in the number of accommodations provides a differential boost to student grades” (p. 79), Trammell (2003) looked at the impact of postsecondary academic accommodations on final grades. The author used a systematic random sample of self-identified students with LD and/or ADD at a small private college in Virginia. Results indicated that “mean grades were highest with one accommodation, but decreased with additional accommodations” (p.83). Although many other variables may also impact postsecondary success for students with disabilities, results of this study suggest that ADA-related accommodations have a positive impact on the grades of many students with disabilities.

Accessing Accommodations

There is a major shift in the process and responsibility for accessing accommodations under the IDEA and the ADA. Under the IDEA the burden in on the school system to identify students with disabilities and to assess and provide educational accommodations for them (20 U.S.C. § 1412 (a) (3)). Under the ADA this burden shifts to the individual with disabilities. Differences may also be found in determination of eligibility and documentation requirements necessary to access accommodations in the two settings (Scott, 1991). In addition, there may be differences in the accommodations
themselves with only reasonable accommodations required in postsecondary education
(Scott, 1991; Simon, 2001).

**Accessing Accommodations in the K-12 Special Education System**

Under the IDEA, initiation of the identification and evaluation process for
determination of disability may be requested by school staff, parents, state agencies, or
state departments of education (20 U.S.C. § 1414 (a) (1) (B)).

Under the IDEA,

A child with a disability means a child evaluated …as having mental retardation,
a hearing impairment (including deafness), a speech or language impairment, a
visual impairment (including blindness), a serious emotional disturbance…, an
orthopedic impairment, autism, traumatic brain injury, an other health
impairment, a Specific Learning Disability, deaf-blindness, or multiple disabilities
and who, by reason thereof, needs special education and related services. (34 CFR
§300.8 (a) (1))

**Documentation of Disability under IDEA**

A variety of assessments, evaluation measures, and other information from
various sources are used by qualified professionals and the parent(s) of the student to
determine if the child has a disability (20 U.S.C. § 1414 (b) (4)). The information from
these evaluations are also used in the development of the student’s IEP (20 U.S.C. § 1414
(b) (2) (A)). The provision of and cost of these evaluations is borne by the school system
(20 U.S.C. § 1414 (a) (1) (a)).
Determination of Accommodations

“Individual appropriate accommodations” are determined by the IEP Team (20 U.S.C. § 1414 (d) (1) (B)) based on multiple evaluations and the academic achievement and functional performance of the child with a disability in the learning/testing environment (20 U.S.C. § 1414 (d) (1) (A) (i) (IV)). Accommodations are included in the student’s IEP.

This information must be accessible to all individuals responsible for implementing the student’s IEP. This includes general and special education teachers, related service providers and other service providers. Each party must be aware of their responsibility to provide specific accommodations, modifications, and supports for the individual with disabilities (34 CFR 300.323 (d)(1)(2)).

Throughout the process of accessing accommodations under the IDEA, the student is not required to initiate, request, or manage his or her access to educational accommodations. He or she is entitled to them.

Accessing Accommodations in the Postsecondary System

When students leave secondary school and enter postsecondary institutions, the responsibility for arranging for accommodations and supports shifts from the school to the students. At the postsecondary level, students with disabilities are expected to advocate for themselves (Stodden & Jones, 2002 a.).

In a study of the differences in regulations for secondary and postsecondary education Madaus and Shaw (2004) indicated that college students fall under the mandates of the ADA and Section 504 and their corresponding clarifications through
court decisions. Variety in procedures and available services is apparent across institutions of higher education because the ADA and Section 504 remain largely undefined. The authors state that

Common accommodation procedures require that a student

- Self-identify as having a disability within the first weeks of class,
- Provide documentation to campus disability professionals that verifies eligibility for accommodations,
- Request specific accommodations based on the disability, and
- Wait for adjustments to be implemented through coordination between faculty and the disability services office. (p. 85)

This mirrors an article by Frank and Wade (1993) that looked at both the interdependent and separate responsibilities involved in accommodations decisions in postsecondary education. They noted that,

The provision or nonprovision of accommodations to qualified disabled students is a decision that involves a whole complex of complementary responsibilities that must reflect both the letter and spirit of the law and implementing regulations. The primary decision makers are the disabled students and responsible institutional officials. Students are required to initiate the process through identification and documentation of the disability, and by requesting specific accommodations on a timely basis. Responsible institutional officials must then decide on a case-by-case basis whether and how to provide effective accommodations within the context of academic and nonacademic standards, the
essential nature of the course of study in question, and the unique abilities of the student” (p. 29).

Thus, institutions or higher education are not required to provide accommodations unless students request them.

*Eligibility under ADA and Section 504*

Eligibility of the student with disabilities to access accommodations in the postsecondary education setting hinge on several criteria. These include meeting the definition of disability, self-disclosure of the disability, documentation of the disability, and determination of what constitutes a reasonable accommodation (Frank & Wade, 1993; Madaus & Shaw, 2004).

*Meeting the Definition of Disability under the ADA*

Currently there is disagreement about what constitutes a disability and what documentation is adequate to support requests for accommodation in postsecondary education. Gregg and Scott (2000) examined research surrounding the definition of disability and documentation needed at the postsecondary level. They found that definitions that are useful in identifying children with LD may not be applicable to the adult population and that “consumers are vulnerable to the disparate ways of defining and establishing eligibility for services among professionals providing diagnoses of impairment, and among legal standards for establishing disability under 504 and ADA” (p. 10).

Definition of disability, which is used to gain access to services differ between the secondary education setting and the higher education setting. Disability is defined by
the ADA and Section 504 as a ‘physical or mental impairment that (1) substantially limits one or more of the major life activities of such individuals; (2) a record of such impairment; (3) or being regarded as having such an impairment’” (42 U.S.C. Sec. 12102 (2)). Disability determination under the ADA is based on a comparison to the “average abilities of most persons” (ADA, Sec. 3(2), 42 U.S.C. 12101). Thus, students determined to have a disability under IDEA may not qualify using the ADA standards if their achievement is not far below that of the average person (Janiga & Costenbader, 2002).

Differing perceptions and lack of clarity as to what constitutes qualification as an individual with a disability under the ADA and Section 504 leads to various interpretations and confusion surrounding the law. The result is litigation through the court system in order to attempt to gain clarity of the issue. Grossman (2001) noted that, “The single most complex and litigated question in disability law: who is an individual with a disability” (p. 44).

*Otherwise qualified.*

Students with disabilities in postsecondary education must also be “otherwise qualified”. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 states that an individual that is “otherwise qualified may not be excluded from participating in or benefiting from federally funded programming (29 U.S.C. § 794(a)). The regulations for Section 504 state that essential requirements of the program or course do not need to be altered (104.44(a)) for the individual with disabilities. In order to be “otherwise qualified”, the student with a disability must be responsible for acquiring the essential skills and knowledge of the activity. Section 504 regulations only state that individuals with
disabilities must have “equal opportunity to gain the same result, to gain the same benefit, or to reach the same level of achievement, in the most integrated setting appropriate to the person’s needs” (104.4(b)(2)). Thus the student with disabilities is guaranteed access, but not necessarily success in the postsecondary education environment.

**Substantial limitation.**

In addition to being “otherwise qualified”, there is requirement that an individual with a disability have a “substantial limitation” to a major life activity. Several court cases, including the Price (1997) and the Bartlett (1997) cases have given alternate interpretations of “substantial limitation” with both indicating that the courts have not yet defined the term nor come to terms with its ramifications. In the Price (1997) case the court found that the impairment must restrict a major life function “in comparison to most people” (C.F.R. pt. 36, app. B, 1996) whereas the judge in the Bartlett (1997) case noted a “horrific Catch 22” (p. 52) in the use of this standard. She stated that,

> [If an applicant strives hard enough to prove him or herself a] qualified individual who has completed the prerequisites for sitting for an examination and who is otherwise capable of performing within the profession, he or she is—almost by definition and by the very nature of his or her accomplishments in graduate work—“average” when compared to the general population. (Bartlett, 1997, p. 52)

Thus, individuals with disabilities would be found not disabled and would be in essence punished for past success.
Self-disclosure

Students with disabilities wishing to access accommodations under Section 504 and the ADA must self-disclose their disability to the postsecondary institution to be eligible for services. Many, however, choose not to do so (U. S. DOE. 2003; Wagner et al., 2005).

Fear may be a factor in failure to disclose disability. Madaus et al. (2002) found that of 132 graduates from a large public postsecondary institution approximately 30% had self-disclosed their disability to their employer even though 90% indicated that their learning disability affected their work. Those not self-disclosing their disability reported fear of a negative impact if they did self-disclosed their disability.

It seems that individuals with disabilities also seek to control the circumstances surrounding self-disclosure and weigh the benefits and costs of that disclosure repeatedly. A qualitative study of 25 self-selected students from a pool of students with psychiatric and cognitive disabilities registered for academic support services at a large public university was done by Olney and Brockelman (2003) to explore perception management by student participants. This study found that regardless of the apparent or hidden nature of the disability, participants sought to control the timing and setting of disclosure. A complex decision-making process was revealed that included perception management as an act of self-determination. Decisions were continually made about advantages and drawbacks of disclosing the disability. Ongoing choices were made between being stereotyped and accessing accommodations needed for success in postsecondary education. The authors found that “Coming out of the disability closet is a
personal decision that has serious repercussions for the individual in terms of relationships and opportunities. It is a decision that must be made repeatedly based on an intricate web of perceived beliefs and consequences” (p. 49).

This is consistent with the findings of Gerber and Price (2006). They found that there is a complicated dynamic of acceptable loss and potential gain that is mitigated by personal risk assessment in a variety of adult contexts including education. In postsecondary education the ability to access reasonable accommodations under Section 504 and the ADA requires disclosure. Individuals with disabilities must make the choice to disclose or not in order to access accommodations they may need to be successful in postsecondary education. Ultimately individuals with disabilities become the custodian of others perceptions of them, choosing to disclose when they feel the benefits of disclosure outweigh the costs.

In their article describing strategies to maximize postsecondary education integration for students with disabilities, Lynch and Gussel (1996) state that, “For postsecondary students with a disability-related need for accommodation, disclosure and self-advocacy are essential” (p. 356). They went on to say that students that do not disclose their disability may end up faced with academic failure that jeopardizes success in postsecondary education. Factors that impact self-disclosure include the attitudes of faculty, student self-advocacy skills, and lack of training in use of college support services which may impact subsequent receipt of accommodations. The authors indicate that counselors in the postsecondary education setting can help students with disabilities learn skills to enhance disclosure. These may include timing disclosure early enough to
make a difference, development of a plan for disclosure, assertive verbal and nonverbal communication skills, self-advocacy, and ability to engage in faculty-student collaboration. The authors posit that, “

Effective disclosure requires shared information regarding disability-related needs; creative, practical suggestions for accommodations; open communication and constructive feedback to evaluate the impact of disclosure and the effectiveness of accommodations; and interactive mechanisms to make changes when efforts are not working. (p. 356)

*Documentation of Disability in Postsecondary Education*

In addition to the requirement of meeting the definition of disability and self-disclosure, the student must provide the required documentation to support the claim of disability. The documentation serves two fundamental purposes: 1) to establish eligibility for protection from discrimination based on disability under the law and 2) to decide what accommodations the individual may be entitled to (Association of Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD), 2005). In order to determine appropriate accommodations the documentation must “provide adequate information on the functional impact of the disability so that effective accommodations can be identified” (AHEAD, 2005).

The NJCLD (2007) found that many postsecondary institutions require documentation that high schools are not required by law to provide creating a “‘disconnect’ between the nature and extent of disability documentation generated during a student’s public school career and the documentation required to access services at the
postsecondary education level” (p. 1). The NJCLD finds that issues that affect documentation are:

1. Lack of consistency for documentation of disability between secondary and postsecondary education as well as lack of consistency across postsecondary institutions of higher education;
2. A disconnect between secondary and postsecondary governing laws with differing purposes, structures, requirements and mandates;
3. Other forces that complicate matters including differences in expectations and programming, testing documentation requirements, and personnel with varying qualifications making educational decisions (p. 2).

Grossman (2001) found confusion in student and parent information about the differences between secondary and postsecondary documentation. He noted that, “Many secondary schools do not explain to their students that the documentation that established their eligibility for services from elementary and secondary schools may be insufficient to establish a disability with a postsecondary institution” (p. 44). The cost of acquiring this updated documentation may fall to the student (Office of Civil Rights, 2007).

According to Sitlington and Clark (2006), the AHEAD (1997) guidelines for documentation of a learning disability established a precedent for determining the need of accommodations for students with disabilities. These guidelines included four components: 1) evaluator qualifications, 2) documentation recency, 3) substantiation of the learning disability through appropriate clinical documentation, and 4) a rational for needed accommodations through supporting evidence. They also noted that
documentation policies of postsecondary institutions should be flexible and allow multiple sources and methods of documentation as long as determining the current functional impact of the disability is the goal.

_Differing Criteria for Documentation across Postsecondary Institutions_

Colleges set their own criteria for required documentation of disability. These may vary across postsecondary institutions with some requiring more or differing documentation (Office for Civil Rights, 2007). The student with disabilities must determine what documentation his or her specific postsecondary institution requires and be responsible for obtaining it.

In addition, the quality and extent of documentation varies. Madaus and Madaus (2001) sought to expand on current studies surrounding acceptable documentation of disability at the postsecondary level for students with learning disabilities. Citing the lack of guidelines for acceptable documentation in the ADA and Section 504, which result in varying quality and scope of documentation provided to postsecondary institutions, the authors examined documentation submitted to two northeast institutions of higher education to propose a basis for minimally acceptable documentation for higher education. They suggest that acceptable documentation include identifying information and reason for referral, background information, the results of formal and informal assessments, observation of behaviors, including behaviors and strategies that did or did not work, and differential diagnosis.
Provision of Documentation

If a student does not possess the documentation required by the postsecondary education institution, arranging and paying for evaluations and assessments to meet these requirements will fall to the student. In addition, IDEA (2004) no longer requires a reevaluation every three years if deemed unnecessary by the parents and the school. The law also states that a student does not need to be reevaluated before termination of eligibility due to graduation or exceeding the age of service eligibility, but postsecondary education institutions require “recent” evaluation, usually within three to five years. According to the Office of Civil Rights (2007) neither the secondary nor the postsecondary school bears responsibility for providing documentation required in postsecondary education settings.

Determination of Accommodations in Postsecondary Education

Once college students have established that they are a student with a disability by self-identifying themselves and have documented their disability in accordance with the requirements of the postsecondary institution, college personnel are required to review, on a case-by-case basis, appropriate accommodations needed by students with disabilities. These accommodations and modifications are not required to lower academic standards or cause undue financial hardship to the institution (Thomas, 2000).

Because schools interpret the guidelines of the ADA and Section 504 differently, there is wide variability in supports and accommodations available to students (NCES, 2000). According to Bursuck, Rose, Cowen, and Yahaya (1989), services for postsecondary students with LD “vary a great deal from campus to campus” (p. 236).
They conducted a survey of 336 postsecondary education directors/coordinators of services for students with disabilities which resulted in 160 responses. Results indicated that although institutions of higher learning were in compliance with the law, the “extent of services offered by a particular institution varies according to service goal priorities [of the institution]” (p. 244) and that services vary with the size of the institution. The authors recommend that parents of students with disabilities and high school counselors consider these differences in selecting a postsecondary institution for students with disabilities.

Requesting Accommodations from Faculty

Students with disabilities must inform instructional faculty or staff of their request for accommodations and they may be met with opposition or cynicism in doing so. Wolanin and Steele (2004) note that faculty and staff may be skeptical or resistant to making academic adjustments because of the view that these are “violations of …academic norms and…threats to academic freedom” (p. 41). They go on to state that “disability experts and advocates were unanimous in identifying faculty attitudes and the academic culture as the major barriers to successful accommodations for students with disabilities in higher education” (p. 41).

Thirteen years prior, Jarrow (1991) noted, in a review of campus issues and the ADA, that the courts and the Office of Civil rights had “routinely found” that an individual’s rights cannot supplant those of another. The “faculty member’s right to academic freedom does not outweigh the student’s right to appropriate accommodations” (p.30).
Differences in Accessing Accommodations between Systems

Accessing accommodations in secondary education and postsecondary education differs because of the change in governing laws from the IDEA to the ADA and Section 504. According to Stodden and Jones (2002 a.), upon leaving high school, students with disabilities may not be aware of the important differences between these philosophies of service delivery and therefore may experience significant discrepancies between their own expectations and those of the postsecondary institution.

Characteristics of the shift between these two environments includes

(1) a mandated, individualized, and parent/agency driven planning process to a youth initiated, undefined process without required procedures or mandated outcomes;

(2) parent/agency driven responsibility for decision making to youth driven responsibility for initiation, management, and follow-through of the decision making process; and

(3) decisions and expectations of a comprehensive program of services (lower education) to decisions about specific and separate accommodations and supports to be implemented in the same post-school settings within which all other persons seek to access and participate. (Stodden & Jones, 2002 a., p. 18)

These differences were also noted in an exploration of the legal/social implications, transition process, and self-advocacy and conflict resolution for students with disabilities entering the postsecondary educational environment by Schutz (2002). He posited that a difference in philosophies between K-12 and these philosophies
…seem to compete with each other in the transition process. And there are stark differences between the two: In the K-12 system, students with disabilities are the recipients of services that are mandated by federal and state laws. Often the provision of services at that level tend to be holistic; inadvertently creating a form of service dependency on the part of the student. Understandably, this philosophy compels K-12 disability service providers to take actions that are in the best interest of the student, who may, in the process, become a passive recipient. Contrarily, in the postsecondary environment, the services are based upon an adult model that requires the student with a disability to request services and therefore become an active initiator, rather than a passive recipient. Hence, the dilemma caused by competing paradigms. (p.49)

The shift from an individualized and prescriptive environment under IDEA to one that is less clear and varies from institution to institution will impact the access of accommodations needed to facilitate success in postsecondary education for students with disabilities. Schutz (2002) noted that

A common concern for many postsecondary students with disabilities is the requesting of classroom accommodations. For some freshmen, the realization that college students with disabilities might be expected to ask for those accommodations themselves may be startling and, for some, an insurmountable obstacle. (p. 57)

Obstacles to accessing accommodations in postsecondary education exist and can be traced to the differences between the legal underpinnings of secondary and
postsecondary education for students with disabilities. A summary of the differences in accessing accommodations between the educational systems may be found in Table one.

Table 1

Differences between high school and college in accessing accommodations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>High School</th>
<th>College</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Legal basis</td>
<td>IDEA</td>
<td>ADA and Section 504</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus</td>
<td>Success</td>
<td>Access and equal opportunity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entitlement or eligibility</td>
<td>FAPE is an entitlement and must be provided in the least restrictive environment.</td>
<td>College education is not an entitlement. Students must be found eligible for services after meeting admission requirements.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who is covered</td>
<td>Students with disabilities age 3-21, requiring special education and related services due to disability</td>
<td>All qualified individuals with a disability regardless of age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accommodations/Modifications</td>
<td>Modifications that fundamentally alter programs are allowed and may be required to meet individual needs.</td>
<td>“Reasonable accommodations” are required that pose no “undue hardship” to the institution. Accommodations are not required to alter the fundamental or essential nature of the program.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item</td>
<td>High School</td>
<td>College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identification</td>
<td>It is the responsibility of school districts to identify students with disabilities under IDEA “child find”.</td>
<td>Students with disabilities must self-identify. The institution bears no responsibility to identify students with disabilities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational</td>
<td>IEPs are developed to delineate services, aids, and accommodations.</td>
<td>Students are responsible for requesting services and identifying needs through the Disability Support Services (DSS) office.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition of</td>
<td>Students must meet one of the specific disability categories found in IDEA.</td>
<td>Students must be “otherwise qualified” and have a “substantial limitation” of a major life function, or a record of or regarded as having such an impairment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disability</td>
<td>Evaluation criteria are specified under IDEA and provided at no expense to the student or their family by the school district.</td>
<td>Evaluation criteria are not specified under the ADA or Section 504. Responsibility for evaluations to meet specific institutional requirements are obtained at student expense</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Documentation of</td>
<td>School/parents/ teachers have the responsibility.</td>
<td>Student has responsibility, and must request services with the DSS office.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>disability</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>High School</th>
<th>College</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Receiving</td>
<td>School, teachers and instructional staff must provide accommodations written in the IEP</td>
<td>Students have the responsibility to request and self-advocate for accommodations with individual instructors after eligibility is decided.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Advocacy</td>
<td>Teachers and parents advocate for or support the student in self-advocacy.</td>
<td>The student has the responsibility to self-advocate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Compiled from Office of Civil Rights, United States Department of Education (2007); Schutz (2002); Stodden and Jones (2002a); ThinkCollege.net (n.d.); Wolanin and Steele (2004)

**Impact of Differences on Students with Disabilities**

As noted earlier, students with disabilities that are unable to access postsecondary education find limited employment opportunities and a lower standard of living than their non-disabled peers that do access higher education (Day & Newberger, 2002; Wagner et al., 2005). Accommodations for students in postsecondary education facilitate success (Fitchen et al., 2006; Trammel, 2003; Wagner et al., 2005), yet barriers to accessing these needed accommodations exist (Gregg & Scott, 2000; Grossman, 2001; Lynch & Gussel, 1996; Madaus et al., 2002; Stodden, 2002a; Wolanin & Steele, 2004) thereby reducing the opportunity for success in postsecondary education for students with disabilities (Stodden, 2003).

Stodden (2003) noted that student lack of knowledge of the differing rights and services between secondary and postsecondary education can discourage or create
roadblocks to postsecondary education. In addition, differences in supports, services, and requirements across postsecondary institutions may be difficult to negotiate.

The challenge to locate and advocate for services and accommodations can be quite frustrating. The various systems feature limited resources, inconsistent terminology, disconnected agencies, inconsistent laws, and conflicting eligibility requirements…Ultimately, without a functioning, successful transition program from secondary to postsecondary education youth with disabilities find themselves burdened with additional disadvantages. (p. 10)

Stodden (2003) also notes that “a failure of secondary and postsecondary schools to establish paths of communication and concert their efforts” (p. 11) may impact transition to postsecondary education.

Self-advocacy and self-determination also play a critical role in student success in postsecondary education. Secondary preparation for self-advocacy and self-determination may be inadequate and “Without the skills of self-advocacy and self-determination, students with disabilities seeking post-secondary education will find this an extremely difficult goal to achieve” (Stodden, 2003, p. 10).

The National Council on Disability (2004) delineated issues surrounding students with disabilities and postsecondary education that serve as barriers to postsecondary education. They included lack of knowledge of the differences of the two settings, how the disability impacts education, and how to negotiate services in postsecondary education including self-disclosure, documentation, and legal changes between systems.
Also lack of self-determination/self-advocacy skills, and learned helplessness were issues that affected postsecondary education for students with disabilities. The council found that student progress in postsecondary education is impaired by “lack of supports, inconsistent interpretations of accommodation requirements, and lack of awareness on the part of faculty members regarding disability issues” (p. 2).

Dowrick, Anderson, Heyer, and Acosta (2005) explored “student-identified barriers to the access and utilization of educational supports” (p. 41). A series of 10 focus groups with postsecondary students and graduates with disabilities was conducted. Problems students encountered were understaffing of DSS offices resulting in the prioritizing of assistance and lack of adequate outreach and information about available services. Students also noted a gap between policy and practice, necessitating the ability to advocate for needed accommodations.

The Specific Problem

As noted earlier, negotiating systems changes between secondary and postsecondary education and students not accessing accommodations limits student success in postsecondary education and has lifelong economic and quality of life implications and consequences for individuals with disabilities (Day & Newberger, 2002; Stodden, 2003; U. S. Census Bureau, 2004; Wehman & Yasuda, 2005). The differences between accessing accommodations in secondary and postsecondary education noted earlier create barriers which students with disabilities must negotiate (National Council on Disability, 2004; Stodden, 2003).
Complicating matters is the noted ongoing lack of communication of personnel between the two systems concerning the transition of youth from secondary to postsecondary education (NJCLD, 1994; NJCLD, 2007; Norlander, et al., 1990; Rothstein, 2003; Stodden & Jones, 2002). This leaves students with disabilities transitioning to postsecondary education at a disadvantage (Stodden, 2003).

Summary of Efforts to Address Accessing Accommodations in Postsecondary Education

Recognition of the Problem

The need to help students with disabilities bridge this divide between differing legal systems became apparent resulting in the transition planning mandates under IDEA. Although the ADA and Section 504 do not specifically address transition, the IDEA does. The IDEA, that guarantees FAPE for children with disabilities in order to “prepare them for further education, employment, and independent living” (IDEA 2004 Sec. 601 (d)(1)(A)). The 1997 amendments to IDEA (IDEA 1997), added requirements to include transition planning in the IEP of all secondary school students with disabilities in an effort to prepare them for the challenges of adulthood.

Currently, transition services are required under IDEA (2004) to promote successful transition to postsecondary education or work. Under this law “transition services” means as a coordinated set of activities for a child with a disability that

- Is designed to be within a results-oriented process, that is focused on improving the academic and functional achievement of the child with a disability to facilitate the child’s movement from school to post-school activities, including postsecondary education, vocational education, integrated employment (including
supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation (20 U. S. C. 1401 (34) (A));

- Is based on the individual child’s needs, taking into account the child’s strengths, preferences, and interests; and

- Includes instruction, related services, community experiences, the development of employment and other post-school adult living objectives, and, when appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation (34 CFR 300.43 (a)) or (20 U.S.C. 1412 (a)(15) (A)(iii)).

The law also requires

- appropriate measurable postsecondary goals based on age appropriate transition assessments related to training, education, employment and, where appropriate independent living skills;

- the transition services (including courses of study) needed to assist the child in reaching those goals; and

- beginning not later than 1 year before the child reaches the age of majority under State law, a statement that the child has been informed of the child’s rights under this title, if any that will transfer to the child on reaching the age of majority under §300.520. (34 CFR 300.320(b) and (c)) or (20 U.S.C. 1313 (d) (1)(A)(i)(VIII)).

There is also a requirement that the child with a disability be invited to IEP team meetings if postsecondary goals will be discussed (34 CFR 300.321 (b)) or (20 U.S.C. 1414(d)(1)(B)) so that the transition IEP that is developed is student centered, focusing on the student’s desires and interests.
Under the IDEA (2004) an evaluation is not required before termination of eligibility due to graduation with a regular diploma or exceeding the age of eligibility. Instead a Summary of Performance (SOP) is required that includes academic achievement, functional performance, and recommendations to assist the individual in meeting their postsecondary goals (34 CFR 300.305(e) (3)) or (20 U.S.C. 1414(c)(5)(B)(ii)). It is currently unknown how effective this document will be for students with disabilities transitioning to postsecondary education seeking to document their disability and request accommodations.

In a review of critical knowledge and skills for students with disabilities transitioning to college, Milsom and Hartley (2005) state that by law “school personnel are directed to help students with disabilities prepare for life after school” (p. 436). Included in this is preparation to transition to college. The authors acknowledge four components for effective college transition planning for students with disabilities. These include knowledge of disability, knowledge of postsecondary support services, knowledge of disability legislation, and the ability to self-advocate. They call for the collaboration of school counselors with special education staff in providing opportunities to determine and explore realistic future options, including college, and to help students with disabilities connect with college personnel, to develop a list of important questions to ask postsecondary personnel, and to discuss changing roles and responsibilities of students and parents in the postsecondary setting. They should also provide opportunities to practice self-advocacy.
Similar issues were discussed by Stodden and Jones (2002) in an issue brief for the National Center on Secondary Education and Transition. They focus on four areas for youth transitioning to postsecondary education including:

1. differences in policy, including information about the impact of differing legislation on provision of assistance after high school;

2. differences across environments, including the differences between high school accommodations aimed at success and the postsecondary “reasonable accommodations” aimed at equal access;

3. lack of attention to the role of youth, including encouragement to become knowledgeable about the disability and its affect on learning and working as well as the skills needed to initiate, advocate for, and manage assistance in the postschool world; and

4. preparation for postschool responsibilities and goals, including structuring IEP planning around students long term goals.

The HEATH resource center, an online clearinghouse on postsecondary education for individuals with disabilities, states in a 1995 paper that “Students with learning disabilities, who will choose to continue their formal education beyond high school, need to take a variety of preparatory steps to get ready for college while in high school” (emphasis in original)” (Barr, Hartman, & Spillane, 1995). According to the authors, these steps include developing:

- self knowledge, including the nature of the disability and one’s own strengths and weaknesses and developing self-advocacy while in high school;
- Understanding legal rights and responsibilities, including the differences between the laws governing K-12 education and those that govern postsecondary education and the students responsibility to provide documentation of disability and to self-identify as an individual with a disability;
- Transition planning for college, including exploring college options, documentation requirements, course selection and accommodations needed in the postsecondary environment; and the
- College application process, including admissions requirements, documentation of disability, and obtaining copies of all student records upon graduation from high school.

Along the same lines, Sitlington (2003) suggests that students with disabilities focus on strategies to assist the transition from high school to college. They include the ability to: “(a) advocate for themselves, (b) deal with the different demands of the postsecondary environment, (c) function with the different levels of support available at the postsecondary level, and (d) use assistive technology” (p. 108). She goes on to state that:

There are two major issues related to postsecondary education that the IEP team needs to consider as part of the transition planning process. First, is postsecondary education a transition goal for the student? If so, how will the need for training in individually determined functional skills needed be balanced with the need for preparation in the skills needed to succeed in postsecondary
education? Second, how will the IEP team ensure that the student will have the
documentation required by the postsecondary institution to determine eligibility
and obtain the needed accommodations. (p. 110)

“Students and parents expecting the K-12 model of special education services are
often surprised and upset with what they encounter in the postsecondary setting” (Harris
& Robertson, 2001, p.126). Their expectations may be unrealistic and the authors
contend that students with disabilities fail in postsecondary education not so much
because of poor aptitude, but because of faulty preparation. The authors go on to state
that “self-determination and assertiveness are the biggest factors related to success or
failure for these students” (p. 126) and they offer a list of what postsecondary personnel
would like to see in students with disabilities seeking postsecondary training or
education. This list includes taking college preparation classes in high school,
knowledge of various study skills and coping strategies, knowledge of the disability and
advocacy skills, as well as critical thinking and problem solving skills. Also included are
more independence and responsibility in and out of school, exploration of various jobs
and careers, knowledge of postsecondary records and information required, and
considering taking fewer credit hours during the first semester at college. They go on to
call for more contact between high school teachers and postsecondary personnel as part
of the path to success in postsecondary education for students with disabilities.

Rothstein (2003) indicates that many students with disabilities enter higher
education with misperceptions of what is required of educators in postsecondary settings.
“One of the most complex issues is the question of who is actually entitled to the
protections of the statutes—both Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990” (p.1), including academic adjustments and services. The lack of student understanding of the differences between their rights and responsibilities under these two systems has resulted in a “groundswell of complaints by students with disabilities….the continued level of activity points up the need for communication to students and their parents about the differences between K-12 and higher education” (p. 2). This should be a proactive approach for the communication of postsecondary policies, practices, and procedures for students, aimed at reducing erroneous expectations about the shift in roles and responsibilities between the K-12 system and the postsecondary system.

Preparation for Postsecondary Education

Hicks-Coolick and Kurtz (1997) looked at contributing factors to the academic success of postsecondary students with learning disabilities in a qualitative exploratory study. Interviews with directors of LD support services from nine postsecondary schools including private and public four-year colleges and universities, vocational schools and one community college were conducted. Themes that emerged from the semi-structured interviews indicated that successful postsecondary students with LD seemed to be differentiated by three interrelated factors. These were (1) motivation, (2) preparation, and (3) self-advocacy. Motivation included goal orientation, determination and perseverance, self-discipline, and a willingness to work hard. Preparation included rigorous academic training in high school, knowledge of study skills and compensatory techniques, knowledge of learning style, and time management skills. Self-Advocacy,
which “differentiates successful from unsuccessful postsecondary students with LD” (p. 36), included self awareness and acceptance, knowledge of laws, policies, and resources, as well as assertiveness skills and problem solving skills.

Janiga and Costenbader (2002) surveyed special services coordinators in 74 colleges and universities in New York to determine their perceptions of students with learning disabilities preparation for postsecondary education. Satisfaction with student preparation for postsecondary education through transition services was found to be minimal. Results indicated the greatest satisfaction with the recency of evaluations with a mean of 3.45 out of 5 on the Likert scale. Least satisfaction was found in student preparation for self-advocacy with a mean of 2.8. Therefore, it seems that self-advocacy, one of the core components of self-determination (Wehmeyer, 1996) and one of the most often cited necessities for success in postsecondary education (Janiga & Costenbader, 2002; Milsom & Hartley, 2005; Sitlington, 2003; Skinner & Lindstrom, 2003) is not being adequately addressed in secondary education (Janiga & Costenbader, 2002).

Self-determination is important in the transition process, in education, and in career development. The importance of self-determination for individuals with disabilities has been examined by Field et al. (1998). They posit that self-determination skills must be matched to individuals’ needs, interests, and goals. Matched with individual needs, interests and goals, self-determination becomes a working skill that will positively contribute to transition planning, career development, postsecondary education and countless other aspects across the lifespan of the student. The authors state that self determination is important for all students and “is highly important to career
development and [the] transition process and needs to be encouraged throughout the lifespan” (p. 113).

In a previous study, Wehmeyer and Schwartz (1997) determined that students who were self-determined had a greater likelihood of achieving more positive adult outcomes. The self-determination of 80 youth with cognitive disabilities or learning disabilities was measured by using the ARC’s Self-Determination Scale (Wehmeyer & Kelchner, 1995) during their final year of high school. A follow-up survey was completed one year later using the same survey instrument. The instrument used was adapted from the National Consumer Survey (Jaskulski, Metzler, & Zierman, 1990) and the National Longitudinal Survey (Wagner, D’Amico, Marder, Newman, & Blackorby, 1992). Questions targeted students’ postsecondary education status, current and past employment situations, living arrangements, and community integration. Youth that scored high on the ARC Self-determination scale were more likely than those that scored low to be employed, make higher wages, have checking and savings accounts, and desire to live on their own.

Jameson (2007) used quantitative and qualitative methods to examine the success outcomes of two-year college students with disabilities. Participants were 255 students from a private mostly two-year institution of higher education. Phase I of the study entailed quantitative data collection through use of the ARC’s Self-Determination Scale (Wehmeyer & Kelchner, 1995) and a demographic and outcomes survey (Jameson, 2007) designed to gain information about college retention status, cumulative GPA, and employment and salary status. Forty-eight of 255 surveys were completed. Results
indicate that students possessing higher degrees of self-determination had more positive post-secondary outcomes than those with lower degrees of self-determination. Phase II of the study included four interviews with students. Two students with low self-determination and two with high self-determination were interviewed. Those with low self-determination described behaviors that were “less autonomous, less regulating, less psychologically empowering, and less self-realizing than the high self-determination participants” (p. 38). Those with high self-determination described postsecondary experiences in more positive terms than those with low self-determination. Results suggested that individuals with higher degrees of self-determination describe highly self-determining behaviors and have more positive success outcomes. Results should be interpreted with caution because of the low response rate for the surveys.

In sum, quality of life and academic success have been shown to be affected positively by self-determination and its associated behaviors. For these reasons, self-determination has been suggested as a component in the preparation of individuals with disabilities in the transition to postsecondary education (Dukes & Shaw, 1998).

Self-advocacy, one of the elements of self-determination, has been indicated as a critical skill for individuals with disabilities enrolled in postsecondary education (Lock & Layton, 2001). The authors indicate that a self-advocacy plan can enhance the chances of success in the postsecondary setting. Examining the result of instruction in the preparation of a written self-advocacy plan for students with LD and practice in communication skills for its use, the authors found, through informal interviews with
participants, that it was “helpful in guiding conversations with their professors” (p. 70).

The authors contend that,

Helping students become better self-advocates is one method for improving the transition from high school to college. These students often do not have specific knowledge about their own intrinsic processing skills and are, therefore unable to successfully articulate this information to their professors. (p. 70)

Since the inception of the NCLB, the push to use scientifically grounded research practices to improve student outcomes has been required of educators. Secondary transition practices were examined in a literature review to determine if they were evidence based by Test et al. (2009). This examination found that teaching self-determination and self-advocacy to students with disabilities in secondary transition met the moderate level of evidence using quality indicators for experimental research. The author suggests that teaching self-advocacy and self-determination to students with disabilities during the transition process are evidence-based practices for transition in the field of special education.

*Preparation for Self-determination and Self-advocacy in Secondary School*

A multitude of curricula have been developed to promote self-determination and self-advocacy for students with disabilities. A summary of these curricula including the components of self-determination covered along with the intended audience for each product was developed by Wood et al. (2000). One of the curriculums for teaching self-determination is Next S.T.E.P. (Halpern et al., 1997).
The Next S.T.E.P. curriculum (Halpern et al., 1997) is designed for transition aged youth between 14 and 21, with and without disabilities. The curriculum consists of instruction in many facets of self-determination. These include choice and decision making, goal setting and attainment, self-evaluation, IEP planning, and self-awareness.

The effectiveness of this curriculum in increasing student’s self-determination was examined in a quasi-experimental research study by Zhang (2001). Using a pre-test/posttest design with a control group and a sub sample of a previous research study, 71 ninth grade students with learning disabilities were tested using the ARC’s Self-Determination Scale (Adolescent Version) (Wehmeyer & Kelchner, 1995). Results indicated that students in the treatment group showed significantly higher scores on the posttest than their control group counterparts. The treatment group had an average adjusted means increase of 9.7 points compared to nearly the same score on both the pre-test and posttest for the control group. The authors concluded that participants’ self-determination skills, as measured by the Arc’s Self-Determination Scale (Wehmeyer & Kelchner, 1995), significantly improved.

Other models for transition have been promoted. These models include instruction in self-determination and self-advocacy skills as well as knowledge of the disability and its impact on learning (Aune, 1991; Durlack et al., 1994), a transition planning timetable (Brinkerhoff, 1996), and opportunities to practice skills learned (Durlack et al., 1994). Increased accountability and independence were also deemed important for postsecondary endeavors (Stodden 2002 a.; deFur et al., 1996).
Aune, (1991) describes a model for preparing students with learning disabilities for transition to postsecondary education which resulted from a federally funded LD transition project with 55 students referred by their high schools. She suggested key elements for successful transition to postsecondary education. These elements included “understanding one’s disability, enrolling in mainstream [college preparatory] academic courses in high school, practicing accommodations and self-advocacy in mainstream courses, involving the student in decision-making, designating a transition case manager, and using a team approach to transition planning” (p. 177). The instruments used were the Janis-Field Feelings of Inadequacy Scale (Robinson & Shaver, 1973), a measure of self-concept, The Career Assessment Inventory (Johansson, 1986), and a transition questionnaire (Aune & Ness, 1987) which “provides information on the student’s perception of his or her strengths and weaknesses, knowledge of postsecondary options, self-advocacy skills, study skills, and interpersonal skills” (p. 179). This last instrument was administered prior to the intervention and each year that the student participated in the project. The previous two instruments were used as students entered the program to determine needs. Needs identified during …the pre-intervention assessment indicated that a significant number of the students did have needs in the areas studied. Many were unsure of their specific strengths and weaknesses, not very knowledgeable of postsecondary options and expectations, unlikely to have learned and applied study strategies and accommodations, and unsure of appropriate behaviors for self-advocacy. (p. 181)
The transition model focused activities around eight areas including understanding strengths and weaknesses, awareness of postsecondary requirements, exploring career options, selecting a college, using study strategies, using accommodations, developing self-advocacy skills, and improving interpersonal skills (Aune, 1991). Results of the study found that, of the students that began postsecondary school, 89% that were followed during their first year post high school completed one full year of postsecondary education. The post-test questionnaire revealed positive results in student’s postsecondary performance with 71% of project participants taking postsecondary courses. The author also noted “positive increases in awareness and self-advocacy skills” (p. 185), however, increased levels of embarrassment and discomfort when asking for help were also revealed.

By the end of their participation in the project, students reported having better study habits; being more knowledgeable about postsecondary options available to them; knowing more about what accommodations they might need and how to request them; and being more likely to acknowledge their learning disability. (Aune, 1991, p. 186)

Durlack et al. (1994) looked at the preparation of high school students with LD for postsecondary education through teaching self-determination skills. Eight high school students with LD in a large Midwestern suburban high school were trained in seven self-awareness and self-advocacy skills necessary for success in postsecondary education. Multiple formal and informal assessments were conducted as pre and post tests along with observational data including employment of a multiple-baseline design
across behaviors. Instruction included modeling of target behaviors, corrective feedback, opportunities for practice, and instruction for generalization of behaviors. “All eight of the students acquired skills of self-determination as a result of the direct instruction provided” (p. 56) although students expressed discomfort, embarrassment, and had difficulty in telling teachers about their learning disability. The study

…underscored the importance of intensive practice in describing their disabilities if students are to reach a level of awareness and understanding that will allow them to communicate clearly to postsecondary service providers…repeated practice of self-determination skills relating to self-awareness, self-advocacy, and assertiveness is essential if students with learning disabilities are to achieve some degree of comfort with, and confidence in, their ability to demonstrate these skills in post-high school environments. (p. 57)

Brinkerhoff (1996) examined the role of the student with disabilities in the transition process. He advocated a timetable for transition planning that begins prior to high school and builds from freshman year through senior year with specific activities aimed at successful postsecondary results. He states that the student being actively involved from the beginning in the transition process as part of the transition team allows them to become informed consumers and become knowledgeable about their options and rights under the law. The rest of the transition team (ideally parent(s), psychologist, guidance counselor, LD specialist, general education teachers, and postsecondary LD service providers) can develop a student centered timetable for college planning that empowers students to become active members of the team. “A timetable approach that
begins in eighth grade and concludes with high school graduation allows students to gradually assume responsibility for their own learning outcomes and to view the postsecondary planning process as a series of coordinated steps” (p. 121). Prior to high school students “should be taught a variety of skills that promote better study habits, time management, test preparation, and test taking” (p.121). They should also participate in their IEP process and explore career and/or vocational options. Freshman year should include: (1) developing an understanding of learning disabilities and their own learning disability, (2) gain knowledge of their current and postsecondary legal rights, (3) take college preparatory classes throughout high school, (4) explore career options, and (5) develop greater independence. Sophomore year should include learning to understand the psycho-educational report as well as continuing college prep courses and collaboratively planning the transition program. Accommodations available on college entrance exams should be tried out to promote successful outcomes on the tests junior year and learning strategies should be taught, practiced, and used. Self-determination should be fostered through development of self-advocacy skills. Career exploration should also continue. Junior year should include exploration of postsecondary options including higher education, and evaluating the support services available in a given setting. Preparation should be made for the SAT and/or ACT including any requests for accommodations on the test(s) and a personal transition file should be kept. Postsecondary options should also be narrowed at this time. Senior year involves the college application process, including the filing of financial aid forms, and the narrowing of career exploration. The author notes that,
Secondary school personnel can help to prepare students with learning disabilities for the challenges of higher education by beginning to replicate some of the demands of postsecondary education while the student is still in high school. Postsecondary LD service providers can help by collaborating with their secondary-level colleagues and by realistically foreshadowing the higher education experience for applicants with disabilities. (Brinkerhoff, 1996, p. 132)

Increasing student accountability and independence is necessary for the assumption of adult roles in postsecondary education. Stodden and Jones (2002 a) noted that, in the effort to teach self-determination to students with disabilities, little attention was paid to “learning increased responsibility and accountability for making decisions about one’s needs and actions” (p. 16).

It is just this that deFur et al. (1996) recommend. They state that increasing student accountability and independence while in high school must be part of the preparation for postsecondary education. Postsecondary planning efforts must include not only meeting the academic requirements for admission, but also direct skills instruction in self-advocacy, and other skills needed in postsecondary education. Skills needed for successful transition must be identified and taught, and the family must be included in promotion of self-advocacy and independence.

The IEP process is one vehicle that allows the student with disabilities to practice self-advocacy skills in a safe environment. Through active participation in this process the student can learn to direct the meeting, become aware of their strengths and
weaknesses as well as develop self-determination skills through helping to establish goals and needed services (deFur et al., 1996).

*Preparation for Self-determination and Self-advocacy in Postsecondary Education*

Teaching self-advocacy and self-determination skills and preparing students to use them have also been studied at the postsecondary level. Lamb et al. (2004) examined the Bridges Research Project, a program funded by the National Science Foundation for individuals with disabilities. Twenty five graduates of area high schools participated in a college success class focused on self-determination and self-advocacy skills, and career exploration. All participants reported the helpfulness of the project in their final evaluation. The Bridges Project team noted “vast differences in student and instructor expectations” (p. 5) with the team concluding that “…self-determination is a key to understanding one’s disability and therefore needs to be explicitly encouraged at every level. Self-advocacy is essential in securing accommodations in college” (p. 5).

Palmer and Roessler (2000) compared the results of an experimental group (24) with that of a control group (26) in a study to evaluate the effects of an eight-hour training program in self-advocacy and conflict resolution skills. Instruction was designed to help college students with disabilities request classroom accommodations. The authors hypothesized that after the self-advocacy and conflict resolution (SACR) training, the students in the treatment condition would possess a significantly higher level of the targeted self-advocacy and conflict resolution behavior, a higher mean level of task-specific self-efficacy, a higher mean level of general accommodations rights and responsibilities knowledge, and a higher mean level of social competence. In a posttest-
only control group design the results of the experiment indicated significantly higher mean scores in each expected effect of the hypothesis. The authors found that “As a result of the intervention, trained individuals possessed significantly more self-advocacy and conflict resolution skills than untrained individuals” (p. 41). Additional results indicated “participants’ knowledge of rights to and responsibilities for academic accommodations increased significantly” (p. 41). They concluded that among other positive effects, students who participated in the SACR training would be able to request classroom accommodations, learn appropriate and effective methods for communicating their needs on their own, and would be better able to resolve conflicts that arise from that situation.

*Universal Design*

Another approach to accommodating students with disabilities in postsecondary education has been proposed. Scott, McGuire, and Shaw (2003) proposed Universal Design for Instruction (UDI) as a new paradigm for students with disabilities in postsecondary education. In this paradigm the focus changes from equal access through accommodation to a focus on effective instruction for all students, including those with disabilities. It is a proactive approach to instruction design that is accessible to a broader range of learning needs and is responsive to the diversity of learners, including those with disabilities. In this approach to instruction, consistency of academic goals and standards are promoted by anticipating and planning for student diversity as the norm instead of making exceptions for “different” learners.
According to the authors, the benefits of UDI extend beyond the scope of civil rights legislation for individuals with disabilities to include other diverse learners in postsecondary education. They contend that,

Universal Design for Instruction is indeed a new paradigm for adult instruction in postsecondary education. It requires that faculty anticipate student diversity in the classroom and intentionally incorporate inclusive teaching practices. The UDI model shifts the primary responsibility for providing equal educational access from retrofitted accommodations often spearheaded by reminders of legal mandates from a disability services office, to the proactive consideration and use of inclusive teaching strategies identified by college faculty. (Scott et al., 2003, p. 378)

The ADA and Section 504 mandates of reasonable accommodations would continue to be applicable, if needed, above and beyond the scope of the UDI model of instruction.

Roles and Responsibilities of Personnel

Preparation of students with disabilities for postsecondary education requires that educational personnel in both systems have the knowledge and skills necessary for the task (Dukes & Shaw, 1998). They must have knowledge of the needs and limitations of each system, accept joint responsibility for the preparation of students for transition to postsecondary education (Brinkerhoff, 1996; Kirst & Venezia, 2006; Stodden & Jones, 2002), and develop paths of communication between the two systems (NJCLD, 1994; NJCLD, 2007; Norlander, et al., 1990; Rothstein, 2003; Stodden & Jones, 2002) to promote successful transition of students with disabilities to postsecondary education.
Secondary Personnel

Secondary level personnel must be knowledgeable about the needs of students with disabilities that choose to pursue postsecondary education after high school (Dukes & Shaw, 1998). They must understand the differences between IDEA, Section 504, and the ADA to adequately prepare students for the changes following high school. They must also prepare students to be self-determined, be self-advocates, and to self-identify, and be able to describe their strengths and weaknesses. Weaning students from support services whenever possible is advised as is instruction in the use of learning strategies.

Madaus and Shaw (2004) examined the differences in Section 504 regulations between secondary education and postsecondary education. They stated that secondary personnel and students with disabilities and their parents must understand that the guarantee of FAPE under IDEA is not available under the ADA and Section 504. These two laws provide for equal access to education and prohibit discrimination based on disability, but only if students have been found to be “otherwise qualified” and met the requirements of self-identification and documentation. Therefore secondary personnel need the ability and skills to help students prepare for postsecondary education by helping them with:

- Knowledge of their disability and review of their diagnostic report;
- Learning about the differing responsibilities under Section 504 and the ADA in postsecondary education;
- Active participation in meetings to determine secondary programming including input for goals, study skills, test-taking strategies, and time management;
• Use of accommodations that are based on their disability needs and are possibly acceptable in postsecondary classes;

• Class selection to prepare academically for postsecondary education (i.e. college prep courses; careful consideration of limitations forced by high school course waivers or substitutions for college options);

• Being able to request and discuss accommodations that are needed appropriately;

• Advocating for updated documentation of disability through psycho-educational evaluation in 11th or 12th grade to meet requirements of postsecondary guidelines for documentation;

• Arranging for accommodations on the SATs or ACTs;

• Gaining self-determination and independence by increasing responsibility in both home and school environments; and

• Determining whether to disclose their disability in the postsecondary setting before admission. (Madaus & Shaw, 2004)

To help meet these needs the Council for Exceptional Children, Division on Career Development and Transition (DCDT) set forth transition specialist competencies in 2000. Based on “research on effective transition practices” (DCDT, 2000, p. 3), the transition specialist is defined as “…an individual who plans, coordinates, delivers, and evaluates transition education and services at the school or system level, in conjunction with other educators, families, students, and representatives of community organizations” (p. 3). These competencies, in addition to the competencies for beginning special educators, require specific knowledge and skill connected with the transition process
including knowledge of applicable legislation and the civil rights of individuals with disabilities after high school, available postschool services, assessment for post school goals based on student preferences and interests, and planning of educational programs to meet identified post school goals. Also included are knowledge of and skills in communication and collaborative partnerships about transition related issues.

Janiga and Costenbader (2002) suggest that high school staff may not fully comprehend the systems changes and needs of students seeking access to postsecondary education. They state that

Currently, high school teachers and support staff may not be fully aware of the needs of students with LD who pursue postsecondary education. They may not understand how markedly advocacy is altered when the laws governing students with disabilities change from IDEA (education law) to ADA (civil rights law) at college entrance. (p. 467)

Understanding these differences must also be complemented with actions in passing this information along to students and their parents. Brinkerhoff (1996) stated that, “high school teachers need to give students with disabilities a more realistic picture of what to expect in college by describing the different roles assumed by campus support staff and faculty” (p. 109). Teachers must also let them know that they will not be provided the same type of support that high school resource teachers provide. It was also noted by Brinkerhoff et al. (1996) and Stodden and Jones (2002) that secondary educators must be able to prepare students to initiate and self-identify, describe strengths and weaknesses, and advocate for needed accommodations in the postsecondary setting.
They also indicate that preparation of students for postsecondary education is a joint responsibility across the two systems.

The joint responsibility of K-12 and postsecondary education for the preparation of students with disabilities for higher education is also noted by Kirst and Venezia (2006) in an issue paper on the future of higher education. They indicate that both systems have created the problems and both systems should jointly work to improve the preparation of students for college. They state that “Each sector has unique responsibilities to improve college readiness. For example it is up to higher education to provide clear signals about what students need to know and do to be ready for college-level coursework (p. 1).

The NJCLD (1994) identified responsibilities of personnel in secondary education in the preparation of students for the transition from K-12 education to postsecondary education. Responsibilities identified for secondary personnel were tasks that relate to the ability to access accommodations in postsecondary education. Through transition planning, secondary personnel should

…help the student use a range of academic accommodations…, help the student evaluate his or her dependence on external supports…, help the student develop appropriate social skills and interpersonal communication abilities, and help the student to develop appropriate self-advocacy skills. [They must also] … inform the student and parent(s) about services that postsecondary settings provide including academic and disability services. (NJCLD, 1994)
The transition responsibilities of secondary school personnel include but are not limited to:

- The development of an appropriate set of materials to document secondary school programming and to facilitate postschool service delivery in the postsecondary setting;
- Inform the student about laws, and regulations to ensure his or her rights;
- Academic accommodations and technological aid use by the student;
- Enabling student evaluation of dependence on supports and adjustment levels over time as appropriate;
- Development of social skills and interpersonal communication;
- The development of self-advocacy skills;
- Fostering independence through increasing responsibility and opportunities for self-management; and
- Providing information about services in postsecondary settings. (NJCLD, 1994)

Postsecondary Personnel

The NJCLD (1994) also identified transition responsibilities for postsecondary personnel including the dissemination of information to secondary educational personnel and prospective students with disabilities and their parents to prepare them for the demands and expectations of the postsecondary education environment. This could be done by,

...providing linkages to high schools…, informing secondary school personnel of the prerequisites for the transition to postsecondary [education]…, disseminating
information about college/vocational school preparation and the expectations associated with various postsecondary settings, help students effectively negotiate postsecondary settings, and teach students how to advocate for themselves in the postsecondary setting and advocate on their behalf, when necessary, to ensure their rights are safeguarded. (p. 4)

In addition, postsecondary personnel must also help students negotiate “reasonable academic adjustments” (NJCLD, p. 5) in postsecondary education.

Postsecondary personnel responsibilities include, but are not limited to:

- Provision of linkages through outreach efforts to high schools;
- Provision of information to secondary personnel of the prerequisites for postsecondary education options;
- Dissemination of information about expectations of postsecondary education and the preparation that is required in college and vocational school settings;
- Helping students negotiate postsecondary settings effectively;
- Teaching self-advocacy in postsecondary settings for students with disabilities;
- Advocating on behalf of students if necessary, to ensure rights are safeguarded;
- Maintenance of curriculum integrity through negotiation of appropriate academic adjustments; and
- Establishment of written procedures and policies for admissions, service delivery, diagnosis, accommodation, and curriculum requirements for students with disabilities. (NJCLD, 1994)
The requirement of postsecondary education personnel to support students with disabilities in the postsecondary education setting was noted by Gambel (2000). He indicated that postsecondary personnel must “…ensure that qualified students with disabilities have the opportunity for full and equal participation and benefit at post-secondary institutions…” (p. 7). In addition, they must “determine a student’s eligibility for protection under the ADA/Section 504, analyze documentation to ensure that it reasonably supports the claim of disability, decide the nature of reasonable accommodations on a case-by-case basis and develop institutional policies and procedures” (p. 5) for students with disabilities. This is consistent with the views of Dukes and Shaw (1998) who indicated that postsecondary personnel are responsible for ensuring equal educational opportunity for students with disabilities through accommodations documented as necessary for equal access under the law.

Norlander et al. (1990) explored the needed competencies of administrative and direct service personnel in postsecondary support programs. They collected data from a national sample of 299 practicing professionals using a survey instrument based on task analysis of the roles and responsibilities of postsecondary personnel in supporting students with disabilities in postsecondary education. Competencies desired most by learning specialists were instructional skills, cognitive interventions, and assessment skills. Management and leadership skills were found to be most desirable by administrative personnel.

…both learning disability specialists and administrative personnel requested more knowledge of high school special education programs and personnel. This may
relate directly to transition issues for students with learning disabilities and the 
collaboration that will need to take place between high school and postsecondary 
personnel….Institutions of higher education need to commit resources and 
personnel to help high school students with learning disabilities identify and 
access appropriate postsecondary options. (p. 431)

**Role of Communication**

Communication between secondary education personnel and postsecondary 
personnel to enhance successful transition outcomes for students transitioning to 
postsecondary education is a recurring theme in the literature base (NJCLD, 1994; 
NJCLD, 2007; Norlander, et al., 1990; Rothstein, 2003; Stodden & Jones, 2002). The 
NJCLD (2007) has indicated the need for all people involved in “the successful and 
equitable transition of individuals with LD to postsecondary institutions … to understand 
each other’s constraints and perspectives.” Commitment to communication across 
settings will enhance the understanding of differing perspectives with the shared goal of 
helping students access the services they need and are eligible for in postsecondary 
education.

Eckes and Ochoa (2005) indicate “A rise in numbers of students with disabilities 
entering higher education necessitates stronger transition programs between high schools 
and postsecondary institutions” (p. 6). They note that these greater numbers of students 
with disabilities in college requires “additional dialogue” between the two educational 
systems regarding better service for students with disabilities. They state that, “Although 
students identified with a disability during K-12 education require a transition plan, such
plans do not require (emphasis added) any communication with the university” (p. 19). The authors see communication between the two settings as inadequate because of the lack of legal mandate for it in the secondary or postsecondary governing laws.

Know your Rights and Responsibilities

The Office of Civil Rights (2007) issued a publication targeted to students with disabilities preparing for postsecondary education. In this publication it is recommended that students with disabilities become

…well informed about your rights and responsibilities as well as the responsibilities postsecondary schools have toward you. Being well informed will help ensure you have a full opportunity to enjoy the benefits of the postsecondary education experience without confusion or delay. (Office of Civil Rights, 2007)

The publication goes on to explain the rights and responsibilities of students preparing to attend postsecondary schools and the obligations of postsecondary schools concerning academic adjustments and non-discrimination. The authors state that this knowledge “will improve your opportunity to succeed as you enter postsecondary education” (Office of Civil Rights, 2007). Knowledge of rights and responsibilities is also suggested by Shaw et al. (2009) as a way to improve student preparation for and increased access to college education.

In order to access accommodations under the ADA and Section 504, students must know their rights and responsibilities under these two laws. These rights and responsibilities include that:
• Students are eligible for services under the ADA and Section 504, not entitled to services as under IDEA, and must meet eligibility requirements,

• Equal access and non-discrimination are guaranteed,

• Postsecondary education is not required to alter the essential nature of the program, only to provide reasonable accommodations to create equal access to the program, and

• Students have the responsibility to initiate and follow through on the process of acquiring accommodations in postsecondary education.

Equipped to Exercise your Rights and Responsibilities

Accessing accommodations in postsecondary education is far different than accessing accommodations in postsecondary education (Schutz, 2002; Stodden & Jones, 2002 a.). The underlying systems construct moves from one of entitlement promoting success to one of eligibility guaranteeing only equal access and non-discrimination.

Responsibilities and rights of the individual with disabilities change also. Under the laws that govern students with disabilities in higher education the student must assume responsibilities previously handled by parents, teachers and school systems. Knowledge of their rights and responsibilities under the adult laws as well as knowledge of how to navigate the new system is needed for success in postsecondary education (Barr et al., 1995; Milsom & Hartley, 2005; Sitlington, 2003).

Students must be academically prepared for the rigors of postsecondary education (Hitchens et al., 2005; Wolanin and Steele, 2004) to meet the “otherwise qualified” stipulation of the law, but also have a “substantial limitation” of a major life function
(Proctor, 2001; Scott, 1991), in this case learning, to be considered a person with a
disability under the adult laws. They must contact the disability support office at the
college or university and self-identify as an individual with a disability (Frank & Wade,
1993; Madaus & Shaw, 2004). They must also provide the required documentation to
support the claim of disability (Frank & Wade, 1993; Latham, 2001; Madaus & Shaw,
2004). Once the institution’s criterion has been met, the student must request the
accommodations needed from instructional faculty on an individual basis (Frank &
Wade, 1993; Madaus & Shaw, 2004). This requires self-advocacy (Lock & Layton,
1994; Stodden, 2003) and knowledge of the disability, how it affects the individual’s
learning, and what accommodations will allow the student equal access to the instruction
(Durlack et al., 1994).

Accessing accommodations in postsecondary education requires that the student:

- Know the laws that govern postsecondary education and the differences between
  accessing accommodations in K-12 and postsecondary education,

- Self-identify,

- Meet the definition of disability in adult contexts,

- Provide required documentation,

- Request accommodations needed, which requires knowledge of the disability and
  its impact on learning in the postsecondary environment, and

- Have self-advocacy skills and self-determination to initiate and follow through on
  requesting accommodations. (Madaus and Shaw, 2004, Scott, 1991)
Curricula and models of transition programming to prepare students for adult rights and responsibilities exist (Aune, 1991; Brinkerhoff, 1996; Wood et al., 2000). Students completing this type of programming have been shown to increase skills in self-determination (Zhang, 2001), which are needed in the postsecondary setting for accessing accommodations to facilitate success in postsecondary education (Fitchen et al, 2006).

Communication between Systems

Communication between systems about facilitating the transition of individuals with disabilities from secondary to postsecondary education has long been a concern (NJCLD, 1994; NJCLD, 2007; Norlander, et al., 1990; Rothstein, 2003; Stodden & Jones, 2002). Research about the current state of communication between these two systems was not found and it is unknown if or how it impacts the preparation of students for accessing accommodations in postsecondary education.

Why this Study?

Problem

During the latter half of the 20th century legislative mandates resulted in increased high school graduation rates of students with disabilities (Wagner et al., 2005). Once in college students with disabilities do not have comparable rates of completion and success as students without disabilities (Janiga & Costenbader, 2002; Milsom & Hartley, 2005; Murray, et al., 2000) despite legislation to ensure equal access and non-discrimination. Coupled with changes in the labor market (Desrochers, n.d.; Holtzer, 1997), this has negative economic and quality of life consequences for students with disabilities (Day & Newberger, 2002; National Council on Disability, 2000; Wagner et al., 2005).
Accommodations during postsecondary education have been shown to promote success (Grossman, 2001; Fitchen et al., 2006; Trammel, 2003). However, students with disabilities are not accessing accommodations in postsecondary education in numbers that reflect their enrollment (USDOE, 2003). This has the effect of reducing their success in postsecondary education.

The need of preparing students for the demands of adult life, including postsecondary education, while in high school was recognized and transition mandates were added to IDEA (20 U. S. C. § 1414 (d) (1) (A) (i) (VIII)) to accomplish this purpose. Preparation of students with disabilities for postsecondary education has been seen to increase success in postsecondary education (Hicks-Coolick & Kurtz, 1997) and methods and strategies for this preparation are known (Aune, 1991; Durlack et al., 1994; Wood et al., 2000; Zhang, 2001). This preparation is a joint responsibility across secondary and postsecondary education personnel (Kirst & Venezia, 2006).

With preparation methods and strategies known and personnel roles and responsibilities delineated, what emerging best practices are being used by public school transition personnel and postsecondary education personnel and do they believe that students with disabilities are adequately prepared to access accommodations in postsecondary education? The answer to this question may be perceived differently by the different stakeholders of secondary education and postsecondary education.

Transition personnel in high schools prepare students with disabilities to access accommodations in postsecondary education, but do not see the result of their efforts while DSS personnel in postsecondary education see the result of student preparation for
accessing accommodations. Similarities and differences in the perception of these personnel about use of emerging best practices in and student preparation for accessing accommodations in postsecondary education are undocumented. This information is needed to inform and improve the preparation of high school students to access accommodations in the postsecondary setting. The roles and responsibilities of personnel in the two settings may also be adjusted in light of this information.

If DSS personnel in postsecondary education believe that students are not prepared to access accommodations in postsecondary education and public school transition personnel believe that they are prepared, there is a disconnect that impacts student success in postsecondary education. This may have lifelong consequences for students with disabilities.

Additionally, the state of existing communication between DSS personnel and high school transition personnel is unknown, even though there has been an ongoing call for increased communication to facilitate transition from high school to postsecondary education for students with disabilities (NJCLD, 1994; NJCLD, 2007; Norlander, et al., 1990; Rothstein, 2003; Stodden & Jones, 2002). This information is necessary in light of the continuing concern surrounding this issue and its impact on student ability to access accommodations in postsecondary education.
Rational

This study will be qualitative and will use inductive reasoning. Qualitative research can be described as:

…an inquiry process of understanding based on a distinct methodological tradition of inquiry that explores a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views on informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting. (Creswell, 2007, p. 249)

Qualitative methods will be used for this study because of their ability to gain an in-depth perception and understanding of a phenomenon. Interactions and nuances of the research would be difficult to capture in predefined measures (Creswell, 2007). Through this method of inquiry, the perspectives of personnel in each setting, postsecondary and public school, may be examined as well as compared across settings to gain an in-depth understanding of the problem. In this study, the qualitative research process will also allow the participants unique beliefs, experiences, and perceptions to be examined in depth. The uniqueness of individual experiences and perceptions would be lost if quantitative measures were employed (Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

According to Creswell (2007) qualitative designs are the most appropriate research method for exploring a problem, determining the essence of an experience, and achieving a deep, rich understanding of a phenomenon. In this study a complex, detailed understanding of use of emerging best practices in and preparation of students with disabilities for accessing accommodations in postsecondary education will be examined through participant’s individual perceptions. Roads to success and barriers to the
preparation of students with disabilities to access postsecondary accommodations may be examined through the telling of lived experiences and perceptions of participants.

This study is qualitative and phenomenological in nature and is guided by the interpretive paradigm. “The basic purpose of phenomenology is to reduce individuals experiences with a phenomenon to a description of the universal essence” of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007, p. 58). A paradigm is an interpretive framework which includes a basic set of beliefs that guide actions (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). The interpretive paradigm sees the world as a social process that is created by individual perceptions and understandings. Reality, in this paradigm, is a network of subjectively shared meanings (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). In this view of the world, words and categories are the constitutive building blocks of the social world (Holstein & Gubrium, 2005).

In the interpretive paradigm, an in depth understanding of the essence of a phenomenon is sought through studying several individuals that have experienced it. Shared meanings are found through the analysis of data for meaning units, description, and significant statements. These can be categorized and coded to understand shared meanings. Themes then emerge from the data and reveal the “essence” of the phenomenon (Cresswell, 2007).

Currently, little is known of what professionals believe about the phenomenon of preparation to access accommodations in postsecondary education by students with disabilities. There is no research that looks at a comparison of the perceptions of secondary and postsecondary personnel about this topic. There is also no indication in
the literature about the existing state of communication between personnel in the secondary and postsecondary setting about the preparation of students with disabilities to access reasonable accommodations in postsecondary education, despite ongoing concern about this topic. This study adds to the literature base about through examination of current use of emerging best practices in the preparation of students with disabilities for accessing accommodations in postsecondary education. It also looked at perceptions of their ability to access accommodations in postsecondary education and the existing communication between DSS personnel and public school transition personnel about this topic.

This study sought to evaluate the bridge from secondary to postsecondary education for students with disabilities, through participants’ perceptions of the use of emerging best practice in student preparation to access accommodations in postsecondary education, adequacy of preparation, and communication between personnel across systems. Perceptions of the preparation of students with disabilities to access accommodations between DSS personnel and public school transition personnel was examined to determine consistency or variation across settings. This information may impact the roles and responsibilities of personnel in one or both settings as well as the preparation of students with disabilities in high school for accessing accommodations in postsecondary education. In addition, this study explored the existing communication between secondary transition personnel and postsecondary DSS personnel and has given an indication of existing communication between the two groups. This informs areas of communication across systems that need to be addressed in the future.
Research Questions

To find out perceptions of use of emerging best practices, strategies, and resources in the preparation of students with disabilities to access accommodations in postsecondary education and whether the perceptions of DSS personnel and public school transition personnel vary about the adequacy of preparation for accessing reasonable accommodations and communication/collaboration across systems the following research questions were explored:

1. What are the preparation strategies/resources used by successful public school transition programs and postsecondary disability services programs in the preparation of students with disabilities for accessing accommodations in postsecondary education? How are they being implemented?

2. Do public school transition personnel and postsecondary DSS personnel believe that students with disabilities exiting high school are prepared to access accommodations in postsecondary education? Why or why not?

3. What are the differences and similarities in the perceptions of DSS personnel and public school transition personnel about the preparation of students with disabilities exiting high school to access accommodations in postsecondary education?

To find out what communication exists between DSS personnel and public school transition personnel and the perceived impact of the communication on the preparation of students to access reasonable accommodations in postsecondary education, the following research questions were explored:
4. What are the communication/collaboration strategies and resources used by successful public school transition programs and postsecondary disability services programs between personnel across systems about the preparation of students with disabilities to access accommodations in postsecondary education? How are these strategies/resources implemented or used?

5. Do public school transition personnel and postsecondary DSS personnel believe there is adequate communication/collaboration between personnel across systems about the preparation of students with disabilities to access accommodations in postsecondary education? Why or why not?

6. Do DSS personnel and public school transition personnel believe that communication between secondary and postsecondary personnel impacts the preparation of students with disabilities to access reasonable accommodations in postsecondary education?

7. What are the differences and similarities in the perceptions of DSS personnel and public school transition personnel about the communication/collaboration of these personnel across systems and the impact of this communication?
CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

Introduction

As noted in previous chapters, little research exists comparing the perceptions of high school transition personnel and postsecondary disability support personnel regarding the preparation of students with disabilities to access accommodations needed for success in postsecondary education (Grossman, 2001; Fitchen et al., 2006). Comparison of perceptions from the two settings for similarities and dissimilarities is complicated by the tendency for researchers to focus on one system, either the K-12 system or the postsecondary education system. The need for research across the boundaries of these two systems has been suggested (Louie, 2007) in order to gain a complete picture of the process of student preparation to access postsecondary accommodations. In addition, little research exists surrounding the ongoing call for communication across the two settings of K-12 education and postsecondary education, in order to improve the ability of students with disabilities to access accommodations in postsecondary education (NJCLD, 1994; NJCLD, 2007; Norlander et al., 1990; Rothstein, 2003; Stodden & Jones 2002).

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to gain an in depth understanding of students’ with disabilities preparation to access accommodations in four-year and two-year for credit, degree seeking postsecondary education programs from the dual perspectives of
postsecondary education DSS personnel and public school transition personnel. It sought to gain a better understanding of emerging best practices, strategies, and adequacy of the preparation of students with disabilities to access accommodations in college. This study had an additional purpose of gaining insight into existing communication between the two settings and the impact that this has on student preparation to access accommodations in the postsecondary setting.

**Design**

This study used an in-depth, open ended guided interview, one of the three forms of data collection for qualitative studies noted by Patton (2002). He indicated that the purpose of open-ended questions is to allow the researcher to capture and understand the varying points of view of participants without imposing predetermined categories of response. The researcher’s task is to “provide a framework within which people can respond in a way that represents accurately and thoroughly their points of view about the world…” (p. 21). Use of a guided interview framework allowed the researcher to gain holistic understanding of each participant’s experiences while retaining the flexibility necessary to explore their experiences. The guide ensured that questions or issues covered remained consistent across participants. The interview guides for this study can be found in Appendix A.

**Statement of the Problem**

The study was guided by foreshadowed problems which gave focus to the inquiry. These foreshadowed problems were anticipated prior to the start of the study and were found through an examination of the existing literature. Foreshadowed problems for
this study included themes consistently found in the transition to postsecondary education for students with disabilities knowledge base. They are:

1) Students with disabilities are not adequately prepared to access accommodations in postsecondary education because they lack knowledge of their rights and responsibilities in adult settings and how they differ from their rights and responsibilities during K-12 education (Harris & Robertson, 2001; National Council on Disability, 2004; Office of Civil Rights, 2007; Schutz, 2002; Scott, 1991; Stodden, 2003; Stodden & Jones 2002 a: Wagner, 2005; Wolanin & Steele, 2004). They also lack the self-determination and self-advocacy skills needed in these settings (deFur, et al., 1996; Harris & Robertson, 2001; Janiga & Costenbader, 2002; Lock & Layton, 2001; National Council on Disability, 2004; Stodden, 2003; Stodden & Jones, 2002 a.).

2) Lack of adequate communication between transition personnel in the high schools and postsecondary DSS personnel may impact student preparation to access accommodations in postsecondary education (NJCLD, 1994; NJCLD, 2007; Norlander, et al., 1990; Rothstein, 2003; Stodden, 2003; Stodden & Jones, 2002).

Research Questions

Research questions emanated from the literature and the foreshadowed questions. In this study, public school system use of emerging best practices in the preparation of students with disabilities to access accommodations in college was examined. The variance in perceptions of DSS personnel and public school system transition personnel about the adequacy of preparation for accessing reasonable accommodations in the
postsecondary education setting was also examined. To meet this end, the following research questions were explored:

1) What are the preparation strategies/resources used by successful public school transition programs and postsecondary disability services programs in the preparation of students with disabilities for accessing accommodations in postsecondary education? How are they being implemented?

2) Do public school transition personnel and postsecondary DSS personnel believe that students with disabilities exiting high school are prepared to access accommodations in postsecondary education?

3) What are the differences and similarities in the perceptions of DSS personnel and public school transition personnel about the preparation of students with disabilities exiting high school to access accommodations in postsecondary education?

To find out what communication exists between DSS personnel and public school transition personnel and the perceived impact of this communication on the preparation of students to access reasonable accommodations in postsecondary education, the following research questions were explored:

4) What are the communication/collaboration strategies and resources used by successful public school transition programs and postsecondary disability services programs between personnel across systems about the preparation of students with disabilities to access accommodations in postsecondary education? How are these strategies/resources implemented or used?
5) Do public school transition personnel and postsecondary DSS personnel believe there is adequate communication/collaboration between personnel across systems about the preparation of students with disabilities to access accommodations in postsecondary education?

6) Do DSS personnel and public school transition personnel believe that communication between secondary and postsecondary personnel impacts the preparation of students with disabilities to access reasonable accommodations in postsecondary education?

7) What are the differences and similarities in the perceptions of DSS personnel and public school transition personnel about the communication/collaboration of these personnel across systems and the impact of this communication?

Study Methodology

Participants

Criteria for selection of study participants required that they be personnel from Virginia public schools and colleges/universities that had firsthand knowledge of student preparation to access accommodations in the postsecondary setting. These individuals had the richness of information that guided and informed the research. Participants included the following:

1) Public school system transition personnel including division level personnel responsible for transition, transition coordinators/specialists, special education teachers/case managers, and guidance counselors (Parent Resource Center
personnel were originally optional study participants, but were dropped because of lack of information);

2) DSS staff members from two-year and four-year colleges/universities. Geographic diversity was also a factor in considering colleges/universities for inclusion in this study.

The individuals were selected for participation because of the role they play in the transition of students with disabilities to postsecondary education and the access of accommodations in that setting. Public school transition personnel prepare students with disabilities to access accommodations in postsecondary education, and postsecondary DSS personnel assist students to access accommodations at their postsecondary education institution. A summary of the role that each of these participants play in the preparation of students with disabilities to access accommodations in postsecondary education may be found in Tables Two and Three following the description of these roles below.

**Public School Transition Personnel**

Division level transition personnel oversee transition specialists and the transition program responsible for preparing students to access accommodations in college. They may be special education coordinators or division staff responsible for setting policy, planning, and overseeing transition within their school division.

The high school transition coordinator/specialist is “...an individual who plans, coordinates, delivers, and evaluates transition education and services at the school or system level, in conjunction with other educators, families, students, and representatives
of community organizations” (DCDT, 2000, p. 3). This individual helps prepare students with disabilities for the transition to post high school options, including postsecondary education. Their responsibilities include, but are not limited to, interagency and intraschool linkages, transition assessment and planning, career counseling, and they act as a resource for the student and family (Asselin, Todd-Allen, and deFur, 1998). This role may be taken over by a school counselor, teacher, or another designated individual in the employ of the high school if there is no designated transition coordinator.

Special education teachers/case managers help to plan, develop, and implement an IEP or Individualized Transition Plan (ITP) for each student with disabilities in collaboration with other educational personnel. Student preparation for life after graduation is an important aspect of their job. They may assume the role of transition coordinator if there is no position specifically allocated for this role at a particular school (Wehman, 2006).

High school guidance counselors are trained educators that help students “monitor progress toward graduation and being adequately prepared for post-secondary options.” They help “…students prepare for post-secondary education and/or training options (e.g. college, trade school) by engaging students in finding accurate and meaningful information on entrance requirements, financial aid, recommendation letters, test-preparation and so forth” (Guidance Counselor, n.d.).
### Table 2

**Secondary personnel**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position/Job</th>
<th>Role in preparation to access accommodations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Division level</td>
<td>Set policy, plan, and oversee transition within their school division</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transition personnel</td>
<td>Coordinates, plans, delivers and evaluates transition services and education in collaboration with students, families, other educators, and community organizations; Linkages with schools and adult service agencies; Transition assessment and planning; Career counseling; Resource information for the student and family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transition specialist/coordinator</td>
<td>Help to plan, develop, and implement an IEP/ITP in collaboration with other educational personnel; Student preparation for life after graduation; May assume the role of transition coordinator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special education teacher/case manager</td>
<td>Monitors progress toward graduation and preparation for postsecondary options; Engages students in finding meaningful and accurate information about college entrance requirements, financial aid, recommendation letters, test-preparation and other requirements for postsecondary education</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Postsecondary Disability Services Personnel

The postsecondary DSS coordinators and/or staff members disseminate information about available services for students with disabilities and how to access them including but not limited to, referral, documentation, accessing accommodations, grievance procedures, and self-disclosure. They must also determine, along with students, the academic accommodations and services that are appropriate for the individual and that do not compromise fundamental aspects of the program of study. Disability Support Services personnel also help to promote student independence and self-determination (AHEAD, n.d.). The personnel included in the study from each institution of higher education had some responsibility for college outreach to high schools.

Table 3

Postsecondary personnel

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position/Job</th>
<th>Role in preparation to access accommodations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Disability Support Services</td>
<td>Disseminate information about disability services and how to access them;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coordinator/staff</td>
<td>Determination of appropriate accommodations (with student);</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Promotion of student self-determination/self-advocacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Some responsibility for college outreach</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Sampling**

Purposeful sampling of personnel from Virginia public colleges/universities and public school systems was done for this study. These key informants were “information rich” and were able to offer insight about the phenomenon (Patton, 2002). Information for this study was collected until the point of saturation was reached. This occurs when no new information is found that adds to the understanding of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985),

In purposeful sampling the size of the sample is determined by informational considerations. If the purpose is to maximize information, the sampling is terminated when no new information is forthcoming from new sampled units; thus redundancy is the primary criterion. (p. 202)

Dukes (1984) recommended studying between three and ten participants in a phenomenological study.

This study collected information from at least four participants from each city/county school division and at least one participant from each of the five, four-year and two-year colleges and/or universities. The total number of participants was 43. The sampling structure may be found in figure one below.
Sampling was based on snowball methods described by Patton (2002). It started with five geographically distinct areas of Virginia including the East, North, Central, Southwest, and Northwest regions of the Commonwealth. One four-year college/university from each region was chosen for participation. A DSS representative from that college/university was contacted to participate because these personnel see the outcome of students with disabilities preparation to access accommodations in college and they are responsible to help student’s access accommodations in college. Four-year college/university personnel each recommended one, two-year college within their
geographic area for participation in the study. Once recommended, the researcher contacted the DSS office at the two-year institution for participation. Participants targeted at both four-year and two-year colleges/universities included the DSS coordinator or a member of the DSS staff. In each instance the DSS coordinator or assistant coordinator/director became the study participant.

Four-year college/university participants and two-year college participants were asked to recommend public school divisions for participation in the study. They were asked to recommend school divisions that were actively sharing information with and in communication with DSS personnel at the college or university. They were also asked to base their recommendation for school divisions on whose students showed positive transition outcomes in postsecondary education and, when they had knowledge of it, were school divisions using emerging best practices to systematically prepare students for accessing accommodations in college.

School division personnel were then contacted to determine the division level individual who was responsible for transition programming for students with disabilities and included directors of special education or administrators that oversaw the transition process. These individuals were asked to recommend high schools that were perceived as doing a better job in preparing students with disabilities for accessing accommodations in college. The researcher requested that high schools recommended be in communication/collaboration with division transition personnel and/or DSS personnel in postsecondary education, show positive outcomes for postsecondary education for students with disabilities, and show use of emerging best practices by systematically
preparing students to access accommodations in college. These individuals were also asked to recommend transition coordinators, special education teachers/case managers, and guidance counselors for participation from the particular high school using the same criteria.

Representatives of parent resource centers were also originally included as potential participants and were recommended by division staff. One parent resource representative was interviewed. Results of this interview indicated slight involvement surrounding students with disabilities transitioning to college. When asked how the resource center was involved in assisting with preparation to access accommodations in college, this participant indicated, “Just by the books that we have in our library and the publications that we might have here that we can give to a parent.” She only saw about four parents with questions about transitioning to college per year. Two other parent resource center representatives were contacted and agreed to participate. These individuals also indicated that they had little information about or dealing with parents of students with disabilities seeking to access accommodations in college. With three of five possible participants indicating that they were not information rich about transition to college and accessing accommodations for students with disabilities, they were dropped from the study.

Study participants in relationship to their geographic areas can be found in Table Four. The interaction of these individuals helps determine the effectiveness of student preparation for accessing accommodations within their geographic area.
Table 4
Participants and their geographic relationship

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Level/Job</th>
<th>Group A</th>
<th>Group B</th>
<th>Group C</th>
<th>Group D</th>
<th>Group E</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College/University DSS Participants</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four-year</td>
<td>Grace</td>
<td>Harold</td>
<td>Kate</td>
<td>Frank</td>
<td>Janice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-year</td>
<td>Brenda</td>
<td>Christy</td>
<td>Ella</td>
<td>Abby</td>
<td>Diana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public School Division Participants</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Division level</td>
<td>Tammy</td>
<td>Brittany</td>
<td>Rita</td>
<td>Mike</td>
<td>Jane</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transition Coordinator</td>
<td>Vaughn</td>
<td>Doreen</td>
<td>Sheila</td>
<td>Nancy</td>
<td>Kristen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School 2</td>
<td>Vince</td>
<td>Ester</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Laura</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special education teacher/case manager</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School 1</td>
<td>Willa</td>
<td>Francis</td>
<td>Trisha</td>
<td>Rachael</td>
<td>Mandy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School 2</td>
<td>Yolanda</td>
<td>Gina</td>
<td></td>
<td>Noel</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guidance Counselor</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School 1</td>
<td>Zenna</td>
<td>Hanna</td>
<td>Tom</td>
<td>Paula</td>
<td>Opal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School 2</td>
<td>Alex</td>
<td>Ingrid</td>
<td></td>
<td>Patrice</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of participants</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Instrument

Patton (2002) indicated that, “The purpose of qualitative interviewing is to capture how those being interviewed view their world, to learn their terminology and judgments, and to capture the complexities of their individual perceptions and experiences” (p. 348). The researcher, in this situation, may be seen as the research instrument. This is an essential component of the design because human beings have the ability to interact and be responsive in the research setting as well as the ability to perceive and collect information on multiple levels concurrently (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researcher in this study collected information from participants using a guided interview format.

The guided interview contained questions designed to gather information about study constructs. Constructs included 1) participant and school information, 2) student knowledge of their disability, 3) student knowledge of differences in student rights and responsibilities across environments, 4) participant knowledge of differences in student rights and responsibilities, 5) self-advocacy and self-determination, 6) preparation to access accommodations, 7) joint responsibility across systems in preparation of students for postsecondary education, 8) need for communication across systems, and 9) improvements, changes, and additions to communication/collaboration across systems and student preparation to access accommodations in postsecondary education.

Initial questions are about participants and their schools in order to provide background information and a way for participant’s to enter comfortably into the interview process. This area of inquiry includes questions about the participant’s job
experience and the numbers/percentages of students with either a transition goal of going
to postsecondary education or enrolled in postsecondary education. This background
information enlightened understanding of participants’ other responses.

After the section about participant and school information, the interview guide
was divided into two basic sections; preparation of students with disabilities to access
accommodations in postsecondary education, the general perceptions of
communication/collaboration of personnel across systems.

The constructs listed above are found throughout both of these sections. One
question addressed participant perception of student knowledge of disability and student
knowledge of differences in rights and responsibilities across environments. Six
questions related to participant’s knowledge of differences in student rights and
responsibilities across environments and one question, with several probes, examined
self-advocacy and self-determination. Four questions about preparation to access
accommodations in postsecondary education were included and one question related to
participant perception of joint responsibility for the preparation of students to access
accommodations in college. Communication across systems was explored through three
questions. Remaining questions sought participant additions, views, and suggestions
about communication/collaboration and student preparation to access accommodations in
postsecondary education.

Table Five below contains study constructs and specific interview questions that
relate to each construct. The supporting literature for each is also included.
Table 5

Study constructs, questions, and supporting literature

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>Interview Questions</th>
<th>Supporting Literature</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Postsecondary (Public Schools)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant/school information</td>
<td>Question:</td>
<td>Wagner et al., 2005;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. (1) Overall enrollment?</td>
<td>Wolanin &amp; Steele, 2004;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. (2) Number/percentage with disability with goal of college or enrolled in college?</td>
<td>Dowrick et al., 2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Structure of DSS office/services?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. (3) Participant’s job?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Knowledge of Disability</td>
<td>Question:</td>
<td>Aune, 1991; Barr et al., 1995; Milsome &amp; Hartley, 2005; Stodden &amp; Jones, 2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7iii. (6iii) Student awareness of requirements and procedures for requesting accommodations in college? Specific probe about knowledge of strengths and weaknesses)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construct</td>
<td>Interview Questions</td>
<td>Supporting Literature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student knowledge of disability and its effect.</td>
<td>Question:</td>
<td>Aune, 1991; Barr et al., 1995; Frank &amp; Wade, 1993; Harris &amp; Robertson, 2001; Latham, 2001; Madaus &amp; Shaw, 2004; Milsome &amp; Hartley, 2005; Office of Civil Rights 2007; Stodden &amp; Jones, 2002; Sitlington, 2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>differences in rights and responsibilities across environments (Knowledge of requesting accommodations in college? Specific probes about steps they must complete to gain access to accommodations and differences between secondary and postsecondary systems.)</td>
<td>7iii. (6iii) Student awareness of requirements and procedures for</td>
<td>Aune, 1991; Barr et al., 1995; Frank &amp; Wade, 1993; Harris &amp; Robertson, 2001; Latham, 2001; Madaus &amp; Shaw, 2004; Milsome &amp; Hartley, 2005; Office of Civil Rights 2007; Stodden &amp; Jones, 2002; Sitlington, 2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant knowledge of differences in student rights and responsibilities across environments (Knowledge of setting?) (Knowledge of postsecondary support services and requirements, differences in policy/legislation, ability to exercise rights)</td>
<td>Question:</td>
<td>Aune, 1991; Barr et al., 1995; Dukes &amp; Shaw, 1998; Frank &amp; Wade, 1993; Harris &amp; Robertson, 2001; Janiga and Costenbader, 2002; Latham, 2001; Madaus &amp; Shaw, 2004;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construct</td>
<td>Interview Questions</td>
<td>Supporting Literature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5a. (4b) Training or information sought?</td>
<td>5b. (4c) Knowledge of differences in accessing accommodations across systems?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construct</td>
<td>Interview Questions</td>
<td>Supporting Literature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparation of students for postsecondary education is a joint responsibility across systems</td>
<td>Question: 7d. (6d) Role/responsibility in preparation of students? Probe about joint responsibility.</td>
<td>Aune, 1991; Brinkerhoff, 1996; Hicks-Coolick &amp; Kurtz, 1997; Wood et al., 2000; Zhang, 2001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication across systems</td>
<td>Question: 9. (8) What communication do you have with the other</td>
<td>Eckes and Ochoa, 2005; Harris &amp; Robertson, 2001; NJCLD, 1994; NJCLD,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construct</td>
<td>Interview Questions</td>
<td>Supporting Literature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
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<td>-----------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>system?</td>
<td></td>
<td>2007; Norlander, et al.,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proactive/Reactive?</td>
<td></td>
<td>1990; Rothstein, 2003;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. (9) Adequacy of communication/</td>
<td></td>
<td>Stodden &amp; Jones, 2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>collaboration across</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>systems?</td>
<td></td>
<td>11. (10) Impact of communication on preparation of students?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Improvements/changes/additions**

| Questions: | Participant suggestions, views, and additions |
| 8. (7) Improvement of preparation? Anything else about Preparation? |
| 12. (11) What changes in communication? Anything else about communication? |

Note: Only partial paraphrased text of questions is found in this table. See Appendix A for full text of guided interview questions.

**Rigor**

In quantitative research, the researcher must be concerned with validity (internal and external), reliability, and objectivity. Lincoln and Guba (1985) defined an alternate
set of criteria for qualitative research that parallels that of quantitative research. These alternative criteria are: credibility instead of internal validity, transferability instead of external validity, dependability instead of reliability, and confirmability instead of objectivity.

According to Patton (2002), the credibility of qualitative inquiry depends on three elements including rigorous methods, the credibility of the researcher, and a philosophical belief in the value of qualitative inquiry. The concept of credibility in qualitative research is the researcher’s ability to accurately portray participant’s views and perceptions. Credibility of the researcher refers to research training and adherence to credible methods. Belief in the value of qualitative research includes appreciation of naturalistic inquiry, inductive analysis, holistic thinking, and purposeful sampling.

Rigor, in this study, was addressed through the design of the study to include triangulation. Triangulation is the use of multiple methods of data collection and analysis to reduce the possibility of errors. This study included multiple informants’ perceptions about the single phenomenon of preparation to access accommodations in postsecondary education by students with disabilities. The study also included a review of documents supporting findings and a website review. Units of meaning and emerging themes found within the data create a rich and thick understanding of the phenomenon. Comparison of the findings with the literature base surrounding transition served as a cross check for consistency and lent credibility to the understanding of the phenomenon. The voice of participants was used, in the form of direct quotes, to support the research findings. Biases of the researcher were examined and peer debriefing, member checking,
and field notes are utilized to reduce possible error. See Figure Two for a diagram of this study’s triangulation measures.

**Figure 2**

*Study Triangulation*

![Triangulation Diagram](image_url)

**Applicability/Transferability**

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), one of the criteria for soundness of a qualitative research study is applicability or transferability. This is the degree to which the findings are useful to others in similar situations.

Applicability of findings must be determined by the consumer of qualitative research. The consumer must determine if the researcher has accurately represented
participants’ experiences and if the findings may apply in their own situation. This can only be determined if the researcher has addressed rigor, the researcher’s characteristics and impact on the findings, and included a rich and thick description of participants and circumstances supported with direct quotes. Only then does the consumer have the information that will allow him/her to decide if the findings will be useful in his or her circumstances (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). This study addressed rigor through the triangulation methods described above (see Figure Two), description of participants, and use of participants’ voices through direct quotes (found in Chapter Four).

*Dependability*

The construct of dependability is the qualitative equivalent of reliability. It involves a very different set of assumptions, however. The concept of reliability sees the world to have an unchanging set of parameters whereas the qualitative, interpretative assumption is that the world is constantly evolving and changing, making the replication concept problematic (Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

Lincoln and Guba (1985), suggest that an inquiry audit is an essential component for establishing dependability in qualitative research. An inquiry audit was done for this study by examining both the process and product of the study for consistency. This audit trail was used to allow the reader to review the researcher’s reasoning, thinking, and decision-making process. The audit inquiry may be found in Table Six.
Table 6

Inquiry audit

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Contents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Data</td>
<td>Recorded interviews, field notes, interview transcriptions, document and web site review, member check</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data analysis and reduction</td>
<td>Initial coding scheme, coded data, code notes and summaries, final coding scheme, document review, web review, tables and figures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data reconstruction/synthesis</td>
<td>Emerging themes, cross check with literature base, peer debriefing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Process notes</td>
<td>Field notes, interviews, document review procedures, calendar of appointments, IRB procedures and requirements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal notes</td>
<td>Research proposal, other personal notes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Confirmability

Confirmability stresses the assumption that findings of the study could be confirmed by someone else. To address this issue the researcher used peer debriefing and cross checking. Three reviewers were asked to examine the researcher’s analysis of data, and the literature base was used as a cross reference. The researcher’s bias was accounted for to increase the likelihood of being able to describe the phenomenon being studied accurately (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). See Table Seven for researcher bias and peer debriefer’s characteristics.

The research study was divided into three sections. They are Procedures and Data Collection, Data Analysis and Management, and Testing of Emergent Themes. A conceptual design of this study may be found in Figure Three.
Table 7
Peer reviewers and researcher bias

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Potential Bias Researcher</th>
<th>Reviewer A: No familiarity with Special Education and/or students with disabilities</th>
<th>Reviewer B: Familiar with Special Education and Transition</th>
<th>Reviewer C: Familiar with Special Education, Transition, and mother of an adult child with a disability that has experienced the transition process</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Special Education Professional</td>
<td>✅</td>
<td>✅</td>
<td>✅</td>
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<td>Transition</td>
<td>✅</td>
<td>✅</td>
<td>✅</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Advocacy/Self-determination</td>
<td>✅</td>
<td>✅</td>
<td>✅</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Stage I: Procedures and Data Collection

The guided interview was created, evaluated by an expert panel, and then pilot tested at one four-year and one two-year college and/or university. It was also pilot tested at one public school division in the Commonwealth of Virginia. This was done to determine clarity of the interview protocol and any changes that may have been warranted. No changes were seen as necessary by participants involved in the pilot test.

Virginia Commonwealth University Institutional Review Board (IRB) policies and procedures were strictly followed. Approval from the IRB for this study was obtained in November 2008 and data were collected over the course of a five month period during the winter and spring of 2008-2009. The methods and procedures used and a description of the data collected follow.
Figure 3

Conceptual design of the study

Stage I: Data collection
- Identification of 4-yr. college/university sites
- Identification of 4-yr. participants
- 4-yr. study recruitment, introduction, & consent
- 4-yr. interviews scheduled & conducted
- Recommendations made for 2-yr. & public school system participants
- 2-yr. study recruitment, introduction, & consent
- 2-yr. interviews scheduled & conducted
- Recommendations made for public school system participants
- Document & web information gathered
- Field notes completed
- Public school system recruitment, introduction, & consent
- Division level recruitment, introduction, & consent
- Division level interviews scheduled & conducted
- Document & Website review, Field notes completed,
  Recommendations made for high schools and high school participants
- High school personnel recruitment, introduction, & consent
- Document & web information gathered
- Field notes completed

Stage II: Analysis & triangulation
- Interviews completed
- Member checking
- Code for units of meaning
- Notes & Summaries
- Peer debriefing
- Document/Web review
- Emerging themes

Stage III: Testing emergent themes
- Test of emergent themes
- Peer debriefing
- Comparison with the literature base
Procedures

After IRB approval was obtained and structured interview protocols accepted, participants were contacted by email using the invitation to participate submitted as part of the IRB application. A brief study description was included in the email invitation for their review (See Appendix B). A follow up phone call was made after potential participants had the opportunity to review information about the study, to answer any questions that they may have had, and to see if they wanted to schedule a face-to-face meeting to review the study further, ask additional questions, and complete consent forms. Study participants also had the option of using this same meeting to hold the interview if desired. Without exception, all participants chose to review the study, sign consent, and conduct the interview during the same meeting time. Consent forms may be found in Appendix C.

Four-year college or university DSS representatives were contacted for participation in the study first. At the conclusion of these interviews, four-year DSS participants were asked to recommend two-year colleges that were in geographic proximity to the four-year institution for participation. They were also asked to suggest one or two public school divisions that they perceived better prepared students with disabilities to access accommodations in college. This was based on their own interactions with students from those school systems seeking accommodations through their office.

Two-year DSS personnel were contacted using the same methods described above. At the conclusion of their interviews, they were also asked to recommend one or
two public school divisions that they perceived better prepared students with disabilities to access accommodations in college. Four-year and two-year DSS participants were asked to rank the divisions as first choice and second choice, based on how well they perceived that they prepared students to access accommodations. In all cases, four-year and two-year college/university DSS personnel recommended the same public school divisions for participation in the study although some ranked divisions differently as first or second. When these rankings differed, the researcher used the ranking from the four-year institution.

The research offices for five public school divisions in Virginia were then contacted for possible participation in the study. In each case, a division specific request to conduct research was required with stipulations similar to IRB procedures. This approval process took anywhere from two weeks to several months. Approval to conduct the research was obtained from all school divisions contacted.

Potential division level participants were contacted using the same methods noted earlier. At the conclusion of their interviews, they were asked to recommend one or two high schools within their division for participation that they perceived were better preparing students to access accommodations in college. They recommended not only particular high schools, but also specific personnel to contact for participation. Transition coordinators, special education teachers, and guidance counselors at the specific high schools were then contacted and meetings and interviews were scheduled.

All four-year and two-year college/university DSS personnel contacted were willing to participate in the study as were all school divisions. One high school
recommended declined to participate; however there was a second one recommended from that division that did participate. All individual personnel contacted from the school divisions participated in the study.

After informed consent was obtained from each participant, information was gathered through individual in-depth interviews following the guided interview format. The interviews averaged approximately 30 minutes to one hour and were audio recorded, with participant permission, to ensure that the researcher captured the participants’ views and perceptions accurately. These recordings were then transcribed, checked by participants for errors or additions they wished to make, and used in data analysis. Several participants chose to make changes to the transcript to more accurately reflect their views.

The interviews usually occurred in the participants’ offices or a quiet place within their school. They began with background questions. Designed to ease the participant into the interview process and help them relax, participants were asked questions about their school enrollment, their educational background, and job path. The researcher often used a paraphrasing technique during interviews to give participants an opportunity to be certain that their views had been correctly understood.

Participants

There were 43 participants in this study. They included representatives from both four-year and two-year college/university DSS personnel as well as participants from public school systems. Most were enthusiastic about participation in the study and the
ability to contribute to a better understanding of the preparation of students with disabilities to access accommodations in college.

Participants from Four-Year Colleges or Universities

Personnel from five, four-year public colleges/universities throughout Virginia were included in the study. These institutions were chosen because of their geographic diversity within the state and their relationship within the VDOE TTACs regions. They have enrollment approximations of 18,000 to 40,000 students. There were seven participants from these colleges/universities including coordinators/directors of DSS offices, assistant directors, and disability services specialists/counselors. They ranged in age from their 30’s to those who were soon to retire.

Experience in their positions varied. Some had only one year of experience while others had 15 plus years of experience with previous jobs in similar fields. The average experience in their current position was 7.2 years. Their previous experience included counseling in the college/community college setting, work with the community college TRIO programs (US federal programs to increase access to higher education for economically disadvantaged students), and various jobs within DSS offices within and outside Virginia. Most had a master’s degree or higher in counseling or special education.

One participant indicated that he had a disability and that having a disability and learning to advocate for himself, he wanted to help others learn to do the same. Others began their interest in DSS services while employed as student workers during their undergraduate education or through graduate assistantships. All indicated a strong desire
to help students with disabilities become good self-advocates and to help foster independence and success in college for them.

*Participants from Two-Year Community Colleges*

There were five participants in this study from five different community colleges in geographic relationship with the four-year colleges/universities selected for the study. The community colleges that participants represented varied widely in enrollment size. The smallest had enrollment of approximately 3,000 students with one campus and the largest had over 60,000 students with multiple campuses. Only one participant indicated a mid-range of enrollment for their community college with approximately 18,000 students. The age range of community college participants tended to be somewhat older with the majority of participants over the age of forty, with several nearing or at retirement age.

Most community college participants had many years of experience in the field of disability support services prior to their current position, but average years of experience in their present jobs were lower than that of their four-year counterparts. Most indicated between one and four years experience in their present position with one exception who indicated 25 years of experience in their current job. Their average experience was 6.6 years experience.

Previous job experiences included work with the community college PAVE (Program for Adults in Vocational Education) program, state rehabilitation agencies, non-profit organizations, teaching, speech and language pathology, and counseling, both with the DSS office and in the public school system. One participant had been a staff
attorney for a state disability organization prior to her role in the DSS office at her community college.

Two participants had degrees in special education or speech and language pathology while others had master’s degrees in counseling. One had a law degree and one was a certified vocational evaluator. One, two-year college participant was an individual with a disability.

*Participants from the Public School System*

Study participants from the public school system encompassed multiple personnel responsible for overseeing the transition of students with disabilities to postsecondary education. These personnel included division level individuals with responsibility for transition, high school transition coordinators, high school special education teachers/case managers, and high school guidance counselors. Individuals represented five school divisions throughout Virginia with enrollment ranging from approximately 12,000 to 57,000 students. These school divisions were recommended as participants by four-year and two-year study participants who see the result of student preparation to access accommodations in college and who perceived that students from these school divisions were overall better prepared than other students seeking accommodations at their colleges.

*Division level transition coordinators.*

Six division level personnel from five public school divisions were participants in the study. They included special education administrators with transition oversight, directors/supervisors of special education, and a division level liaison for support of
transition teachers. Their experience in their current job ranged from under a year to five years and their ages ranged from approximately 30 to their 50’s. Previous experience included teaching and other division level work supporting transition, being assistant principals, school social workers, high school coordinators of special education, and transition coordinators/supervisors. Education for these individuals varied. Some had or were working on a Ph.D. in educational leadership or special education, while others had master’s or bachelor’s degrees with a wealth of previous experience in special education.

**High school transition coordinators/teachers.**

There were eight transition coordinators/teachers who were participants in the study from the five school divisions across Virginia. They had responsibility to coordinate and oversee transition for their respective high schools and to support teachers/case managers in transition activities and planning for their students. Their educational backgrounds were diverse with bachelor’s degrees in psychology and either certificates in special education or master’s degrees in special education. Some had bachelor’s degrees in special education with graduate degrees in social work or vocational rehabilitation. One had a doctorate in educational leadership. Experience in their positions ranged from two to 25 years with the average being 8.3 years. Previous job experience included teaching special education, serving as a high school consulting teacher, vocational rehabilitation counseling, and work in supported employment or sheltered employment. Ages of these participants ranged from approximately their late 20’s to late 50’s.
Special education teachers.

High school special education teachers participating in the study included nine representatives whose approximate age was between their 20’s and their late 50’s. Experience on the job included as little as 1 year teaching and as much as 33 years with additional experience in other localities out of state. The average time that a teacher had been teaching was 8.3 years with the majority falling into the one to six year range. Previous experience included running a group home and teaching reading, English, and Russian literature.

These participants’ education may be indicative of the varied paths to licensure for teaching special education. Some individuals had bachelor’s or master’s degrees in fields outside education with licensure certificates in special education, while others had bachelor’s in special education or speech pathology with master’s degrees in counseling and endorsements in special education. Still others had master’s degrees in special education. One participant indicated that a sibling with learning disabilities sparked interest in the field, leading him to becoming a special education teacher.

High school guidance counselors.

Eight guidance counselors participated in the study. They were in their late 20’s to 50’s and had between one and thirteen years of experience in their current position with the average being 7.8 years. The majority of participants had seven or more years experience as a counselor. Previous experience included teaching psychology or special education, and work at universities in counseling.
All guidance counselor participants indicated that they had master’s degrees in counseling, school counseling, or counseling education. One was a licensed professional counselor and another was working toward that licensure.

A numerical count of participants, their employment positions and their geographic location in Virginia is found in Table Eight below. Each participant was also assigned a pseudonym to help ensure anonymity. See Appendix D for a list of participants’ pseudonyms and employment positions.
Table 8
Study participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Geo-</th>
<th>4-Year</th>
<th>2-Year</th>
<th>Public School Division</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>graphic</td>
<td>Col./U.</td>
<td>Col./U.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Area of Virginia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>High school</th>
<th>Div.</th>
<th>Transition Coordinator</th>
<th>Special Ed. Teacher/</th>
<th>Guidance Case Manager</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Central</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southwest</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northwest</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Participant</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Document and Website Review

The triangulation process for this study includes a website review and the collection of documents from participants. Document information requested and the rational for its request can be found in Appendix E, along with the researcher’s website.
review form. The researcher decided to combine the document review and the website review. This was done because of such a wide variance in information provided by participants. A document review/website review checklist for four-year colleges/universities, two-year colleges/universities, and public school systems was developed for this process and is provided in tables Nine, Ten, and Eleven below.

Table 9

Four-year college/university document and website review

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>College 1</th>
<th>College 2</th>
<th>College 3</th>
<th>College 4</th>
<th>College 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mission statement</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staffing and personnel</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contact information</td>
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<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policies and procedures</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personnel training/knowledge</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to access accommodations (information, classes, support groups)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategies &amp; resources</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rights &amp; responsibilities</td>
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<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-advocacy/ self-determination</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Documentation</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<td>✓</td>
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</tr>
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<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item</td>
<td>College 1</td>
<td>College 2</td>
<td>College 3</td>
<td>College 4</td>
<td>College 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of disability</td>
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<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services, supports, accommodations available</td>
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<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-college programs</td>
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<td>✓</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publications</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty Resources/Handbooks</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>Transition information for college</td>
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<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data reports</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication/ Collaboration evidence</td>
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<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ease of finding information on website</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>N/A</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1=easy &amp; 5=hard</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 10
Two-year college/university document and website review

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>College 1</th>
<th>College 2</th>
<th>College 3</th>
<th>College 4</th>
<th>College 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mission statement</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staffing and personnel</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contact information</td>
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<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policies and procedures</td>
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<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item</td>
<td>College 1</td>
<td>College 2</td>
<td>College 3</td>
<td>College 4</td>
<td>College 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personnel training/knowledge</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to access accommodations (information, classes, support groups)</td>
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<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategies &amp; resources available</td>
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<td>✓</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rights &amp; responsibilities</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-advocacy/ self-determination</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Documentation</td>
<td>✓</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disability Criteria</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of disability</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services, supports, accommodations available</td>
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<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-college programs</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Publications</td>
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<tr>
<td>Faculty Resources/Handbooks</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transition information for college</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data reports</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication/ Collaboration evidence</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ease of finding information on website 1=easy &amp; 5=hard</td>
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<td>N/A 3</td>
<td>N/A 3</td>
<td>N/A 3</td>
<td>N/A 1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 11

Public school system document and website review

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>School System 1</th>
<th>School System 2</th>
<th>School System 3</th>
<th>School System 4</th>
<th>School System 5</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Indicator 14</td>
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<td>How to access accommodations</td>
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<td>(information, classes, support groups)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Item</td>
<td>School System 1</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Data reports</td>
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<td>✓</td>
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<td>Parent resource center activities for transition</td>
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<td>Diploma options &amp; requirements</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ease of finding information on website 1=easy &amp; 5=hard</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Website Review

Website reviews for all colleges/universities and public school systems and schools were completed after all interviews were finished for each educational institution. A guide was created for the website review that reflected the constructs of the study. This guide can be found in Appendix F. The researcher visited each website and explored it for information concerning transition and preparing students with disabilities to access accommodations in college. The website review guide was used to document this exploration. Information gathered from school division participants and high school participants was combined to present an overall picture of what was available for the school system as a whole. The researcher also noted how easy or difficult it was to find entrance to the website information. This was recorded on a continuum from one to five with one being easy, three adequate, and five hard.

Document Review

Participants were asked, at the conclusion of each interview, for supporting data or documents that would corroborate and enhance interview discussions. These documents were provided in person, by email, or were accessed via the educational institutions’ webpage. Several participants indicated that they would like to consult with supervisors about what they were at liberty to disclose. They were usually able to provide ample information to strengthen credibility of the information obtained through the interview process. Most provided information that was readily available; however, a few declined to provide any documents. Other participants kept the documents request form, completed it, and provided many documents for the researcher to review.
The document/website review garnered information to support interview responses. Colleges and universities had the most information available. Four-year colleges/universities had more information on their websites than two-year colleges. This information provided an overview of what was offered and was supplemented with specific and in-depth information for students, parents, and faculty. Ease of access to the website information ranged from “easy” to “adequate”.

School system information found was far less for the document/website review. The website review revealed the increased difficulty in finding information. Ease of access ranged from “somewhat easy” to “somewhat hard” for school systems. Items included on the website, with the exception of one school system, provided little information for students or parents.

Field Notes

Field notes were also made during and immediately after each interview. Participant’s reactions, behaviors, and surroundings were recorded immediately after each interview. This information was used to inform and compare with interview responses. See Appendix G for the field notes guide.

Stage II: Data Analysis and Management

Data Analysis

“Qualitative analysis transforms data into findings….In this complex and multifaceted analytical integration of disciplined science, creative artistry, and personal reflexivity, we mold interviews, observations, documents, and field notes into findings” (Patton, 2002, p. 432). The challenge of this process is to make sense of voluminous
amounts of data by sifting out the trivial, by reducing raw information to its component meaning units, and finding patterns within the data that are significant. These patterns are then reconstructed to form a framework that revealed the essence of the phenomenon.

Data for this study was analyzed by research question. Research questions, their constructs, and interview questions that were analyzed for each are found in Table 12 below.
Table 12

Data analysis by research question, constructs, and interview questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research question</th>
<th>Constructs</th>
<th>Interview questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. What are the preparation strategies/resources used by successful public school transition programs and postsecondary disability services programs in the preparation of students with disabilities for accessing accommodations in postsecondary education?</td>
<td>1. Preparation to access postsecondary education</td>
<td>6,7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How are they being implemented?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Do public school transition personnel and postsecondary DSS personnel believe that students with disabilities exiting high school are prepared to access accommodations in postsecondary education?</td>
<td>1. Participant /school information</td>
<td>1,2,3,4,5,6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Participant knowledge of differences in student rights and responsibilities</td>
<td>7,8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Preparation to access accommodations in postsecondary education</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research question</td>
<td>Constructs</td>
<td>Interview questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>---------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. What are the differences and similarities in the perceptions of DSS personnel and public school transition personnel about the preparation of students with disabilities exiting high school to access accommodations in postsecondary education?</td>
<td>Constructs from question two will be compared for differences and similarities between postsecondary personnel and high school personnel responses.</td>
<td>Interview questions for research question two will be compared for differences and similarities between postsecondary personnel and high school personnel responses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. What are the communication/collaboration strategies and resources used by successful public school transition programs and postsecondary disability services programs between personnel across systems about the</td>
<td>1. Communication across systems</td>
<td>9  8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

education

4. Self-advocacy & Self-determination

5. Improvements/changes/ additions
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research question</th>
<th>Constructs</th>
<th>Interview questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>preparation of students with disabilities to access accommodations in postsecondary education? How are these strategies/resources implemented or used?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Do public school transition personnel and postsecondary DSS personnel believe there is adequate communication/collaboration between personnel across systems about the preparation of students with disabilities to access accommodations in postsecondary education? Why or why not?</td>
<td></td>
<td>1. Communication across systems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Do DSS personnel and public school transition personnel believe that communication between secondary and postsecondary personnel impacts the preparation of students with disabilities to access reasonable accommodations in postsecondary education?</td>
<td>1. Communication across systems</td>
<td>11 10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
7. What are the differences and similarities in the perceptions of DSS personnel and public school transition personnel about the communication/collaboration of these personnel across systems and the impact of this communication?

Constructs from questions three and four will be compared for differences and similarities between postsecondary personnel and high school personnel responses.

Interview questions for research questions five and six will be compared for differences and similarities between postsecondary personnel and high school personnel responses.

Note: Constructs, research questions, and supporting literature may be found in table six.

Interview questions may be found in Appendix A.

Collected data was examined for units of meaning using an initial coding scheme that was fluid and changed to meet the information found in the data. It was adapted to emerging themes and categories as they occurred. These codes were added, deleted, or combined as necessary. As data analysis progressed, a final coding scheme emerged. This coding scheme was organized into a hierarchy and is presented in Appendix H.

During the data analysis process the researcher first read the interview transcripts. Interview transcripts were then coded using the data analysis software, Hyper-Research. Once transcripts were coded, each code was broken out by participants’ roles. The
information was then examined both by role and by the whole code. The researcher took
detailed notes on these reviews to aid in determining emerging themes and similarities
and differences in perceptions found between the two settings.

Data, codes, and emerging themes were examined by three reviewers (peer
debriefers) to check the researcher’s coding and understanding of it and to lessen the
effects of personal bias. Potential sources of bias identified for the researcher were the
researcher’s professional focus on transition to postsecondary education, a focus on self-
advocacy/self-determination, and past experience as a special educator.

Three peer debriefers were selected to gain alternate perspectives of those inside
and outside the field of special education. They included one reviewer who is both a
professional in special education and a mother of a child with a disability who has gone
through the transition process, one reviewer that was previously a special educator with
experience in transition that is now focused on educational leadership, and one reviewer
that had no experience with special education or transition. Refer to Table Six for an
examination of bias and peer debriefer’s characteristics.

Data management

Strict confidentiality of all data collected was maintained at all times and data
was kept in a secured location. No identifiers are used in the study, either for individuals
or entities in order to protect participant privacy.

Stage III: Testing Emergent Themes

Themes that emerged in this study were tested through peer debriefing and
comparison with the literature base. In addition, several methods were used in this study
to address rigor. They include triangulation strategies, the description of participants, and the use of participant voices through direct quotes. The researcher is comfortable that this study accurately represents participants’ perceptions in the findings and themes presented. These procedures are consistent with those described by Marshall and Rossman (2006) and Creswell (2007).

Limitations

Qualitative research provides an in-depth analysis of individual’s personal experiences with the phenomenon studied. It relies on relatively small numbers of participants to generate data and findings. Although data in this study was collected until the point of saturation was reached, it is possible that views exist that were not captured in this study.

The snowball sampling method focused on finding school systems that were perceived by four-year and two-year college/university participants as doing a better job than others in preparing students with disabilities for accessing accommodations in college. Although college DSS personnel see the result of school system preparation of students with disabilities to access accommodations in college and they were asked to provide recommendations based on their perceptions, there may be other school systems not recommended that are doing as good or better a job at preparing students. These perspectives are not present in this study. In addition, college DSS personnel typically see only those students that self-identify. The students that DSS personnel do not see may have skewed their perceptions of school systems that were doing a better job in preparing students with disabilities for postsecondary education.
This research study focused on students with disabilities preparation to access accommodations in college and was therefore focused on the preparation of students with disabilities capable of gaining admittance to four-year and two-year postsecondary education institutions. The results may not be of value for others outside that group of individuals.

The research was conducted with participants from public four-year and two-year colleges/universities and public school systems in Virginia. Findings may not be useful for private colleges/universities and they may not be representative outside of the Commonwealth of Virginia.
CHAPTER 4
STUDY FINDINGS

Introduction

Chapter four presents the findings of the study, addresses each of the prescribed research questions, and discusses the themes that emerged from the data. This study examined emerging best practices, strategies and resources used in the preparation of students with disabilities to access accommodations in postsecondary education. It also examined the perceptions held by DSS personnel and high school transition personnel about the extent to which students with disabilities are adequately prepared to access reasonable accommodations in the postsecondary education setting. The similarity and variance in perceptions held by postsecondary DSS personnel and public school transition personnel and the existing state of communication between personnel across systems was also examined. The chapter concludes with a conceptual framework of the study.

Data collected through interviews, document analysis, and a website review were examined for each research question. Results are presented below.

Preparation to Access Accommodations in Postsecondary Education

Research Question One

*What are the preparation strategies/resources used by successful public school transition programs and postsecondary disability services programs in the preparation
Public school systems and colleges are actively working to prepare students with disabilities to access accommodations in college. They are preparing transition plans and providing information on an individual basis, through transition events and fairs, and/or in elective classes. These classes are focused on the development of skills needed in college and adult life, including self-advocacy/self-determination. In lieu of these classes, transition planning, IEPs, and individual work with teachers/case managers are another way that students gain the skills needed.

Self advocacy was identified by study participants as the most important requirement for students planning to attend college after high school. Participants from all levels of the study referred to it as essential. Ella, a two-year disability services participant, provided an illustrative comment,

They have to be their own advocate. That’s the number one reason that a student is going to be successful is learning to become their own advocate. …It’s up to the student at the college level or university level to be their own advocate, to sign up for those accommodations, to send in a request on time, to sign a release so that the professors can understand where they’re coming from and what accommodations they need. And that is a very difficult thing for students to do when somebody else, the school and the parent, has done this for 12 years.

Echoing these same sentiments, Mandy, a special education teacher, indicated, “That’s probably my number one thing would be the self-advocacy skills.” Alex, a
guidance counselor also said the same thing. He responded, “I think the key ingredient, what I was saying before, is self-advocacy. They cannot rely on mom and dad to do everything.”

Participants felt that it was important for students with disabilities to practice self-advocacy skills while in high school to make them more comfortable and less intimidated with being their own self-advocate during college. School system participants indicated little opportunity to practice self-advocacy with students with disabilities that transition to college. Nancy summed this up best when she said,

So I think that’s where I think we need to do a better job with our seniors especially starting to practice that kind of stuff. It is hard for some kids to go and ask for their accommodations. Or talk to a professor. College is intimidating anyway, and then to have to say, here’s my accommodations and have to remind them to use them if they need them, it’s a tough, … that’s tough for some kids. … I think having the Disabilities Coordinator come in to College Night was huge this year… So things like that so we can make the parents more aware so they can help, you know, push their kid a little bit. It’s that kind of stuff and I think we're headed in the right direction, it’s just knowing how to figure out which kid may need that extra reinforcement or practice or role play, or whatever, trying to get, and I don't know where you squeeze it in during the day. That’s a problem. So I think we know what they need, but trying to make sure they have it all besides just telling them all this information.
Student knowledge of their disability and its impact on learning was also viewed as essential to student preparation for college by study participants. College and school system personnel alike noted that students needed to be able to understand and describe their disability and how it affects them in the classroom. They should also be able to indicate what accommodations will help them access learning. Janice, a four-year college DSS participant, noted this well by saying,

Well, I would educate the student in, first of all, understanding what his or her disability is, to explain it clearly and simply, to talk about it in light of what that person’s strengths and weaknesses are, to talk about what works and what doesn't work in terms of getting the job done, (i.e. what accommodations and services are helpful and what are not).

When asked about preparing students to access accommodations in college, Hanna, a guidance counselor, replied,

I think it all depends on how much the kid has really come to understand their disability, and it’s up to the schools, the counselors, the transition teachers, parents, to make sure it’s not just them in the IEP meetings without the student and doing all these things and the student is like, well, I get all these accommodations but I don’t really know why. So it’s our job to make sure that the kid knows what it is that they're receiving help for, that they are fully understanding of the disability.

Strategies and resources used by participants and their schools for preparing students with disabilities for accessing accommodations in college have several foci.
They include informational strategies, skill development strategies, and student knowledge strategies. Transition planning was also used as a means of preparation as were a variety of other strategies and resources.

*Informational Strategies*

Information about accessing accommodations in college for students with disabilities is gathered, shared, and provided to students with disabilities and/or their parents. Two issues in this area were knowledge of who to contact for information at the colleges and networking across and within systems.

College DSS personnel indicated that they were more than willing to talk with, provide information to, and meet with teachers and students about what they need when they get to the college setting in order to access accommodations. This service is not usually initiated by college staff. College personnel are first contacted by staff from the school systems and then they provide the information via publications and resource materials. College personnel also participate in transition fairs or events in the public school system. In addition, college DSS offices maintain websites that include information that students and their parents need to know. Janice, a participant from a four year university indicated that,

Well, first of all, we serve those students who come to us. And I think we do a very good job of that. Second of all, we try to market, inform our population and those students seeking [this college] as a possible school choice, we do our best to have a website that’s decent enough to provide information. We have certain pieces of information in the publications that go to students seeking entrance into
[this college]. We go when invited to share information. We entertain folks who come in from high school, those classes with students with disabilities if they come in, we are pleased to share information.

School system personnel contact college DSS staff to determine what colleges require in order for students to access accommodations. Since requirements are college specific, they initially provide students with disabilities general information about college requirements. Once they are accepted into a specific college, high school personnel often research and provide a contact person in the specific college’s DSS office so that students know who to contact for information at the college. School staff may also research and provide specific information about a particular college’s requirements for accessing accommodations or they may get students to do the research themselves. Two school system participants summed this up best. Yolanda, a special education teacher related that,

If they have a particular college in mind, we can tell them the name of the person, we look it up on the website together. We tell them the name of the person who runs the office there, who you’ll need to go see. So the more concise they are with their information, the more concise we can be. If they can narrow down the college, we can help them with the actual name. If they can’t narrow down the college, if they don’t know, then we provide, we tell them, this is what you look for on a website, or we’ll certainly go through different websites with them and say this is how you can find the information.

And Vince, a transition specialist noted that,
Whenever we're sitting in IEPs or even in the transition fairs setting when we're talking with parents and students, we're encouraging them if they're going towards college to go and talk to the school, either schools that are there, or schools that they might be interested in…. Yeah, and really trying to get them to “learn to fish” sort of. Because they're going to be fishing. We won’t be able to fish for them any longer…. they get some material here from the school, but then they need to go to the colleges and take that step of independence and really when we look at students that are headed towards college, we want to foster that independence. They're going to need to go be their own advocate to a great degree so we want them to start that process early, and this is good practice for them in that regard. So if we can kind of make that connection [at college fairs] and make the [college] people available to them, that’s who you need to talk to, that person right over there across the room, go talk to them now. Then I think that’s making the connection for these kids. …we want them to actually connect.

School systems also invite college representatives to participate in transition events or fairs where they provide information to students and parents. This is one of the major means of conveying needed information with almost all participants talking about transition fairs or events. Yolanda was a good example of this,

We have transition fairs and frequently, we do that once a year with other schools nearby and we have college professionals come and talk to us, people from [four-year and two-year colleges and universities], they have all come and participated
in panel discussions so not only are we made, but certainly parents and students are made aware if they attend, of course, of what is available at the college level.

A four-year DSS representative, Grace, indicated the same thing.

We send out information and I go as requested. High schools call me, we go, we attend transition fairs…. Basically the transition fairs and again, occasionally a specific teacher will call me and ask me to come to their high school to talk to their seniors or juniors or whatever but, I guess if you look at the transition fairs as being the primary mode then that’s it. And again, that focuses on students and parents. It really doesn't focus on the teachers although teachers do come and they gather the information.

One geographic area of Virginia has a transition network established where participants meet a few times a year to discuss transition issues. This network is made up of high school personnel, DSS personnel from the area colleges, and others involved in the transition of students with disabilities to college or work. Participants repeatedly referred to the network as very helpful in understanding the needs and limitations of both the postsecondary system and the public school system surrounding transition to college.

Janice, a four-year DSS participant and Kristen, a transition coordinator, spoke about the network. Janice said,

We have a network group that is very strong and has been up until this year, we haven’t met yet. That’s not a good thing, but we have a very vibrant network group which is our local subsection of the state AHEAD, local AHEAD group, and we have had strong participation in that including high school transition
specialists, and DRS, and college folks here…. That network group that I was
talking about is the primary group that fosters communication between
postsecondary and secondary issues in this area.

Kristen indicated the importance of networking in transition,

…you have to get out and network. You can’t do transition just staying within the
confines of the school, so I think it’s the responsibility to provide an avenue for
the school staff whether that be teachers or transition specialists or guidance
counselors to network with these individuals and it would be a joint thing where
we're bringing people in from the colleges and/or other postsecondary settings
and having them come into our environment earlier on so that the students can get
to network as well. …we used to have a transition network where all the
transition people, and this was just locally, … We actually would get together and
have transition resource fairs for all of the cities together and then we would
rotate from city to city, year after year. But that’s really important. The larger
your school division gets, it’s harder to do that, or the more, and the greater your
responsibility is within your school division, so it gets more difficult to meet on a
regular basis like that.

Skill Development Strategies

Development of skills needed after high school to promote success for students
with disabilities in college is a strategy used by public school transition personnel to
prepare students to access accommodations in college. Specific skills seen as essential
for the college setting by study participants were self-advocacy/self-determination,
student knowledge of their own disability, developing comfort with their identity as a person with a disability, and the confidence to self-disclose their disability in order to access accommodations.

Tammy, a division level participant, talked about this by saying,

Self-advocacy is enormous because again you're moving from K-12 which is based on law to not K-12 which isn't. So they need to know that if they're not going to speak up for themselves, that there's not going to be a professor chasing them down to find out what accommodations they need. I think disability awareness is huge because a lot of kids and families are not comfortable with that discussion happening with the student around the table. Now luckily we're supported with inviting students to IEP meetings at the high school level and it's now being driven by them so they're much more aware of what their specific disability is and what their needs are where they can speak up and say, “these aren’t really my needs at all”. I think that’s a huge step forward, the fact that we're saying at the high school level kids are going to be involved so that they know…

Study participants also saw study skills and communication skills as needed skills for the college setting. Ester and Trish, both school system personnel, indicated the difficulties that students with disabilities may encounter with study skills. Ester, a transition specialist, felt that colleges are,

…up against students that don’t have study skills. They're used to being in high school and here I decorated my notebook and I can get extra credit for that.
You're not going to get extra credit in college and college is a whole lot different than high school and I don't think until they've done it that they're going to see it.

Trish, a special education teacher, expanded on this theme indicating that,

It’s quite frightening, they've been 12 years, they've been told what time to get up, what to do in class, sit down, get your paper out, get your this and that, and then they go to college and they don’t have that. They need to learn, and we're working on note taking skills, all of those kinds of things that are kind of generic that they need more help with.

In addition to study skills, communication skills are needed in the college setting.

Xavier, a special education teacher spoke of the need of communication skills in accessing accommodations in college. He stated,

My overall understanding is that students who would like to apply for accommodations on a postsecondary level have to have the resources and ability to not only understand their accommodations and their particular situation but also be able to communicate that to the postsecondary institution. It is important that they do so simply because of the laws that are in place regarding parental, I hate to use the word responsibility but how students once they turn 18 really have to be able to communicate that information because their parents will not be able to.

These skills are taught by school system personnel to students with disabilities through transition focused courses or individually through IEP/transition planning efforts and goals. Self-advocacy goals, for example, are found in various transition curricula
used throughout the state in transition courses. Often these courses are focused on students transitioning to vocational education, work, or those needing a more functional oriented curriculum. The majority of these courses are elective courses which may not be viewed as essential for or by students with disabilities seeking to enter college. They may deem other electives more important in preparing for college. Tammy, a division level participant, noted that,

Although we do have personal development classes in all of our high schools which is specifically for self-determination and self-advocacy and disability awareness. Those are the three main components of that as well as how to fill out a job application and just functional skills because a lot of our kids with the modified standards that are working towards a modified standard diploma may be accessing that, and a lot of our kids on standard diploma, if they have elected space, will also be accessing that….I don't know how much of it has, I was hoping, and, again, I'm new, so I was hoping that I would find when I went looking at senior English classes that I’d find some of that, but I'm not finding as much as I would have liked to. I think that that would be a good training opportunity, would be to get those case managers in and talk to them about what is the procedure for transitioning to college and for developing self-advocacy and developing all of the rest of that. That's on my list of things for the summer.

A transition specialist from the same school division, Vince, when asked if this transition focused class hits all students with disabilities, indicated that, “It’s really not hitting all students because it’s in there as an elective.”
Students with disabilities, transitioning to college, work individually with high school staff to learn these skills. Trish, a special education teacher indicated, when asked what the preparation of students with disabilities to access accommodations in college was like at her school, replied that,

> We have one of our classes is called an Academic Lab. And that’s where we work part of the time on postsecondary skills, whether it’s going to college, whether it’s going into the work force, and all of that together kind of works in. And the students who don’t have, we meet with them, they're very involved in their IEP, it’s crucial that they are involved in their IEP so a lot of discussion goes on there.

Several participants indicated that students with disabilities transitioning to college are falling through the cracks of the preparation system in high school. While students transitioning to work or vocational education often have access to transition focused courses that develop the skills needed after high school, those transitioning to college do not have the same access. Finding a way to prepared students with disabilities transitioning to college is tricky. Vince, a transition specialist, indicated that it’s a,

…tricky element to find a venue for that, for us to talk with those students. Those students we don’t have as great an access to as the students in a functional classroom. They have so much more flexibility in their schedule. The students who are looking at going to college are looking at adding up all those credits and making sure they’ve got the appropriate classes and so forth and so on that they’re going to look good on paper for a college and that they’re going to be
prepared. And so, when we’re offering them classes along the lines of the [transition preparation] class, people are shying away.

Participants were asked if the transition skills of self-advocacy or self-determination were embedded in the general education curriculum so that all students could work on development of these skills. A lot of school personnel indicated that it was difficult to teach and practice transition skills. For instance, there was no mechanism set up to practice self-advocacy skills. Francis, a special education teacher noted that,

Okay, but there's no mechanism set up for them to be able to practice the self-advocacy skills within a classroom, I mean, the classroom as a whole practice them? In a team-taught I haven’t seen, I haven’t seen that, I mean, it’s something that could be done with everyone. That would be good to get the skill that everybody needs, that they could all use, otherwise you sit there and wonder why you don’t get and everybody else does.

School system personnel indicated that they knew what students needed, but didn’t know how to work it in during the day. Speaking about teaching self-advocacy, Nancy, a transition specialist noted that,

So we kind of know what they need, but getting them to practice it and feel confident and comfortable doing these things…. Well, I think I know what they need, it’s how to get the information, well, we get the information to them, but how do we practice with them, how do we prepare them better, I guess, and how do we do that? I mean, we can practice and resource the kids, and research and
then a lot of the kids who don’t have a research class, who are just monitor status who have an IEP but, how, I guess it’s more how can we do a better job. We give them the information, but do you understand what I mean, how can we work with them more extensively and practice and try to …… So I think we know what they need, but trying to make sure they have it all besides just telling them all this information.

One teacher, however, indicated that he does embed teaching transition skills, including self advocacy, within SOL (Standards of Learning) driven lessons. Xavier stated that,

I'll speak for myself, I embed a lot of the transition goals and teaching about accommodations and teaching about disability support and so forth within the classroom setting. So within the lessons, there’s strategic plans for students to understand how this information can be tied into their transition goal, whatever that may be. And a lot of my teachers, or a lot of our teachers here at [this school] are incorporating those strategies as well, which I think is an effective way to have students get that knowledge…. just not being afraid to go there, to understand that we have academic responsibilities but also to understand that we have responsibilities when they graduate and leave high school because that’s our ultimate goal, to prepare them for that future, so whether I'm teaching a lesson on math skills, and I'm targeting a particular SOL goal, being able to use transition resources within that lesson, to prepare students for that transition ideal whatever they're planning for.
No participants indicated that practice of skills was specifically addressed in IEP/Transition plans. Students may have goals linked to self-advocacy, as noted above, but no specific references to a time or mechanism to practice was discussed.

**Student Knowledge Strategies**

Development of knowledge by students and school personnel is another strategy used to prepare students for accessing accommodations in college. Acquisition of knowledge for students focuses mainly on knowledge of their disability, the procedures for accessing accommodations, and the documentation requirements of postsecondary education.

Students gain knowledge of their disability and its impact on their learning by planning for and participating in their IEP. They may also lead their IEP development process. Tammy, a division level representative, spoke to this,

I think disability awareness is huge because a lot of kids and families are not comfortable with that discussion happening with the student around the table. Now luckily we're supported with inviting students to IEP meetings at the high school level and it's now being driven by them so they're much more aware of what their specific disability is and what their needs are where they can speak up and say, ‘these aren’t really my needs at all.’ I think that’s a huge step forward, the fact that we're saying at the high school level kids are going to be involved so that they know…

Rachael, a special education teacher, when asked about student knowledge of their disability and its impact on their learning indicated that her students helped with the
creation of their own IEP to help them understand their disability and its impact. She stated that,

We have started where the students actually help us write their present level, so that’s worked out really well, where they tell us what their problems are. They tell us where they struggle, they tell us what they're really good at, and they tell us what their interests are. So we help make the IEP with them.

Self-advocacy is also tied to the IEP through student’s individualized goals. Brittany, a division level representative, and Zena, a guidance counselor both talked about the specific inclusion of self-advocacy goals in students IEPs. Brittany relayed that,

One of the big things that we do is we're working on student led IEPs. We just started working with the I’m Determined site, that’s the Department of Education’s site, and we've been working on self-advocacy. We have self-advocacy goals included in every IEP, self-advocacy and self-determination. Every transition plan.

Knowledge of the procedures for accessing accommodations and documentation requirements for students with disabilities in college are found through attending and participating in transition fairs and events. Information is also obtained individually through high school staff or web related research. Vince, a transition specialist indicated that transition fairs were a big part of educating students about the procedures for accessing accommodations in college. He stated that,
…we’ve been bringing some representatives from [a four-year college] disability services office, some people from [a two-year college]…We’ve brought in people…to give them [students with disabilities and their parents] some sampling and some idea of what the process is like at the college level. So we encourage people to come in and talk to them.

Yolanda, a special education teacher also spoke to this when she said,

We have Transition Fairs and frequently, … we have college professionals come and talk to us [from various colleges and universities], they have all come and participated in panel discussions so not only are we made, but certainly parents and students are made aware if they attend, of course, of what is available at the college level.

Gina indicated that knowledge about accessing accommodations in college was included in transition classes as well as related individually. She also indicated that students would need to document their disability in postsecondary education. She stated that,

…we do tell the students, just because you have all of this here, there's not a guarantee that you're going to have it there. And it’s not, you can’t walk in and say, here’s my IEP, I want this. They don’t really care that you had an IEP. They want to know were you all right now; and how you can document it. So we're pretty specific with that.
Personnel Knowledge Strategies

School personnel, both high school and college, attend conferences, professional development activities, and participate in networking to gain increased knowledge of what is needed/required to access accommodations in college. Doreen and Kristen, transition specialists, and Yolanda, a special education teacher, spoke to this when asked how they gained their knowledge or understanding of what was required to access accommodations in postsecondary education.

Doreen indicated that trainings and conferences were an important way of gaining knowledge. She stated that her information was gained,

Through a lot of different trainings, especially the first year on the job, all the transition teachers attend the [transition conference] and that is held annually and that is probably where we get the most knowledge, … all the different laws, like IDEA versus ADA so the various trainings throughout the year, but the biggest one would be the [transition conference].

Yolanda indicated that she gained her knowledge from professional development offered by her school system and from communication with college personnel. She relayed that,

Our Central Office certainly trains us, provides the initial information and then probably most of it has come from college personnel at the Career Fairs or my making phone calls and asking, you know, I heard this is accurate, can you clarify that for me? Especially when it came to the testing portion. Do they really need an updated psychological, within how many years, that kind of thing. So I do make phone calls.
Kristen indicated that networking was an essential part of transition for staff knowledge. She stated that,

Talking directly to people who are working in it every day, also having them as a resource and they share information with us, and we share information. We find out what they need, we kind of tell them what our students need or what we need, so I think that’s one of the best ways because even on any given day, you can’t be totally on top of everything dealing with postsecondary education …So having them come and talk about their particular college also helps because sometimes you can’t assume that certain things go on because it happens here, it doesn't necessarily happen here, or it may look different here or there, so having those type of connections and networking really helps to keep us abreast of what’s going on.

Personnel read, research, and access college web sites to get information. Lisa, a DSS participant, indicated that knowledge of other staff members and networking with personnel in other offices helped to develop information. Reading and research also contributed to her knowledge base. She stated that,

Well, because of some of the staff that we’ve had in the past in this office, some of our staff that we've had in the past have actually come from the secondary or K-12 grades, most of them, usually 6th or 7th grade. So a lot of my knowledge base really has come from them. And the other thing that we've tried to do too, is have one person that stays active in working with K-12 grades whether it’s a transition program or a conference or something like that. And also the ADA
director on campus, her background is in that area too. And she still stays active
in some of those organizations. So sometimes we have some shared information
with her office. So I would say basically that’s one way that we gain our
information and stay abreast of what’s going on. And the other thing is the
reading of journals and articles, and research and things like that. Plus we have
the [transition] program that I talked about a little bit earlier this afternoon where
we do have transition counselors and the high school guidance counselors and
whoever wants to participate and be a part of that too.

Laura, a transition specialist, relayed that,

I just looked it all up on the, if you go to the National Department of Education, it
gives you, they have pamphlets that explain it and what the rights and
responsibilities of the students and of postsecondary environments are, so you can
look all of that up and I just read it all so I could know.

High school personnel rely on other staff expertise as a source of information.

Xavier, a special education teacher, indicated that,

We use a lot our Transition Coordinators for the county, we rely on them to feed
us information and vice versa about the process and what new ideas and new
strategies are coming up so they're also a resource.

Many wish that their teacher/counselor education program had contained more
information about transitioning students with disabilities to college. Xavier, a special
education teacher, when asked what he would like to discuss or see change noted that,
The only change, again, I think would be appropriate would be to be able to have everyone prepared to a certain degree about the process. I think from a postsecondary institution standpoint there can be some more classes and supports for teachers to learn that information.

The researcher then sought to paraphrase and clarify his answer by asking, “So in a teacher preparation program, teachers should be getting more information about students going on to college and how they would need to provide that information?” He replied,

Exactly. I think that would be the one thing I would like to see heightened, but also the school taking responsibility for understanding the long-term goals and the purpose of transition planning, so having some professional development on that, I don’t think that would hurt.

Other secondary personnel relied on the trial and error method of gaining knowledge. Willa, a special education teacher, indicated that, “Trial and error, I'm afraid. Just working with students and finding out what their needs were and what the school expected.”

Zena, a guidance counselor, brought to light a trend found with the majority of the guidance counselors that participated in this study. Guidance counselors, who are considered part of the transition team, have little knowledge of what students with disabilities must do to access accommodations in college. Zena was asked whether she thought she had enough knowledge or understanding about students with disabilities accessing accommodations in college. She replied,
No, I don't think I have enough knowledge myself. I think that’s something that is always good to be learning about and being, keeping up on that. I don't think that I, and I think I could probably speak for everybody in the department, I don't think that we really know a whole lot about how students are able to access the accommodations and that sort of thing.

Asked if that information would be helpful she indicated,

Oh definitely I think it would be helpful. I don’t always like to rely on another person to get information from when sitting down and doing the interviews that we do, because we do a junior and a senior interview where we sit down and we lay out all the information. Having to refer them to their case manager who has all that kind of information. I don't always [like] to kind of outsource that way but I don't feel like I have a whole lot of information when it comes to, I mean, I think that I could go and I could find that information if asked specifically, but I don't feel like I have a lot of knowledge in that area.

Zena was then asked if her counselor training had touched on students with disabilities at all she indicated that,

Some, but not, it was not a specific class, nothing like that. A lot of our training was on the softer skills, that’s kind of what the counselor training is, you know, how to listen, how to communicate, that sort of thing. We do training on research but there was never a specific class on how to deal with or how to work with students with disabilities. I had that limited knowledge from the time that I was a special education teacher, but it was at a different level, and it’s completely
different at the middle school level than it is at the high school level. I'm fortunate that I had, you know, coming I knew how to read an IEP, knew how to find like if this new student came in, I could, I knew where in the IEP to go and look and see what kind of classes, what kind of accommodations, that sort of thing because I was familiar with it. But there's no specific training for counselors as far as students with disabilities.

Some participants also indicated that they wished for more school system focus on transition to college for students with disabilities. Vince, a transition specialist indicated that,

We come very much from the background of working with the functional classroom, I think, primarily, in transition as a whole that we've focused very much on those students in a functional curriculum. And looking at getting them employment and that sort of thing. And we need to be looking at students who may not be as significantly disabled, and who are looking at going and getting some more education and enhance their careers that way.

The difference in rights and responsibilities between high school under IDEA and college under the ADA is not much of a focus for high school staff. When asked about whether they talked about the differences in rights and responsibilities between high school and college, Noel, a special education teacher said, “Not specifically. We talk about how once they leave high school it’s their responsibility if they want accommodations that they have to go seek them out, nobody is going to come and check up on them”, while Rachael, a guidance counselor, simply said, “No.” Some participants
did indicate that they went over the different rights and responsibilities between high
school and college. Typical of these responses, Willa, a special education teacher, stated
that, “Yes, and actually we have a couple of pamphlets. One of them is called, Now
You’re 18, that we use with them. We have a couple, or at least one, on going into
postsecondary education that we give them.”

Rights and Responsibilities

The difference in rights and responsibilities between high school and
postsecondary was cited by many DSS participants as an area in which incoming students
lack knowledge. Participants indicated that they provided instruction/information for
students when they seek accommodations. Lisa, a four-year college participant, stated
that,

So the biggest problem is that when they get here, they're so used to their parents
handling everything, they still think it should be that way. And I'm very quick to
tell them, as are the rest of the staff, that you need to understand, we don’t track
you while you're here. If you're having difficulty, you have to come in and talk to
us because I won’t know that you've made a bad grade or that you're not attending
class unless, of course, a professor could call me and tell me that, but it's not
likely. So, and there are some accommodations if you don't go to class, you're not
going to get those accommodations like notes, you know, it’s not a service that
we just give you when you can’t go to class. You have to go to class to get the
accommodation. So I think that’s the biggest problem that I see and the biggest
hurdle, students not understanding what their responsibility is when they first get here.

Kate, another four-year DSS participant indicated that,

…what we end up having to do is train the student before we can even give them their accommodations. We have to tell them it’s your responsibility to come by here and talk to us. It’s your responsibility to fill out this form. It’s your responsibility to talk to your professor. And they've never done any of that. So I think we're limited by the transition services that the schools are giving to the students and they're limited by time basically. I don't think I have ever heard a college counselor, I mean, a high school counselor say that they had time to really sit down and talk to the students about ‘here’s what’s going to happen when you go to college, it’s going to be like this.’ Or even maybe to give them referral names. I know a lot of students who come here don’t, they don’t know to contact us…. I would like students when they become freshmen here or any college to have this under their belt. They know what I need to do the minute I'm accepted to that college, I need to hightail it over to the Office of Students with Disabilities and get things going maybe in June or July before I even start school in August. But we get so few students who actually do that. Every once in a while we'll get one and we're just amazed, you know, it’s like, oh my gosh, this person is just on top of everything! It’s wonderful! But it hardly ever happens. In fact, what I've seen since I've been here this semester is we had a rash of students identify themselves in November.
College personnel often must inform students and parents about the documentation required to access accommodations. Christy, a two-year college DSS participant, related that, “Parents are often very surprised, for instance, that the provision of documentation of a disability is their responsibility and that students must self-identify and must meet academic and technical standards for the programs they are entering.”

Frank, a four-year DSS participant, indicated that,

…it would really be helpful for me on a day-to-day basis if the documentation requirements were clear to the students and the guidance counselors and the families prior to the students arriving here because it’s really challenging when I don’t have anything to work with and have to either say, ‘I'm sorry, until we get this’, which is a time consuming process, ‘there’s not much we can do for you except recommend some of those other services that I mentioned.’

School system participants indicated that there was individual planning and services for students with disabilities seeking to attend college. They pointed out that transition and IEP planning and services were individual, resulting from the student’s goals for after they graduate high school and that student preparation was driven by the IEP/transition plan.

*Transition Planning Strategies*

Transition planning was done with the student’s postsecondary goals in mind. Goals were formulated and teachers try to impart the skills that students will need to accomplish those goals after high school. Mandy, a special education teacher summed this up by saying,
Well, all of our students have a transition plan which we all know is required by law, and have goals for everything like postsecondary education, postsecondary employment, and independent living regardless of whether they're going on a college track or not, because all three of those are important once you get out of school. I mean, you may not go to college, but your postsecondary education could involve some vocational training or something like that. So we're trying to address all three aspects.

College participants perceive that high school staff is more concerned with making sure that students graduate than other things needed for college. They believe that school system personnel are focused more on immediate versus long range objectives. Christy, a two-year DSS participant said this,

I think one of the biggest dilemmas is understanding the transition out of the secondary entitlement program into an adult setting of eligibility, success versus access, self-advocacy… all of those issues. Secondary personnel are so busy meeting the goals of helping the students to graduate and the cross over to postsecondary is not always as strong as it could be. They are busy with transition plans, IEPS, SOPs and meeting the present needs of the students under their guidelines and laws…. Therefore, students and parents are not always prepared to transition into the world of ‘No more IEPS’, eligibility vs. entitlement, self-advocacy, reasonable accommodation rather than special education and the other differences that will help students successfully transition into the world of ADA.
Both college and school system staff are concerned about students having realistic goals. Two-year college DSS staff pointedly remarked that some students believe that they are capable of a college education, when in fact they test extremely low and only meet the minimum criteria for admittance. They often spend much time and money on remedial classes only to drop out. Diana, a two-year college participant spoke to this,

It’s a real struggle that we have as community colleges and I can’t speak for everybody, but generally we have open admission, and we require a student to be 18 years old and have either a GED or a high school diploma. We do require a placement test. Now, when the State of Virginia started giving four different kinds of diplomas, everybody who registers [here] checks, yes, I have a diploma, which in fact might be a special diploma or might be a certificate of attendance, but parents and students alike believe it’s a diploma. We’ve struggled with this because if they take the placement test, and they do meet the minimum ability to benefit, that is fine by me, … we have to go ahead and allow them to come in and take classes….until they can bring that level up to college level… and quite frankly what happens is they come here, they take developmental math, or developmental English, they don't’ pass. They take it again, they take it again, and as soon as they use 30 hours of the financial aid in developmental classes, they’re gone…. and there's nothing more heartbreaking to me than having a student sit across from the desk just crying uncontrollably because they can’t understand what’s been taught in the classroom even at the lowest level. We don’t know how to stop that….at other 4 year colleges they have admission standards and that
kind of thing and that is not so much a problem for them. But it’s a huge problem for community colleges everywhere. When I go and talk to other people from all parts of the country, it’s huge.

She continued by saying,

…we all agree it’s just not fair for anyone - parents, teachers, schools - to tell somebody if you try hard enough, you can do it. We all have to face our own limitations. And to put that on a student who is not ready for that level of work, it is devastating when they come in here and say ‘I don’t understand, I can’t understand a thing they're talking about.’ And then I have teachers coming to my doorway, ‘I have students in my classes, they don’t understand.’ It’s very frustrating for everybody…. it’s good to have dreams and it’s good to tell all children to dream but I think we need to be, to give them a little bit of a reality check once in a while and most of them come to that on their own.

*Other Strategies*

Other preparation strategies participants talked about to a lesser degree were weaning students with disabilities off accommodations that are not available in the college setting. They also spoke of the use of student developed portfolios so that students would have examples of their work and knowledge of themselves. College personnel discussed the need for students to use technology to a greater degree. They also suggested that students use college wide supports, such as learning or writing centers that are available to all students on campus.
Summary of Research Question One

School system personnel and college DSS personnel are actively working to prepare students with disabilities, who have a goal of college, for accessing accommodations in that setting. The strategies and resources that they employ to meet this end focus on providing information, student skill development, and student knowledge. They also focus the on the knowledge of personnel.

Transition planning plays a large role in the provision of information to students and parents as well as the development of student knowledge. Transition/IEP planning is also one of the main avenues by which students develop knowledge about their disability and learn to self-advocate. Self-advocacy, seen as the most important skill needed for college success by students with disabilities, is often included as a transition goal.

Transition planning is the primary way that students and parents have access to the knowledge and information that school system personnel have.

Personnel from both educational systems want students to have realistic transition goals for life after high school. They saw the need for students with disabilities to set realistic goals for transition which do not overestimate student skills and academic preparation for college. Participants from colleges/universities see that students with unrealistic goals for college often waste time and money. They become frustrated, drop out, and end up with lower levels of self-esteem.

School personnel say that they know what students need to be prepared for college, but struggle to find ways to fit self-advocacy, and other transition skill instruction/practice into the day, unless students take an elective, transition focused
course. Transition courses are often focused on functional skills and may not be seen as essential for students seeking to enter college and/or students may not have an elective slot to work them in. Embedding transition skills instruction and practice into SOL driven lessons for all students is an avenue for practice that was spoken about and practiced by one participant. Other participants indicated that they had not seen this, but that all students would benefit. This conundrum leaves students seeking a college education and their parents to develop these essential skills on their own. With the traditional focus of transition having been on students needing a more functional curriculum, participants expressed a wish to see more school system focus on students with disabilities transitioning to college.

Student knowledge is also developed through attending transition events and fairs, individual interaction with high school staff, and/or through web searches. Transition fairs and events are one of the most important ways that DSS personnel provide information for students with disabilities. Through these events, students often become aware of the procedures for accessing accommodations in college and of the documentation requirements that individual colleges have.

School personnel gain increased knowledge of requirements to access accommodations in college by attending transition fairs/events, conferences, and professional development activities, but funding for participation in these types of events has been severely curtailed. Personnel also read, research, access college websites, and rely on other staff for information and knowledge. Teachers and school counselors wish that their university education courses had contained more information on students with
disabilities preparing to access accommodations in college. They would also like to see more professional development offered around this topic. In one area of Virginia, both DSS personnel form the colleges/universities and school systems participate in networking to gain an understanding of the needs and issues of the other educational system.

Student understanding of rights and responsibilities and how they differ from K-12, under the IDEA, to postsecondary education, under the ADA, is not much of a focus for participating school system personnel. This is an area in which DSS personnel see that students with disabilities entering postsecondary education lack knowledge. Disability services personnel often provide instruction about rights and responsibilities under the ADA prior to discussing accommodations with students. Another area that they often must inform students of is documentation of disability. This is of particular concern because it creates a delay in the ability to provide accommodations for students and may result in students struggling or failing. College personnel perceive that school system personnel are more focused on getting students with disabilities to graduate than on preparing them for postsecondary education.

Research Question Two

Do public school transition personnel and postsecondary DSS personnel believe that students with disabilities exiting high school are prepared to access accommodations in postsecondary education? Why or why not?

College DSS personnel and school system personnel responded to this question with a variety of views. College personnel were less positive than school system
personnel about the adequacy of preparation of students with disabilities to access accommodations in college. Table 13 below indicates how study participants responded to this question. Their answers were categorized as Yes, No, and those that had Mixed feelings about the adequacy of preparation.

Table 13
Adequacy of Preparation

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Institution Level</th>
<th>Participant level</th>
<th>Responses: Are students with disabilities adequately prepared to access accommodations in college?</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>No</td>
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<tr>
<td>College Participants</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Guidance Counselors</td>
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</table>

College DSS staff, when asked about adequacy of preparation to access accommodations in college by students with disabilities, tended to perceive that students
were not adequately prepared, or they had mixed feelings about their preparation. Harold, a four-year college participant, indicated mixed feelings about the adequacy of preparation when he stated that,

Sometimes [they are prepared], not always. I would say the majority of students aren’t prepared… Yes, they are not. They know to come to this office, but they really don’t know what they should bring, what documentation means, how we determine their accommodations.

Other college participants indicated that even though the current state of student preparation was not adequate, it was substantially better than a few years ago. Janice, a four-year college participant, saw improvement in student preparation to access accommodations in college. She responded to the study question about adequacy of student preparation by answering,

More so all the time. I have definitely seen an improvement in the ability of students to explain their disabilities and the ability of students to talk about what accommodations are helpful for them. I have seen an improvement in coming sooner rather than later to request help. At the same time, there is a certain percentage of students who just want to avoid us like the plague because finally they can do it on their own or think they can. So they have to learn the hard way.

No college DSS personnel indicated that there was adequate preparation of students with disabilities for accessing accommodations in college, while one participant spoke of the change in mindset required and the brief time during which it needed to take place.

Christy, a two-year participant related that,
I think that the students are not as prepared as they could be. They’ve worked to get through the high school. Now they’re thinking “Beach Week, I’m 18, I’m done.” The parents are still stressing and worrying because they still want what’s best for their child. And I think it’s just a huge leap to get from that point of graduating from high school to: “now, okay, here’s my new mindset.” And even though we do collaborative trainings, we do workshops, there is that gap. In some respects, I truly believe it would be really great if students could take a year off and sort of regroup without the structure of high school, as adults. I just think it’s such a fast turnaround – so many changes and the way services are conducted, how they’re conducted, what they need to do. You graduate the end of May, and now here it is the beginning of August, you supposed to completely have a new mindset. I think that’s hard but I don’t know how we would fix it. It is as much a struggle for the parents as the student because it is so different. I think it is getting better over the years though. More and more parents understand the requirements; they just need to help their son or daughter learn self-advocacy.

School system personnel were more positive about the preparation of students with disabilities for accessing accommodations in college. Many school system participants believe that students are adequately prepared. Ingrid, a guidance counselor, summed this viewpoint up by saying, “I do feel, are they prepared in that they're aware of what they need to do? Yes. Whether they’ll actually follow through on it, I don't know. But I think we prepare them. Absolutely.” Other school system participants indicated
that they feel mixed about students’ adequacy of preparation to access accommodations in college. Brittany, a division level representative indicated that,

I think some are and some aren’t. I think there's a lot of variance there. I've seen students who are fabulous self-advocates and are right up front and have no problem talking to anyone about their disability and what they need. And then I've also seen students who have a very difficult time doing that, and once they get there [college], they won’t do it. So I would say it’s very much a mix. It depends on the student’s individual personality a lot of the times.

Few school system participants indicated that students were not adequately prepared to access accommodations in college, but those that did felt strongly about their views. Xavier, a special education teacher indicated that he did not believe that students with disabilities were prepared to access accommodations in college. He stated that,

I believe that students are not aware, are not educated enough on the accommodation process, on what are their accommodations, and how to effectively use and communicate what their accommodations are, how to connect with the postsecondary institutions and communicate that information. I think that there is a lack of knowledge and a lack of training that the secondary institution does for students.

The reasons for their perceptions varied. Some perceive that college bound students with disabilities are “falling through the cracks”. Gina noted that if students did not take the basic skills class [which is usually an elective] students and their parents were on their own in gathering information needed for college. She stated,
…most of the students at some point in time, take a Basic Skills class and that’s part of the curriculum in Basic Skills is helping them recognize what they need to do for the next step after high school…. If they don’t take a Basic Skills class, then it really falls on the shoulders of the parent and the student to get that information. …But, again, if [they are in] the Basic Skills class, I show them that video on self-advocacy in college, that’s done by [a four-year Virginia College’s] students, it’s very eye opening for our students.

Others note that the level of involvement and support that students with disabilities are mandated to receive in high school and throughout their K-12 education under IDEA, hinders the development of self-advocacy skills and the independence needed to succeed in college. Nancy, a transition specialist noted that in college,

They have to do all this stuff [request accommodations] and our kids aren’t used to doing that because it’s been done for them for years. I mean, they've never had to… I mean, the teachers, we send the accommodations to the teachers as the case manager, we've never, …So now the responsibility falls on them.

Frank, a four-year DSS participant summed it up with this,

I think that another impact is that sometimes the students aren’t really, don’t know how to navigate higher education once they get here because they've been kind of, some of them again, it’s hard to speak in generalizations here, but some of them have been kind of coddled by the system and/or their parents so they haven’t developed some of the necessary attitudes and skills that will allow them to be successful when they arrive here. So, you know, things that the system
might be able to do to continue to nurture the students sense of self, their identity, self-advocacy skills, being able to explain the limitations of their disability, their strengths, and knowing what accommodations are the most beneficial to them, what services are the most beneficial to them.

One participant observed that student empowerment may get put on the back burner because of the pressures associated with completing high school for a student with disabilities. Kristen, a transition specialist noted that,

    Well, I guess as with anything else, some may be more prepared than others. It’s kind of like it is what you make it. If you take advantage of the services or you’re encouraged to take advantage of the services within the schools and talking to the guidance counselors and having a very good transition plan that you have those things built into to teach you and empower you. I think it makes all the difference. If you kind of have a kind of passive, and don’t take advantage of your resources, or just kind of wait until you get out of high school and then, you know, you’re going to try to pursue things, I think it all is what you make it and it’s all in the support that you receive and having people around you, whether it’s parents or teachers or guidance counselors or administrators, whoever it happens to be to encourage you and you follow through, you could certainly, if you’re a student who’s preparing to go to college, that’s something that you should be expected to be able to do. But I think you have to be encouraged to do that and sometimes some of our students, particularly our students in the special education programs, are kind of bogged down with everything else just trying to get through
the classes, trying to get the tutoring and extra resources, and sometimes just being empowered kind of gets put on the back burner or some things just kind of get shoved aside until and then until, it might be after graduation.

Personnel from the school systems and the colleges indicate that student preparation to access accommodations in college depends on (1) student characteristics, (2) the quality and training of teachers/case managers, and (3) parental support, understanding, and high expectations for their children with disabilities. An example of this was provided by Frank, a four-year DSS participant, who responded to the adequacy of preparation question by stating,

Some are and some aren’t. And I think it’s kind of a result of partly the student themselves and their view of themselves as a person with a disability. Part of it is connected to their familial life and what goes on with that. And part of it is connected with the same thing, how the school system that they're navigating has kind of prepared them. So I think it depends on an accommodation of those factors.

Mandy noted that student preparation depends on the case manager’s ability to teach and the student’s ability to learn self-advocacy. She answered,

It depends on who your case manager is, I think. I would like to say yes, all of them are but I think some case managers are stronger at teaching the children self-advocation skills so I really think it depends on who your case manager is. I’d love to say globally across the city absolutely but I've seen just from our building
certain children are more capable of self-advocating than others and sometimes it’s based on the kid’s personality.

Parent expectations also play a role in student preparation to access accommodations in college. Alex, a guidance counselor indicated this by saying,

I'll go back again to what I've previously said which is that a lot of that drive and determination comes from the parents, because of the parents expectations of the kids because I think it’s just like anything else. More often than not students are going to meet expectations that are put out there. They want to succeed.

Many school system participants indicated that they felt that the schools had done all that they could to prepare students and that it was up to the students to do it and follow through. Indicative of these was Sheila, a transition specialist who said,

We tell the kids it’s the kids. The kids are responsible. That it’s not going to happen unless they do it. It’s not the parents, we can set them up, we can give them all the information, we can train them, we can show them, we can tell them, we can take them over for a visit, we can introduce them to the people, but it’s not going to happen unless they make it happen.

School system personnel lack feedback about their preparation of students with disabilities to access accommodations in college. They have little or no indication of what the results of their preparation efforts are. They have nothing to base program improvements on, nor do they know if existing programming is effective. Vince, a transition specialist, expressed these views when he said,
We're not seeing enough of what the end results are so we're putting forth these efforts and we're not necessarily seeing the feedback of how effective are they in that regard. And then I think there's always, you always kind of want to utilize some of that feedback to hone your methods so that you can be more efficient and be more effective. But we don’t have that feedback yet for the most part. I think we need so much more ongoing kind of feedback in that regard.

Summary of Research Question Two

The majority of school system personnel believe that students with disabilities are adequately prepared to access accommodations in college. College personnel are less positive about their preparation. They note the change in mindset (i.e. difference in rights and responsibilities) needed between high school, under the IDEA, and college, under the ADA. School system personnel believe that they have done all that they can to adequately prepare students with disabilities to access accommodations in college and that students just need to follow through.

College DSS personnel perceive a lack of education during high school about the college accommodation process, student’s accommodations, and how student’s communicate their needs to college DSS staff and professors. They believe that the reasons that students are not adequately prepared hinge on traditional systemic design around transition.

Students seeking college are “falling through the cracks” of the transition preparation system that high schools currently have in place. Transition courses offered to students with postsecondary goals of vocational education or work, are not geared
toward those that are seeking to attend college, therefore college-bound students are not likely to access them. These students are left to develop the skills needed after high school individually through their IEP/transition plan. Participants perceive that school system priorities focus first on getting students with disabilities to graduate and not enough on the development of skills needed for life after high school.

Development of the skills needed in college (i.e. self-advocacy and independence) is also hindered by the mandates of the IDEA. Provision of accommodations under this system, are automatic once students are identified and the IEP is written. Students have little desire or need to self-advocate with parents or school personnel taking care of it for them. Independence and self-advocacy are not fostered.

Student preparation to access accommodations in college also depends on the student’s own characteristics and influences. First, it depends on their view of disability and their comfort with being a student with a disability, which results in part from both family and school influences. Second, preparation is reliant upon the quality and training of the teacher/case manager and their ability to teach self-advocacy and other skills needed in college. Third, parental knowledge, support, and expectations for their student with disabilities play a role in student preparation.

Complicating all of these factors is the lack of feedback that school system personnel have about the effectiveness of their efforts to prepare students with disabilities for college. They have little or no knowledge about the adequacy of their student preparation and they lack information with which to improve their preparation programs. School system personnel would like to have a method of getting this feedback.
Research Question Three

What are the differences and similarities in the perceptions of DSS personnel and public school transition personnel about the preparation of students with disabilities exiting high school to access accommodations in postsecondary education?

Differences and similarities in the perceptions of college DSS personnel and public school transition personnel about the preparation of students with disabilities to access accommodations in college were found in this study. Differences were found in participants’ perceptions of adequacy of preparation, (including self-advocacy, knowledge of disability, documentation, knowledge of rights and responsibilities, and self-disclosure) and the differing goals of the two education systems. Similarities in perceptions were found for self-advocacy, networking, and documentation. Both systems personnel perceived that students with disabilities with a goal of going to college were “falling through the cracks”, and both systems personnel wanted students to have realistic postsecondary goals.

Differences in Perceptions between College Personnel and Public School System Personnel

Adequacy of Preparation

The majority of school system personnel believe that students with disabilities with a goal of entering college are adequately prepared to access accommodations while DSS personnel in the colleges and universities do not believe the same (see Table 12). School system personnel indicate that they have provided information for students (and their parents) and have done what they can to prepare students to access accommodations
in college; it’s up to them to follow through (See Sheila above). They do not see the result of their preparation and have little knowledge of whether it is effective or not. They do not have any basis on which to make program improvements for preparing students with disabilities to access accommodations.

College DSS personnel indicate that although they have seen some improvement over the last few years, they do not, as a group, perceive that students with disabilities are adequately prepared to access accommodations in college. Areas of preparation that they see as lacking are: 1) self-advocacy skills, 2) self-knowledge of their own disability and its impact, 3) having appropriate documentation, 4) knowledge of their rights and responsibilities under the ADA, 5) the comfort and ability to self-disclose to DSS staff and professors, and 6) knowing college procedures for accessing accommodations.

Self-advocacy.

College DSS personnel indicate that students with disabilities entering their institutions often lack adequate self-advocacy skills. Brenda and Christy, two-year college DSS participants, reflected on the self-advocacy skills of incoming students with the following remarks. Brenda said,

They can’t advocate for themselves….It’s so important. And I know that they talk about teaching them those skills in high school and I'm sure they attempt to teach them those skills in high school but it doesn't seem to be translating into when they get over to the college, from my experience that they follow through.

Christy indicated that,
There’s an issue of developing self-advocacy, there’s an issue of developing independence and I think while the secondary schools are kind of aware of that, they again are focusing on what their immediate objectives are, which is to help the student graduate. So, while they touch briefly on independence, advocacy, parental involvement, and entitlement versus eligibility, they may not put enough focus on these areas.

*Knowledge of disability.*

College DSS personnel point out that students are often unable to tell them what their disability is and how it impacts their learning. They may know what accommodations that they received in high school, but may not know why they received them. They don’t know which accommodations to request in college for a particular situation. Inez spoke of this when she said,

…they don’t necessarily know what their disability is and how it impacts them.

When I’m sitting here with an incoming freshman or even somebody a transfer student in their junior year, the first question that I ask everybody is, ‘tell me about your disability and how it impacts you.’ And I get from what I read in the documentation to what comes out of their mouths is two completely different things. Not really understanding, “well, I just need extended time.” Okay, what does extended time mean? “I don’t know, I just always got it.” So there’s a lack of understanding I see of what your disability is coming from the K-12 system.
Many students do not have appropriate documentation when they seek accommodations from DSS personnel in the colleges. They either have testing that does not meet the college’s requirement of recency or the testing did not use adult norms. Students and their parents, in general, do not realize that neither the high school nor the college disability services office is responsible for providing this documentation. They must provide documentation of disability to meet the college’s specifications under the ADA. Lisa, a four-year DSS participant summed this up with,

What parents don’t understand is that when a student comes to college, if they have not been tested on adult norms, then we’re usually not going to take that documentation because what you did as an eighth grader or ninth grader is not really a true accurate reflection of what you're capable of doing as a college freshman, when you're 18 years of age. And the biggest shock, I think, to those families is the fact that when you’re in K-12, you're in the public sector. The school systems pay for that testing. However, once they turn 18, or they graduate, then it’s the responsibility of the student to pick up the cost of that and depending on where you live, it could be $1,000 and up for a full psycho-educational battery. So that really is a deterrent, especially for families that don’t have a lot of money or can’t come up with a lot of money at the last minute, because insurance doesn't always pick up on that.
Knowledge of rights and responsibilities.

College DSS participants indicate that students entering college directly from high school do not know what their rights and responsibilities are under the ADA. They must instruct them in their rights and responsibilities before they can begin to help them access accommodations in college. Janice, a four-year DSS participant, summed this up with, “Many students are stymied and hold themselves back because they're not aware of what their rights and responsibilities are”, while Christy, a two-year DSS participant stated that,

I think one of the biggest dilemmas is understanding the transition out of the secondary entitlement program into an adult setting of eligibility, success versus access, self-advocacy… all of those issues…. It’s helping students and parents understand the difference between the laws in terms of entitlement versus eligibility, success versus access, choice to disclose versus identifying students, having to meet the same academic requirements, not altering essential requirements of fundamental natures of courses, the fact that in college there is not special education – it’s more of an equal access for those that can meet the academic and technical standards. I think those are the biggest issues.

School system participants provide the mandated age of majority legal information to students with disabilities, but do not focus much on explanation of rights and responsibilities under the ADA. Perceptions of college DSS personnel regarding this were summed up by Christy,
…while the secondary schools are kind of aware of that [the difference in the laws between the IDEA and the ADA], they again are focusing on what their immediate objectives are, which is to help the student graduate. So, while they touch briefly on independence, advocacy, parental involvement, and entitlement versus eligibility, they may not put enough focus on these areas. Parents are often very surprised, for instance, that the provision of documentation of a disability is their responsibility and that students must self-identify and must meet academic and technical standards for the programs they are entering.

*Self-disclosure.*

Students entering college are often not prepared to self-disclose their disability to DSS staff or professors. They lack comfort with their disability and wish to remain anonymous. Kate, a four-year DSS participant noted that,

I think when they get here, they're still in that low self-esteem mode. They feel like something is wrong with them which is just horrible. They feel like they're different in a bad way and yet they don’t understand the neurology or whatever, usually the brain part. They just see themselves in a very poor light. And I've had so many of them say they feel so isolated and they feel like they stick out like a sore thumb…

They don’t realize that the college setting is different than the high school setting and that unless they choose to let someone know they have a disability, no one will know. Diana, a four-year DSS participant, indicated this by stating,
Unlike the secondary or K-12 system, we can’t go out and find our students. They have to come to us and so one of my challenges is letting students know what we do, that coming here is not something that they should be ashamed of, that everything we do is confidential, and that nobody will know anything about them or their disability unless they choose to tell them or ask us….So probably the most limiting factor for me is just getting students in here because we intuitively kind of know that for every student that we have identified, there’s probably another one out there, just as many who we don’t know about.

**Knowledge of procedures for accessing accommodations in college.**

Although high schools believe that students have been provided the necessary information, college DSS participants perceive that students arrive in college not knowing the procedures for accessing accommodations. Students (and parents) do not see the acquisition of accommodations as a process they must go through. They don’t understand the need to meet the college’s requirements and the length of time that the process may take. Kate, a four-year DSS participant noted,

> My impression is that students think, and their parents think that getting accommodations in college is a simple snap, that all they have to do is run over here for five minutes with any form of documentation in their hand, and drop it in our lap on a moment’s notice and boom, everything is taken care of. And they don’t understand that that’s not how it works. That you have to fill out forms, you have to provide documentation that is acceptable, you have to meet with us, we
have to arrange your letters to give to your professors and it takes two or three meetings to do all this.

Differing goals.

Personnel in the two settings have different goals and mandates, resulting from differences in their governing laws. The public school system, under IDEA, is focused on getting students to graduate from high school and to prepare them for postsecondary education and life (including accessing accommodations in college if that is their goal). The majority of school system personnel believe that students are prepared to access accommodations in college. College DSS personnel believe that schools are focused on supporting students through graduation and have less time to devote to preparing for postsecondary goals. They would like to see school system improvement in staff knowledge of the requirements of the ADA and improvement in the preparation of students with disabilities to access accommodations in college.

Christy, a two-year participant said,

I believe that the secondary schools’ main goal is to provide services while the students are in school to help them achieve the greatest degree of success and to prepare to make the transition out of high school and into the world of work or college. They are very knowledgeable in the requirements as outlined in IDEA. However, I do not believe they are as clear on the differences between IDEA and the world of ADA/504. Therefore, students and parents are not always prepared to transition into the world of “No more IEPS”, eligibility vs. entitlement, self-
advocacy, reasonable accommodation rather than special education and the other differences that will help students successfully transition into the world of ADA.

Similarities in Perception between College Personnel and Public School System Personnel

Self-advocacy

Self-Advocacy was seen by both college DSS personnel and public school system transition personnel as the most important skill needed for success in college. Lisa, a four-year DSS participant, spoke to the perspectives of both college and the school system. Lisa, talking about self-advocacy, said,

The biggest thing is it's up to that student from here on out to make sure that they request accommodations and they come by, they pick them up, and they take them to the professors and they sit down with them and they discuss what their needs are. I think we give them the tools to do that. We teach them to say and how to role play some of those situations…. [self-advocacy] It’s huge. Yes, huge at this office.

Networking

Participants from both college and school systems believe that networking with others is beneficial for the transition of students with disabilities to postsecondary education. One area of Virginia has an established network that has grown out of this belief. Participants from this area indicate its usefulness. Kristen, a transition specialist indicated that,
…locally, we would get together and we would call it a Transition Chat. And it was very light but we just shared information about different things, some things like oh I didn’t know that was going on, or here, let me share this with you, this is going on [here], or this is going on [there]…. I can honestly say I know all the other transition personnel in the area and I feel like I could go to them with a question or for support and hopefully they feel the same way. So I think it’s good that, even though we're not working really closely on a day-to-day basis together that we still have that support. And that we can kind of bounce things off one another and that type of thing, see what other cities are doing.

Diana, a two-year DSS participant, indicated that,

We have a network of people who serve students with disabilities in high school and college, and all of the colleges in the area and most of the transition coordinators in the Department of Rehabilitative Services and many other people who have interest in students with disabilities, we have a network that’s been around for about ten years…. That has been wonderful because we learn from each other. We can sit down and discuss what our frustrations are with, you know, this is what we're seeing from students coming out of high school and this is what needs to be addressed and that kind of thing.

**Documentation**

All participants agree that neither school systems nor colleges are responsible for providing the updated documentation needed in the postsecondary setting. This is not
just an issue for the college bound student, but for those seeking additional vocational education or disability services as adults. Diana summed this up when she noted,

And the new amendments to IDEA have been quite frankly frustrating to us because what we need from the school system is up-to-date documentation. And that’s not what we’re getting now…. We were able to tell parents when we talk to them, ‘make sure that you have the school test your son or daughter in their junior or senior year because we can’t use it if it’s more than three years old.’ And now what we're having, unfortunately, to say, is that they're going to need to go out and get the testing [on their own].

Some schools and/or system personnel try to accommodate requests for updated documentation when they can. Noel, a special education teacher and case manager, indicated this when she said,

Recently, I think within the past few years, they stopped testing kids in their 12th grade year just for accommodations for college so we try to work around that whole situation by saying, if you think you're going to go to college, and you're testing isn’t current, let us know, or have the teachers look it up in the file and let’s get them tested when they're a junior so that nobody is looking at it going, why are we testing all these kids in their senior year. So we try to work around that a little bit when we can.

*Falling through the cracks*

Participants from both systems indicated that they felt students with disabilities that are college-bound are falling through the cracks of the system. They see the
traditional focus of transition having been on the transition to work and that the current system is not strong enough in its focus on the college-bound. Those going to college usually must pick up the needed knowledge and skills on an individual basis with their case manager instead of in a “basic skills” course focused on transition skills. Most high school staff saw this as a result of lack of time and access to students with a goal of college. Vaughn, a transition specialist noted that,

…their courses are so geared toward going to college, there's less time to talk about other things, other issues in their lives, and so I think it’s difficult but we definitely try to make people aware of that, and we try to talk to the teachers about helping the student to learn about advocating for yourself so that when they're at school, when they're at a university, they're not sitting, just going to class and never saying a word to the, because that’s a big part of it…

Realistic goals

Participants from both systems are concerned with realistic postsecondary goals for students. Participants want students with disabilities to achieve to their potential, but do not want students to have unrealistic goals. School system personnel examine student testing and student performance during high school to help guide students toward appropriate postsecondary goals. Tammy, a division level participant stated that,

On a daily basis, it’s one of my biggest frustrations, having discussions with parents who believe their kids are going on to a four-year college or whatever other thing, and you talk to this student and look at their course of study that they're going through and look at their quality of work and look at their ability
levels, and I'm not one that would ever tell a kid, no, no, no. But I do believe in realism and having the discussion about if your kid isn’t going to be able to have the stamina to go through four years of college, or to do two years of college in an extended period of time, you know what I mean? To stretch out their program, if they don’t have the stamina and work ethic to do that, we need to look at what’s going to sustain them in the meantime. You can build that into the plan in addition to community work. There are ways to creatively carve things out for them, whether it’s taking one class at a time and working part time or whether it’s taking the full load of classes and not working or taking the full load of classes and working, there’s so many permutations of that. But trying to get that importance across and the realism that goes along with it, it’s a constant struggle for K-12 because the high school environment with the SOLs particularly, we're set up to say, if you're going to go to college, you're going to do the SOLs. You must meet these criteria and no matter how I accommodate you, sometimes that’s not going to work.

Doreeen, a transition specialist, believes that students are not adequately prepared for college if they have unrealistic goals. She said,

…for the students who have unrealistic goals and that is for example, a sophomore who has very little understanding of the disability and how it impacts them thinking they're going to be a doctor and not really understanding exactly what is required to be in medical school, how long, and how much they have to study. So, for a student like that, especially when they're younger, the goal, you
know, we write down that their goal is to be a doctor, but then we will say we're going to work with that student to help them understand exactly what is required of being a doctor. So eventually they are prepared, but, am I making sense, if we write that they're going to be a doctor, we're writing it because that is what they’ve said, but we will work with them to make sure they understand exactly what the requirements are in a situation like that.

College DSS personnel see students entering college with low “ability to benefit” scores. These students struggle through remedial classes without advancing toward a degree and often drop out. They wish that students had more realistic goals. Grace, a four-year DSS participant, stated that,

What is it that you want to be? And looking at the fact that not only do you have to meet the academic standards, but the technical standards for the degree, for the program that you're going into. So if you're going to culinary arts school to be a chef, and one of the technical standards, you must be able to lift 50 lbs. unassisted, can you do that? Is your disability prohibitive of that? And if so, is that a realistic goal for you? If you have Asperger’s or you're a student with Autism, and we've got a young man, actually who wants to be a broadcaster, that’s wonderful, if you're an autistic person or a person with Asperger’s, that is a social person which usually isn’t the case. So if you're going to go on television, then you've got to look at that camera, you've got to exude personality. Is your disability prohibitive of that?
Summary of Research Question Three

Study participants from postsecondary DSS offices and K-12 school system personnel had both differences and similarities in their perceptions about students with disabilities preparation to access accommodations in college. Differences were found in perceptions of adequacy of preparation and the differing goals of both educational systems. Similarities were found for self-advocacy, networking, and documentation of disability in college. Personnel from both systems want students to have realistic goals and they both believe that students with disabilities transitioning to college are “falling through the cracks” of the school system transition system.

School system personnel believe, in general, that students are adequately prepared to access accommodations in college while college DSS personnel perceive the outcome of high school preparation is not evident or sufficient once students enter college. Students arriving in DSS offices are not prepared with knowledge of their disability and its effects, or the self-advocacy skills to communicate with DSS personnel and professors about what they need and why. They often arrive without the appropriate documentation or knowledge of what is accepted as documentation. They also don’t understand the procedures that they must go through to access accommodations in postsecondary education. College DSS personnel believe that this is a result of the school system’s primary focus on getting students to graduate and having less time to spend on preparing for transition. They feel high schools meet their immediate goal of student graduation first and don’t focus enough on transition skills and goals. High school personnel feel
they have less access and opportunity to teach and practice transition skills to students that are college bound.

College DSS personnel observe that students with disabilities and their parents don’t understand the differences in the laws between K-12 education (IDEA) and postsecondary education (ADA). They don’t realize the differences in their rights and responsibilities under the two systems and the practical results of these differences in what they must do or provide to access accommodations. High school personnel say that they don’t focus much on student rights and responsibilities under the ADA during transition planning. They provide the appropriate notices when the student reaches the age of majority, but do not discuss in depth the ADA provisions or requirements. College personnel believe that high school staff does not focus enough on teaching this to students and their parents.

Personnel from both the public school system and the college/university DSS office agree that self-advocacy is of paramount importance for student success in postsecondary education. They both want students to have realistic goals for transition, which necessitates knowledge of their disability and its impact. They also agree that neither system is responsible for providing testing to document a student’s disability in order to access college accommodations. Personnel from both educational systems also believe that the traditional focus of transition has been on students transitioning to vocational education or work and that not enough attention has been paid to students that are transitioning to college.
Communication between Personnel across Systems

Research Question Four

What are the communication/collaboration strategies and resources used by successful public school transition programs and postsecondary disability services programs between personnel across systems about the preparation of students with disabilities to access accommodations in postsecondary education? How are these strategies/resources implemented or used?

Most communication between college DSS personnel and public school transition personnel takes place by phone or e-mail, with some in-person contact during transition events or fairs. Representative of this, Janice, a four-year DSS participant relayed that,

We have inquiries, both phone and email inquiries, from time to time in terms of, especially documentation, in terms of subjects that a student should or should not be taking. We have again college nights where we're invited to come and participate with our tables and the sharing of information. We sometimes are invited to speak. Always, because of the history of working with these folks in this area, certainly there is a collegiality among so many of us so that we know that those folks are there and we're here.

Frank, another four-year DSS participant indicated that the communication between college DSS personnel and school division personnel usually took place only when school division personnel initiated it. When asked about his communication with school division personnel he replied, “Only when they contact us.” And when asked how the communication took place, he responded, “Occasionally phone calls, usually email.”
Echoing these sentiments, Rita, a division level participant, also indicated that communication transactions were mostly informational.

Well, we collaborate as needed. They're always available, pick up the phone or send them an email; those folks are willing to accommodate the school system. We have a very good collaborative relationship. The best relationship is with, once again, the community college because they're smaller and they can, they tend to be able to come see us more, you know, with the university we have to kind of make more of an effort to get there, but I think we have good collaboration with all three universities, two universities and the community college.

When asked what type of communication strategies were used she replied, “Primarily informational. Presentations on their end. Passing of information back and forth.”

Vaughn, a transition specialist, also indicated that communication was mostly informational. He stated that,

… I think a lot of times there's direct information that we need to share that gets done through the phone and emails, and I think when we have each person come to the transition fairs, being able to just talk with them a little bit about things and how things are going, I think we learn more about things that maybe we weren’t just asking direct questions about and so you learn more about what’s going on at the universities and how things, how services are accessed and things like that that you might not have even thought about for a question.
As noted earlier, one area of the state indicated that they used a formal transition network to bring personnel together and to collaborate on issues or events. Diana, a two-year DSS participant, noted when asked about communication and collaboration, “…the network is our vehicle for that. And we do have good communication in this area. But we're all constrained by what the college will allow and what the high schools will allow.” Mike, a Division level participant answered the same question by stating,

Yeah, there's dialogue between the universities, we have our College Fairs and we have the event for college experiences just for students, specifically for students with disabilities. So there is a discussion and engagement with postsecondary, and exactly what is the process, what’s needed, what the students have to do to get there. So not only is it an event, an education event for parents and students, but our professionals are there and they are hearing this, and they are understanding their responsibility in the process. So for, really for our state universities, there's a good relationship, good process, good discussions and it really comes about through their willingness to do those kind of events. That really is the starting point because all that collaboration beforehand is probably great dialogue that’s going on.

Participation in regional or statewide meetings and events opens the door for establishing relationships with college DSS personnel. This can then be used as a resource throughout the year when needed, for division level participants and transition teachers/coordinators. Kristen, a transition specialist summed this up by relaying,
It’s ongoing communication. I'm not the Transition Specialist that is representing [this school system] on the higher education committee, that’s another Transition Specialist, but she goes out and she brings that information back to us, and then occasionally sometimes we will go, if we're hosting the meeting then we'll go.

Division level transition personnel and transition teachers/coordinators saw themselves as acting as a liaison bringing students and parents together with college information and contacts. Laura, a transition specialist, noted that,

When students start getting acceptance letters and things like that, we'll have a lot of more phone call type conversations. And then if I have a student that I'm working with that I know needs to speak to a Disabilities Counselor, especially like at [the local community college] where they may not decide until the end of registration that they're going to actually attend, I will go ahead and contact those, whichever campus they're interested in, that Disabilities Counselor and try to get them in contact with one another so just act as a liaison basically because beyond that I really can’t do anything else for them.

Special education teachers tended to rely on transition specialists to obtain information and pass it along to them. They have little direct contact with two-year and four-year colleges and universities DSS staff, although contact with two-year community colleges is more frequent than with four-year colleges or universities. Gina, a special education teacher, noted

We have a Transition Teacher. She, I rely on her because I'm teaching English, I'm teaching Earth Science, I'm teaching Basic Skills, I do my case management,
that’s her role. To me, her, the biggest asset for her is that she has the opportunity, the time, and the contacts to work one-on-one with students.

Guidance counselors tend to use similar strategies with all students, including those with disabilities. They provide information for case managers and teachers to use. Patrice, a guidance counselor noted that,

So in most cases, I'm a resource for the Special Education teachers and then at times, they need a little more help and that’s when I'll meet with those students individually and walk them through or those parents and the students…. I use basically the same strategies that I use with the regular education students except I explain them a little differently to these students and I hand hold just a little bit more than I would with the regular education students.

One method of communication between systems seems to currently be of little practical help for DSS personnel. The SOP, an exit document for students with disabilities graduating high school, includes student academic achievement, functional performance, and recommendations to assist the individual in meeting their postsecondary goals. It was developed to aid in school system communication with postsecondary education, adult service providers, and other post school settings. Few study participants discussed either the merits or shortcomings of the SOP.

School system personnel indicated that students with disabilities exit with a summary document intended to relay student needs and accommodations as well as a summary of their educational program to post school settings including postsecondary education. Mike, a division level participant speaking of the SOP, stated that,
We look at that as a formal document that the student would put on top of their little packet to go to a postsecondary setting. That helps to facilitate that discussion. Here is your disability and you tell me how does your disability…. and that’s what I mean.

Postsecondary personnel indicate that they have seen few SOPs, but their numbers are increasing. When asked if they were helpful, Janice, a four-year DSS participant replied, “To some degree.” Probing further the researcher asked if they were more helpful than the IEP. She answered, “I would say about the same. They are very general.” Brenda, a two-year DSS participant had similar views. She indicated that she had only seen a few SOPs and that most of the ones that she had seen were not detailed enough. She said, …absolutely, I mean, two or three sentences in each, if you were lucky, and it didn't really, it didn't describe what the student was trying to work their way through or how the disability impacted the student in the classroom setting, what were the student’s strengths and weaknesses. It just said the student is going to contact the Community College. You know, it’s almost like a transition plan. The student will contact Community College after high school, period. Well, what is he going to do when he contacts the Community College? My goodness! How vague! No indication of his investigated career path, he wants to explore this or that or is that a reasonable expectation for him to, you know, is he qualified to be a culinary chef? Or should he try to be a civil engineer if he can’t do math? … No, really aren’t [detailed enough] and it’s unfortunate because it leaves the student holding the bag.
Although some participants indicated proactive communication, most saw it as reactive, in response to a need or a problem. Alex, a guidance counselor, indicated that, “I'm all about proactivity. If it’s reactive, then something else is happening and you're no longer in control.” Carla, a division level participant noted that, “I think that we're more at the awareness stage and moving toward a bit of a proactive stage…. think it’s better than it used to be, definitely. But there's still room for improvement.”

Table 14 below provides a visual representation of the responses indicating that communication between personnel across systems was proactive, reactive or mixed.
Table 14

Proactive vs. reactive communication

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution Level</th>
<th>Participant level</th>
<th>Responses: Would you characterize communication between personnel across systems as proactive or reactive?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>College Personnel</td>
<td>Four-Year DSS</td>
<td>Reactive 3  Mixed 3  Proactive 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Personnel</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Two-Year DSS</td>
<td>Reactive 3  Mixed 0  Proactive 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Personnel</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School System Personnel</td>
<td>Division Level Personnel</td>
<td>Reactive 0  Mixed 1  Proactive 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Transition Specialists/ Coordinators</td>
<td>Reactive 1  Mixed 2  Proactive 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Special Education</td>
<td>Reactive 4  Mixed 1  Proactive 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Guidance Counselors</td>
<td>Reactive 3  Mixed 0  Proactive 2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Summary of Research Question Four

Communication and collaboration strategies and resources that college DSS personnel and public school system personnel use about the preparation of students with disabilities to access accommodations in college center on the provision or request of
information. This exchange of information usually takes place via email or phone conversations. Where the network exists it is seen as the means for communication and collaboration.

There is also some in-person contact during transition fairs/events and state or regional meetings/conferences involving personnel from both systems. These opportunities to meet in person lead to unforeseen information that participants would not have known to ask direct questions about. Contacts made at these meetings are then seen as resources for further information.

Communication between the two systems is directional, usually from the school system to the college DSS offices. College personnel are willing and available to work with school staff when they initiate the request. Transition specialists see themselves as liaisons between students, parents, and college contacts/information. Special education teachers rely on transition specialist’s time and expertise in this area and they have no direct contact with college personnel.

The SOP, an exit document for students with disabilities envisioned as a communication tool between secondary education and postsecondary settings, is currently of little practical use for DSS personnel. Student’s SOP documents are not detailed enough to enhance DSS personnel’s understanding of student needs and accommodations.

It is notable that most college/university DSS personnel, special education teachers, and guidance counselors believe that communication and collaboration between personnel across systems is reactive, in response to a need or problem. Most division
level participants and transition coordinators/specialists characterized this communication/collaboration as proactive.

Research Question Five

_Do public school transition personnel and postsecondary DSS personnel believe there is adequate communication/collaboration between personnel across systems about the preparation of students with disabilities to access accommodations in postsecondary education? Why or why not?_

College DSS personnel and school system personnel responded to this question with multiple points of view. College personnel were less positive than school system personnel about the adequacy of communication about preparation of students with disabilities to access accommodations in college. Table 15 below indicates how study participants responded to this question. Their answers were categorized as Yes, Needs Improvement, NO, and Don’t Know.
Table 15
Adequacy of communication

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution Level</th>
<th>Participant level</th>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Don’t Know</th>
<th>No Needs Improvement</th>
<th>Yes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>College Participants</td>
<td>Four-Year DSS Personnel</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Two-Year DSS Personnel</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School System Personnel</td>
<td>Division Level Personnel</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Transition Specialists/ Coordinators</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Special Education Teachers</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Guidance Counselors</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

College DSS personnel do not believe that there is adequate communication/collaboration with transition personnel in the public school system. When asked about adequacy of communication eight DSS participants said “no” there was not adequate communication between personnel across systems. Frank, a four-year DSS participant, responded “No”. He was then asked why he felt that communication was not adequate. His reply follows.
I think probably time constraints, it’s resource issues, I think that time, meaning time, financial resources, human resources, and the, sometimes maybe the lack of collaboration hasn’t enabled, you know, those more streamlined processes to be created so there's some sort of like workflow process, or some sort of process for involving it. I'd say that’s like a catch-22 because it's one of those things that could be beneficial and do some front end loading that would be beneficial later, but at the same time, I feel often burdened by the multitude and complex constituencies and issues that I face on a day-to-day basis. So it’s balancing basically competing priorities, all of which have, could have more hopeful and positive outcomes for students with disabilities.

Six additional college participants indicated that there was room for improvement with no four-year or two-year college DSS participants indicating that there was adequate communication. Brenda, a two-year participant said there was room for improvement. She replied, “I think there's significant room for improvement. I think we've made a few good steps to moving in that direction but I don't think we're there yet. I would like to see something of an ongoing communication….”

Public school system personnel see less need for additional communication than do college DSS personnel. The expressed adequacy of communication between school system personnel increases as you get farther from the division level school system participants toward the high school staff. There were still “no” responses, although far fewer than found from college staff. Special education teachers did not give the “No” response, although three guidance counselors did answer “No”. The majority of
responses from these personnel indicated that they saw much room for improvement of communication between personnel in the two systems. Tammy, a transition specialist spoke to this,

I don't think it’s ever adequate. I think there's always room for improvement, there's always room for more discussion and more information and more training and more working together. So while it’s workable, I wouldn't say that it’s adequate. It’s workable, we get what we need, but I don't think that it’s a fostered relationship.

There were six school system participants that saw communication/collaboration between personnel across systems as adequate. An example of one of the participants that felt communication was adequate was Yolanda, a special education teacher. She indicated,

I think so. I think we probably started it, we initiated it but like I said, college personnel, I mean, they've been wonderful about working with us, especially the Transition Fairs are probably the most beneficial. They're willing to give up their evenings to come and talk to a group of parents. And they do it more than once. We try to, we used to have individual Transition Fairs at schools, and then we started grouping together, which made it easier, of course, on everyone actually, as far as the planning and for college personnel to get there. But I think the communication is very positive and it’s ongoing and it's very good.

Overall, there is a desire and need for additional communication between the two educational systems. Mandy and Willa, both special education teachers spoke about the need of additional communication. Mandy stated that, “I would say there needs to be
more, I mean, it’s functional and accomplishes pretty much what needs to happen but I think it would be more effective if there were more.” Willa indicated that,

See, my first reaction is to say, there's never enough. And I still think that, there's never enough. But I think it’s a work in progress and that we're all seeing the need and seeing how we can support each other and so it’s just going to get better…. Could it be better? Yes.

**College Outreach**

Many school division participants would like to see more college outreach. Nancy, a transition coordinator, wants “a way to get four-year colleges more involved” while Willa, a special education teacher, desires “colleges to be a little bit more, a little easier to get in touch with” and Mandy, another special education teacher, wants, “more input from the postsecondary people, …more time from them, I guess face time because we don’t get that a whole lot…”.

School division participants tend to have closer relationships and more communication with DSS staff from the local community college than the local four-year college/university. Rita, a division level participant, indicated that the best relationship was with community colleges. She stipulated that, because of their smaller size, they were more accessible to school system staff. Nancy, a transition specialist, gave a slightly different take on this when she said,

So most of our contact is really through [the local community college] to make sure kids, …. because most of the kids that are going to [the local community college] are the ones that are going to be a little bit needier.
College DSS participants self descriptions of their job responsibilities did not include college outreach. Even though they did not state college outreach as part of their job responsibilities, it did become evident over the course of the interview that many DSS personnel did participate in transition fairs/events when requested to do so by school system personnel.

College DSS staff does not seem to engage in self-initiated college outreach. Frank, a four-year college participant indicated that, “I sometimes do outreach with some schools in the community when we’re contacted by the school staff to do that” while Kate, a four-year DSS participant, stated

I don't think we communicate well enough with secondary education. In my mind, I would like to see the colleges outreach to their area schools, if each college did that, if each college did an outreach within a certain number of miles of their campus to the area school counselors and teachers, if we went there and told them what we expect of them, of the students to have when they come to us, I think that we would be much better off. But whether it’s because we're so busy or they're so busy, I don't know why, we don’t communicate with them unless they have a question and they call us or we have a question and we call them.

Abby, a two-year DSS participant indicated that even though she wanted to engage in college outreach with local high schools, she was not allowed to because of lack of time, financial restraints, and lack of administrative support.
Summary of Research Question Five

Participants from both systems see the need for more ongoing communication between college DSS personnel and school system transition personnel. College personnel’s view of existing communication/collaboration is less positive than that of their school system counterparts. Although several believe that existing communication between the two systems accomplishes the essential information exchange that needs to occur, it was referred to as a “catch 22”. The need for professionals to balance competing priorities and the effects of limited time, funding, and human resources constraints results in personnel that feel that they cannot devote time and resources to collaboration even when they realize that it would be beneficial in the long run.

Currently College DSS staff does not tend to initiate college outreach activities.

School system staff has a stronger relationship with community college DSS personnel than they do with four-year college/university DSS personnel. They indicate that a greater number of students with disabilities needing more support attend community colleges than four-year colleges/universities.

Research Question Six

*Do DSS personnel and public school transition personnel believe that communication between secondary and postsecondary personnel impacts the preparation of students with disabilities to access reasonable accommodations in postsecondary education?*

Participants saw the impact of communication between college DSS personnel and public school transition personnel as both positive and negative. College DSS personnel saw a positive impact when students were adequately prepared during high
school to access accommodations in college and a negative impact when there was miscommunication resulting in erroneous expectations. School system personnel saw a positive impact when the members of the transition team were knowledgeable and a negative impact when they were not.

Perceptions of college and university personnel about the impact that existing communication has on the preparation of students with disabilities to access accommodations in college indicated that the impact can be positive or negative. The impact can be positive if the student (and his or her parents) has been prepared during high school for what to expect. Janice, a four-year DSS participant, saw a positive improvement. She indicated that,

Well, some preparation is going on. As I have alluded to, I have seen an improvement in the information that students have when they get here, and the expectations of students and their parents for that matter. Especially their parents. So I would say that there definitely is an improvement.

Kate, a four-year DSS participant relayed that students struggle, fail, or waste precious time because they are not prepared for college. She stated that,

…the freshman student with a disability ends up wasting weeks of time when they could be receiving accommodations right from the beginning. I mean, we would like them to have their accommodations in place on day one. I would like them to go to their professors the day before school starts and give the professors their letters. But what happens because they're not prepared to come to school, to college, they don’t know where to go, they don’t know where our office is, they
assume that their section, this is exactly what they tell me and I've heard this twice this week alone “I thought my 504/ IEP plan would automatically come here.” That’s what they tell me. So because they're under that impression, they go for several weeks of the first semester and take several exams before they start asking questions. “Where are my accommodations? What happened? Who does the 504 stuff? What happened to my IEP?” Typically what they do then is they go to mom and dad and then mom and dad then get on the internet and start calling different offices and trying to figure out, so by the time they land here, it’s been, it's usually the end of August, or the middle of September by the time we get them going with what they need. So they have actually wasted 3 or 4 weeks of important time when they should have had, and typically they don’t do well on their first few tests because of that. They don’t have the extra time or the quiet space, and they're freshmen to begin with, and so my impression is that we're wasting their time, their valuable time by not having them more prepared. Parents become frustrated and resentful about inaccurate expectations. Talking about the need to pay for current documentation on adult norms, Lisa, a four-year DSS participant indicated that,

…And I think I hear a lot of resentment in parents’ voices when they say “well, why didn't anybody tell me this at the high school? Why didn't anybody talk about that? They said I should be good to go, they were tested when they were a sophomore in high school.” So I guess, and like I said, it always seems to shock me even though I know that happens a lot because I feel like well, there should be
some transition kind of issues going on, some training there at the high school, and again, I don't know if the breakdown is because the parents are not seeking out those services because their student is bright and they've had to use a very minimal services, or whether they're just not communicating that to them, information to the parents and students. I don't know. I don't know where the breakdown is.

Public school transition personnel perceive that the impact of communication/collaboration with DSS staff depends on the education and knowledge of the transition team and can be either positive or negative. This was summed up best by Xavier, a special education teacher when he said that,

Well, the impact can be two fold. It can be obviously a situation where the student is not appropriately educated or the team is not appropriately educated and the student will be impacted in college and not receive the accommodations and not be able to effectively manage the college program. I have not necessarily been, seen that. I'm sure it happened but I can’t say that I've seen that. But on the other end of that, when you have a well prepared team, the transition to postsecondary education is a much smoother process and the student will be able to not only have that knowledge and self-determination that they hopefully will have, but they're better prepared to effectively manage their college process.

The impact of communication on the preparation of students also depends on the students themselves. Sheila, a transition specialist, indicated this by saying,
Impact on students, in the situation that I worked in, I felt like it was pretty significant as long as the students were open to it, as long as the students were interested in it. It was there, it was there for them to learn about. We were telling them, we were giving it to them, we were showing them, we were offering things. Some were like, “oh yeah, let me find out about it”. Their parents were like, “oh yeah, tell us everything”. And some were like, “that’s fine, I got it”. So it’s person dependent.

The impact of communication can also be seen for parents of students with disabilities. They may be unaware and shocked when they find out what is required to access accommodations in postsecondary education. Good communication between postsecondary and secondary personnel can lessen the negative impact. Mike, a division level participant, said that,

I think the impact is that parents are aware and they’re not shocked, so the shock, any potential shock on that transition from high school to postsecondary is lessened, it’s diminished. Where I really do believe if parents are shocked, their reaction would be, “that’s what they were talking about that I should have done”. Versus, “they never told me about this”. So the collaboration increases, the outcome is better transition planning, better preparation for students going to postsecondary institutions, and less anxiety, less shock when they get there.

School system transition personnel indicate that what they have is working and it’s better than it used to be, but there is room for improvement. Tammy, a division level participant, summed this up with,
I think for what we have it’s working. And I think that transition itself as a process is evolving… So I think it’s adequate in terms of the needs are being met…. I don't know if there’s a systematic way to give them more information.

Doreen, a transition specialist, indicated that, “I think just awareness and education. Because we're all able to communicate, we're able to help the students more, to make them more aware of what they need to do.”

Making connections with college personnel before students begin college, puts students in a better position for accessing accommodations in college in a timely manner. Brittany, a guidance counselor stated this by saying,

Well, I think any time that communication is done beforehand helps put the student in a better position, even if it’s just a phone call that’s been monitored by the transition teacher because a lot of times they want the students to make the phone call and find out about the disabilities so they may do it with the transition teacher there, sitting there watching or whatever. I think that helps put them in a better position for starting at the university. I wouldn't even venture to guess what happens afterward, but I think anything that we do to make that connection beforehand is positive. It’s a positive thing.

Public school participants feel that they need more feedback about the results of their preparation efforts. They would like to have college personnel provide generalized information about student preparation to access accommodations when they enter the college setting. This information is needed to inform program improvements and increase the effectiveness of student preparation.
Guidance counselors seem to be largely unaware of what colleges have available for students with disabilities. Alex a guidance counselors spoke to this by saying,

I don't think that the students at [my high school] or any high school are as aware as they could be as to what’s available to them. I know certainly I'm not. And that’s something that’s disheartening because often times I can’t give them an answer or I don't know necessarily who to go to and I think too often times that falls on IEP case managers … who have to do a lot of the leg work…. And I think that’s the reason we're in this business because we care about kids, I mean, that’s the bottom line. We're not in it to make money, and if I can help one of my kids by picking up a phone or sending an email, I'll certainly do that. But there's no foundational thing that’s in place to help anybody to the degree that it should be.

Summary of Research Question Six

The impact of communication/collaboration between secondary and postsecondary personnel is perceived by study participants as positive or negative depending on the characteristics of the transition team and the student. If the team is knowledgeable then students and their parents are better prepared and know what to expect in the college setting. Students tend to have more self-determination and are able to more effectively manage their postsecondary education. The opposite is true when transition teams are not knowledgeable. The result is miscommunication, frustration, and resentment on the part of students and parents. Students are unable to access their accommodations in a timely fashion and they waste time, struggle, and/or fail.
The positive or negative impact of communication/collaboration is also person dependent. The willingness to be open to the process of becoming prepared depends on the students and their parents. If they actively participate in the process, they have better transition planning and preparation. Students and parents have less anxiety and are less shocked about the requirements faced in postsecondary education enabling them to access accommodations sooner.

There is a lack of communication between the two system’s personnel about the effectiveness of student preparation to access accommodations. As noted earlier, school system personnel receive little feedback about how well students are prepared to access accommodations in postsecondary education during high school. Personnel charged with the design of transition programs have no basis on which to make changes or improvements to their preparation program.

Research Question Seven

What are the differences and similarities in the perceptions of DSS personnel and public school transition personnel about the communication/collaboration of these personnel across systems and the impact of this communication?

Differences

The majority of study participants see a need for improvement in communication between college DSS personnel and public school system transition personnel. There were, however, differences between personnel in the two settings concerning adequacy of communication. College DSS personnel were more likely to view communication as more inadequate than were school system personnel. See Table 13.
Several school system personnel saw need for a method or system for ongoing communication/collaboration between college and school system personnel. Rachael, a guidance counselor said about the impact of communication,

[It’s] not a very effective impact. I don't feel like the impact is, I don't feel like there is one….I feel like our communication tools aren’t the best…. I almost feel like there should be a liaison between high school and college. Someone who, that is their job to say, oh, so they're going to this school, this is the people, this is what they do, this is how they help…. I feel like that would be easier if we knew that in advance. So I feel like there should be someone who is a liaison.

Carla, a division level participant responded to the question of adequacy of communication by answering,

I don't think so. I think there needs to be more communication, definitely. I don't know what type of structure could be set up for that to occur. I think we've had a little bit more since we've been a part of the [local college’s transition] programs. But had I not been able to participate in that and be on the committees, I think one year I was on the committee for the Resource Fair, I was actually given a list of different colleges and services to access to invite them to be part of the Resource Fair so I was able to communicate and talk with them a little bit, but I think I just more or less just touched the surface. I would like to see a better structure.

Where there was such a system or structure in place, participants indicated that it was beneficial. Diana, a two-year DSS participant stated repeatedly that the network was a valuable means of communication. When asked what communication/collaboration that
she had with personnel in secondary education, she replied, “Well, as I said, the network is our vehicle for that. And we do have good communication in this area.” When she was asked about the strategies and resources she used for communication she replied,

Through the network, we also work with the transitional coordinators. They’re part of the network. So it is an ongoing process for us….But the network has been very, very, very good for everybody…. Not everybody is on it, not everybody comes every time, but it is something that we, it’s very, very valuable.

Another area of differences between the two systems was feedback. Feedback about the preparation of students for accessing accommodations was a strong desire by public school system personnel, but was not mentioned by college staff. School personnel would like to make program improvements, but don’t have information on which to base them.

**Similarities**

Participants from both systems viewed the impact of existing communication between personnel similarly. They stated that the impact of existing communication/collaboration between personnel across systems could be either positive or negative and that they perceived that it depended on two things, the students and the education and knowledge of the transition team charged with the student’s preparation.

First, preparation to access accommodations depended on the students themselves, and their ability to take advantage of the information provided during high school. Jane, a division level participant, responded to the question about the impact of communication/collaboration by saying, “I think that if the kids take advantage of what
they’re offered, for example, if the phone numbers, if they contact the people who they need to contact, they have a better chance of being successful.” In talking about the preparation of students with disabilities to access accommodations in college this same participant noted that,

…one of my frustrations was that the kids weren’t real prepared and the parents weren’t real prepared, and even though things were offered, they don’t always take advantage of it. We can offer until we’re blue in the face, but if they don’t take advantage of it, it’s not going to help them.

Parents also played a role in receptiveness to information and support for development of skills students need in college. Jane, a division level participant, stated that,

I think that sometimes parents become a part of the high school, or some try to be careful. I think sometimes as parents it’s difficult to step back and let them make a mistake and let them fall. But I think that sometimes you have to let that happen so that they can then learn how to speak up themselves. And it’s okay to make a mistake. I messed up, but you know what, this may be able to help me. I don't think we do that enough and I'm not sure how to tell parents to back off. And not that they, that’s going to sound terrible if that’s misread, but you know what I mean? It's just that, we need to allow them to advocate for themselves and to speak up in a nice mature way, and we can’t do that if the parents are always doing it for them.

Jane also indicated that,
They need to know the difference. Their parents need to know the difference [in rights and responsibilities] and I think that [our transition specialists]... do a real nice job about disseminating information.... Like I said, the parents who take advantage of the training and advantage of booklets offered, things like that, are doing, are right up on it.

Noel echoed this sentiment in her answer to who is responsible for student preparation for accessing accommodations in college. She said,

I think everybody is. From us, from the teachers, to guidance, to the parents, I mean, the more the parents ask, the more they're going to learn and the more they can help their child when they come home and say, “you know, Mum, I'm having a really hard time in English class, but I just don’t know where to go to get some help.” Well, the parents, you can’t just turn your child loose in college, you have to be able to give them advice when they ask for it, so if the parents are educated, then the students, they can educate their child and help them be more successful.... we try to reiterate that the more you educate yourself the better off you’ll be. Knowledge is power. So to try to help them and we really encourage self-advocacy...

Summary of Research Question Seven

Most study participants indicated that they would like to see an improvement in the communication that takes place between DSS personnel in the colleges and transition personnel in the school systems. School system personnel indicated a strong desire for an ongoing systematic structure for communication/collaboration between systems with
several participants indicating the need of a “liaison” to bridge both systems. Where there was a structure for communication/collaboration (the network), it was viewed as extremely helpful. Of note is the fact that school system personnel indicated a strong desire for feedback about their preparation of students with disabilities to access accommodations while DSS participants did not mention it.

Both systems personnel viewed the impact of communication/collaboration as both positive and negative depending on the knowledge of the transition team and the student’s personal characteristics. If students took advantage of the information/knowledge offered by the school system, they were seen as more likely to be prepared to access accommodations in college. Study participants indicated that parents needed to allow their sons or daughters to develop self-advocacy/self-determination and when parents used school system information to become knowledgeable, they could then continue to provide support to their college student with disabilities when needed.

Overall Study Themes

This study revealed six major themes. They are:

1) Differences in the laws that govern students with disabilities during K-12 education (IDEA) and college education (ADA) make a seamless transition to college difficult. Requirements of systems and individuals under these laws are near opposites in important areas making transition to college and access of accommodations difficult. Eligibility vs. entitlement, access vs. success, and the need to self-advocate are some of these areas. Students with disabilities must have knowledge of the laws and their
differing rights and responsibilities under them. Gina, a special education teacher summed up this major theme by saying,

Well, I think in the high, in the public school setting, K-12 or till they're 21 or 22, there's laws that are very clearly defined that say, this is what you will provide for a child with learning disabilities. When they get out of high school, and it falls under ADA and it’s no longer as heavily mandated, the colleges are, well, I don't know who’s shoulders it falls on, whether it’s the college or the student’s, but the safety net is not there. So, I mean, either we have to do a better job of helping our kids understand and learn strategies to be successful, or there needs to be a better bridge between the two institutions. But right now the way the law is written, our job is to help kids live without that safety net because the colleges are not required to do, I mean, you've got the limitation of the recent psychological testing. A lot of kids, the parents are coming in their senior year wanting them to be retested. Well, we don’t provide the kinds of tests the colleges are requiring, the psychological tests. They want the adult scale and all that stuff. We don’t do that. It’s not even in the testing battery that they provide for eligibility. There's just a lot of differences and expectations and also what’s presented for the kids by the two. So you're talking about two very different playing fields.

2) Self-advocacy/self-determination was paramount throughout the study and can be found in responses from all study participants. Listed as the number one skill students need in college, self-advocacy was seen as essential for student success in college.
3) The traditional systemic focus of transition on students with disabilities preparing for transition to work or vocational education has hindered development of a system to develop the skills and knowledge needed for students with disabilities seeking a college education. School system participants feel that they have lack of access to students with disabilities transitioning to college. Students with disabilities transitioning to employment or vocational education take transition focused courses to develop skills and knowledge for post high school settings. Students with disabilities transitioning to college either don’t have elective slots open to take the courses or they do not believe that these courses will meet their needs because they are geared to a more functional curriculum. Case managers/teachers must work to develop these skills and knowledge on an individual basis and through IEP/transition planning.

4) Additional communication is needed between postsecondary education DSS personnel and secondary transition personnel. Currently the communication is directional with school system staff making requests for information or participation in transition fairs. There is little ongoing college outreach. School system personnel lack feedback about their efforts in preparing students with disabilities to access accommodations in college and therefore have no reliable information on which to base program changes or improvements.

5) Although not specifically spoken of by participants, it is evident that personnel from both postsecondary DSS offices and the public school divisions are engaged in pointing fingers at the other group and indicating that they want additional preparation or support from that group. They are each focused on their own immediate needs and seem not hear
or take heed what the other is saying. They do not appear to be working jointly to prepare students with disabilities for their postsecondary goal of college.

6) Characteristics of individuals help determine how effective student preparation for accessing accommodations in college is. Students own characteristics act as a filter through which they process information and instruction that they receive during the preparation process. Their individual lenses determine how they use information and instruction to become prepared to access accommodations in college. The knowledge and skill of teachers/case managers and the entire transition team affects student’s preparation. Parent knowledge, skills, and support also play a role. This is especially true surrounding the development of self-advocacy skills needed in college.

This study focused on discovering what strategies and resources were currently in use by successful school systems to prepare students with disabilities to access accommodations in college and their perceptions of the adequacy of their preparation. It revealed that personnel are aware of the needs and strategies suggested in the existing literature surrounding transition and are attempting to provide instruction in these areas. Many, however, indicate that they don’t know how to fit it in during the school day for students that are college bound. These students are focused on becoming academically prepared for the demands of college and case managers indicate that they do not have enough access to them for adequate preparation. Additionally, although preparation information is provided for students during high school, it is filtered through their own personal characteristics and the lack of feedback that school system personnel receive about the effectiveness of their preparation programs.
This study also revealed the previously undocumented state of existing communication between personnel across the secondary and postsecondary educational systems. It found that the essential exchange of information is taking place when personnel from the school systems request information from college DSS personnel. There is little unsolicited college outreach.

Differences and similarities in perceptions about student preparation to access accommodations in college and the communication/collaboration between college DSS personnel and public school transition personnel were heretofore unknown. These differences and similarities indicate areas for additional focus and work especially an increased focus on student rights and responsibilities under the ADA by school system personnel and two-way communication/collaboration between systems personnel.

The study also revealed that the divide between the secondary and postsecondary educational systems are based on the laws under which they operate and that personnel have not engaged in substantial joint efforts to address this chasm. Although personnel in both systems say they are aware of the needs and constraints of the other system, they are focused on meeting their own immediate and individual priorities. They have not developed a long range vision for the effective use of staff time and resources in preparing student with disabilities for accessing accommodations in college.

The conceptual framework that emerged from this study is presented below. It illustrates the current division of the two systems and the divide that students must negotiate to become prepared to access accommodations in college.
Figure 4: Conceptual Framework

Secondary
- IDEA
  - Entitlement
    - Standardized
  - Success
    - Can modify educational program
  - Self-Advocacy
    - Not required
  - Student Characteristics
    - Yes
      - Takes advantage of preparation
    - No
      - Doesn’t take advantage of preparation: Unreceptive
      - Lack of access to students
        - School Personnel: No feedback on effectiveness of student preparation

Postsecondary
- ADA
  - Eligibility
    - Lack of Standardization
  - Access
    - No modification of essential requirements
  - Self-Advocacy
    - Required
  - Student Characteristics
    - Yes
      - Better chance of success
    - No
      - Struggle, fail, and/or drop out
      - Little college outreach
        - College Personnel: No method to provide feedback to school systems about effectiveness of preparation
        - Student preparation programs lack information for improvement
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the bridge from secondary education to postsecondary education for students with disabilities entering college. In light of the fact that students with disabilities have a lower rate of success than their non-disabled peers (NCES, 2000), information about preparation to access accommodations in postsecondary education by school systems that are perceived as doing a better job than most was needed. This study focused on determination of strategies and resources currently used in the preparation of students with disabilities for accessing accommodations in college and differences and similarities in perceptions of college DSS personnel and public school system personnel about the adequacy of student preparation. School system personnel prepare students with disabilities to access accommodations in college, but do not see the results of their preparation in action, while postsecondary DSS personnel do see the results. Differing or similar perceptions about preparation across systems had not previously been studied and were needed to determine if views of student preparation efforts were the same across systems.

There had also been a continuing call for increased communication between postsecondary personnel and secondary personnel to facilitate transition from high school to postsecondary education for students with disabilities (NJCLD, 1994; NJCLD, 2007; Norlander, et al., 1990; Rothstein, 2003; Stodden & Jones, 2002). Despite this call, the
state of existing communication between DSS personnel and high school transition personnel had not been documented. This information was needed to inform future efforts and practices in communication/collaboration between personnel across systems.

This chapter presents an overview of significant findings, the study’s organizational design, and the applicability/transferability of findings to wider audiences. It also includes implications, limitations of the study, a conclusion, and closes with recommendations for future research.

Overview of Significant Findings

The preparation of students with disabilities for accessing accommodations in postsecondary education is better than it used to be only a couple of years ago. Postsecondary DSS participants indicated that they see improvement in the ability and numbers of students with disabilities seeking accommodations. They see self-advocacy and student knowledge of their disability as most important for students with disabilities in postsecondary settings. This is followed by knowledge of rights and responsibilities under the ADA. These findings are consistent with those of Hicks-Coolick and Kutrz (1997), Lock and Layton (2001), Barr et al. (1995), Milsom and Hartley (2005), Sitlington (2003), and Stodden (2003), who saw self-advocacy and knowledge of rights and responsibilities as the harbingers of success in postsecondary education for students with disabilities. Postsecondary DSS participants do stipulate that there is still room for much improvement in student preparation to access accommodations in college.

Consistent with Aune (1991), Barr et al. (1995), Brinkerhoff (1996), Milsom and Hartley (2005), and Stodden (2002), who urged improvements in the preparation of
students with disabilities for postsecondary education, school systems are implementing student instruction based on previous research recommendations. They are actively working to train students with disabilities to access postsecondary accommodations, using transition/IEP planning methods, individual work with case managers/teachers, and transition focused courses. They see teaching self-advocacy as a big part of this preparation. This is in line with Test et al. (2009) who found that teaching self-advocacy skills was an evidence-based practice with a moderate level of support as examined under the quality indicators for experimental research. It is also in line with the works of Hicks-Coolick and Kurtz (1997), and Lock and Layton, (2001).

Personal Characteristics

Personal characteristics of students, their parents and the transition team help determine how well students are prepared to access accommodations in college. Student characteristics such as independence follow through, self-concept, and receptiveness influenced preparation to access accommodations in college.

The students view of their disability including acceptance and disability related stigma also played a role in preparation as did acceptance of increased responsibility and student apathy. These are consistent with deFur et al. (2002) and Stodden (2002a), who argued that students with disabilities should increase independence while in high school to prepare for college and similar to the findings of Litner et al. (2005) who found that disability related stigma was the top reason for not seeking accommodations in college.

The availability of family and professional supports also impacted student preparation. Participants in this study perceived that students who had a knowledgeable
transition team and knowledgeable teachers/case managers were more likely to be better prepared to access accommodations in college than those that did not have these supports.

Participants also perceived that students who had knowledgeable and supportive parents were also more likely to be better prepared. In light of this finding, the fact that parent resource center personnel had little to contribute to this study is perplexing. Parent resource centers may be one of the best ways, outside of the IEP process, for parents of students with disabilities to become educated about student transition to college and the ability to access accommodations in that setting, yet the resource centers do not focus on it.

Knowledge of Rights and Responsibilities

Participants in this study viewed the adequacy of preparation for students with disabilities as dependent on the knowledge of the teacher/case manager and the transition team. If these individuals understand what is required for students to access accommodations in college, they can then effectively prepare them to complete this process. Knowledge of student’s rights and responsibilities in postsecondary education is needed for transition team members to adequately prepare students with disabilities for accessing accommodations in college.

This need for knowledge of rights and responsibilities by school system personnel preparing students for transition to college was discussed by Dukes and Shaw (1998). They indicated that preparation of students with disabilities for postsecondary education requires that education personnel in both systems have the knowledge and skills
necessary for the task. Others also indicated that personnel must have knowledge of the needs and limitations of each system, (Brinkerhoff, 1996; Kirst & Venezia, 2006; Stodden & Jones, 2002).

School system participants indicated that they do not focus to a large extent on student’s rights and responsibilities under the ADA while in high school. They do inform students that they are responsible for advocating for their accommodations in college, but don’t go much beyond that in explaining the differences between the two settings and how they will affect students seeking accommodations in college. They indicated that they give students the mandated information under IDEA when they reach the age of majority, but they do not focus much attention on instruction about the ADA and rights and responsibilities under it for post school life.

Some school personnel have misconceptions about rights and responsibilities under the ADA during postsecondary education. Through their responses it became evident that they did not understand the ADA and its relationship to students with disabilities in postsecondary education. These personnel each indicated that during K-12 education, students with disabilities were covered under the IDEA and during postsecondary education they were not covered. One example was the response from Tammy noted in chapter four. She felt self-advocacy was important because students were moving “…from K-12 which is based on law to not K-12 which isn’t”. Tammy either doesn’t realize that students have rights under the ADA and section 504 as adults with disabilities in postsecondary education, or she doesn’t have knowledge that there are laws that provide protection for individuals with disabilities as adults. Without accurate
knowledge, school system personnel will not be able to effectively prepare students to assume their roles as adults under the ADA.

Participating guidance counselors, who are members of student’s transition teams, indicated that they do not have knowledge of what students with disabilities must provide and/or do in college in order to gain accommodations. They must rely on other members of the transition team for this information and refer students to them as needed. They indicate that their counselor education programs did not provide enough information about the rights and responsibilities of students with disabilities and postsecondary education.

**Lack of Access to Students**

School system participants feel that they have lack of access to students with disabilities transitioning to college. They must prepare them for transition and accessing accommodations in college individually and/or through the IEP/transition planning process. Other students with disabilities that are transitioning to employment or vocational education have greater access to transition focused courses aimed at building transition skills and knowledge. It seems that the historic roots of transition planning and the development of instructional programming around transition to work and/or vocational education have affected the development of a widespread system of transition preparation for students with less severe disabilities capable of attending college.

The way students with disabilities transitioning to college are currently prepared necessitates alternative strategies and methods of instruction and practice for transition related skills. Practiced by only one study participant, embedding transition skill
instruction and practice into general education SOL focused courses is one such alternative. When asked about this, other study respondents indicated that they had not seen it in practice, but that it should be beneficial for all students.

Communication

Study participants indicated that the communication that exists between personnel across systems is working, but most of them characterize it as reactive instead of proactive. School system personnel get the information that they need and college DSS personnel are willing to provide them with information and attend college fairs when asked. This communication is directional with the school system staff contacting the college staff. Initiation of communication on the part of the college DSS staff was not discussed by participants.

The NJCLD (1994) indicated college outreach to high schools as a duty of postsecondary personnel when it identified postsecondary responsibilities in the transition process of students with disabilities to college. This joint responsibility for transition preparation of students with disabilities seeking college was also noted by Brinkerhoff et al. (1996), Kirst and Venezia (2006), and Stodden and Jones (2002). These findings are consistent with those of this study which found that the majority of study participants indicated that preparation to access accommodations in college was a joint responsibility between school system personnel and college/university DSS personnel.

Currently, however, there seems to be little college outreach that is not initiated by a request form secondary personnel. There are on campus college transition events,
but these are not frequent and do not involve a great number of school system personnel. College DSS personnel need to focus more on methods of college outreach to support school system personnel in preparing students with disabilities to access accommodations in college. There is an ongoing network for communication/collaboration set up in one area of Virginia that participants saw as very helpful. This may be an avenue for communication/collaboration that postsecondary and secondary personnel should explore developing.

The SOP, designed to enhance communication between secondary education and post school settings, including postsecondary education, does not yet seem to be of much practical use. Postsecondary DSS personnel have seen few of them; however the ones that they have seen are vague and not detailed enough to enhance understanding of student needs.

_Pointing Fingers_

Personnel from postsecondary DSS offices and school system personnel appear to be focused on their own needs and seem not to hear what the other is saying. They point fingers at personnel from the other system saying you need to do a better job, while not finding a way to work together to accomplish the goal of improving student preparation to access accommodations in college.

Postsecondary DSS personnel are not mandated by law to engage in college outreach to the school systems, even though it was included by the NJCLD as a job responsibility. Time and financial restraints help create an environment in which this aspect of their jobs remains a low priority even when they understand that focusing on
outreach to school systems would likely result in students entering postsecondary education more prepared to access accommodations. Postsecondary DSS personnel would have to expend less time and resources once students arrive on campus if they were better prepared. This would seem to be an instance of learning to work toward far sighted goals and not necessarily working harder. Postsecondary DSS personnel choose instead to continue to request that school system personnel better prepare students before they arrive on campus.

School systems would like more support from postsecondary DSS personnel through college outreach to the school systems. They say they would like a better understanding of what colleges require in general and the specifics that individual colleges require. Yet, even though they currently understand that student self-advocacy, knowledge of disability, and knowledge of rights and responsibilities under the ADA is essential for postsecondary education, there has been no system set up for instruction of students with disabilities that are college bound and high school personnel do not focus much on rights and responsibilities under the ADA with students with disabilities that are college bound.

School system personnel currently tend to focus on the immediate objective of getting students with disabilities to graduate while spending less time and effort on preparing them for their transition goal of college. College bound students with disabilities are left to develop the skills and knowledge needed individually through IEP/transition planning or individual work with case managers. Since high school personnel feel that they have limited access to students with disabilities that are college
bound, this likely means that little time is spent in skill instruction and practice, knowledge acquisition, or provision of information.

Personnel from both systems are focused on immediate goals instead of long range goals. This is much to the detriment of students with disabilities wanting to pursue a college education and it creates a situation where personnel from neither system are focused on long term objectives aimed at improving student preparation to access accommodations in college.

*Differences in Perceptions*

Differences in perceptions between postsecondary DSS personnel and school system personnel were found in this study. They center on adequacy of student preparation to access accommodations in postsecondary education.

Public school system transition personnel tend to believe that students with disabilities are prepared to access accommodations in college, whereas college DSS personnel did not feel the same way. College DSS participants perceive that students with disabilities entering college do not understand their rights and responsibilities and what they must do and provide in order to access accommodations. They often do not have knowledge of their disability and its impact nor do they have the self-advocacy and communication skills to request the accommodations they need.

This difference in perceptions is possibly an outcome of school system personnel not being able to see and evaluate the result of their preparation efforts. Public school transition personnel would like feedback about their preparation efforts to inform transition preparation program improvement. This was a recurring theme throughout
secondary participant responses. There were no postsecondary DSS personnel that spoke of this. Confidentiality for students with disabilities is one explanation for this difference. Postsecondary DSS personnel cannot discuss student’s individual abilities and preparation with secondary transition staff. Postsecondary DSS personnel could discuss general trends they see in the preparation of students to access accommodations in college with school system personnel without compromising student confidentiality.

Similarities in Perception

Similarities in perception between postsecondary DSS personnel and public school transition personnel were also found in this study. Personnel in both systems feel that students with disabilities that are college bound are falling through the cracks of the secondary education system. Many believe that the traditional focus on students transitioning to employment or vocational education has left those heading to college without a structure for their preparation. They are left to develop the knowledge and skills needed for college on an individual basis.

Personnel from both systems agree that neither postsecondary education nor secondary education is responsible for the documentation required in college to access accommodations. Personnel from both systems also see the need for an ongoing structure for communication. This is especially true of school system personnel that seek feedback about their preparation efforts.

Organizational Design

The conceptual framework of the study presented in chapter four illustrates the significant findings of the study (see Figure Four). Secondary education, governed by
the IDEA, and postsecondary education, governed by the ADA, are two separate worlds. Each has its own very different set of rights and responsibilities under the laws. Marked differences are found with entitlement vs. eligibility, success vs. access, and the differing requirements for self-advocacy in order to access services. These differences are filtered through student’s characteristics, including knowledgeable and skilled professionals and parents, student’s personal views, and receptiveness to preparation efforts. If students take advantage of preparation efforts and they have knowledgeable and skilled individuals to support them in this process, they are more likely to be prepared to access accommodations in college. Secondary school personnel perceive a lack of access to college bound students with disabilities and have no way of knowing if their preparation efforts are effective. Postsecondary DSS personnel initiate little college outreach and do not provide feedback to secondary personnel. Secondary student preparation programming lacks a means of information needed to improve the process.

Applicability/Transferability

Methods of research have been used for this study that result in the researcher’s confidence that the findings presented are accurate and represent the views of participants in this study. Rigor has been addressed through triangulation of interview data with both a document review and a website review. The researcher’s characteristics and biases were noted and peer debriefing was completed. A rich description of participants has been included and participants’ voices are represented with direct quotes (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Patton, 2002). The degree to which
the findings of this study will be useful to others in similar situations must be determined by the consumer of this information.

Implications

*Implications for Preparation*

**Increased knowledge of transition team members and parents/family is needed to better support students with disabilities in their preparation to access accommodations in college.**

Participants in this study indicated that adequacy of preparation to access accommodations in college depended on students’ personal characteristics. They believe that students become better prepared when they have knowledgeable and supportive transition teams (Dukes & Shaw, 1998) and parents/family. Knowledge of student’s rights and responsibilities under the ADA is needed for transition team members (Brinkerhoff, 1996; Kirst & Venezia, 2006; Stodden & Jones, 2002) and parents/family to prepare students for what they will encounter in accessing accommodations in college. Yet currently, school system staff does not focus on student rights and responsibilities under the ADA. Reasons for this suggested by participant responses were lack of knowledge and/or misperceptions of the ADA and its application for students with disabilities in college.

Increased knowledge of rights and responsibilities under the ADA for transition team members and parents is needed. This can be accomplished through higher education personnel preparation that includes increased training on rights and responsibilities of students with disabilities under the ADA who wish to pursue a college
education. This training should target not only future special education teachers, but general education teachers and guidance counselors as well. They will be future members of transition teams and will be able to provide avenues of knowledge and support for students with disabilities transitioning to college.

In this same vein, school systems should work to increase the knowledge of rights and responsibilities under the ADA for current transition team members in their school systems. This can be done through professional development and/or in-service training. It is especially important to include guidance counselors in this training since they indicated that they had little knowledge in this area.

Additional avenues for parents/family to gain increased knowledge are needed. Parent resource centers that currently have little programming targeting parents of students with disabilities that are college bound should develop and market programming aimed at teaching parents/family about student’s rights and responsibilities under the ADA in college. That should also increase parent knowledge of what to expect during the college accommodation process.

Recommendations

Increase higher education personnel preparation for special education teachers, general education teachers, and guidance counselors about rights and responsibilities of students with disabilities under the ADA, especially focusing on rights and responsibilities during college education. This can be done by adding additional information to existing transition courses and/or revamping existing courses that focus on the legal underpinnings for individuals with disabilities to include more information on
the impact of differences in rights and responsibilities between secondary education and postsecondary education, specifically focused on accessing accommodations in those settings.

School systems should offer professional development and/or in-service training about students with disabilities rights and responsibilities under the ADA in college and the procedures for accessing accommodations in college. All members of transition teams, including special education teachers, general education teachers, and especially guidance counselors, should receive this training.

Parent resource centers should increase their resources and educational opportunities for parents of students with disabilities seeking a college education. They should focus on rights and responsibilities of students during college and the procedures that students will need to accomplish in order to access accommodations in that setting. They should also focus on skills that students will need, and how parents can help their children develop those skills. Marketing of parent resource center offerings should also be a priority. Without much previous programming targeting this area, parent resource centers will need work to develop parent awareness and excitement about their offerings.

**Identification of best practices in student preparation to access accommodations in college.**

Practices in preparing students with disabilities for transition and accessing accommodations in college have been suggested in transition literature and were noted by study participants as important areas for student preparation. They include instruction
and practice in self-advocacy/self-determination, self-knowledge of disability and its impact on learning, and knowledge of rights and responsibilities under the ADA.

Transition practices need to be tested to determine their effectiveness in preparing students with disabilities to access accommodations in college. Only through knowledge of what works and what does not will teachers, transition team members and parent/families be able to provide instruction and practice opportunities using strategies that will make a positive difference in preparing students with disabilities to access accommodations in college. Determining effectiveness of practices is also relevant in light of the evidence-based requirement for teaching practices mandated by NCLB.

**Recommendation**

Transition practices need to be tested specifically for effectiveness in preparing students with disabilities for accessing accommodations in college. Among those tested should be instruction and practice in self-advocacy/self/determination, self-knowledge of disability and its impact on learning, and knowledge of rights and responsibilities under the ADA.

**A system for the widespread preparation of students with less severe disabilities for accessing accommodations in college is needed.**

School system study participants indicated that they have less access to students that are college bound for transition preparation than those transitioning to work or vocational education. These students do not have the same opportunities for skill instruction and practice which leaves them to develop skills needed individually. There needs to be a system for the widespread preparation of students with less severe
disabilities for accessing accommodations in college. Embedding of transition skill
instruction in general education SOL focused classes was suggested to combat the
problem of access to students that are college bound. Study participants indicated belief
that this strategy would be helpful for all students, not just students with disabilities.
This would achieve the objective of providing preparation to access accommodations in
college while simultaneously providing the SOL academic content needed for pursuit of
a college degree.

Development and testing of a model for embedding transition skills instruction
into SOL driven lessons is needed. Once established, this model would necessitate
higher education personnel preparation and school system professional development and
support in the use this strategy.

Recommendation

Educational researchers should develop a model for embedding transition skills
instruction into SOL driven lessons. Once developed the model should be implemented
in school systems to test its effectiveness in preparing students with disabilities with the
skills and knowledge needed to access accommodations in college.

Implications for Communication/Collaboration

Identification of best practices in communication/collaboration across systems to
increase student ability to access accommodations in college

There has been an ongoing call in transition literature for additional
communication/collaboration between personnel across systems to improve student
preparation to access accommodations in college, yet existing
communication/collaboration practices were undocumented. This study presented an initial examination of existing communication/collaboration between personnel across systems. Study results indicated that where there was a structure for communication/collaboration (the network); participants saw it as helpful.

Examination of the network to help determine best practices in communication/collaboration is needed. Understanding what is working in communication/collaboration between personnel across systems in this area may inform an overall understanding of best practices in communication/collaboration across systems.

Recommendation

Examine the “network” to shed light on possible best practices in communication/collaboration between personnel across systems. Also locate and examine other possible sources of best practice in communication/collaboration between personnel across systems.

Increase feedback to school system personnel to inform student preparation program improvement

This study found that school system personnel believe students with disabilities are prepared to access accommodations in college while DSS participants did not feel the same way. It has been theorized that this may be due to the lack of feedback that school system personnel receive about their preparation efforts. They currently have little information on which to base preparation program improvements. College DSS
personnel see the result of school system preparation efforts, but do not provide needed feedback because they are restricted by student confidentiality requirements.

There is a need to develop and test a model for DSS personnel to provide feedback to school system personnel about student preparation to access accommodations while maintaining confidentiality. This may be accomplished through the development of a system that reports generalized trends that DSS personnel see in students seeking access to accommodations in college. Although not specific to any given school system, this would allow school system personnel to evaluate and improve their preparation programs based on trends DSS personnel observe.

Recommendation

Development of a system for DSS personnel to provide generalized feedback to school system personnel about what they observe in student preparation and ability to access accommodations in college is needed. The VDOE and SCHEV, in conjunction with university researchers, postsecondary personnel, and secondary personnel, need to develop and pilot a means of feedback about student preparation to access accommodations in college.

Usefulness of the SOP

This study revealed that the SOP document is not currently functioning as intended. Created to enhance post school communication, study participants indicated that it does not seem to be of much practical use. College DSS personnel have seen few of them, but the ones that they have seen are vague and not detailed enough to enhance understanding of student needs.
It needs to be determined what DSS personnel would find helpful in the SOP document for college bound students with disabilities. Inclusion of this information would likely enhance understanding of student needs and accommodation requirements in college. Since DSS staff does not yet see current SOPs as helpful, school staff training in how to complete a detailed SOP that would be useful for DSS personnel would also be needed.

**Recommendation**

Determine what DSS personnel would find helpful in the SOP for students with disabilities that are college bound through research about this topic. School system professional development or in-service training about completing an SOP that is detailed enough to enhance understanding of student needs in the college setting is also warranted.

**Increase the joint responsibility for preparation of students to access accommodations in college**

Participants in this study indicated that they viewed the preparation of students with disabilities to access accommodations in college as a joint responsibility across systems, which is consistent with existing literature (Brinkerhoff et al., 1996; Stodden & Jones, 2002). With little unsolicited college outreach and the directional nature of communication found in this study, it is evident that joint preparation is not happening to a great extent. Participants indicate that they need to balance the competing priorities of limited time, funding, and human resource constraints. They feel that they cannot devote time and resources to communication/collaboration even when they understand that it
would be beneficial in the long run. This is seen as an instance of learning to work toward far sighted goals and not necessarily harder. If students were better prepared before they try to access accommodations in college, college DSS personnel would expend less time, effort and resources when they arrive on campus.

There is a need to develop joint responsibility for preparation to better prepare students with disabilities to access accommodations in college and to maximize staff resources and time for both college DSS personnel and school system transition personnel. This may be accomplished through additional college outreach and ongoing, facilitated in-person meetings, symposiaums, and/or summits between college DSS personnel and school system transition personnel. In addition, joint meetings of SCHEV (State Council of Higher Education for Virginia) and VDOE secondary transition personnel are needed to addresses joint preparation efforts. Joint conferences for Virginia AHEAD and DCDT members should also be planned to address this joint preparation of students with disabilities for accessing accommodations in college.

Evidence from this study also indicated that both DSS personnel and school system personnel are engaged in pointing fingers at each other and indicating that they want more from that group. Although personnel in both systems say they are aware of the needs and constraints of the other system, they are focused on meeting their own immediate and individual priorities and haven’t developed a long range vision for the effective use of staff time and resources in preparing students with disabilities for accessing accommodations in college. Long term goals need to be developed for joint
preparation by DSS personnel and secondary transition personnel and an action plan for achieving those goals should be developed and implemented.

Beneficial in this pursuit would be the establishment of an ongoing structure for communication/collaboration. Development and testing of a model for an ongoing structure for communication/collaboration between personnel across systems is needed to facilitate joint preparation efforts and personnel knowledge.

**Recommendation**

Colleges should increase efforts for unsolicited college outreach activities with area school systems. This should be focused on improving personnel knowledge and student’s preparation for accessing accommodations in college.

Ongoing facilitated meetings and communication between SCHEV and VDOE representatives about ways in which personnel from both systems can support each other in preparing students with disabilities to access accommodations in college is needed. It could include symposiums and/or summits about preparation efforts and how personnel from both systems can jointly work to improve student preparation. These meetings should focus on development of long term goals with an action plan for implementation.

In addition, an ongoing structure for communication/collaboration between postsecondary DSS personnel and secondary transition personnel needs to be developed, implemented and tested. This ongoing structure may facilitate joint preparation efforts and may reduce overall staff time and effort.
Limitations

Qualitative research provides an in-depth analysis of individual’s personal experiences with the phenomenon studied. It relies on relatively small numbers of participants to generate data and findings. Although data in this study was collected until the point of saturation was reached, it is possible that views exist that were not captured in this study.

The snowball sampling method focused on finding school systems that were perceived by four-year and two-year college/university participants as doing a better job than others in preparing students with disabilities for accessing accommodations in college. Although college DSS personnel see the result of school system preparation of students with disabilities to access accommodations in college and they were asked to provide recommendations based on their perceptions, there may be other school systems not recommended that are doing as good or better a job at preparing students. These perspectives are not present in this study.

College DSS personnel see the result of student preparation to access accommodations in college, but they typically see only those students that self-identify. Participants indicated that they know that there are many more students with disabilities on campus that choose not to self-identify. The students that DSS personnel do not see may have skewed their perceptions of school systems that were doing a better job in preparing students with disabilities for postsecondary education. Students that they see from a particular school system may seem better prepared, but there may be many more from that same system that were not prepared to self-identify.
This research study focused on students with disabilities preparation to access accommodations in college and was therefore focused on the preparation of students with disabilities capable of gaining admittance to four-year and two-year postsecondary education institutions. The results may not be of value for others outside that group of individuals.

The research was conducted with participants from public four-year and two-year colleges/universities and public school systems in Virginia. Findings may not be useful for private colleges/universities and they may not be representative outside of the Commonwealth of Virginia.

Conclusion

With little change expected in the laws that govern postsecondary and secondary students with disabilities, and the differences in rights and responsibilities that exist between the two, education professionals must continue to improve the preparation of students with disabilities to access accommodations in college. Increased knowledge of personnel and communication/collaboration across systems to improve student preparation programs for accessing accommodations in college may help reduce the gap in success rates between students with disabilities and those without disabilities in higher education. As it currently exists, the job of personnel in both systems is to help students negotiate two very different playing fields. In the words of Gina, “…either we have to do a better job of helping our kids understand and learn strategies to be successful, or there needs to be a better bridge between the two institutions.”
Future Research

Many avenues for future research become apparent from the findings of this study and previous research. They range from research on identification of best practices to enhance specific skill and knowledge instruction for students with disabilities seeking a college education to the development, implementation, and testing of a systematic means of communication across systems.

Preparation

The identification of best practices in student preparation for accessing accommodations in college is essential to improve the preparation of students to access accommodations before they arrive on campus. Future research is needed to identify best practices and the effectiveness of preparation strategies for students with disabilities that are college bound. Strategies delineated in previous research and found within this study, including self-advocacy/self-determination (Lock & Layton, 1994; Stodden, 2003), student self-knowledge of disability and its impact on learning (Durlack et al., 1994), and knowledge of rights and responsibilities under the ADA in college (Barr et al., 1995; Milsom & Hartley, 2005; Sitlington, 2003) should be tested to determine their effectiveness in preparing students to access accommodations in college. Knowledge of best practices for preparation will inform personnel of what strategies would be most beneficial in preparing students with disabilities for accessing accommodations in college. This should help reduce the lag time in student access of accommodations in college, thereby improving their success rate.
Since students with disabilities seeking a college education do not, as a rule, access transition focused courses; future research is also needed on development and testing of a systematic way of preparing students with less severe disabilities for accessing accommodations in college. Embedding skill instruction in SOL driven lessons, such as described in *Universal Design for Transition* (Thoma, Bartholomew, & Scott, 2009) is one such avenue to explore. An added bonus of this method of preparation is that all students, not just those with disabilities, would benefit from the instruction and practice.

Another area for future study is methods for personnel to work jointly and collaborate across systems to prepare students with disabilities for accessing accommodations in college. Noted by both study participants and previous research (Brinkerhoff et al., 1996; Stodden & Jones, 2002) as a joint responsibility for personnel across systems, there is not much current evidence that joint preparation is taking place. Seen to be of long term benefit, personnel haven’t been able to break the cycle of meeting immediate needs and learning to work jointly across systems. The focus of these studies may be on methods for the effective use of personnel time and institution resources through development of long range goals and an action plan for implementation of jointly working to prepare students. Personnel behavior change studies in learning to work jointly across systems to prepare students to access accommodations in college should be included.
Communication/Collaboration

Research is needed to identify best practices in communication/collaboration between personnel across systems. This study gave an initial indication of existing communication/collaboration, but little or no research had previously been done in this area.

The focus of this study on the perceptions of college DSS personnel and public school transition personnel about student preparation to access accommodations in college and the communication/collaboration that exists between personnel across systems provides a first glimpse into existing communication/collaboration. Although information was gathered from participants in five geographic areas of Virginia, the units of study were postsecondary DSS personnel and secondary transition personnel and therefore the perceptions of individual geographic groupings were not examined in depth. Case study research focused on one or more groupings of four-year and two-year DSS personnel and public school system transition personnel would allow an in-depth examination of this interaction and would be a valuable perspective to understand. The area of Virginia that has the “network” is one such grouping to study and it may shed light on localized methods of communicating/collaborating that may be best practice.

Personnel in this study desired and ongoing method of communication. Development and testing of a model for ongoing communication between systems personnel is an area for future study that should be pursued. It could provide an avenue for generalized feedback to secondary personnel for use in improving their preparation programs. The effectiveness of the model in informing secondary preparation program
improvement should also be studied as should the ability of personnel to listen, internalize information and recommendations from personnel across settings, and act to improve programming. The usefulness of the SOP is once such instance with DSS study participants indicating little value in the generalized nature of SOPs they currently see.

Research on what DSS providers would find useful in the SOP document for students with disabilities seeking college accommodations is needed to inform secondary professional development about the detail needed in the SOPs they write for college bound students. This would increase the likelihood that DSS personnel would have enhanced information about students. This would in turn help to accelerate the provision of accommodations in college thereby increasing student success. This line of research should also include student involvement in creating the SOP document and the effect that this has on student preparation to access accommodation in college.

Preparation efforts were found by study participants to be student dependant and to act as a filter for preparation efforts. Research is also needed to understand the role that student’s characteristics play in communication and creating a bridge between secondary and postsecondary education and the access of accommodations in college.
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APPENDIX A

Interview Guides

Postsecondary Personnel Interview Guide

Research has shown (Grossman, 2001; Fitchen et al., 2006; Trammel, 2003) that accessing accommodations in postsecondary education promotes success for students with disabilities. The purpose of this interview is to determine your understanding and views about the preparation of students with disabilities for accessing accommodations in postsecondary education. It will also focus on the role of communication/collaboration between personnel in the postsecondary and secondary educational systems regarding this preparation. This information may be helpful in guiding the future preparation of students with disabilities for accessing accommodations in postsecondary education.

Interview Questions:

Participant and School Information

1. Approximately what is the overall enrollment at your school?

2. Approximately what number and/or percentage of students enrolled in your postsecondary education institution has a disability?

   Probe:
a. Can you tell me about the different disability types represented in this number/percentage? Does this percentage represent mostly students with learning disabilities or is there an equal mix of students with varying disabilities?

3. Can you tell me a something about the Disability Support Services office at your school?

   Probe:
   a. Approximately how many students with disabilities are/were served for the 2007-2008 school year?
   b. Is this typical or an increase or decrease from previous years?
   c. Can you tell me something about what you see as the typical type of service they receive?

4. Can you tell me about your job?

   Probe:
   a. How long have you held this position?
   b. How did you come to this job?

5. What are your understanding and/or knowledge about the demands, requirements, and limitations of secondary education regarding preparation to access accommodations in postsecondary education by students with disabilities?

   Probe:
   a. Do you have enough knowledge and/or understanding? How did you gain it?
b. What are the differences between what students must do in high school and college in order to access accommodations?

**Preparation to Access Accommodations**

6. Do you believe that students with disabilities are adequately prepared to access accommodations in college?

Probe:

a. Why or why not?

7. How is your school involved in assisting or contributing to the preparation of students with disabilities to access accommodations in postsecondary education?

Probe:

a. What strategies/resources are used or available?

b. What do you see as the essential elements of this preparation? What about:

   i. Knowledge of differing rights and responsibilities between secondary and postsecondary education?

   ii. Self-advocacy/self-determination? Taught or practiced?

   iii. Are students aware of the procedures for accessing accommodations in postsecondary education?

      1. Definition of disability

      2. Documentation

      3. Knowledge of their disability and how it impacts their learning?
c. How does this preparation take place?

d. Who is responsible for the preparation of students to access accommodations in postsecondary education? Is it a joint responsibility between postsecondary and secondary education?

e. What is your (or your school’s) role in this process?

8. Is there anything else you would like to discuss or anything you would like to see change about student preparation to access accommodations in postsecondary?

    Probe:

    a. Why or why not?

Communication/collaboration/knowledge of personnel across systems

9. What communication/collaboration do you have with personnel in secondary education about the preparation of students to access postsecondary accommodations?

    Probe:

    a. How does the communication/collaboration take place?

    b. What strategies/resources are used?

    c. Is this communication/collaboration proactive (ongoing) or reactive (responding to a need or problem)?

10. In your view, is there adequate communication/collaboration between personnel across systems about the preparation of students with disabilities to access accommodations in postsecondary education?
Probe:

a. Why or why not?

11. What do you believe is the impact of existing communication/collaboration between postsecondary and K-12 transition personnel about the preparation of students with disabilities for accessing accommodations in postsecondary education?

Probe:

a. Can you explain further?

12. Is there anything else you would like to discuss or anything you would like to see change about the communication/collaboration between postsecondary and K-12 personnel about the preparation of students with disabilities to access accommodations in postsecondary education?

a. Why or why not?

**Recommendation for participation**

13. Could you recommend two or three public school divisions in your area with whom you communicate/collaborate and/or whose students with disabilities show evidence of preparation for and/or success in accessing accommodations in college for participation in this study?

14. Could you recommend one or two, two-year colleges in your geographic area for participation in this study?
Documents/Information/Events

15. Would it be possible to review information or documents supporting the preparation of students with disabilities for postsecondary education? This information may include college outreach materials/events and any or all of the following that you are comfortable discussing/allowing access to:

   a. College policies/procedures for supporting students with disabilities in accessing accommodations

   b. Staff specifically allocated to transition and/or college outreach

   c. Personnel knowledge/training/education

   d. Pre-college programs

   e. Data reports indicating the number of students with disabilities served, services received, and type of accommodations

   f. Communication/contact with high school personnel

Thank you for participating in this study.
School Division Personnel Interview Guide

Your school division has been recommended for participation in this study because of the perceived engagement in promising best practices in the preparation of students with disabilities for postsecondary education. Research has shown (Grossman, 2001; Fitchen et al., 2006; Trammel, 2003) that accessing accommodations in postsecondary education promotes success for students with disabilities. The purpose of this interview is to determine your understanding and views about the preparation of students with disabilities to overcome the barriers associated with accessing accommodations in postsecondary education and the use of emerging best practices, behaviors, and events in this process. It will also focus on the role of communication/collaboration between personnel in the postsecondary and secondary educational systems regarding this preparation. This information may be helpful in guiding the future preparation of students with disabilities for accessing accommodations in postsecondary education.

Interview Questions:

Participant and School Information

1. Approximately what is the overall enrollment at your school?

2. For the previous school year (2007-2008), approximately what percentage of students with disabilities from your school, age 16 and above, has or had a postsecondary transition goal of going to college?
Probe:

a. Does this represent mostly students with learning disabilities or is there an equal mix of students with varying disabilities whose goal is to go to college?

3. Can you tell me about your job?

   Probe:

   a. How long have you held this position?
   
   b. How did you come to this job?

4. What are your understanding and/or knowledge about the demands, requirements, and limitations of postsecondary education regarding preparation to access accommodations in postsecondary education by students with disabilities?

   Probe:

   a. Do you have enough knowledge and/or understanding of student preparation to access accommodations in postsecondary education?
   
   b. How do or did you gain knowledge/understanding of the demands, requirements, and limitations of postsecondary education? What would you add or change?
   
   c. What are the differences between what students must do in high school and college in order to access accommodations? How did you find out about these differences?
Preparation to access accommodations

5. Do you believe that students that have a transition goal of going to college are adequately prepared to access accommodations in college?

   Probe:
   a. Why or why not?

6. What is the preparation of students with disabilities for accessing accommodations in postsecondary education like in your school/school division?

   Probe:
   a. What strategies/resources are used or available?
   b. What are the essential elements of this preparation? What about:
      i. Knowledge of differing rights and responsibilities between secondary and postsecondary education?
      ii. Self-advocacy/self-determination? Taught or practiced?
      iii. Are students aware of the procedures for accessing accommodations in postsecondary education?

         1. Definition of disability
         2. Documentation
         3. Knowledge of their disability and how it impacts their learning?
   c. How does this preparation take place?
d. Who is responsible for the preparation of students to access accommodations in postsecondary education? Is it a joint responsibility between postsecondary and secondary education?

e. What is your (or your school division’s) role in this process?

7. Is there anything else you would like to discuss or anything you would like to see change about student preparation to access accommodations in postsecondary?
   a. Why or why not?

Communication/collaboration/ of personnel across systems

8. What communication/collaboration do you have with personnel in postsecondary education about the preparation of students to access postsecondary accommodations?

   Probe:
   a. How does the communication/collaboration take place?
   b. What strategies/resources are used?
   c. Is this communication/collaboration proactive (ongoing) or reactive (responding to a need or problem)?

9. In your view, is there adequate communication/collaboration between personnel across systems about the preparation of students with disabilities to access accommodations in postsecondary education?

   Probe:
   a. Why or why not?
10. What do you believe is the impact of existing communication/collaboration between postsecondary and K-12 transition personnel about the preparation of students with disabilities for accessing accommodations in postsecondary education?

Probe:

a. Can you explain further?

11. Is there anything else you would like to discuss or anything you would like to see change about the communication/collaboration between postsecondary and K-12 personnel about the preparation of students with disabilities to access accommodations in postsecondary education?

a. Why or why not?

Recommendation for participation

12. Could you recommend one or two high schools within your division that are engaged in promising best practices in the preparation of students with disabilities for postsecondary education? Inclusion in this study of a high school transition coordinator, special education teacher, and guidance counselor would help complete the picture on implementation of the division’s vision for transition preparation.

13. Could you recommend a representative from your parent resource center(s) with whom I could speak with about the center’s role in helping parents prepare for the transition of students with disabilities to college?
Documents/Information/Events

14. Would it be possible to review school division information or documents supporting the preparation of students for postsecondary education? This information may include any or all of the following that you are comfortable discussing/allowing access to:

a. Indicator 13 and 14 data results

b. Division policies/procedures for transition

c. Staff specifically allocated to transition activities

d. Transition curricula

e. Transition fairs/events

f. The number of SAT/ACT student requests for accommodations

g. Community based training activities related to college

h. Parent resource center activities

i. Communication/contact with postsecondary education personnel

Thank you for participating in this study.
High School Personnel Interview Guide

Your school division has been recommended for participation in this study because of the perceived engagement in promising best practices in the preparation of students with disabilities for postsecondary education. Research has shown (Grossman, 2001; Fitchen et al., 2006; Trammel, 2003) that accessing accommodations in postsecondary education promotes success for students with disabilities. The purpose of this interview is to determine your understanding and views about the preparation of students with disabilities to overcome the barriers associated with accessing accommodations in postsecondary education and the use of emerging best practices, behaviors, and events in this process. It will also focus on the role of communication/collaboration between personnel in the postsecondary and secondary educational systems regarding this preparation. This information may be helpful in guiding the future preparation of students with disabilities for accessing accommodations in postsecondary education.

Interview Questions:

Participant and School Information

1. Approximately what is the overall enrollment at your school?

2. For the previous school year (2007-2008), approximately what percentage of students with disabilities from your school, age 16 and above, has or had a postsecondary transition goal of going to college?
3. Can you tell me about your job?

Probe:

a. How long have you held this position?

b. How did you come to this job?

4. What are your understanding and/or knowledge about the demands, requirements, and limitations of postsecondary education regarding preparation to access accommodations in postsecondary education by students with disabilities?

Probe:

a. Do you have enough knowledge and/or understanding of student preparation to access accommodations in postsecondary education?

b. How do or did you gain knowledge/understanding of the demands, requirements, and limitations of postsecondary education? What would you add or change?

c. What are the differences between what students must do in high school and college in order to access accommodations? How did you find out about these differences?
Preparation to access accommodations

5. Do you believe that students that have a transition goal of going to college are adequately prepared to access accommodations in college?

   Probe:

   b. Why or why not?

6. What is the preparation of students with disabilities for accessing accommodations in postsecondary education like in your school/school division?

   Probe:

   a. What strategies/resources are used or available?

   b. What are the essential elements of this preparation? What about:

      i. Knowledge of differing rights and responsibilities between secondary and postsecondary education?

      ii. Self-advocacy/self-determination? Taught or practiced?

      iii. Are students aware of the procedures for accessing accommodations in postsecondary education?

         1. Definition of disability

         2. Documentation

         3. Knowledge of their disability and how it impacts their learning?

   c. How does this preparation take place?
d. Who is responsible for the preparation of students to access accommodations in postsecondary education? Is it a joint responsibility between postsecondary and secondary education?

e. What is your (or your school’s) role in this process?

7. Is there anything else you would like to discuss or anything you would like to see change about student preparation to access accommodations in postsecondary?

   a. Why or why not?

Communication/collaboration/ of personnel across systems

8. What communication/collaboration do you have with personnel in postsecondary education about the preparation of students to access postsecondary accommodations?

   Probe:

   a. How does the communication/collaboration take place?

   b. What strategies/resources are used?

   c. Is this communication/collaboration proactive (ongoing) or reactive (responding to a need or problem)?

9. In your view, is there adequate communication/collaboration between personnel across systems about the preparation of students with disabilities to access accommodations in postsecondary education?

   Probe:

   a. Why or why not?
10. What do you believe is the impact of existing communication/collaboration between postsecondary and K-12 transition personnel about the preparation of students with disabilities for accessing accommodations in postsecondary education?

   Probe:
   
   a. Can you explain further?

11. Is there anything else you would like to discuss or anything you would like to see change about the communication/collaboration between postsecondary and K-12 personnel about the preparation of students with disabilities to access accommodations in postsecondary education?

   a. Why or why not?

Recommendation for participation

12. Could you recommend a representative from your parent resource center with whom I could speak with about the center’s role in helping parents prepare for the transition of students with disabilities to college?

Documents/Information/Events

13. Would it be possible to review school information or documents supporting the preparation of students for postsecondary education? This information may include any or all of the following that you are comfortable discussing/allowing access to:

   a. Division policies/procedures for transition

   b. Staff specifically allocated to transition activities
c. Personnel education/training/workshops

d. Transition curricula

e. Transition fairs/events

f. The number of SAT/ACT student requests for accommodations

g. Community based training activities related to college

h. Parent resource center activities

i. Communication/contact with postsecondary education personnel

Thank you for participating in this study.
APPENDIX B

Email Invitation to Participate

Postsecondary Education Institutions E-mail Invitation to Participate

This e-mail was sent to Offices of Disability Support in two-year and four-year public colleges and universities that were potential sites for inclusion in the proposed research study.

Dear ________,

The Virginia Commonwealth University, School of Education, Department of Special Education and Disability Policy is conducting a qualitative research study to develop a deeper understanding of the bridge from secondary to postsecondary education for students with disabilities and the use of emerging best practice in their preparation to access accommodations in college. Accommodations in postsecondary education have been shown to facilitate success; therefore it is important that students be prepared to access them in the college setting, especially in light of recent requirements to report post high school outcome data. Additionally, a more thorough understanding of the communication/collaboration that exists between high school transition personnel and postsecondary disability services personnel and the impact it may have on the preparation of students with disabilities to access accommodations in postsecondary education is sought.

The participation of your school through interview(s) with disability services personnel would be helpful in gaining an understanding of emerging best practice in the preparation of students and communication between system personnel. All individual responses will be strictly confidential and institutional affiliations will not be reported.

Please, let me know if your institution is willing to participate by allowing the researcher to interview one or more disability support services personnel and/or if there are specific procedures that your institution requires for consideration of this request.

The study has been reviewed and approved by the VCU Institutional Review Board. Thank you for consideration of this request.

QUESTIONS

In the future, you may have questions about your participation in this study. If you have any questions, complaints, or concerns about the research, contact:
Principal Investigator: Dr. John Kregel
jkregel@vcu.edu,

Graduate Research Assistant Sandra C. Fritton
frittonsc@vcu.edu

If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this study, you may contact:

Office for Research
Virginia Commonwealth University
800 East Leigh Street, Suite 113
P.O. Box 980568
Richmond, VA 23298
Telephone: 804-827-2157

You may also contact this number for general questions, concerns or complaints about the research. Please call this number if you cannot reach the research team or wish to talk to someone else. Additional information about participation in research studies can be found at http://www.research.vcu.edu/irb/volunteers.htm.
Individual E-mail Invitation to Participate

This e-mail was sent to all potential participants in the participating K-12 public school divisions and the two and four-year colleges and universities in Virginia.

Dear ________,

The Virginia Commonwealth University, School of Education, Department of Special Education and Disability Policy is conducting a qualitative research study to develop a deeper understanding of the bridge from secondary to postsecondary education for students with disabilities and the use of emerging best practice in their preparation to access accommodations in college. Accommodations in postsecondary education have been shown to facilitate success; therefore it is important that students be prepared to access them in the college setting, especially in light of recent requirements to report post high school outcome data. Additionally, a more thorough understanding of the communication/collaboration that exists between high school transition personnel and postsecondary disability services personnel and the impact it may have on the preparation of students with disabilities to access accommodations in postsecondary education is sought.

Your participation through an interview, lasting approximately 30 minutes to one hour, would be helpful in gaining an understanding of emerging best practice in the preparation of students and communication between system personnel. Support or evidence of emerging interview themes may also be discussed. All individual responses will be strictly confidential and school affiliations will not be reported.

Please, let me know if you are willing to participate. The study has been reviewed and approved by the VCU Institutional Review Board.

Thank you for consideration of this request.

QUESTIONS

In the future, you may have questions about your participation in this study. If you have any questions, complaints, or concerns about the research, contact:

Principal Investigator: Dr. John Kregel
jkregel@vcu.edu.

Graduate Research Assistant Sandra C. Fritton
frittonsc@vcu.edu
If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this study, you may contact:

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Richmond, VA 23298
Telephone: 804-827-2157

You may also contact this number for general questions, concerns or complaints about the research. Please call this number if you cannot reach the research team or wish to talk to someone else. Additional information about participation in research studies can be found at http://www.research.vcu.edu/irb/volunteers.htm.
APPENDIX C

Consent Form

RESEARCH SUBJECT INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM

TITLE: Evaluation of the bridge from secondary to postsecondary education for students with disabilities: Perceptions of emerging best practice in student preparation to access accommodations and communication between personnel across systems

VCU IRB NO. 11866

This consent form may contain words that you do not understand. Please ask the study staff to explain any words that you do not clearly understand. You may take home an unsigned copy of this consent form to think about or discuss with family or friends before making your decision.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this research study is to develop a deeper understanding of the bridge from secondary to postsecondary education for students with disabilities and the use of emerging best practice in their preparation to access accommodations in postsecondary education. An additional purpose is to gain an understanding of the communication/collaboration that exists between high school transition personnel and postsecondary disability services personnel and the impact it may have on the preparation of students with disabilities to access accommodations in postsecondary education.

DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY AND YOUR INVOLVEMENT

If you decide to be in this research study, you will be asked to sign this consent form after you have had all your questions answered and understand what will happen to you. There will be between 16 and 33 participants for this study.

In this study, you will be asked to participate in a personal interview that will last approximately 30 minutes to an hour. The interview will address student preparation to access accommodations in postsecondary education and the communication/collaboration that exists between secondary transition personnel and postsecondary disability services...
personnel. The interview will be recorded with your permission, but no names will be recorded. The recorded interview will be transcribed and participants will be asked to review it so that accuracy may be ensured.

To support emerging themes in the interview, you may also be asked to discuss and/or provide access to records that document events/or programs about communication/collaboration across systems and use of emerging best practices at your school/organization. You will only be asked to share what you are comfortable with sharing. These items may include but are not limited to: 1) written policies and procedures for transition and/or supporting student access of accommodations in postsecondary education, 2) staffing, education, and training of personnel, 3) curricula/student educational programs/events to support transition to postsecondary education and the access of accommodations, 4) SAT/ACT requests for accommodations, 5) indicator 13 and/or 14 data, and 6) evidence of communication/collaboration across systems.

Significant new findings developed during the course of the research which may relate to your willingness to continue participation will be provided to you.

RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

It is not anticipated that talking about preparation of students with disabilities to access accommodations in postsecondary education and the communication between high school and postsecondary personnel will create any psychological or emotional discomfort. You may, however, choose not to talk about a specific question and/or you may stop the interview and withdraw from the study at any time.

BENEFITS TO YOU AND OTHERS

You may not get any personal benefit from participating in the study. However, information learned from participants in this study may lead to improvement in the preparation of students for postsecondary education. It may also inform the design of personnel preparation programs and the roles and responsibilities of personnel across systems.

COSTS

There are no costs for participating in this study other than the time you will spend participating in the interview and reviewing the interview transcript.
PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION

There is no compensation for participation in this study.

ALTERNATIVES

The alternative is not to participate in the study.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Potentially identifiable information about you will consist of interview notes and recordings. Interview data is being collected only for research purposes. Your data will be identified by initials only, not names, and will be stored separately from any contact information you provided. All personal identifying information will be kept in password protected files. Other records including interview transcripts and contact information will be kept in a locked file cabinet for two years after the study ends and will be destroyed at that time. Electronic files will be kept indefinitely. Access to all data will be limited to study personnel.

We will not tell anyone the answers you give us; however, information from the study and the consent form signed by you may be looked at or copied for research or legal purposes by Virginia Commonwealth University.

What we find from this study may be presented at meetings or published in papers, but your name or that of your school will not ever be used in these presentations or papers.

The interview session will be audio recorded, but no names will be recorded. At the beginning of the session, you will be asked to use initials only so that no names are recorded. The tapes and the notes will be stored in a locked cabinet. After the information from the recording is typed up, the recording will be destroyed.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

You do not have to participate in this study. If you choose to participate, you may stop at any time without any penalty. You may also choose not to answer particular questions that are asked in the study.
QUESTIONS
In the future, you may have questions about your participation in this study. If you have any questions, complaints, or concerns about the research, contact:

Dr John Kregel
VCU School of Education
Department of Special Education and Disability Policy
e-mail: jkregel@vcu.edu
phone: 804-828-1872

If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this study, you may contact:

Office for Research
Virginia Commonwealth University
800 East Leigh Street, Suite 113
P.O. Box 980568
Richmond, VA 23298
Telephone: 804-827-2157

You may also contact this number for general questions, concerns or complaints about the research. Please call this number if you cannot reach the research team or wish to talk to someone else. Additional information about participation in research studies can be found at http://www.research.vcu.edu/irb/volunteers.htm.

CONSENT
I have been given the chance to read this consent form. I understand the information about this study. Questions that I wanted to ask about the study have been answered. My signature says that I am willing to participate in this study. I will receive a copy of the consent form once I have agreed to participate.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant name printed</th>
<th>Participant signature</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Name of Person Conducting Informed Consent Discussion / Witness (Printed)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Signature of Person Conducting Informed Consent Discussion / Witness</td>
<td>Date</td>
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<tr>
<td>Investigator Signature (if different from above)</td>
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Master Participant List with Pseudonyms

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<th>Employment Position</th>
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<td>Transition Coordinator/ Specialist</td>
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<td>Abby</td>
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<td>Rachael</td>
<td>Special Ed. Teacher/ Case Manager</td>
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<td>Vaughn</td>
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<td>Vince</td>
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<td>Doreen</td>
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<td>Paula</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ester</td>
<td>Transition Coordinator/Specialist</td>
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**APPENDIX E**

Documentation Protocols

Documentation Protocol – Possible Postsecondary Education Documents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Document/Information</th>
<th>What it is</th>
<th>Reason requested</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Written college policies and procedures for supporting students with disabilities in accessing accommodations</td>
<td>Goals, mission statement for transition, memoranda, e-mails, correspondence, personnel instructions</td>
<td>Indicated the college’s beliefs, goals, and commitment to supporting students with disabilities in the college setting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staffing- Personnel allocated to transition and/or college outreach</td>
<td>Number of personnel</td>
<td>Indicates the commitment to supporting students with disabilities through staff time and expertise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personnel knowledge/training</td>
<td>Workshops, division training, formal education</td>
<td>Indicates the commitment to ongoing education and knowledge of staff members</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student educational programs aimed to increase student ability to utilize accommodations</td>
<td>Classes, instruction, services to help student utilize accommodations (including self-advocacy/self-determination, study skills, support groups, etc.)</td>
<td>Indicates how students are prepared and if the instruction is formalized</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-college Programs</td>
<td>Events at the college level that bring together students with disabilities and college representatives (i.e. College For You, College Bound etc.)</td>
<td>Indicates an attempt to provide information and contact with college personnel to prepare students prior to admission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual data reports</td>
<td>Number of students with disabilities served, type of services received, type of accommodations</td>
<td>Indicates level of overall office activity and time required</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Web site review</td>
<td>Disability services information and contacts listed on the college web site</td>
<td>Indicates dissemination of disability support services information for prospective students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Published disability support services information for</td>
<td>Brochures and other printed material for public</td>
<td>Indicates dissemination of disability support services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>prospective and current students</td>
<td>dissemination</td>
<td>information for prospective students</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evidence of (ongoing) Communication with HS or school divisions</td>
<td>Contacts with personnel in public school divisions (e-mail, in person, other)</td>
<td>Indicates that college personnel are in contact with school division personnel about preparing students for postsecondary education</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Documentation Protocol – Possible School Division Documents**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Document/Information</th>
<th>What it is</th>
<th>Reason Requested</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Indicator 13 (This is not public information and schools will be asked if this information may be accessed for the purposes of this study)</td>
<td>“Percent of youth aged 16 and above with an IEP that includes coordinated, measurable, annual IEP goals and transition services that will reasonably enable the student to meet the post-secondary goals.”*</td>
<td>Transition planning requirements under the IDEA are being widely met within the school division</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indicator 14 (This is not public information and schools will be asked if this information may be accessed for the purposes of this study)</td>
<td>Percent of youth who had IEPs, are no longer in secondary school and who have been competitively employed, enrolled in some type of postsecondary school, or both, within one year of leaving high school.” *</td>
<td>Indicates success in preparation for postsecondary school and/or employment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Written Division policies and procedures for transition</td>
<td>Goals, mission statement for transition, memoranda, e-mails, correspondence, personnel instructions related to transition, division decisions surrounding transition</td>
<td>Indicated the divisions beliefs, goals, and commitment to transition planning for students with disabilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staffing-Division personnel specifically allocated to transition</td>
<td>Division, corridor, and school levels</td>
<td>Indicates the commitment to transition through staff time and expertise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personnel knowledge/training</td>
<td>Workshops, division training, formal education</td>
<td>Indicates the commitment to ongoing education and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Transition Curricula</strong></td>
<td>Transition preparation curricula including self-determination &amp; self-advocacy</td>
<td>Indicates how students are prepared and if the instruction is formalized or left to be incorporated into other instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Transition Fairs/Events</strong></td>
<td>Events at the high school level that bring together representatives of adult settings and services for life after high school</td>
<td>Indicates an attempt to provide information and contact with adult services that may be needed after high school</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>SAT/ACT accommodation requests</strong></td>
<td>Request for accommodations on the SAT/ACT with the goal of improved testing outcomes</td>
<td>Indicates planning with the future goal of college education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Community based training</strong></td>
<td>related to college</td>
<td>Indicates preparation for college</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parent Resource center activities</strong></td>
<td>Information about college application, requirements and acceptance</td>
<td>Indicates division commitment that parents have the information to help guide their children in preparation for postsecondary education</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Evidence of (ongoing) Communication with PSE</strong></td>
<td>Contacts with personnel in college postsecondary disability services offices (e-mail, in person, other)</td>
<td>Indicates that school division personnel will be aware of the requirements for accessing accommodations in postsecondary education</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: *Indicator 13 and 14 from US Department of Education: State Performance Plans (20 U.S.C. 1416(a) (3) (B))
## APPENDIX F

Web Site Review Guide

### Four Year Colleges/Universities

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<tr>
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<td>Contact information available (Phone, email, address)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mission Statement</td>
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<tr>
<td>Policies and procedures (transition &amp; preparation to access accommodations)</td>
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<tr>
<td>How to access accommodations (college only)</td>
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### Strategies and Resources

**Essential Elements of preparation**

1. Rights and responsibilities
2. Self-advocacy/Self-determination
3. Procedures for accessing accommodations
4. Definition of disability
5. Documentation
6. Knowledge of impact of disability

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transition information and/or steps</th>
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<td>Communication/Collaboration evidence</td>
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<td>Other</td>
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<td>Items</td>
<td>Central</td>
<td>Southwest</td>
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<td>3. Procedures for accessing accommodations</td>
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<td>4. Definition of disability</td>
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<td>5. Documentation</td>
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Public School Systems - division level

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### Public School System-High Schools

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<th>Items</th>
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<th>North A</th>
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<tr>
<td>Ease of finding information 1=easy and 5=hard</td>
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<td>Mission Statement</td>
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<td>Policies and procedures (transition &amp; preparation to access accommodations)</td>
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<td>Strategies and Resources</td>
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<td>Essential Elements of preparation</td>
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<td>1. Rights and responsibilities</td>
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<td>2. Self-advocacy/Self-determination</td>
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<td>3. Procedures for accessing accommodations</td>
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<td>6. Knowledge of impact of disability</td>
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<td>2. Transition fairs/events</td>
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<td>3. Pre-college programs</td>
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<td>Available disability support services/accommodations</td>
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<td>Communication/ Collaboration evidence</td>
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**Field Notes Guide**

Study Participant: _____________________________

School or College: ____________________________

Date of Interview: _____________________________

Location of Interview: _________________________

<table>
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<th>Observations</th>
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<tr>
<td>Attitude/comfort level</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Belief in capability of students to access accommodations in PSE</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Knowledge of demands, requirements, limitations of other setting</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of strategies/resources</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vision for transition-knowledge of essential elements of preparation</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
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<td>Accepts responsibility for preparation of students to access accommodations</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
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<td>Willingness to communicate across systems</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
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<td>Setting</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other:</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
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</table>
Key:
1= LOW
2= MEDIUM LOW
3= LOW AVERAGE
4= AVERAGE
5=HIGH AVERAGE
6=MEDIUM HIGH
7= HIGH
**APPENDIX H**

Final Coding Scheme

**Group I: Background Information**

1. **Code: Number of campuses/high schools**

   **Definition:** The number of separate campuses for a college or the number of high schools in a school district

   **Decision Rule:** This code is used to record participant’s indication of the number of campuses or high schools within an educational institution.

2. **Code: Overall enrollment**

   **Definition:** The approximate number of students enrolled in the college or the public school system

   **Decision Rule:** This code is used to report the overall number of students with and without disabilities enrolled in the college or the public school system participating in the study.

3. **Code: Percentage of students with a disability**

   **Definition:** The approximate percentage of students in a participating college, public school system, or high school identified with a disability

   **Decision Rule:** This code is used to report the approximate number or percentage of students identified with disabilities in a participating college, public school system, or high school and if this number is an increase or decrease from the 2007-2008 school year.
4. **Code: Type of disability**

*Definition:* Identified students type of disability

*Decision Rule:* This code is used to report the different type(s) of disability found within the percentage of students with disabilities in a participating institution.

5. **Code: Transition goal of college**

*Definition:* The number/percentage of students within an institution with a transition goal of going to college

*Decision Rule:* This code is used to report participant approximations of percentages or numbers of students identified with a disability that have a transition goal of going to college.

6. **Code: College dropout rates**

*Definition:* The numbers/percentage of students with disabilities that do not continue in or complete college after entering

*Decision Rule:* This code is used to record when participants talk about the numbers or percentage of students with disabilities that drop out of college.

7. **Code: Your job**

*Definition:* The participants’ description of their job

*Decision Rule:* This code is used to record the participant’s job title and description in addition to the activities, duties and responsibilities of the participants’ job as he/she sees them.

7a. **Code: Job path**
**Definition:** The participants’ description of the route to their job

**Decision Rule:** This code is used to record the participant’s career path that led to this job.

8. **Code: Disability services office or special education office**

   **Definition:** Information about the offices and staff supporting students with disabilities, the numbers served and type of services received

   **Decision Rule:** This code is used to report information about the disability services office or special education office (including staffing), the number of students served, and the typical type of services they might receive.

8a. **Code: Staffing**

   **Definition:** The number of staff positions indicated for DSS offices, schools and school systems

   **Decision Rule:** This code is used to record when participants talked about the number of staff and its impact on student preparation to access accommodations.

**Group II: Knowledge and/or Understanding**

9. **Code: Enough knowledge or understanding of the other settings requirements**

   **Definition:** Participants’ description of whether they have enough knowledge/understanding of the other settings requirements
Decision Rule: This code is used to record when participants talk about their knowledge/understanding of the other setting and whether or not they view it as sufficient.

10. Code: Method of gaining knowledge/understanding of the other settings requirements

Definition: How participants gained their knowledge or understanding of the requirements of the other setting

Decision Rule: This code is used to record when participants talked about how they gained the knowledge or understanding of the other setting.

11. Code: Standardization

Definition: Standardization (or lack thereof) in admission and eligibility requirements, services, and accommodations across colleges/universities

Decision Rule: This code is used to record when participants talked about standardization in college admission, eligibility requirements, and/or services and accommodations that are available to students with disabilities in college and their effect on schools and students.

12. Code: Barriers/constraints

Definition: Barriers and/or constraints talked about affecting students transitioning to college, postsecondary DSS personnel and offices, and secondary personnel and offices

Decision Rule: This code is used to record when participants talked about various barriers or constraints for students, personnel, and /or institutions. It includes
financial restraints, administrative support or restraint, overworked/overburdened, active participation in the IEP process, college professor reaction to disability claim, financial aid, and academic probation.

13. Code: Other knowledge or understanding

*Definition:* Knowledge and/or understanding of participants that was not included in “Enough knowledge or understanding”

*Decision Rule:* This code is used to record when participants discussed other knowledge and/or understanding that was not included in the code “Enough knowledge or understanding”. It includes college entrance exams, measures of success, diploma type, transition from two-year to four-year colleges/universities, home schooled, college experience for all students with disabilities, and seamless transition.

14. Code: Essential elements

*Definition:* Essential elements of preparing students with disabilities to access accommodations in postsecondary education

*Decision Rule:* This code is used to report what participants view as the essential elements of preparing students for accessing accommodations in postsecondary education (i.e. academic preparation, knowledge of differing rights and responsibilities, self-advocacy/self-determination, and student awareness of procedures for accessing accommodations in postsecondary education including definition of disability, documentation of disability, and knowledge of their disability and how it impacts their learning).
14a. Code: Biggest differences between high school and college

*Definition:* Participant’s perception of the biggest differences between high school and college for students with disabilities

*Decision Rule:* This code is used to record when participants talked about the biggest differences between high school and college for students with disabilities.

14b. Code: Differences in the laws

*Definition:* Differences in the governing laws between high school and college, impact on students with disabilities, and preparation to access accommodations in college

*Decision Rule:* This code is used to record when participants talk about the differences between the ADA and IDEA and how this affects students with disabilities transitioning to college and their preparation to access accommodations in college.

14c. Code: Availability/difference in accommodations between K-12 and college

*Definition:* The discussion of differences in the availability of accommodations between high school and college

*Decision Rule:* This code is used to record when participants talked about differences in accommodations available in high school and college.

14d. Code: Time/timing
**Definition:** The effects of time or timing in accessing accommodations in college and possible college outcomes

**Decision Rule:** This code is used to record when participants talked about how the time/timing of accessing accommodations in college affects students in college and possible college outcomes. It includes the timing of information/planning/ and student preparation. It also includes time constraint of personnel and its effect on student preparation to access accommodations. Additionally, it includes the time required to change the mindset from that of entitlement to eligibility or from IDEA to the ADA.

15. **Code: Responsibility for preparation**

**Definition:** Participant’s view of who is responsible for preparing students with disabilities for postsecondary education

**Decision Rule:** This code is used to record participant’s views about who is responsible for preparing students with disabilities to access accommodations in postsecondary education.

16. **Code: Role in preparation**

**Definition:** Role of the individual and/or school in the preparation of students with disabilities for accessing accommodations in postsecondary education

**Decision Rule:** This code is used to record the role that an individual participant and/or school has in preparing students with disabilities to access accommodations in postsecondary education.

17. **Code: Adequacy of preparation to access accommodations**
Definition: The adequacy of students’ preparation to access accommodations in postsecondary education

Decision Rule: This code is used to record participant views about the adequacy of preparation to access accommodations in postsecondary education.

17a. Code: Feedback

Definition: Feedback about the adequacy of preparation of students with disabilities to access accommodations in college

Decision Rule: This code is used to record when participants discuss feedback/lack of feedback about how well students with disabilities are prepared to access accommodations in college.

Group III: Preparation

18. Code: Strategies and resources for preparation

Definition: Strategies and/or resources that participants use in preparing students with disabilities to access accommodations in college

Decision Rule: This code is used to record when participant’s discussed use of strategies and resources in preparation of students with disabilities to access accommodations in college.

19. Code: Providing/gathering/sharing information

Definition: Participants discussed providing/gathering/sharing information about accessing accommodations or college

Decision Rule: This code is used to record when participants talk about how and when they gather, share, and/or provide information to personnel and/or students
with disabilities about preparing to access accommodations in college. It includes knowing who to contact for information and networking.

20. Code: Skills

Definition: Skills students need, skills taught, and practice of skills

Decision Rule: This code is used to record when participants discussed transition skills, teaching of skills, and practice of skills.

Code 20a: Individual skills

Definition: Skills students need or already possess to access accommodations in college

Decision Rule: This code is used to record when participants discussed student skills including self-advocacy/self-determination, self-disclosure/self-identification, and knowledge of disability, study skills, and communication skills.

Code 20b: Teaching of skills

Definition: How and when teachers teach skills

Decision Rule: This code is used to record when participants discussed how they teach students the skills they need. It includes individual teaching of skills, participation in the IEP/transition planning process, and embedding instruction in SOL driven lessons.

Code 20c: Practice of skills

Definition: Practice of skills needed for accessing accommodations in college
**Decision Rule:** This code is used to record when participants discussed how or when students practiced the skills needed to access accommodations in college.

21. **Code: Knowledge**

*Definition:* Knowledge that students and personnel need to prepare for accessing accommodations in college

*Decision Rule:* This code is used to record when participants discussed knowledge of rights and responsibilities, knowledge of procedures and processes, and staff knowledge and training.

21a. **Code: Knowledge of rights and responsibilities**

*Definition:* Knowledge of rights and responsibilities and the differences between IDEA and the ADA

*Decision Rule:* This code is used to record when participants discussed the IDEA and/or the ADA and the differences in the laws, including differences in documentation of disability required for postsecondary education.

21b. **Code: Knowledge of procedures/process**

*Definition:* Student knowledge of the procedures required to access accommodations in college

*Decision Rule:* This code is used to record when participants talk about student’s knowledge of the procedures or process for accessing accommodations in college.
21c. Code: Staff knowledge/training

Definition: Staff knowledge/training about preparation of students to access accommodations in college

Decision Rule: This code is used to record when participants talked about staff knowledge/training for preparing students to access accommodations in college. It includes use of other staff expertise/knowledge, staff knowledge, and teacher/faculty training.

22. Code: IEP/transition planning

Definition: Discussion of IEPs, transition planning, and/or services

Decision Rule: This code is used to record when participants talk about IEPs, transition planning and/or services. It includes assessment, quality of transition planning, and student involvement. It also includes the SOP, individual planning and IEP driven, and goals.

22a. Code: Realistic transition goals

Definition: Whether or not transition goals that students have are realistic for their individual abilities

Decision Rule: This code is used to record when participants discuss students’ transition goals and if they are realistic. It also includes whether or not the students understand what is required in skills and abilities to pursue the goal.

22b. Code: Immediate vs. long range goals
**Definition**: System or personnel focus on immediate and/or long range goals

**Decision Rule**: This code is used to record when participants discuss individual’s or system’s focus on immediate and/or long range goals.

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23. **Code: Factors affecting ability to prepare students**

**Definition**: Factors that affect the ability of personnel to prepare students with disabilities to access accommodations in college

**Decision Rule**: This code is used to record participant’s discussion of things that affect their ability to prepare students to access accommodations in college. It includes teacher/staff preparation and knowledge.

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24. **Impact of preparation**

**Definition**: Impact of current student preparation to access accommodations in college

**Decision Rule**: This code includes participant’s discussions about the impact of existing preparation of students to access accommodations. It includes college bound falling through the cracks, students failing/struggling/falling behind, student empowerment, and high expectations.

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25. **Code: Changes in preparation**

**Definition**: Discussion of, or changes in preparation that participants would like to see regarding students with disabilities preparation to access accommodations in postsecondary education
Decision Rule: This code is used to record any additions or changes participants would like to see regarding students with disabilities preparation to access accommodations in postsecondary education.

Group IV: Communication

26. Code: Adequacy of communication

Definition: Participant’s views about whether the communication between personnel across systems about preparation to access accommodations in college is sufficient or adequate

Decision Rule: This code is used to record when participants discuss the level of communication that currently exists between personnel in both systems about preparing students to access accommodations in college and if it is adequate.

27. Code: Type of communication

Definition: The type of communication that personnel use in contacting personnel across systems

Decision Rule: This code is used to record when participants discuss the type of communication that takes place between personnel across systems.

27a. Code: Proactive vs. reactive communication

Definition: Participants characterize communication between personnel across systems as proactive, reactive, or both
Decision Rule: This code is used to record when participants discuss whether communication between personnel across systems is proactive and/or reactive.

28. Code: Strategies and resources for communication

Definition: Communication strategies and resources that personnel use to communicate across systems

Decision Rule: This code is used to record participant’s discussion of communications strategies and resources that they use between personnel across systems. It includes college outreach.

29. Code: Impact of communication/collaboration

Definition: The perceived impact of the existing communication between personnel across systems about the preparation of students with disabilities to access accommodations in postsecondary education

Decision Rule: This code is used to record participants’ views about how the existing state of communication/collaboration between personnel across systems affects students with disabilities in postsecondary education. It includes the impact of resources on communication.

30. Code: Changes in communication

Definition: Discussion of, or changes in communication that participants would like to see between personnel across systems

Decision Rule: This code is used to record any additions or changes participants would like to see regarding communication between personnel across systems.
Group V: Personal characteristics/influences

31. Code: Student characteristics

*Definition*: Student characteristics that affect preparation to access accommodations in college

*Decision Rule*: This code is used to record participant’s views about student characteristics that affect student preparation to access accommodations in college. It includes student independence, know it all, self-concept/self-esteem, follow through, student’s view of their disability, denial of disability, disability related stigma, and student apathy.

32. Code: Parent/family characteristics

*Definition*: Parent/family characteristics that affect preparation to access accommodations in college

*Decision Rule*: This code is used to record participant’s views about parent/family characteristics that affect student preparation to access accommodations in college. It includes protecting students, parental/family knowledge and understanding, parental/family involvement and support, and parent/family apathy.

33. Code: Transition team/teacher/case manager characteristics

*Definition*: Characteristics of transition teams and teacher/case managers that affect student preparation to access accommodations in college

*Decision Rule*: This code is used to record participant’s views about characteristics of transition teams and teacher/case managers that affect student
preparation to access accommodations in college. It includes knowledge of personnel.
VITA

Sandra Coffman Fritton was born in Richmond, Virginia, September 6, 1955 and is a current citizen of the United States of America. She graduated from Marymount High School in 1973 and received her Bachelor of Fine Art degree in 1976 from Virginia Commonwealth University. She received her Master of Fine Art degree from the same institution in 1983 and she worked as a Theatre Specialist and Cultural Arts Coordinator for the Henrico Division of Recreation and Parks where she founded the Henrico Theatre Company.

Ms. Fritton has also worked as a special education teacher in King and Queen County and Hanover County and is an adjunct faculty member at Virginia Commonwealth University. She was also a research assistant in the Department of Special Education and Disability Policy and the Department of Foundations of Education. Ms. Fritton currently serves as a grant coordinator and program evaluator for two VCU Federal grant awards. Her primary research interest is transition to postsecondary education for students with disabilities.