DISABILITY DOCUMENTATION CRITERIA FOR STUDENTS WITH

LEARNING DISABILITIES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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DISABILITY DOCUMENTATION CRITERIA FOR STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Allison Erath Shipp

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DISABILITY DOCUMENTATION CRITERIA FOR STUDENTS WITH

LEARNING DISABILITIES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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Allison Scholly (Erath) Shipp, daughter of Dr. Harold and Paula Erath, was born on May 23, 1977, in Memphis, Tennessee. She graduated from Auburn High School in 1995. She attended Auburn University in Auburn, Alabama from 1995 through 2008. Mrs. Shipp received her Bachelor of Arts degree in Psychology in December of 1999. In May of 2002, she received her Masters of Business Administration degree with a dual concentration in Finance and Management of Information Systems (MIS). While pursuing her Ph.D. in Rehabilitation and Special Education, Mrs. Shipp also graduated with a second Masters degree in Rehabilitation Counseling in December of 2005. She worked at Auburn University's Program for Students with Disabilities as an Assistive Technology and Alternate Format Specialist from 1996 until 2007. In this position, Mrs. Shipp coordinated Braille, tactile images, electronic text and other alternate format materials for college students with disabilities. In 2008, Mrs. Shipp accepted a position at Louisiana Tech University as a Rehabilitation Technology Specialist in Baton Rouge, LA. In this position, she meets with consumers with disabilities in their homes and worksites to assess their assistive technology and accessibility needs. Mrs. Shipp holds two certifications in the field of rehabilitation; Assistive Technology Practitioner (ATP) and Certified Rehabilitation Counselor (CRC). She is married to Micah Shipp, son of Neal and Phyllis Shipp. The couple has a beautiful daughter, Savannah, who was born on November 14, 2006. The family currently resides in Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

DISABILITY DOCUMENTATION CRITERIA FOR STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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As students with learning disabilities transition from high school to postsecondary education they encounter a multitude of barriers. It is essential that these transitioning students carefully plan and fully prepare themselves to succeed in the higher education environment. A few keys to success include (a) selecting the right institution, (b) providing sensitivity training for faculty and staff, (c) encouraging parents to promote independence in their children, and (d) incorporating assistive technology. Students are expected to take the lead for the first time by documenting their disability and requesting accommodations. Unfortunately, the documentation that they are expected to present is typically not what they received in high school. This disconnect should be mended to facilitate a seamless transition.

This study surveyed disability support services programs at institutions of postsecondary education and collected information about their criteria for documentation for students with learning disabilities. The researcher worked in collaboration with the Association of Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD) to create a robust online survey and to reach a wide population of disability support services programs. One hundred and sixty two respondents completed the online survey.

The results of the survey confirmed the researcher's hypothesis that there is a great deal of incongruency between schools regarding their documentation requirements for students with learning disabilities. These results could be devastating to students who need and expect to obtain academic accommodations at the post-secondary level.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Students with disabilities are one of the most unemployed and underemployed groups in America today (National Organization on Disability, 2001b; National Council on Disability, 2004). Postsecondary education is becoming increasingly more important in the workforce. More and more careers are requiring at least a bachelor's degree in order to gain and retain positions (U.S. Department of Labor, 2006). With the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act and with the focus on transitioning students from high school to post-school activities, more and more students with learning disabilities are choosing to attend college. However, recent legislation and current trends in education have unintentionally erected a stumbling block for students with learning disabilities as they transition from secondary to postsecondary education (Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act, 2004). A primary issue is that the secondary schools are no longer providing the types of assessments and evaluations that are being required at the postsecondary level.

This incongruency may cause a break in accommodations, forcing some students to attempt some of their college career in the absence of appropriate academic accommodations. Transitioning students are already bombarded with numerous burdens and difficulties. The absence of accommodations for students who truly need them puts them at a big disadvantage when compared to their peers without disabilities. The

National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities (2007) published a report entitled *The Documentation Disconnect for Students with Learning Disabilities: Improving Access to Postsecondary Disability Services.* This publication focuses on the "documentation disconnect" for students with learning disabilities as they transition from high school to postsecondary education. This publication stresses the significance of this growing problem and encourages others to continue further research in this area in an effort to find amenable solutions.

The purpose of the current study was to explore the criteria for documentation for students with learning disabilities as they attempt to gain access to disability support services at institutions of higher education. An online survey tool was developed through a literature review and a 3-round Delphi process with experts in the field. The survey was a collaborative effort with the Association of Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD), and the population was public and private institutions of higher education who were members of AHEAD for the 2007-2008 school year. Participation in the survey was voluntary.

The research questions were: (a) How recent must the documentation be in order for students with learning disabilities to become eligible for services?; (b) Are adult measures generally required in order for students with learning disabilities to become eligible for services?; (c) Which tests and scores are required, recommended, accepted, discouraged or not accepted in order for students with learning disabilities to become eligible for services?; (d) Are temporary academic accommodations generally given while a student makes an attempt to gain up-to-date and complete documentation?; and

(e) What are other meaningful trends and findings that can be gleaned from the data that has been collected?

The results of the study show that there is much divergence among institutions of higher education with regards to what constitutes "good and acceptable" documentation. Requirements such as recency, the use of adult measures, and acceptable assessments used during testing differed greatly among institutions. These results are not promising for transitioning students with learning disabilities.

With these findings, the researcher plans to encourage AHEAD to endorse the use of provisional or temporary accommodations for those students who may have incomplete or outdated documentation, but who have a documented history of learning disabilities throughout their primary and secondary educational career. These provisional accommodations should be provided while the students are awaiting further evaluations that will meet the criteria for disability documentation. Additionally, the researcher would like to encourage further legislative action that could help ease the transition for students with learning disabilities who wish to attend postsecondary institutions. Perhaps some funding could be given to the school systems for these students in order to send them off to college with updated and complete evaluations. Also, if one set of criteria is adopted for all colleges and universities, then the evaluations could be conducted based on this criterion. This would eliminate the problems that could arise with different schools requiring different time frames, tests, evaluator qualifications, and scores.

Students with learning disabilities should be able to benefit from their college experiences just as much as all other students. This document divide for students with learning disabilities transitioning to postsecondary education is a growing area of concern

that needs to be further explored. The researcher hopes that this study can benefit subsequent researchers and encourage all stakeholders to work together with a common goal of success for these students with learning disabilities as they attempt to succeed and gain academic accommodations at the postsecondary educational level.

II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Postsecondary education is quickly becoming a prerequisite for many primary labor market jobs in the United States. In the primary labor market, "workers enjoy relatively high wages, fringe benefits, satisfactory working conditions, and employment security" (Hagner, 2000, p. 23). According to the U.S. Department of Labor (2006), unemployment rates for high school graduates and for individuals who had received their bachelor's degree were 4.7% and 2.6% respectively in 2005. Additionally, the median weekly earnings for high school graduates was in the $500 range while college graduates received nearly $1,000 per week (U.S. Department of Labor, 2006). Twenty-nine percent of individuals with disabilities live at or below the level of poverty, compared to only 10% of individuals who do not report a disability (National Organization on Disability, 2001b). Getting out of poverty typically requires a dependable income and steady employment. Jobs in the primary labor market are beginning to demand continued education more and more. Individuals with disabilities are already at a great disadvantage when it comes to gaining quality employment, with their numbers far below the mean. Students with learning disabilities still lag behind their peers in postsecondary education enrollment numbers, and those who do attend postsecondary education often experience difficulties once they arrive at the institution (Wolanin & Steele, 2004).

Students with disabilities have traditionally encountered many barriers to postsecondary education, ranging from low teacher expectations and limited access to core curriculum to discouragement by career counselors and other stakeholders at the secondary level. Fortunately though, students with disabilities are beginning to choose postsecondary education as a transition goal at increasing rates. This makes them more marketable in an already fiercely competitive labor market. Wolanin and Steele (2004) found that in 2000, 73% of high school graduates with disabilities attended postsecondary institutions, compared to 84% of their cohorts without disabilities. To add to these numbers, approximately half of the individuals with disabilities who were 39 and younger (college-going years) had an onset of their disability after they exited high school. This means that they were not able to benefit from the typical transition services that are provided to students with disabilities who are served under the Individuals with Disability Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) (Wolanin & Steele, 2004).

Students with learning disabilities are the fastest growing group choosing to attend higher education. However, their attendance and completion rates are still below those of their peers without disabilities. Oftentimes when these students make it to a higher educational institution they experience further difficulties in staying in school. Murray, Goldstein, Nourse, and Edgar (2000) conducted a study that examined the higher education attendance and completion rates of high school graduates with and without learning disabilities. They found that only 8.5% of students with learning disabilities had attended a four-year college five years after graduation from high school when compared to 62.1% of their peers without disabilities (Murray et al., 2000). Even more startling is the finding that only 2.4% of students with learning disabilities and 45.5% of students

without learning disabilities had graduated from a four-year college 10 years after their high school graduation (Murray et al., 2000).

Many transitioning students are overwhelmed by the disability service process once they enter the realm of higher education. Coming from a system that identifies students with academic difficulties internally and then works proactively to compensate for them, higher education is a rude awakening for many students and parents. It is the students themselves who are required to take the first step and become their own self advocates, as opposed to relying on the education system. Students with learning disabilities are expected to document their disability and request reasonable accommodations for the first time, and for many this is a foreign concept. Many students are not aware of the differences or their newfound responsibilities and often lose sight of their duties. Others are left floundering in a disability documentation abyss in which postsecondary institutions are requiring more than is being provided to high school students transitioning into their institutions. All of these factors impede upon students with learning disabilities and may make them unable to take full advantage of postsecondary educational opportunities.

This chapter will explore students with learning disabilities as they prepare for and enter higher educational institutions. The current definitions of learning disabilities and transition services will be explored from the side of special education as well as from vocational rehabilitation. The similarities and differences between these definitions will be discussed, along with potential problems that this definitional difference may cause. Legislation that affects the population of transitioning students with learning disabilities as they prepare for and enter postsecondary education will also be addressed. The many

benefits of higher education for students with disabilities will be demonstrated, and trends in this area will be reported. Students with learning disabilities encounter all general transitional barriers in addition to those that are experienced due to their disability. Choosing the right institution and being able to cope with both the academic and nonacademic factors successfully is very important.

There is often a double-edged dichotomy between (a) special education at the secondary level and disability support services at the postsecondary level, as well as between (b) student rights and responsibilities and institutional expectations and responsibilities in higher education. Being unaware of postsecondary educational laws and policies often puts many students at a disadvantage. Self-advocacy plays a big role in encouraging the success of individuals with learning disabilities in higher education. This is also a time when parents need to learn to take a step back and enable their children instead of overprotecting them. It is important for faculty and staff to be knowledgeable about working with students with learning disabilities at the postsecondary level. Proper use of assistive technology can be very beneficial to students with learning disabilities as well once they enter higher education, which has many more demands than was previously experienced in high school. It is also essential that the student present proper documentation to support his or her disability and justify reasonable accommodations. Predictors of success for students with learning disabilities in higher education will be explored, and some programs and services that were designed to facilitate a seamless transition will be introduced.

Definitions

Learning Disabilities

There are two primary models that are used when defining the term *disability* (*Disability*, 2007). The most common definition is based on the medical model which focuses on the individual and his or her functional limitations that are a result of a physical, cognitive, intellectual, sensory, or mental health impairment. The second definition is based on the social model that identifies the disability as residing in the interaction between the human and the environment (*Disability,* 2007). It is the environment, not the individual, that is considered to be *disabled.* In this social definition, someone does not have a disability if they are able to interact with their environment as well as their peers. One example of the differences in these two definitions is as follows. Based on the medical model, someone who has paraplegia will always be considered to have a disability. However, that same individual will only have a disability in the social sense if he or she encounters barriers or difficulties when interacting with his or her environment. If the individual has all of the appropriate accommodations put in place and can fully function in his or her environment then he or she does not have a disability.

Dr. Samuel Kirk first coined the term "learning disabilities" on April 6, 1963 at the "Exploration into the Problems of the Perceptually Handicapped Child" conference in Chicago (*History of LDA, n.d.*; Larson & Majsterek, n.d.). Kirk (1963) wrote the following in his conference paper:

> I have used the term 'learning disabilities' to describe a group of children who have disorders in development in language, speech, reading, and associated

> communication skills needed for social interaction. In this group I do not include children who have sensory handicaps such as blindness or deafness, because we have methods of managing and training the deaf and the blind. I also exclude from this group children who have generalized mental retardation. (pp. 2-3)

Following this conference, the term *learning disabilities* became common terminology in the field of disability services. Also as a result of this conference, the Learning Disability Association of American (LDA) was established in 1964. This non-profit, consumer-led organization advocates for individuals with learning disabilities and boasts over 15,000 members worldwide (*About LDA*, 2006).

The IDEA 2004 amendments list thirteen specific categories of disabilities. A learning disability is defined as follows:

> …a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, that may manifest itself in the imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations, including conditions such as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia. (IDEA 2004, Part 300/A/300.8)

More specifically,

> (1) The child does not achieve adequately for the child's age or to meet State-approved grade-level standards in one or more of the following areas, when provided with learning experiences and instruction appropriate for the child's age or State-approved grade-level standards:

(i) Oral expression.

(ii) Listening comprehension.

(iii) Written expression.

(iv) Basic reading skill.

(v) Reading fluency skills.

(vi) Reading comprehension.

(vii) Mathematics calculation.

(viii) Mathematics problem solving. (IDEA 2004, Part 300/D/300.309/a/1)

Students whose learning problems are primarily the result of (a) another disability (e.g., sensory impairment, motor impairment, mental retardation, emotional disturbance), (b) a disadvantage (e.g., economic, cultural, environmental), or (c) limited English proficiency, are not included in this classification.

The definition of a disability in the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 is nearly identical. Both state that a disability is a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities. Learning has been identified as being a major life activity. An individual can also be considered to have a disability if he or she has a record of such an impairment, or is regarded as having such an impairment. However, the last two prongs of this definition rarely apply to individuals who are considered to have a learning disability. Based on this legislative definition in the field of rehabilitation, a student will have a learning disability if his or her learning is substantially limited by a mental impairment.

Transition

Transition services for youth with disabilities began to emerge in the mid 1980s. Madeleine Will is credited with the first true definition of transition from a special education and rehabilitation perspective. She was the Assistant Secretary of the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS), U.S. Department of Education (Rabren & Curtis, 2007). Will (1984) focused primarily on employment as a solitary outcome for transition services and introduced the *Bridges Model* that listed three tiers of services for students with disabilities. The first tier was no special services, the second was time-limited services, and the third was ongoing services. These three bridges were meant to symbolize the paths that students with disabilities may need to take in order to gain employment. Using this model, Will (1984) defined transition as:

> …an outcome oriented process encompassing a broad array of services and experiences that lead to employment. Transition is a period that includes high school, the point of graduation, additional post secondary education or adult services, and the initial years of employment. Transition is a bridge between the security and structure offered by the school and the risks of life. (p. 1)

While Will's Bridges Model provided a good working definition of transition services for children with disabilities, many felt that it needed to be broadened to include goals other than employment. Andrew Halpern (1985) expanded Will's transition model to incorporate the three aspects of community adjustment. "The ultimate goal of transition, successful community adjustment, must then be concerned not only with employment, but also with residential environments and the quality of social and interpersonal networks" (Halpern, 1985, p. 486). He continued to use the three bridges of

generic services, time limited special services, and ongoing special services in his model to get from high school to community adjustment. However, the platform of community adjustment in Halpern's model (1985) is supported by the three legs of employment, residential environment, and social and interpersonal networks.

Rabren and Curtis (2007) maintain that a broader definition of transition has been accepted by the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC), Division of Career Development and Transition (DCDT). This definition, also proposed by Halpern (1994), reads as follows:

> Transition refers to a change in status from behaving primarily as a student to assuming emergent adult roles in the community. These roles include employment, participating in postsecondary education, maintaining a home, becoming appropriately involved in the community, and experiencing satisfactory personal and social relationships. The process of enhancing transition involves the participation and coordination of school programs, adult agency services, and natural supports within the community. The foundations for transition should be laid during the elementary and middle school years, guided by the broad concept of career development. Transition planning should begin no later than age 14, and students should be encouraged, to the full extent of their capabilities, to assume a maximum amount of responsibility for such planning. (p. 117)

This comprehensive definition is still in use today to describe transition services for students with disabilities as they exit high school and enter the realm of adulthood.

Transition Laws

Throughout history many groups of individuals have been marginalized in their quest for equality in education. There has been a steady march towards inclusion for all individuals, regardless of race, gender, income, nationality, religion, age, and disability. Racial minorities led the way with their landmark victory in *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954). This monumental case dismantled racial segregation in schools, claiming that separate was, in fact, not equal. A decade later the Civil Rights Act of 1964 mandated the elimination of discrimination due to race, color, and national origin. Women gained their right to equality in education eight years later through Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972.

The group of individuals who has most recently struggled to gain full participation in education is students with disabilities. The plight for these students rode on the heels of the aforementioned groups who fought long and hard both in the court systems and in the classrooms to create an environment that embraces all learners. *Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children (PARC) v. Pennsylvania* (1971) and *Mills v. the Board of Education* (1972) paved the way for all students to receive a free and appropriate public education. The *PARC* (1971) case was a class action lawsuit that was filed on the behalf of students with mental retardation and similar disabilities who were being denied access to public education in Pennsylvania. The Supreme Court ruled that this denial of education for students with mental retardation was not constitutional and violated the equal protection clause of the 14th amendment. The *Mills* (1972) decision expanded the *PARC* (1971) ruling to include all children with disabilities, and

also removed financial burdens as a reasonable basis for failing to provide an appropriate education that is based on the child's specific needs.

After these Supreme Court rulings, individuals with disabilities and their advocates began to have an increasingly empowered political voice as they demanded their basic civil rights and equality in the classroom. The breakthrough in educational legislation for individuals with disabilities came with two key pieces of legislation that were signed into law in the mid 1970s. The first of these was the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Section 504 of this act "prohibits discrimination against otherwise qualified persons with disabilities in any program or activity receiving federal funds, including education" (Wolanin & Steele, 2004). While this act continues to hold clout, the real victory for children with disabilities came with the enactment of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975. This legislation mandated a free and appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment for all students with disabilities.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) as amended in 2004 is the most recent legislation that deals specifically with students with disabilities at the primary and secondary levels. Unfortunately, this comprehensive law is no longer applicable once the student exits high school, either by completion, dropping out, or aging out. The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 amendments and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 are the primary laws that govern the inclusion of students with disabilities in higher education. However, some students are also covered in primary and secondary education through these laws if they do not meet the specific criteria as outlined by IDEA but may still have a disability that impacts a major life activity.

In 1990, transition services became a legal requirement through IDEA for high school students with identified disabilities. Postsecondary education is the transition goal for many students with learning disabilities, themselves representing the fastest growing disability population today. Exploring the transition phenomena from a legislative perspective, many differences can be highlighted between IDEA, the Americans with Disabilities Act, and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. It is quite an adjustment for many students to make the transition from the protective nature of IDEA to the basic civil rights laws of the ADA and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act (Gartin, Rumrill & Serebreni, 1996). Schutz (2002) purports that the legislation in the secondary educational system often unintentionally encourages the student to become a passive and dependent recipient of services. In contrast, the laws governing the postsecondary institutions call for an active self-advocate who must initiate contact and request services. Unfortunately, many students exit high school unaware of this discrepancy and "therefore may experience significant cognitive dissonance between their own expectations and those of the postsecondary DSP's" (Schutz, 2002, p. 50).

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

In the early 1970s, more than one million children with disabilities were denied access to public education, with an additional four million not receiving the appropriate disability-related services (U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, 1999). For some, this was due to the fact that their disability was not detected, and for others it was because their schools did not offer the services they needed to be successful. Congress passed the Education for All Handicapped Children Act in 1975 in an attempt to remedy this problem. This piece of legislation was later amended and called the

Individuals with Disability Education Improvement Act (IDEIA). The most recent amendment of IDEIA was authorized by Congress on December 3, 2004, and the final regulations took effect in the fall of 2006.

The underpinnings of IDEA (as amended) include such concepts as free and appropriate public education (FAPE), least restrictive environment (LRE), zero-reject, and individualized education programs (IEP). Every child in America has the right to compulsory education which cannot be terminated for any reason. This education must be free to the child and family, and must be appropriate for the child in order for him or her to benefit the most from the educational experience. The mandate of least restrictive environment is put in place to encourage the most integrated setting possible for students with disabilities. Zero-reject means that no child may be denied these services for any reason, and financial burdens may not be used as an excuse to deny education to any child. If a child has been found to have a disability through IDEA then an individualized education program (IEP) is established. The IEP is developed by a team of individuals and is a written document that outlines the education plan for a child with a disability. The IEP also contains measurable goals and objectives to determine if adequate progress is being made.

Transition services for all students with disabilities have been a mandatory part of IDEA since 1990. From 1990 to 2004, transition services were planned when the child turned 14 and were to be put in place by the time that child reached the age of 16. However, IDEA 2004 reduced the years of planning by two, stating that the transition services were to be in place when the child turns 16. This age adjustment is unfortunate for students with disabilities who are receiving services through IDEA since those two

extra years can be invaluable, particularly if the student is planning to attend postsecondary education. Table 1 notes the key differences of the definition of transition from IDEA 1997 to IDEA 2004.

While the definition of a learning disability has not changed in IDEA since 1977, *how* the schools can determine that a student has such a learning disability *has* changed. It is no longer necessary to require a severe discrepancy between intellectual levels and academic achievement. As stated in *IDEA 2004 and AHEAD* (2004),

> While in previous legislation a child had to demonstrate a severe discrepancy between achievement and aptitude, the new language removes this requirement in recognition of the fact that often students had to fail repeatedly before they could be identified as having a specific learning disability. (¶ Significant Changes in IDEA 2004)

The discrepancy requirement has been in question for many years. This requirement often resulted in misidentification and late identification for students with specific learning disabilities. The discrepancy rule was also found to be problematic for students who were from a different culture, whose native language was not English, and for those who were economically disadvantaged (Corteilla, 2006a).

In an attempt to circumvent the problems caused by the discrepancy requirement, IDEA 2004 stated that educators could use a process of eligibility determination for students with learning disabilities called Response to Intervention (RTI). Corteilla (2006b) defined RTI as "an individualized, comprehensive assessment and intervention process, utilizing a problem-solving framework to identify and address student academic difficulties using effective, efficient, research-based instruction." Students with learning

Table 1

A Comparison of the IDEA 1997 and IDEA 2004

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1997 P.L. 705-77	Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 PL. 108-446
Transition services—The term 'transition services' means a coordinated set of activities for a student with a disability that—	Transition services—term "transition services" means a coordinated set of activities for a child with a disability that—
(A) are designed to be within an outcome-oriented process, which promotes movement from school to post-school activities, including postsecondary education, vocational training, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation;	(A) are 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;

Table 1—*Continued*

A Comparison of the IDEA 1997 and IDEA 2004

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1997 P.L. 705-77	Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 PL. 108-446
(B) are based upon the individual student's needs, taking into account the student's preferences and interests; and (C) include 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. [IDEA, P.L. 105-17, 20 U.S.C. Chapter 33, §633 (a) (25)]	(B) are based on the individual child's needs, taking into account the child's strengths, preferences, and interests; and (C) include 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. [IDEA, P.L. 108-446, 20 U.S.C. Chapter 34, §602 (a) (34)]

Note. From "Partners in the transition process: Special education and vocational rehabilitation" (p. 44) by K. Rabren, and R. S. Curtis, 2007, in E. D. Martin, Jr. (Ed.), *Principles and Practices of Case Management in Rehabilitation Counseling*, Springfield, IL: Charles C Thomas Publisher, Ltd.

difficulties are introduced to a series of individualized and increasingly intensive interventions. This intervention is accompanied by close monitoring of the student to determine whether or not he or she is benefitting from the intervention. If the student does not appear to "respond" or improve from the intervention, then he or she is considered to have a learning disability based on this RTI model (Corteilla, 2006b).

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act

Once the student leaves high school and enters the realm of postsecondary education, he or she moves from an enveloping law that is aimed at educational success to civil rights legislation that is geared towards equal access and ensuring nondiscriminatory practices. The main legislative acts that govern disability support services in postsecondary education are Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, which is now part of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA), states that:

> No otherwise qualified individual with a disability…shall, solely by reason of her or his disability, be excluded from the participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance… (29 U.S.C. § 794)

Nearly identical is the statement in the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990:

> …no qualified individual with a disability shall, by reason of such disability, be excluded from participation in or be denied the benefits of the services, programs, or activities of a public entity, or be subjected to discrimination by any such entity. (42 U.S.C. § 12132)

State-funded schools are covered under Title II of the ADA while private institutions are covered under Title III of the ADA, and institutions receiving federal monies are covered by Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act (Leuchovius, 1994). Between these two pieces of legislation, nearly every postsecondary education institution in America is required to provide equal access to students with disabilities. Subpart E of the Rehabilitation Act applies specifically to postsecondary education. It states that no academic requirements, rules, or evaluation methods may be discriminatory for individuals because of their disability. However, postsecondary institutions "are not required to compromise on requirements that are essential to the program or course of instruction, that are directly related to licensing requirements, or that alter content or process that is essential to the evaluation" (Sitlington, 2003, p. 105). The student with a learning disability must be otherwise qualified for the program, course, or institution before being provided reasonable accommodations. It should be noted that all of the accommodations and services that are provided through these laws must be at no cost to the student receiving them.

Another important prong in postsecondary accommodations is to ensure that students are evaluated on their skills and abilities and not on their disability. For example, giving a student with a visual impairment a map test may test his or her vision more than it would any knowledge of maps if he or she has trouble clearly seeing the map. Finally, the law requires that the students themselves must make the first move towards requesting accommodations and providing appropriate documentation of their disability. This is very different from what these same students experienced in high school.

Students with Learning Disabilities and Higher Education: Trends

In fall of 2005, over six million students with disabilities (ages 6 to 21) were receiving educational services through Part B of IDEA (as amended), with approximately half of these students (46 to 61%) having learning disabilities (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, 2005a; U.S. Department of Education, 2003; Wolanin & Steele, 2004). Additional students who don't meet the specific qualifications of a learning disability as it is defined in IDEA are also being served under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. In the mid 1980s, only a quarter of students under IDEA were receiving services in their regular classrooms for at least 80% of the school day (U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, 1999). By 2005, this number had dramatically increased to 54% of students receiving special education services in their regular classrooms for less than 20% of the day (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, 2005b). Assuring that students are educated in the least restrictive environment has placed many students with learning disabilities into college preparatory classrooms. This is beginning to open doors to postsecondary education for students with learning disabilities that were previously closed due to non-preparatory course requirements and minimal content knowledge.

Students with learning disabilities are beginning to attend postsecondary institutions at increasing rates, representing the most rapidly growing and largest group of students with disabilities entering college today. While many students come from high school with this label, many others are not diagnosed as having a learning disability until after they arrive at college (HEATH Resource Center, 1999). Henderson (2001) found that the percentage of freshman with disabilities who reported having a learning disability

grew exponentially from 16% in 1988 to 40% in 2000. These numbers far overshadow the next largest group of freshman with disabilities, "other," weighing in at only 16.9% (Henderson, 2001).

Unfortunately, the rates of students with learning disabilities are still low when compared to their peers without disabilities on such statistics as postsecondary educational attendance and completion of degree programs (Sitlington, 2003). Because numerous studies have linked educational attainment to increased employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities, this gap needs to be closed for those students with learning disabilities who are capable of attending and succeeding at a postsecondary institution.

Once students with learning disabilities make it to higher education, it often takes them longer than their peers without disabilities to complete their studies. Wolanin and Steele (2004) found that students with disabilities were taking twice as long to graduate from postsecondary institutions. Also, many federal aid programs, such as the Pell Grant, require students to attend college full time. This may not be realistic for many students with learning disabilities. It often takes students with learning disabilities additional time outside of class to compensate for their academic difficulties, so many also are not able to hold down even a part-time job while attending school. This further compounds the financial burdens that are experienced by these students.

Benefits of Higher Education for Students with Learning Disabilities

The multitude of benefits of attaining a college degree has been well documented in the literature. Results of the 2000 Harris Poll indicated that individuals with disabilities who completed their college degrees were less likely to be both unemployed

and underemployed. Looking only at individuals with disability who are able to work, their employment rate was only 56% in 2000 (National Organization on Disability, 2001b). The National Council on Disability (2004) proclaimed that:

> With unemployment among persons with disabilities remaining stubbornly high despite a variety of federal initiatives and public-private partnerships designed to improve the situation, and with long-term job prospects and income potential for individuals without college education looking increasingly grim, it should be more apparent than ever before that, whenever possible, higher education is key to the economic prospects and aspirations for independence of youth with disabilities. (p. 68)

Consequently, the value of continued education for high school graduates with learning disabilities should be stressed. Janiga and Costenbader (2002) found an estimated graduation rate of 73% for students with learning disabilities who chose to attend a college or university in New York and use disability support services. This is high compared to the average college retention rate of only 50%. These figures suggest that the majority of students with learning disabilities can succeed at this level when they choose to use proper supports.

Madaus (2006) conducted a nationwide survey that included graduates who had a documented learning disability and were served by disability support service programs while they were on campus. The purpose of this survey was to assess the employment outcomes of these students once they graduated from a postsecondary institution. Due to issues of confidentiality, an individual was appointed at each school to make contact with the students. Each student was given a unique number that was used to track responses

and for follow-up mailings. The survey was mailed three different times, and one time a link was provided for the graduates to complete the survey online if that was their preference. The response rates for the six institutions participating in the study were 28%, 28%, 44%, 29%, 53%, and 11%.

The survey was divided into four main parts (Madaus, 2006). The first section focused on demographics and inquired about such things as:

(a) gender,

(b) ethnicity,

(c) multiple disabilities,

(d) time of initial diagnosis of a learning disability,

(e) additional education since graduation,

(f) highest degree obtained,

(g) type of employment,

(h) current level of employment (full-time, part-time, not employed),

(i) reason for part-time or unemployment,

(j) salary,

(k) lay off history,

(l) benefits,

(m) how frequently the learning disability impacts their work,

(n) what areas of work are impacted by the learning disability,

(o) disclosure to employers and coworkers,

(p) positive or negative effects of past disclosures, and

(q) accommodations and compensatory strategies used on the job.

The last three sections were set up on a 5-point Likert scale, asking the graduates to agree or disagree with statements about the American's with Disabilities Act and transition to work, their job satisfaction, and employment self-efficacy.

Out of the 500 graduates surveyed, a little over half of the respondents had been initially diagnosed as having a learning disability in elementary school, with the second largest group (23.9%) only being diagnosed after high school (Madaus, 2006). The majority of the graduates had pursued additional education since graduation, 40% of those in some sort of graduate program. Seventy-five percent of the graduates surveyed were currently employed full-time, and another 11% were employed at least part-time. Of those respondents who were not currently employed, 23 were seeking employment. This means that the unemployment rate for college graduates with learning disabilities in this study was 4.6%, which is slightly below the national average of 4.8% (Central Intelligence Agency, 2007). The full-time employment rate of the participants in this study (75.3%) significantly surpassed that for individuals with disabilities in general (35%) (Madaus, 2006; National Organization on Disability, 2004). Additionally, the benefits and salary levels of the respondents were also comparable to the general workforce. Since many individuals with learning disabilities who do not have a postsecondary education are either unemployed or underemployed, the results from Madaus' (2006) study support the benefits of obtaining a degree from a postsecondary institution for individuals with learning disabilities.

The graduates in Madaus' (2006) study also reported a high degree of job satisfaction, relative job stability, and a suitable match between their skills and level of employment (Madaus, 2006). Satisfaction with life in general for individuals with

disabilities was found to be only 34% in 2004 with 61% representing individuals who did not have a disability (National Organization on Disability, 2004). Since job satisfaction is an integral part of overall life satisfaction, Madaus' study provides encouraging results for students with learning disabilities who choose to attend and graduate from postsecondary institutions. These results also reinforce the importance of properly preparing students with learning disabilities for college. The respondents were graduates of higher education institutions, so it is essential that transitioning high school students fill their "tool boxes" with the necessary components for postsecondary success, ultimately leading them to obtain a degree from one of these institutions. The Harris Study of Americans with disabilities found that the percentage of individuals with disabilities who had graduated from college fell from 19% in 1998 to 12% in 2004 (National Organization on Disability, 2004). This trend must be reversed.

General Differences between Secondary and Postsecondary Education

Students with and without disabilities all must be prepared for the extensive changes that will be taking place as they transition from secondary to postsecondary education, both socially and academically. Brinckerhoff (1996) identifies a variety of differences experienced by students as they transition from secondary to postsecondary education (see Table 2). Schutz (2002) discusses the social and academic aspects of the transition dilemma. The high school years typically consist of six hour days, strict attendance policies, frequent exams coming mainly from lecture, close-knit relationships with teachers, small classes, minimal reading, and a negligible amount of outside research. In contrast, college typically involves 12 hours of class a week, lenient or nonexistent attendance policies, infrequent exams coming from a variety of sources,

limited contact with professors, auditorium-size classes, a considerable amount of outside reading, and an ample number of research requirements. College life opens the door to a world "void of limits and rules" (Schutz, 2002, p. 52). While these differences are across the board for all freshmen, they are magnified for students with learning disabilities.

Table 2

Differences Between High School and College Requirements

	High School	College
Class time	6 hours per day, 180 days Total: 1,086 hours	12 hours per week, 28 weeks Total: 336 hours
Class size	25-30 students.	Up to 300 students.
Study time	Whatever it takes to do your homework – 1-2 hrs. per day.	Rule of thumb: 2 hours of study for 1 hr. of class – 3-4 hrs. per day.
Tests	Weekly; at the end of a chapter; frequent quizzes.	2-4 per semester; at the end of a four-chapter unit; at 8:00 a.m.; after Homecoming.
Grading	Passing grades guarantee you a seat. Performance evaluations may be subjective; based on level of effort or level of improvement.	Satisfactory academic standing requires grades of C or above; performance-based mastery of course content material.

Table 2—*Continued*

Differences Between High School and College Requirements

	High School	College
Teaching	Teachers often take attendance. May regularly check notebooks and homework assignments. Teachers lecture from textbook and often use blackboard and worksheets. Teachers impart knowledge and facts.	Professors rarely take attendance, seldom check homework, or monitor daily work. Professors lecture nonstop and rarely teach you the textbook. Professors require library research and expect integration of information from a variety of sources.
Freedom	Structured time. Limits are set by parents, teachers, and other adults. High school buildings are monitored.	Managing time and personal freedom is greatest problem college students face. Self-reliance is the key. College campuses are often sprawling.

Note. From "Table 4" (p. 119), Brinckerhoff (1996), Making the transition to higher education: Opportunities for student empowerment, *Journal of Learning Disabilities, 29*(2).

Selecting the Right Institution

Selecting the appropriate institution is just as important as knowing what to do once the student arrives there. Transitioning students should carefully research aspects of the institutions that are important to them, including size, locality, ambience, disability support services and many other factors (Sitlington, 2003). Having the proper academic accommodations will not help if a student is otherwise unhappy with his or her choice of institutions. If postsecondary education is a viable and desired option for the student with a learning disability, preparation is necessary to ensure a seamless transition to the appropriate institution. Table 3 outlines the key factors that the student should weigh when choosing an institution that will provide a good fit.

The prospective student should visit any institution that he or she is considering, preferably while classes are in session (West & Taymans, 2001). There are many things that cannot be fully appreciated or determined simply from brochures, phone calls, or viewing websites. The student should create a list of questions that he or she wants answered prior to the visit (HEATH Resource Center, 1999). It is also important for the student to set up a time to meet with the disability support services office during the visit. Just as all institutions are different, so are the supports that are offered to students with learning disabilities. Some institutions only provide minimal services while others may offer an array. Many smaller institutions (particularly junior colleges) do not offer as many services as some of the larger institutions. For instance, a large institution may offer electronic text and provide screen reader software for students with a learning disability in reading. However, a smaller institution may only suggest that the student work closely with the professor or a tutor and may not provide alternate formats for

Table 3

Institution Factors and Criteria

Factor	Questions to Ask
Type of Institution	Is it a 2- or 4-year institution? Is it private or public? What types of degree programs does it offer?
Location	Is it close to home? Is it in an area of the country that I enjoy?
Setting	Is it in an urban, suburban, or rural setting?
Admission	Does the institution have open enrollment? Or is enrollment dependent upon high school GPA and/or test scores such as the ACT and SAT?
Factor	Questions to Ask
Classes	What is a typical class size? Will I have to do much traveling across campus to get to my classes? Are any courses web-based?
Student Body	How many students does this institution serve? What is the general make-up of the student body (political orientation, race, religion, affluence)? Is the institution diverse? Will I feel comfortable with these peers?
Cost	What is tuition (in-state vs. out-of-state)? What are the living expenses for this area? How much will books cost?

Table 3—*Continued*

Institution Factors and Criteria

Factor	Questions to Ask
Academics	Is this institution known for having good academics? Are there any programs that it is particularly known or recognized for?
Residence	Is there housing on campus? Will I be required to live on campus for any length of time? What off-campus housing is available?
Programs	Does this institution offer the academic programs that I am interested in?
Social Environment	What is the social climate? Is the Greek life important to me? What student groups and activities are available?
Disability Support Services	What disability support services are offered? Will these services meet my needs as a student?
Criteria for Documentation	What are the criteria for documentation? Do I have the appropriate documentation for my disability or will further assessment be necessary?
Miscellaneous	What study broad programs are available? Is it possible to co-op? What career counseling and job placement services are available? What are the math and/or foreign language requirements?

Source. HEATH Resource Center, 1999; West & Taymans, 2001; McGuire, n.d.

textbooks. Some institutions have specialized centers that cater to students with learning disabilities and go above and beyond the basic services that are covered by law. Other institutions have disability support services that provide accommodations to all students with disabilities without giving special attention to students with learning disabilities.

Whenever possible, prospective students should talk to current students at that institution. It would be ideal for the prospective student to talk to another student with a similar disability to see how the accommodation process works and to assess the student's satisfaction with these services. While there are some privacy and confidentiality issues involved with this, the disability support services coordinator may be able to arrange for such an interaction. Another avenue would be to find out if there are any disability advocacy groups on campus. It would be practical for the student to schedule a campus visit when one of these groups is scheduled to find out how the disability support services work from a student's perspective. The student should also find out what criteria are needed to document his or her learning disability. This should be done as early as possible so that if another evaluation is needed it will be completed by the time the student enters the institution.

Issues Affecting a Seamless Transition

Transition can be a daunting process for college freshmen, particularly those students with learning disabilities. Adjusting to the new roles, responsibilities, freedoms and privileges of college life can be overwhelming for many incoming freshman. As mentioned previously, college is typically less structured than the customized high school setting to which many of these students are accustomed. As a result, many students with learning disabilities fail to complete their college careers while others experience many

difficulties before graduating. In addition to the academic factors, research has identified many non-academic difficulties that freshmen with learning disabilities encounter upon entering college (DuChossois & Michaels, 1994). Oftentimes it is the lack of these necessary non-academic prerequisite skills that sabotage many students with learning disabilities as they attempt to navigate the postsecondary educational environment.

DuChossois and Michaels (1994) stress the importance of finding the right balance in nonacademic areas, such as social concerns, metacognition, and executive functioning. A few other non-academic skills include (a) disclosure of one's disability, (b) awareness of how the disability impacts their academic performance, (c) initiating accommodations, (d) effective time management, and (e) a shift in support networks (Foley, 2006; Gartin, Rulrill, & Serebreni, 1996; Smith, English & Vasek, 2002). Many students become overwhelmed with these new responsibilities, and research has shown that failure of students with learning disabilities is more often linked to these non-academic factors, specifically self-advocacy skills, than to academic skills or preparation (Foley, 2006). These pertinent skills should be developed and practiced prior to entering college to give these students a level playing field and greater opportunity to succeed in postsecondary education.

Another barrier to access and success in postsecondary education for many students with learning disabilities is the lack of true academic development at the secondary level (Sitlington, 2003). Oftentimes the content preparation for students with disabilities is subpar when compared to their peers without disabilities, and many students with disabilities are not able to adequately transfer their strategies and study skills from one area to the next. Unfortunately, as Sitlington (2003) points out, there are

times when special education classes do more harm than good when it comes to academically preparing students for the college level. The purpose of these classes is typically to cater to the student's individual needs, which in turn, may encourage an attitude of dependency and helplessness once the student exits this umbrella of secondary disability services. Increased academic competition is also a stressor for incoming freshman (Gartin, Rulrill & Serebreni, 1996). In high school, all students were taught, regardless of their ability levels. College students, however, are typically in the upper echelon of the high school graduates, at least academically. Therefore, it becomes more difficult to rise to the top of the class.

Dichotomy of Secondary and Postsecondary Education

There are many basic differences between secondary and postsecondary education. Accommodations and services that are available for students with disabilities vary greatly as one transcends from the secondary to postsecondary world of education, creating a dichotomous dilemma. In the K-12 environment, students are identified by the school system, enveloped with holistic services, and tracked for progress. No student may be rejected, nor may the education be terminated. Primary and secondary education is a basic American right, and *all* students are entitled to receive a free and appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment. The legislation governing this arena is geared towards individualized academic success by whatever means possible.

However, students encounter a much different domain once they enter the postsecondary education system. While students cannot be denied admission to higher education institutions and programs *because* of their disability, students with disabilities are routinely rejected from entrance into college and specific programs for a variety of

other reasons. Many others fail out and are no longer able to receive an education, regardless of their disability status. At the postsecondary level, support services are based on eligibility, not entitlement. Students are expected to initiate contact with the disability support services office, document their disability, convey their needs, and request accommodations. It is important for all parties involved to remain flexible because appropriate accommodations are neither static nor always identified through the initial assessment. Also noteworthy is the fact that prior use of accommodations in high school does not always merit their continued use once the student reaches a higher level of education. The legislation at the postsecondary level is primarily centered upon ensuring equal opportunities and removing discrimination, with success no longer being the key objective.

Many students enter college not even aware of disability support services programs, what may be available to them, or how to contact these programs. Some have unrealistic expectations of the continuation of a resource room similar to what they had in high school (Sitlington, 2003). Schutz (2002) identifies four potential areas of confusion that further contribute to the transition dichotomy. They are: (a) the services that are needed by the student, (b) the services that the college or university is legally mandated to provide, (c) the actions and expectation of the student, and (d) the behavior that is expected of the student entering the postsecondary institution.

In her article entitled *Postsecondary education: The other transition*, Sitlington (2003) noted the increasing number of students with learning disabilities who were choosing to enter higher education institutions and also requesting disability support services. Schutz (2002) notes the increased strain that this is putting on postsecondary

disability service providers as more and more students with disabilities require their assistance. The Association of Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD) is the premier association for disability support services at the postsecondary level, cited as the "flagship professional association for postsecondary disability providers" (Schutz, 2002, p. 58). Table 4 outlines the eight AHEAD-sanctioned program standards and performance indicators in disability support services at postsecondary institutions (*AHEAD Program Standards and Performance Indicators*, n.d.). Schultz (2002) encourages disability service providers to be proactive and challenges them to heighten their responsiveness to issues and also to exhibit these best practices in their profession.

Many well-intentioned parents often contribute to the detriment of their children's smooth transition from high school to college. Parents have often spent the previous eighteen or so years advocating for their child and being his or her voice. Many parents attempt to continue this trend once their children continue on to higher education. Parents often still try to play the role of nurturer, and can unknowingly imbed a feeling of powerlessness in their children. It is instead most beneficial for the parents to "pass the baton" of advocacy and responsibility onto the student and encourage him or her to begin making his or her own decisions in life and education. It is important for counselors, teachers, and other stakeholders to work with and support parents as they transfer their advocacy and independence to their children in order to ensure a successful transition for the student with a learning disability.

Table 4

AHEAD Program Standards and Performance Indicators

Program Standards	Performance Indicators
1. Consultation / collaboration	Provide representation for disability related issues on campus and advocate for campus-wide collaboration to ensure equal access.
2. Information dissemination	Ensure that program information, policies, and procedures are up-to-date, readily available, and easily accessible to all current and prospective students, both electronically and in print. Make available assistive technologies that will facilitate information access.
3. Faculty / staff awareness	Work with faculty and staff to educate them on proper procedures, rights, and responsibilities. Consult with faculty and staff to ensure appropriate academic accommodations and modifications that are consistent with program and course requirements. Provide disability awareness training and information about services to campus constituents.
4. Academic adjustments	Working closely with the student to provide appropriate modifications and academic adjustments on a case-by-case basis that are within the parameters of the documentation. Ensure that these academic accommodations and modifications do not fundamentally alter the nature of the program or course.

Table 4—*Continued*

AHEAD Program Standards and Performance Indicators

Program Standards	Performance Indicators
4. Academic adjustments *cont.*	Maintain a confidential and comprehensive file for each student that includes disability documentation, eligibility decisions, recommendations, and accommodations.
5. Counseling and self-determination	Promote self-advocacy and independence for all students with disabilities.
6. Policies and procedures	Maintain current written policies and procedures for the following: confidentiality, program access, criteria for disability documentation, eligibility determination, requesting and securing reasonable accommodations, service provision, program modifications, faculty and staff rights and responsibilities, student rights and responsibilities, dispute resolution, and guidelines for filing a grievance.
7. Program administration and evaluation	Develop a mission statement and philosophy that is congruent with that of the institution. Glean feedback and assess student satisfaction with services. Gather data to track the use of disability services and to identify areas for improvement. Formulate a budget to efficiently manage program resources. Procure assistive technology through the appropriate channels.

Table 4—*Continued*

AHEAD Program Standards and Performance Indicators

Program Standards	Performance Indicators
8. Training and professional development	Encourage staff to take advantage of professional development opportunities, and provide financial assistance for such activities. Orient new staff members and provide training as needed. Ensure adherence to a code of ethics.

Source. AHEAD Program Standards and Performance Indicators, n.d.

Parental Involvement and Self-Advocacy

Smith, English, and Vasek (2002) combined portions of an existing survey (High School and Beyond, 2001) and distributed it to Baylor University students with learning disabilities who requested accommodations from the disability support services during the 2000-2001 school year. Sixty students completed the survey. Many of these students exhibited negative self-talk and many others relied on their parents for input and to stay on track. It was found that the over-protectiveness of parents is often detrimental and encourages dependence upon others of their children. The authors suggested that parents should teach their young adults skills that promote self-advocacy and other skills that will enhance their college experience rather than encourage their feelings of powerlessness and dependence upon their parents.

Self-advocacy is a cornerstone to taking full advantage of postsecondary education for students with learning disabilities. Self-advocacy covers many areas related to disability knowledge and proper request and use of academic accommodations.

Schutz (2002) stresses the importance of self-advocacy, self-determination, and conflict resolution in ensuring a successful transition. Durlak, Rose, and Bursuck (1994) define self-advocacy for students with learning disabilities at the postsecondary educational environment as:

> (a) an awareness of academic and social strengths and weaknesses, as well as compensatory strategies; (b) the ability to express such an awareness to faculty and staff; (c) an awareness of service needs and appropriate accommodations; and (d) the ability to request information, assistance, and accommodations when appropriate and necessary. (p. 108)

It is important that a student be cognizant of how his or her disability affects academic performance and not merely that he or she has a specific learning disability in reading. The HEATH Resource Center (1999) states that "developing knowledge about one's self – the nature of one's learning disabilities as well as one's personal and academic strengths and weaknesses – is vital for success in college" (¶ 1).

Coordinators of disability support service programs at the postsecondary level in the state of New York were surveyed by mail (Janiga & Costenbader, 2002). The results indicated that a lack of self-advocacy skills and the inability of the students to act independently were of the utmost concern. It is unfortunate that so many freshmen with learning disabilities are entering college with minimal self-advocacy skills. These skills are fundamental in achieving success at the postsecondary level. Mastery of these skills involves the student's own awareness of his or her disability, knowledge of pertinent compensatory strategies, the ability to disclose his or her needs to the appropriate individuals, and ultimately, independence.

In high school, teachers and administrators are part of the team that determines what kind of special education is appropriate for each student. The student never has to disclose his or her disability to the teacher because the teacher is already a part of the process to deliver specialized instruction. Therefore, for many incoming freshmen, the thought of disclosing their disability and discussing disability-related issues with instructors and disability service providers seems like a daunting task. Palmer and Roessler (2000) conducted a study in which modules of self-advocacy, communication skills, and conflict resolution were introduced to postsecondary students with disabilities. Results from this experiment indicate that such training modules are beneficial to students in this environment. The modules increased the student's level of self-advocacy and conflict resolution behavior among other things, and overall produced positive effects. Another way to further students' understanding about their disability and appropriate accommodations is to have them examine and understand any disability documentation that details their functional limitations and suggests accommodations. This could be in the form of a psychoeducational report, an IEP, or other documentation from a qualified professional.

Faculty and Staff

Ensuring appropriate academic accommodations in the classroom does not only involve the student and the disability support services office. Faculty and staff must also be cognizant of their responsibilities in the process as well. Many faculty and staff members are ignorant with regards to how to interact with students with disabilities. Some may feel uncomfortable providing academic modifications and adjustments without knowing the nature of the disability if the student wishes for that to remain

confidential. Others may feel resentful that someone of perhaps a lower status is requiring them to alter their course in some way (e.g., disability staff member with a master's degree requiring accommodations of a faculty member with a Ph.D.). Also, some instructors may be from another country and may either be unfamiliar with our legislation governing equal access for students with disabilities, or they may be unwilling to provide these accommodations because they were not required in their native country.

It is the job of the disability support services program to educate faculty and staff members on disability issues (AHEAD Program Standards and Performance Indicators, n.d.). The ethical and legal responsibilities for instructors must be clear-cut, and adherence to providing accommodations that have been deemed acceptable by the disability support office must be stressed. While the professors and instructors are experts in their subject domain, disability specialists are experts in the disability realm. Therefore, it is vital that both parties work together, along with the student, to create an accessible learning environment that removes barriers that are due to the student's disability. Not providing reasonable accommodations that will allow a student with a disability to gain equal access to education is a great disservice. However, fundamentally altering the nature of the course or program to ensure the success of a student with a disability is a disservice to the other students in the class who must adhere to the course requirements as well as to the student with a disability, who is not benefiting from learning the content as expected. A common resolution that maintains the integrity of the course while also leveling the playing field for the student with a disability is often difficult, but necessary, to find.

It is beneficial for the instructor to make him or herself open and available to allow for the student to approach him or her to discuss accommodations. Many times a statement in the syllabus that identifies how and when to approach them for disability accommodations may be all that is needed. However, it is also a good idea for the instructor to state his or her preference during the first class. Because their disability is "hidden," many students with learning disabilities feel intimidated about disclosure for fear of being treated differently or looked upon as having something wrong with them. Disability support programs should provide faculty and staff with sensitivity training to make the interactions between students and faculty regarding disability related issues as pleasant and inviting as possible.

The U.S. Department of Education has a competitive grant program called Demonstration Projects to Ensure Students with Disabilities Receive a Quality Higher Education. This program:

> …supports technical assistance and professional development activities for faculty and administrators in institutions of higher education (IHEs) to improve their ability to provide a quality postsecondary education for students with disabilities….Grantees in the program develop innovative, effective, and efficient teaching methods and other strategies to enhance the skills and abilities of postsecondary faculty and administrators in working with disabled [*sic*] students. (U.S. Department of Education, 2007)

This is an excellent way for disability support service coordinators to develop faculty and staff awareness and to increase sensitivity to disability-related issues.

Assistive Technology

Assistive technology is defined as "any item, piece of equipment, or product system, whether acquired commercially, modified, or customized, that is used to increase, maintain, or improve functional capabilities of individuals with disabilities" (Assistive Technology Act of 1998 as amended, 29 USC §3002.3). Assistive technology is identified by Sitlington (2003) as a key ingredient in the successful transition for students with disabilities. It is important that transition professionals identify the specific devices needed as well as funding sources for these devices. A thorough assistive technology evaluation should be conducted with postsecondary educational demands in mind. This evaluation "should take into account the individual's learning profile, the tasks and functions to be performed, the specific technology, and the contexts of use" (West & Taymans, 2001). Finding the right fit between the student and technology is key. What works for one student may not be a good solution for another. Once assistive technology needs have been identified, it is imperative that the student be properly trained in the use of the device(s).

Mull and Sitlington (2003) conducted a literature review that examined research and articles that addressed the use of assistive technology for students with learning disabilities in the postsecondary environment. The following issues were identified as potential barriers limiting the link between student and technology: (a) "cognitive prosthesis" versus "cognitive partner," (b) financial burdens and limited availability of assistive technology, (c) abandonment of the assistive technology following purchase, (d) training needs, and (e) questions regarding eligibility. Mull and Sitlington (2003) also

brought up the repercussions of removing a student from special education services at the secondary level, particularly when assistive technology is being used.

Analogous to a compensatory device, a cognitive prosthesis provides a substitution or alternative to circumvent the limitation that is imposed due to the disability. A cognitive partner, also known as a remedial assistive technology device, "supports the student's efforts to accomplish a task by assisting in learning specific material or in performing specific tasks" (Mull & Sitlington, 2003, p. 29). One of the stickiest issues in providing assistive technology to postsecondary students with learning disabilities is that of funding. Computer access is quickly becoming a prerequisite to full participation in the postsecondary environment. With so many students owning their own computers and becoming computer-savvy, having access to assistive technology is more important than ever. While some software is free or cheap, the most powerful tools are typically fairly expensive and not readily available to students. Then, once the assistive technology has been purchased, the risk of abandonment by the student is high. Training is of the utmost importance since lack of training is one of the primary reasons for abandonment of assistive technology devices.

Roessler and Kirk (1998) found that many postsecondary students with learning disabilities were encouraged to use assistive technology that did not meet their specific needs. An astounding 92% stated that they did not receive an individualized assistive technology assessment. Oftentimes the disability support services office has purchased one or more pieces of equipment and attempted to push these assistive technologies onto the students, neglecting the need for individualized assessments. While it may not be feasible for each postsecondary institution to conduct individualized assistive technology

assessments and purchase all of the devices that are recommended, one suggestion is for the coordinators of disability support services to work closely with vocational rehabilitation counselors and representatives from other disability-related organizations (e.g., Lion's Club) who can help defray some of the costs.

Disability Documentation

Disability documentation plays an important role in procuring and providing accommodations at the postsecondary level. Stitlington (2003) points out that the purpose of this documentation is threefold. First, it may provide appropriate evidence to document the disability and also support the student's role as an "otherwise qualified" individual for the school or program. Second, it is a useful, and often essential, ingredient in defining the appropriate, individualized, academic accommodations for the student. Finally, documentation can be seen as a good teaching tool for the students themselves, encouraging them to acknowledge their strong suits along with their areas of weakness. Being more aware of their disability and how it affects their performance allows the students to set more realistic goals. HEATH Resource Center (1999) also recommends using the disability documentation as a learning tool for the student. Unfortunately, the results, diagnoses, and recommendations in the psychoeducational evaluations are often kept hidden from the very individual who can benefit from them the most, the student. It is proposed that the professional who performed the evaluation frankly discuss the contents of that report with the student and what it may mean for him or her in a college setting.

The removal of the discrepancy requirement from IDEA 2004 for students with specific learning disabilities has the potential to greatly impact these students as they

attempt to secure accommodations at the postsecondary level. A clear discrepancy is still a cornerstone in documentation for students with learning disabilities in higher education. Also problematic is the fact that each state has been given the responsibility of developing its own criteria for documentation of a learning disability for students in primary and secondary public education (Cortiella, 2006a). Colleges and universities accept students from across the country, so there will be no true consistency in documentation for these students.

Further attributing to the disconnect between what is provided from high schools and what is needed at the postsecondary level is the fact that each institution of higher education sets its own criteria for disability documentation as well. AHEAD has provided guidelines for proper documentation of a learning disability, but these are not mandates or requirements. These guidelines are as follows: (a) evaluator qualifications, (b) date of documentation, (c) clinical support for the diagnosis of a learning disability, and (d) appropriate justification of the need for accommodations (AHEAD Ad Hoc Committee, 1997).

The evaluator must be qualified to conduct such psychological and psychoeducational assessments. Individuals considered to be *qualified* to assess and diagnose a learning disability include psychologists (clinical, educational, or school), learning disability specialists, neuropsychologists, and medical doctors. The evaluator must specify his or her title, licensing information, and professional credentials in the report. AHEAD guidelines call for a recent assessment, but do not provide specific timelines on which to base this judgment. In order to substantiate a learning disability, the professional must complete "a comprehensive assessment battery, and the resulting

diagnostic report should include a diagnostic interview, assessment of aptitude, academic achievement, information processing and a diagnosis" (AHEAD Ad Hoc Committee, 1997, p. 2). Comparison of the scores is important, along with a specific diagnosis of a learning disability by the professional. Further, the diagnosing professional should recommend appropriate accommodations and justify the need for such in the postsecondary educational arena. AHEAD also points out that an IEP or 504 Plan alone is not sufficient documentation to support the diagnosis of a learning disability. Many times this is what follows the student from their high schools.

Gormley, Hughes, Block, and Lendman (2005) conducted a study on eligibility requirements for disability documentation of 104 institutions of higher education in 36 states. While each institution has the right to set its own guidelines, there seemed to be a few consistent themes throughout. Many of these institutional requirements either mirrored or resembled those provided by AHEAD. For most institutions surveyed, documentation to support the diagnosis of a learning disability must: (a) be up-to-date (conducted within the last 3 years), (b) be administered by a qualified professional who has adult experience, (c) include measures of aptitude, achievement, and information processing, (c) be scored on adult-normed tests, (e) be reported as percentiles or standard scores (not grade-equivalence), (f) show a discrepancy between aptitude and achievement scores, (g) include a specific diagnostic label, and (h) outline the functional limitations. Since evaluations of this nature are rarely provided to high school students, even for those transitioning to college, the authors found a "mismatch between documentation availability and documentation requirements" (Gormley et al., 2005, p. 63).

Sitlington (2003) expresses her regret that high schools and postsecondary education appear to be moving in opposite directions with regard to documentation. Also, secondary educational professionals are moving away from standardized instruments and disability-specific labels and towards curriculum-based assessments and vague labels (Gormley et al., 2005). Disability support service coordinators at the postsecondary level in New York were surveyed to assess their satisfaction of transition services as provided to college students with learning disabilities (Janiga & Costenbader, 2002). The results indicated that they were most satisfied with the up-to-date evaluations that were given to many of the students, but the quality of the reports was an issue for many. However, based on the IDEA 1997, a reevaluation every three years is no longer required if it is not necessary to determine continued eligibility (Sitlington & Payne, 2004). Consequently, many students are likely to enter college with outdated documentation that may not be sufficient to justify eligibility for disability support services. Difficulties are bound to arise when these two worlds of documentation collide.

Interestingly enough, families of postsecondary students with diagnosed learning disabilities are in the highest income category of any disability group, and even higher than their peers without disabilities. Wolanin and Steele (2004) suggest that this discrepancy may be "the result of affluent parents buying fake LD diagnoses to gain an education advantage for their children" (p. ix). To eliminate the ability to *buy* a diagnosis, it is important that disability support professionals carefully examine the documentation that is provided and evaluate it on benchmarks such as those provided by AHEAD.

Procuring and financing up-to-date assessments is no longer the responsibility of the public school system once students leave the IDEA umbrella and enter the realm of higher education. It can be very expensive to obtain a comprehensive psychoeducational evaluation by a licensed professional, and for some students, this is not a viable alternative. Gormley et al. (2005) note that "this can lead to inequity in accessing postsecondary educational opportunities for students who may not be able to pay for expensive evaluations" (p. 68). In Alabama and many other states, Vocational Rehabilitation will pay for updated psychoeducational assessments for students who are suspected of having a learning disability. While these evaluations are primarily used for the purposes of determining eligibility for Vocational Rehabilitation services, they can also be provided to disability support services at postsecondary institutions as documentation of a disability. It is important, however, that the student be aware of the criteria for documentation prior to obtaining the evaluation. Many schools have strict guidelines regarding what is acceptable and necessary to diagnose a learning disability. This is something that the evaluator should be aware of prior to the assessment so that he or she can be sure to include all of the necessary tests and follow protocol.

Maintaining the privacy and confidentiality of disability documentation is of the utmost importance. Psychoeducational and other reports contain personal information about the student and should be kept in a separate file, only to be seen by professionals who work in the disability support office. There are two pieces of legislation that apply to records kept in the disability office. These are the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) of 1974 (also known as the Buckley Amendment) and the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) of 1996. FERPA allows faculty

and administrators to view educational information that is pertaining to enrolled students. However, information that documents the student's disability (e.g., psychoeducational evaluation, letter from physician) is treated as private health information (PHI) and is therefore covered under HIPAA. This information is not readily available to faculty and administrators.

Transition Planning

Getting a head start on transition planning is key to future success once the student enters higher education. Janiga and Costenbader (2002) used a mail survey to assess the effectiveness of transition services for students with learning disabilities who chose to attend a college or university in New York. Demographic information was collected along with their perceptions and the degree of satisfaction of the transition services that were provided to the college students with learning disabilities. Results of the survey showed minimal satisfaction of transition services as provided to students with learning disabilities. The need for further planning at this level is crucial.

Sitlington (2003) offers preparatory suggestions for students as they transition to postsecondary education. She identifies three main areas of focus that are important for all transitioning students, but particularly relevant for students who also have a disability. These prongs are career planning, academic preparation, and personal-social development. The author identifies two primary barriers that often preclude students with disabilities from fully benefiting from their postsecondary experience. The first is the lack of self-awareness about one's disability and how it relates to the student's education, including specific strengths and weaknesses. Even when they are aware of the true impact of their disability on their learning styles and preferences, many students

don't possess the proper skills related to self-disclosure. The following four planning strategies were suggested for transitioning students: (a) self-advocacy, (b) the capacity to handle the typical pressures and nuances of college life, (c) the ability to perform with the appropriate academic accommodations, and (d) the use of assistive technology (Sitlington, 2003).

Schutz (2002) suggests starting the transition process as early as possible to encourage ownership over the goals and outcomes. He also recommends that the transition team include a representative from postsecondary institutions whenever feasible as well as school social workers. There are several transition models in place. Gartin, Rumrill, and Serebrini (1996) developed Guidelines for Facilitating College Transition Among College-Bound Students with Disabilities. This model is threefold with academic development, psychosocial adjustment, and college and community orientation rounding out the three dimensions of change that are required when acclimating to college life. The second model was Levinson's Transdisciplinary Transition Model in which the student with a learning disability can follow sequential steps (assessment, planning, training, placement, and follow-up) to work toward their postsecondary goals. Finally, Schutz (2002) introduced the Alternative Learning Project which was sponsored by the Pennsylvania Department of Education / Bureau of Special Education. Students who participated were exposed to a series of 44 objective-oriented activities during their four years in high school. The modules of this project centered on such things as curriculum boosting, parent responsibilities, choosing the right college, career planning, assessment, becoming aware of one's disability, participation in summer activities, general planning, and IEP development.

Recommendations for Transition Services

While transition services have come a long way, there is also a long way to go. In their *Higher Education Opportunities for Students with Disabilities: A Primer for Policymakers*, Wolanin and Steele (2004) made the following recommendations:

- The difference between the rights and responsibilities as one transitions from secondary to postsecondary education should be clearly identified, using unambiguous, clear, and concise language and terms.
- Developing self-advocacy skills should become a high priority prior to transition.
- Students should be required to take a more active role in developing and carrying out their transitional plans.
- Documentation for disability should be routinely updated for students wishing to attend postsecondary education.
- Professional development and in-service training opportunities on the education of students with disabilities should be enhanced and increased for post-secondary educators.
- Administrators and presidents should further advocate for equal opportunities in education for students with disabilities.
- A study should be conducted to explore the possibilities of providing student federal aid to students who are participating in postsecondary education at their maximum personal capacity, regardless of their full- or part-time status as a student.

- In-service training should be conducted to familiarize financial aid administrators with the additional strains that low-income students with disabilities face.

West and Taymas (2001) note that transition planning should also involve preparing the student to take standardized tests and other proficiency examinations that are typically used for college entrance criteria, such as the SAT and ACT. This is particularly important if the student wishes to have accommodations on these exams since proper disability documentation is required for such. Utilizing accommodations on standardized tests is beneficial since this ensures that the assessment truly measures the student's ability and not the effects of his or her disability. Some accommodations that may be available on such standardized tests include extended time, a reader, or a writer.

Approximately one fourth of all students with disabilities enrolled in undergraduate programs (between 300,000 and 400,000) receive some sort of financial assistance from Vocational Rehabilitation Services (Wolanin & Steele, 2004). The U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services wishes to increase these numbers. The third goal of the Vocational Rehabilitation Services Draft Strategic Performance Plan Goals and Objectives is to "provide transition-age youths [*sic*] with services to prepare for and obtain employment" (Rehabilitation Services Administration, 2007, p. 5). It is vital that a vocational rehabilitation counselor meet with a transitioning student long before the student exits high school. If this student is planning to attend a postsecondary institution then it would be beneficial for a vocational rehabilitation counselor to suggest an evaluation that can be used to secure academic accommodations that will increase the likelihood of success. A triad of planning and

collaboration between the secondary school, the rehabilitation counselor, and the postsecondary disability services office creates a platform of success.

Summary

Students with learning disabilities who decide embark on the journey to postsecondary education face a myriad of obstacles and hurdles that must be successfully tackled. In many areas, the gap between secondary and postsecondary education is narrowing (e.g., more students enrolled in college preparatory classes). However, there is one area in particular where the disparity between secondary and postsecondary education is becoming increasingly evident. This area is that of disability documentation for students with learning disabilities as they attempt to become eligible for disability support services and procure accommodations at the postsecondary level (NJCLD, 2007).

Navigating the labyrinth between disability documentation at the secondary and postsecondary levels is an often underestimated, yet very important, step in creating a seamless transition for students with learning disabilities as they prepare for higher education. Many students are denied academic adjustments and accommodations because they failed to provide sufficient documentation of their disability and support for accommodations. While some institutions may provide temporary accommodations for students as they are waiting to get reevaluated, this is typically an exception rather than a rule. Unfortunately, many students with learning disabilities get caught by surprise when they discover that their IEP or outdated assessment is not going to be enough to warrant eligibility into the disability support services program. Any time that a student with a learning disability spends in college without appropriate accommodations puts this student at a disadvantage. Since students with learning disabilities already encounter so

many barriers to entry into higher education, disability documentation discrepancies should not be another. Leading organizations should work together to converge, rather than diverge, the legislation and guidelines. With IDEA 2004 creating an even greater gap between what is provided by the secondary school and what is expected in higher education, finding a common ground is even more important than ever.

Research in the area of disability documentation for transitioning students with learning disabilities is in its early stages and there is very little that has been published. This field of research needs to be expanded to show that there is, in fact, a true problem that has emerged and appears to be worsening rather than improving. Legislators and organizations can then use the further research to improve upon this area of the transition process for this population of students. Exploratory and empirical studies will increase the awareness of the specific issues that are causing the gap to widen. The researcher attempts to expand the knowledge base of this topic by gathering and analyzing information about the criteria for disability documentation for students with learning disabilities at postsecondary institutions.

III. METHODOLOGY

Disability Support Services' criteria for documentation for students with learning disabilities were examined at the postsecondary educational level. This section contains details about the methods and research design that were used to conduct this study. The criterion used for participant selection is established, and the instrumentation and procedures for gathering information is detailed. Information on the research variables and statistical analysis is also included in this section.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the current criteria for documentation for services for students with learning disabilities in institutions of higher education. Demographic information about the institution's type, funding source, and size are noted. However, the researcher is primarily investigating trends in disability documentation, and whether or not provisional / temporary accommodations are provided for students who may not initially meet the criteria for documentation.

Research Design

Collaboration with AHEAD

A proposal for collaborative research was submitted for review to the Association of Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD) in the fall of 2007. This proposal was submitted in an attempt to partner with AHEAD to broaden the results of this study.

AHEAD is considered to be the premier association on higher education and disability support services (AHEAD, 2004). Therefore, endorsement and support from this organization was highly valued. Additionally, AHEAD has a current database of its members, which is precisely the population the researcher was hoping to target.

This proposal for collaborative research with AHEAD was accepted, and a mutually agreeable timeline was established for the completion and dissemination of the survey. Because of previous commitments to send out an extensive bi-annual survey to all of their members in late-January/early-February of 2008, the AHEAD representative indicated that the survey for this research could not be disseminated until mid-February. The researcher indicated that this would not be a problem. All communications regarding this collaborative research were made through Stephan Hamlin-Smith, AHEAD's Executive Director.

Creating the Survey

Development of the Original Survey

An extensive literature review found two articles that were particularly relevant to serve as guidelines for the development of the survey for this research. Hatzes, Reiff, and Bramel (2002) conducted an online survey of disability support services offices across the nation. The purpose of their study was to examine "institutional guidelines for documentation of learning disabilities" (Hatzes et al., 2002, p. 37). Gormley et al. (2005) gathered the written documentation criteria for students with learning disabilities at institutions of higher education. "The purpose of this study was to survey colleges' and universities' eligibility requirements needed for students with LD to obtain services and academic accommodations" (Gormley et al., 2005, p. 64). The researcher melded these

two measures to create a modified survey that captured relevant information about the criteria for documentation for students with learning disabilities in higher education. This initial survey was used in the first round of the Delphi portion of the study. With each round, the survey was guided by the experts into a more robust and sound instrument.

Delphi Study

During AHEAD's collaborative research review process, a team of research experts in higher education disability support services closely examined the research methodology and survey instrument to be used for this study. Some minor suggestions were made regarding the survey, and those changes were made by the author. Additionally, in order to create a more robust survey, an expert panel was used in a three-round Delphi process. The purpose of this Delphi process was to increase the content validity of the study by ensuring that the survey contained questions that best represented the issue at hand.

Expert Panel

The author approached Mr. Hamlin-Smith and asked for a list of individuals whose expertise was closely in line with the current research. The nine members who were recommended for this expert panel were carefully selected by AHEAD for their extensive knowledge in the area of criteria for documentation for students with learning disabilities in higher education. The names, credentials, and institutions of employment were given to the researcher by Mr. Hamlin-Smith (see Table 5). The researcher then compiled an email list of the expert panelists from AHEAD's member directory which is online and available only to other current AHEAD members.

Table 5

Delphi Expert Panel Participants

Name	Institution of Employment	Position
Rhonda Rapp	University of the Incarnate Word	Director of DSS
David Parker	Washington University	Learning Specialist of DSS
Scott Lissner	Ohio State University	ADA Coordinator
Lydia Block	Ohio Wesleyan University	LD Instructional Aide
Karen Pettus	University of South Carolina	Director of DSS
Bea Awoniyi	Florida State University	Director of DSS
Louise Russell	Harvard University	Director of DSS
Richard Allegra	AHEAD	Director of Profess. Development
Mattie Grace	University of Southern California	Associate Director of DSS

Procedure

Round 1. An introductory email was sent out in round 1 (see Appendix A). This email introduced the researcher, provided some background information on the importance of the research, and explained the purpose of the study. The collaborative efforts of AHEAD were also delineated in this email. The panelists were told that they had been specifically selected by AHEAD as an expert in the field. The details of the panelist's time commitment were outlined: 30-45 minutes once a week for a total of three weeks/rounds.

An instruction sheet (see Appendix B) was provided along with the first draft of the survey (Appendix C). Delphi experts were asked to carefully read over the survey

and to select “not applicable / relevant,” “acceptable with revisions,” or “acceptable without revisions” for each question. If the experts decided that a question was “acceptable with revisions,” they were asked to provide a suitable edited question. Experts were also asked to supply reasons for any questions that were deemed “not applicable / relevant.” Expert participants were also asked to add any questions that they felt would be beneficial or appropriate for the survey and were asked to provide any additional comments or suggestions. Panelists were given nine days in December 2007 to complete round 1. Six out of nine experts completed the first round. The second draft of the survey with the expert’s suggestions and corrections can be found in Appendix D.

Round 2. Prior to beginning round 2, the changes that were suggested during round 1 were made to the survey. The researcher agreed with all of the suggestions made and did not choose to overrule any of the suggestions made during the first round. During round 2, another email was sent to the panelists. This email once again outlined the responsibilities of the experts. The tasks in round 2 were identical to those in round 1. Experts were again asked to carefully read over the survey and select “acceptable without revisions,” “acceptable with revisions,” or “not applicable / relevant” for each question. They were again asked to provide an edited question for any that they felt needed revisions and to also provide a reason for any questions they deemed to be “not applicable / relevant.” Finally, the panelists were requested to add any questions they felt would be beneficial and to also provide any additional comments or suggestions. Delphi panelists were given eight days in January 2008 to complete round 2. Only one out of the nine one expert panelist returned the results for round 2 of the Delphi process.

Round 3. Once results from the second round were collected, the appropriate changes and suggestions were made to the survey. Once again, there were no suggestions that were felt by the author to be unreasonable or unbeneficial, so all changes were made to the survey. Panelists were asked to once again review the attached survey and then to visit a website to complete the final Delphi results survey.

For this round, the online survey was composed and disseminated using Survey Gizmo (2008). Experts were asked to rate the appropriateness for each of the questions and their parts. The appropriateness of each survey item was based upon a 4-point Likert scale (not at all appropriate, somewhat appropriate, appropriate, and very appropriate). Panelists were asked via email to keep the following statement in mind when completing the final survey:

> The researcher wishes to examine current criteria for disability documentation for students with learning disabilities in higher education. The researcher is interested in trends and also whether or not provisional / temporary accommodations are provided for students who may not initially meet the criteria for documentation.

Delphi expert panelists were then asked to provide any additional comments or suggestions that they felt would improve the quality of the survey instrument. The panelists were given seven days in February 2008 to complete round 3. Five out of the nine experts completed the online questionnaire for this round.

Responses

Unfortunately, response rates for the first round were mediocre and very poor for the second round. Six of nine panelists replied to the first round and only one provided

suggestions during the second round. The researcher felt that this low response rate was primarily due to the timing of the rounds. The first round took place in mid-December of 2007, during finals for many institutions and also shortly before the holiday break. The second round took place in mid-January of 2008, which for many schools is the beginning of a new term. This is often one of the busiest times for disability support services programs. The third round took place in mid-February of 2008. Five of the nine experts responded to the third and final round. Once all three Delphi rounds were completed, the appropriate changes were made from the suggestions and the final survey was developed (see Appendix E).

The Study

Participants

The target population is disability support services programs at institutions of higher education. The sample population is all current members of AHEAD and all members of the Disabled Student Services in Higher Education Listserv (DSSHE-L). Since AHEAD is the largest and leading organization that deals specifically with students with disabilities and higher education, its members were ideal participants for this research. However, not all institutions of higher education have an employee who is also a member of AHEAD. Upon speaking with the research coordinator for AHEAD, it was decided that the recruitment email should also be posted on the DSSHE-L in order to gain the most exposure. The researcher agreed that this was the best way to reach the targeted population and reach the most participants. The AHEAD members represent approximately 1,750 unique institutions of higher education and the breakdown of these by type is: 36% graduate degree granting universities, 32% traditional four-year, 28%

community college, and 4% trade/tech or online institutions. There are 2,381 subscribers to the DSSHE-L listserv. No similar demographic information is available from the listserv members due to the fact that this information is not gathered when individuals register for the listserv. The total number of email invitations to participate in the survey that was sent out was 4,131. It is important, however, to note that this number is greatly inflated due to factors such as some individuals receiving emails from both AHEAD and DSSHE, and some institutions having several members of either AHEAD and/or the DSSHE listserv.

Instrumentation

Survey Gizmo was used as the survey development and dissemination tool. This program was chosen because of its ease of use and also because of the company's commitment to compliance with web accessibility standards such as Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act. Universal accessibility of the survey was essential, and Survey Gizmo as been cited numerous times as being one of the most accessible online web surveying tools (Mardahl & Pappas, 2007; McDaniel, 2007). Once the final version of the survey was complete after round three of the Delphi process, it was sent to AHEAD for review by the research committee. For this final review, the survey was examined for accessibility compliance and to ensure that the questions would appropriately address the research questions.

The first page of the survey collected brief demographic information about the institutions and their disability support services. Information was gathered about the institution type (e.g., technical or trade school, 2-year institution, 4-year institution, 4+ year graduate-degree-granting institution, or professional school only) and funding source

(e.g., public or private). The following data was also collected for the 2006-2007 academic year: (a) total student body enrollment at the institution, (b) number of students with disabilities, and (c) number of students with learning disabilities.

The second section of the survey collected information regarding criteria for disability documentation for students with learning disabilities. Staff members who are primarily responsible for reviewing documentation and making the final decision regarding eligibility for students with learning disabilities were identified. Recency requirements of the documentation and information on criteria development guidelines were gleaned. Specific case scenarios were presented in which the individual read the case and chose the most appropriate response regarding provisional or temporary accommodations. The frequency of use as a basis for determining eligibility was surveyed for a variety of items, including (a) IEP / Section 504 Plan, (b) history of learning disability, (c) rationale for diagnosis, (d) report writer's diagnosis, (e) Summary of Performance (SOP), and (f) test scores.

The third and final section presented specific assessment instruments in the areas of aptitude, achievement, and information processing and asked how each was used for determining eligibility for a student with learning disability. The participants were instructed to rate each instrument on a 5-point Likert scale as not accepted, discouraged, accepted, recommended, or required. A text box was provided after each series of tests and participants were also asked to identify any additional assessment instruments that were used for determining eligibility for a student with a learning disability. Information on the type of scores that were used for eligibility determination was also asked using the

same 5-point Likert scale. Finally, participants were asked to provide any additional information or comments that they feel would be helpful for this research.

Procedures

The survey was disseminated to all AHEAD members in mid-February of 2008. The introduction email contained a direct link to the survey and had some background information about the study and rationale for conducting this survey. Because the email came from AHEAD, it held more credibility than if it came from a single researcher. This same email was copied and also sent to the DSSHE listserv. Participants had two weeks to respond to the survey. After one week before the survey results were due, an email reminder was scheduled to be sent to all of the AHEAD members and DSSHE listserv subscribers. This reminder email was not sent by AHEAD and the researcher chose not to send one to the DSSHE members either to keep the two groups comparable.

Research Questions

The first research question to be addressed was: *How recent must the documentation be in order for students with learning disabilities to become eligible for services?* This could potentially be a problem for transitioning students since many of them have not received a complete and updated evaluation for many years. Recent legislative changes are no longer requiring repeated assessments unless the school system feels that one is necessary in order to determine continued eligibility in special education (Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act, 2004). Since these repeated assessments require additional paperwork, personnel, and funds, they are likely to be deemed unnecessary in most cases. This decision could prove to be costly to a student if

the majority of colleges and universities are requiring documentation within the past three years and that student was last assessed in the eighth grade.

The second research question was: *Are adult measures generally required in order for students with learning disabilities to become eligible for services?* Similar to the first research question, the consequences could be bad for a student if his or her last assessment was given with measures that were normed on children as opposed to adults. Such assessments that have been normed only on children are typically not accepted by many institutions of higher education as documentation for a learning disability because it is thought that they do not provide a complete enough snapshot of how the young adult will perform once he or she enters the college environment. Unfortunately, adult-normed assessment tools are rarely used on students who are being served under IDEA, so very few are likely to come to college with an evaluation using these measures (NJCLD, 2007).

The third research question posed was: *Which tests and scores are required, recommended, accepted, discouraged, or not accepted in order for students with learning disabilities to become eligible for services?* The three specific testing areas that were examined are aptitude, achievement, and information processing. With so many public K-12 schools moving away from standardized assessments and towards curriculum based assessments, this could cause a potential bottleneck for students wishing to access accommodations at the postsecondary level (Gormley et al., 2005). Even if a recent assessment has been given in high school, oftentimes the tests that are required at universities and colleges are not the ones used (Sitlington, 2003).

The fourth research question was: *Are temporary academic accommodations generally given while a student makes an attempt to gain up-to-date and complete documentation?* This is a very important issue for many students with disabilities. Oftentimes they are not even aware of the differences in policies and program requirements in order to obtain academic accommodations (Schutz, 2002). Because of this, some students are not made aware of the fact that they need updated assessments until after the term has started. If temporary accommodations are not given while the student is awaiting an up-to-date evaluation then he or she could be put at a great disadvantage by not being allowed equitable access to education. Allowing a student to have provisional or temporary accommodations while he or she makes a concerted effort to obtain documentation that meets an institution's criteria increases the likelihood that the student will be able to be successful during this transitional period. Exploring the usage of temporary and provisional accommodations is one of the main goals of this research.

The fifth research question was: *Are there any significant differences between disability documentation criteria for institutions when examining size, type and funding source?* The researcher hypothesized that different types of institutions (community college vs. graduate-degree-granting) would have significantly different disability documentation criteria. It was also believed that institutions with a greater population would behave more similarly than those with a smaller student body population.

Data Analysis

The results from the survey and the analysis of the criteria for documentation were coded and entered into SPSS 16.0 Statistical Package for the Social Sciences. Once

all of this information was gathered, a snapshot of the current criteria for documentation for students with learning disabilities was established for postsecondary institutions. Descriptive statistics and linear regressions were computed with SPSS 16.0 using this data.

Summary

Through a survey of disability support services staff members, the researcher intended to gain further insight into what is required at the postsecondary level in order for students with learning disabilities to become eligible for disability support services. The researcher's goal was to present the results of this study to organizations who work closely with this population of students, such as the Council for Learning Disabilities (CLD). It was the aim of the researcher to gain support for organizational and legislative changes that may make the transition from secondary to postsecondary education much smoother for students with learning disabilities.

IV. RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to investigate the criteria for disability documentation for students with learning disabilities as they transition to post-secondary education. An online survey of disability support services at postsecondary educational institutions was conducted to explore the documentation criteria and identify trends and current practices. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected in order to gain the most accurate and comprehensive illustration of post-secondary educational criteria for disability documentation. Table 6 identifies the assessments, the type of assessment, and their abbreviations. For the purpose of this table, Aptitude was shortened to Apt, Achievement was shortened to Ach, and Information Processing was shortened to Inf.

Table 6

Full Titles and Abbreviations of Assessments Used in the Survey

Assessment	Abbreviation	Apt	Ach	Inf
Bender Visual-Motor Gestalt Test	Bender			X
Delis-Kaplan Executive Function Scale	D-KEFS			X
Detroit Tests of Learning Aptitude	DTLA			X
Differential Aptitude Test	DAT	X		
Gray Oral Reading Test	GORT		X	

Table 6—*Continued*

Full Titles and Abbreviations of Assessments Used in the Survey

Assessment	Abbreviation	Apt	Ach	Inf
Kaufman Adolescent and Adult Intelligence Test	KAIT	X		
Kaufman Assessment Battery for Children	K-ABC	X		
Kaufman Brief Intelligence Test	K-BIT	X		
Nelson-Denny Reading	Nelson-D		X	
Rey-Osterrieth Complex Figure Test	Rey-O			X
Scholastic Abilities Test for Adults	SATA		X	
Slosson Full-Range Intelligence Test	S-FRIT	X		
Slosson Intelligence Test	SIT	X		
Stanford Diagnostic Math Test	SDMT		X	
Stanford Diagnostic Reading Tests	SDRT		X	
Stanford Test of Academic Skills	TASK		X	
Stanford-Binet	Stanford-B	X		
Test of Written Language	TOWL		X	
Wechsler Abbreviated Scale of Intelligence	WASI	X		
Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale	WAIS	X		X
Wechsler Individual Achievement Test	WIAT		X	
Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children	WISC	X		
Wechsler Memory Scale	WMS			X
Wide Range Achievement Test	WRAT		X	

Table 6—*Continued*

Full Titles and Abbreviations of Assessments Used in the Survey

Assessment	Abbreviation	Apt	Ach	Inf
Woodcock Johnson Achievement	WJ ACH		X	
Woodcock Johnson Cognitive	WJ COG	X		X
Woodcock Reading Mastery Test	WRMT		X	

Demographic Information

A total of 162 participants responded to the survey. A breakdown by type of institution is: 45.7% graduate degree granting universities, 32.1% community college, 18.5% traditional four-year, and 2.5% trade/tech or online institutions. One-hundred and eleven institutions (68.5%) were public, forty nine institutions (30.2%) were private, and two institutions (1.2%) did not respond. Table 7 details the descriptive statistics for the number of students for the 2006-2007 academic year in the categories of (a) total student body enrollment, (b) students with disabilities, and (c) students with learning disabilities.

Table 7

Descriptive Statistics for Student Population for the 2006-2007 Academic Year

Student population	Mean	Median	Std. Dev.	Minimum	Maximum
Total student body	11,220	7,600	11,354	325	60,000
Students with disabilities	412	250	405	2	2,000
Students with LD	187	125	186	4	800

Research Questions

Research Question 1

How recent must the documentation be in order for students with learning disabilities to become eligible for services? Respondents were asked "How recent must documentation be in order to be used for determination?" Nearly half of the respondents (44.4%) stated that the disability documentation must have been completed within the past three years. An additional 8.0% wrote in their answer in the "other" box and identified three years as being considered "recent" but also had other conditions that needed to be met (e.g., adult measures must have been used) or exceptions that could be made (e.g., allowing for greater flexibility for the non-traditional student). This brought the total percentage of institutions that either required or preferred documentation to be from the past three years to 52.5%. The second largest time frame that was identified was within five years. Thirty eight disability support services (23.5%) either require or recommend documentation from the last 5 years. Table 8 shows the complete breakdown of the recency requirement.

Research Question 2

Are adult measures generally required in order for students with learning disabilities to become eligible for services? When asked whether or not "adult" measures and norms were required, 37 (23%) respondents said "no," 80 (49%) said "yes" and 45 (28%) said "it depends." Many of the institutions that stated "it depends" offered that adult measures and norms are only recommended or strongly encouraged. Many others stated that it depended upon the age of the student when the assessment was completed or enrollment status (e.g., dual enrollment in high school and college). This means that

nearly half of all respondents (49.4%) *require* adult measures and norms and another 27.8% recommend or require them in some circumstances.

Table 8

Recency Trends for Learning Disability Documentation in Postsecondary Institutions

Recency Preference	Frequency	Percentage
None	16	9.9%
Less than or equal to 1 year	1	0.6%
Less than or equal to 2 years	1	0.6%
Less than or equal to 3 years	85	52.5%
Less than or equal to 4 years	7	4.3%
Less than or equal to 5 years	38	23.5%
Other	14	8.6%
Total	162	100%

Research Question 3

Which tests and scores are required, recommended, accepted, or discouraged, or not accepted in order for students with learning disabilities to become eligible for services? Each respondent was asked to identify how each assessment in a list was used for determining eligibility for a student with a learning disability. The options were: not accepted (1), discouraged (2), accepted (3), recommended (4), and required (5). These lists were broken into three groups of assessments: aptitude, achievement, and information processing. Based on the results of these ratings, it is clear that there is much

divergence among institutions of postsecondary education regarding which assessments should or should not be used for determining eligibility for students with learning disabilities in postsecondary institutions. Tables 9, 10, and 11 reflect the descriptive statistics for these three different types of assessments and the percentage that each response (1 through 5) was given for each assessment in the three categories.

Table 9

Aptitude Assessments Used for Eligibility of Students with LD

Assessment	Mean	Std. Dev.	Not Acc. (5)	Dis. (4)	Acc. (3)	Rec. (2)	Req. (1)
DAT	2.40	0.981	26.0%	17.1%	48.8%	7.3%	0.8%
KAIT	2.78	0.859	12.9%	10.6%	62.9%	12.9%	0.8%
K-ABC	1.88	0.872	41.9%	30.2%	25.6%	2.3%	0.0%
K-BIT	2.12	0.930	32.3%	28.6%	33.8%	5.3%	0.0%
S-FRIT	2.48	0.907	20.5%	18.1%	55.1%	5.5%	0.8%
SIT	2.39	0.940	23.0%	23.8%	45.9%	6.6%	0.8%
Stanford-B	3.19	0.765	4.3%	4.3%	63.8%	23.4%	4.3%
WAIS	4.07	0.704	0.0%	0.0%	21.3%	50.3%	28.4%
WASI	2.82	1.131	18.2%	12.1%	45.5%	18.2%	6.1%
WISC	2.51	1.128	24.0%	24.0%	32.2%	16.4%	3.4%
WJ-COG	3.90	0.790	0.6%	0.6%	30.5%	44.2%	24.0%

Table 10

Achievement Assessments Used for Eligibility of Students with LD

Assessment	Mean	Std. Dev.	Not Acc. (5)	Dis. (4)	Acc. (3)	Rec. (2)	Req. (1)
GORT	2.66	0.811	15.3%	9.9%	68.7%	6.1%	0.0%
Nelson-D	3.03	0.914	11.3%	3.5%	59.2%	23.2%	2.8%
SATA	2.78	0.903	15.5%	7.8%	60.5%	16.3%	0.0%
SDMT	2.89	0.819	11.5%	5.3%	66.4%	16.8%	0.0%
SDRT	2.90	0.843	12.3%	3.8%	65.4%	18.5%	0.0%
TASK	2.86	0.874	12.7%	7.1%	62.7%	16.7%	0.8%
TOWL	2.90	0.854	11.8%	5.9%	64.0%	17.6%	0.7%
WIAT	3.66	0.652	0.0%	1.3%	40.1%	50.0%	8.6%
WRAT	2.80	1.089	17.7%	13.6%	43.5%	21.1%	4.1%
WJ-ACH	3.81	0.653	0.0%	0.6%	30.3%	56.1%	12.9%
WRMT	3.39	0.836	4.8%	1.4%	50.3%	36.6%	6.9%

The Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale (WAIS) and Woodcock Johnson Cognitive (WJ-R) were deemed the most acceptable of the aptitude assessments with means of 4.07 and 3.90, respectively. Additionally, these were the only two aptitude assessments whose most frequent response was "recommended." The respondents identified the WAIS as being accepted 21.3% of the time, recommended 50.3% of the time, and required 28.4% of the time. Those percentages for the WJ-COG were 30.5%, 44.2%, and 24.0%, respectively. The Kaufman Assessment Battery for Children (K-ABC) with a mean of 1.88 was regarded as the least desirable aptitude assessment in the determination of a

learning disability diagnosis. The K-ABC was also the only aptitude assessment in which "not accepted" was the most frequent response (41.9%). The Wechsler Abbreviated Scale of Intelligence (WASI) and the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children (WISC) were the two aptitude assessments with the most varied responses.

Table 11

Information Processing Assessments Used for Eligibility of Students with LD

Assessment	Mean	Std. Dev.	Not Acc. (5)	Dis. (4)	Acc. (3)	Rec. (2)	Req. (1)
Bender	2.99	0.702	6.5%	5.8%	70.5%	17.3%	0.0%
D-KEFS	2.89	0.801	11.1%	3.7%	70.4%	14.8%	0.0%
DTLA	2.75	0.799	12.7%	9.5%	68.3%	9.5%	0.0%
Rey-O	2.72	0.860	14.8%	10.2%	63.3%	11.7%	0.0%
WAIS	3.81	0.725	0.0%	2.0%	31.6%	50.0%	16.4%
WMS	3.51	0.766	2.1%	1.4%	48.6%	38.9%	9.0%
WJ-COG	3.74	0.726	0.6%	1.9%	32.7%	51.9%	12.8%

Research Question 4

Are temporary academic accommodations generally given while a student makes an attempt to gain up-to-date and complete documentation? In order to assess this, two questions were developed. The choices to both questions were always (5), frequently (4), sometimes (3), rarely (2), and never (1). Questions 11 and 12 on the survey read:

11. Suppose a student was diagnosed with a learning disability in high school, but the report (while complete and supportive of the diagnosis) is out-of-date. Does

the disability support services program provide temporary or provisional services and accommodations for these students while they obtain an up-to-date report?

and

12. Suppose a student was diagnosed with a learning disability in high school, and the only documentation you have is an IEP that states the diagnosis and accommodations that were provided. Does the disability support services program provide temporary or provisional services and accommodations for these students while they obtain a complete report?

The most common answer given to question 11 regarding an out-of-date report was always. Seventy one percent of the respondents stated that temporary accommodations would be provided in this situation either always or frequently. The mean for this question was 3.90, but the standard deviation was relatively high at 1.129. The response for question 12 was not quite as emphatic and there seemed to be a high degree of dissonance. The 25th percentile, median and 75th percentile responses were rarely, frequently, and always. This shows a great deal of variability among responses. Table 12 shows the results of a descriptive analysis for these two questions.

Table 12

Temporary Accommodations Provided When New Documentation is Being Obtained

Question	Mean	Std. Dev.	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Frequently	Always
11. Out-of-date	3.90	1.129	4.3%	9.3%	15.4%	34.6%	36.4%
12. Only have IEP	3.43	1.294	9.3%	17.3%	20.4%	27.2%	25.9%

Research Question 5

Are there any significant differences between disability documentation criteria for institutions when examining size, type and funding source? The researcher performed many multiple regressions in an attempt to find some meaningful relationships between the variables. It was thought that there would be a difference between public and private institutions in terms of what assessments are accepted, what is used for determining eligibility, adult-based requirements, etc. However, no significant differences were found between public and private institutions. While there were some significant differences found between documentation criteria for the various types of institutions (e.g., community college vs. traditional 4-year), the variable that seemed to make the most difference was the overall size of the institution. Tables 13, 14 and 15 show the results from a multiple regression model with total student body enrollment as the dependent variable and (a) IEP / Section 504 Plan, (b) requiring "adult measures," and (c) use of the WISC as the independent variables.

The results of this analysis show that the larger the total body student population, the more likely the institution is to require adult measures, and not accept the WISC or an IEP / Section 504 Plan as documentation for a student with a learning disability. The combination of these three things accounts for 10.6% of the variance in total student body population. While this was a significant finding, this is not a large variance.

Table 13

First Model Summary with Total Student Body Enrollment as the Dependent Variable

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.326	.106	.086	10393.568

Table 14

First ANOVA with Total Student Body Enrollment as the Dependent Variable

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	1.732E9	3	5.774E8	5.345	.002
	Residual	1.458E10	135	1.080E8		
	Total	1.632E10	138			

Table 15

First Coefficients with Total Student Body Enrollment as the Dependent Variable

		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
Model		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	19109.255	2823.275		6.768	.000
	Adult measures	1132.208	795.082	.116	1.424	.157
	WISC	-2391.988	817.540	-.249	-2.926	.004
	IEP / Section 504 Plan	-1171.337	775.515	-.128	-1.510	.133

In question 13, the participants were asked how often things such as "Summary of performance," "Test scores," and "Report writer's specific diagnosis" were used as a basis for determining eligibility for a student with a learning disability. The size of the institution was, once again, better explained by the independent variables than was either the funding source or the type of institution. Tables 16, 17 and 18 show the results from this multiple regression analysis.

Interestingly enough, the larger the institution, the less likely it was to use the report writer's specific diagnosis when determining eligibility as noted by the standardized beta weight of -.285. Additionally, the larger the institution, the more likely they were to use the rationale for the diagnosis ($\beta = .181$). In this model, 10.5% of the variability in an institution's size can be accounted for by how often it uses various inputs (e.g., history of learning disability, report writer's specific diagnosis, test scores, professional judgment by DSS) as a basis for determining eligibility for services.

When asked specifically which scores were used for determining eligibility for a student with a learning disability, the respondents from the larger institutions were more likely to report that standard scores ($\beta = .258$) were used the most while stanines ($\beta = -.289$) and grade equivalent ($\beta = -.216$) scores were the least desirable. Seventeen percent of the variance in total student body enrollment was explained by these variables. There was not a significant relationship between these variables and either the funding source of the type of institution. See tables 19, 20 and 21 for the complete analysis of how the scores that are used predicted the size of the institution.

Table 16

Second Model Summary with Total Student Body Enrollment as the Dependent Variable

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.401a	.161	.105	10766.379

a. Predictors: (Constant), Test scores, Specific diagnosis, IEP / Section 504 Plan, Professional judgment of DSS staff, Suggestion of a diagnosis, Summary of Performance, Student input, History of learning disability, and Rationale for diagnosis

Table 17

Second ANOVA with Total Student Body Enrollment as the Dependent Variable

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	3.038E9	9	3.375E8	2.912	.003a
	Residual	1.588E10	137	1.159E8		
	Total	1.892E10	146			

a. Predictors: (Constant), Test scores, Specific diagnosis, IEP / Section 504 Plan, Professional judgment of DSS staff, Suggestion of a diagnosis, Summary of Performance, Student input, History of learning disability, and Rationale for diagnosis

Table 18

Second Coefficients with Total Student Body Enrollment as the Dependent Variable

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	29780.603	6104.430		4.879	.000
Professional judgment of staff	391.448	849.480	.046	.461	.646
IEP / Section 504 Plan	-1066.527	909.106	-.111	-1.173	.243
History of learning disability	-1581.657	1087.704	-.160	-1.454	.148
Rationale for diagnosis	1726.782	1115.753	.181	1.548	.124
Specific diagnosis	-3723.201	1196.963	-.285	-3.111	.002
Suggestion of a diagnosis	-1571.934	885.559	-.168	-1.775	.078
Student input	728.234	838.370	.084	.869	.387
Summary of performance	794.094	833.838	.090	.952	.343
Test scores	-402.469	878.886	-.040	-.458	.648

Table 19

Third Model Summary with Total Student Body Enrollment as the Dependent Variable

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.413a	.170	.132	9966.508

a. Predictors: (Constant), Stanines, Standard scores, Age equivalent, Percentiles, Grade equivalent, Quartiles

Table 20

Third ANOVA with Total Student Body Enrollment as the Dependent Variable

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	2.651E9	6	4.419E8	4.449	.000a
	Residual	1.291E10	130	9.933E7		
	Total	1.556E10	136			

a. Predictors: (Constant), Stanines, Standard scores, Age equivalent, Percentiles, Grade equivalent, Quartiles

Table 21

Third Coefficients with Total Student Body Enrollment as the Dependent Variable

		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
Model		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	13592.657	5149.544		2.640	.009
	Age equivalent	854.315	911.290	.098	.937	.350
	Grade equivalent	-2011.543	1074.879	-.216	-1.871	.064
	Percentiles	-2115.455	1025.253	-.199	-2.063	.041
	Quartiles	1518.129	1355.493	.150	1.120	.265
	Standard scores	3067.056	1081.930	.258	2.835	.005
	Stanines	-2912.135	1258.272	-.289	-2.314	.022

Other Significant or Relevant Findings

There was a great deal of other information that was collected through this survey. Question 13 asked "How often are each of the following used as a basis for determining eligibility for a student with a learning disability?" Nine items were listed and the respondents were asked to rate them as either always (5), frequently (4), sometimes (3), rarely (2), and never (1). An Individualized Education Program (IEP) / Section 504 Plan (mean = 2.75, mode = rarely) and a Summary of Performance (SOP) (mean = 2.54, mode = never) were rated as the least likely to be used to determine eligibility of a student with a learning disability. The two most likely to be used as a basis for determining eligibility were the report writer's specific diagnosis and the test scores. See Table 22 for complete descriptive statistics.

Table 22

Descriptive Statistics for Basing Eligibility upon for a Student with a Learning Disability

	Mean	Std. Dev.	Never	Rarely	Some-times	Fre-quently	Al-ways
Professional judgment by DSS staff	3.90	1.329	8.7%	9.3%	13.0%	21.1%	47.8%
IEP / Section 504 Plan	2.75	1.203	15.8%	31.0%	24.1%	20.3%	8.9%
History of LD	3.54	1.157	7.5%	9.4%	26.4%	34.6%	22.0%
Rationale for diagnosis	3.89	1.176	6.2%	6.2%	18.8%	30.0%	38.8%

Table 22—*Continued*

Descriptive Statistics for Basing Eligibility upon for a Student with a Learning Disability

	Mean	Std. Dev.	Never	Rarely	Some-times	Fre-quently	Al-ways
Report writer's specific diagnosis	4.38	0.851	1.9%	1.2%	9.3%	32.3%	55.3%
Report writer's suggestion of a diagnosis	3.06	1.206	13.1%	20.0%	24.4%	32.5%	10.0%
Student input	3.39	1.276	11.2%	13.0%	23.6%	29.8%	22.4%
Summary of performance	2.54	1.282	30.1%	18.6%	25.0%	19.9%	6.4%
Test scores	4.16	1.104	4.4%	5.6%	10.6%	28.1%	51.2%

V. DISCUSSION

This study explored current disability documentation criteria for students with learning disabilities at postsecondary institutions. One hundred and sixty two respondents completed the survey. The results of the survey were very revealing and substantiate the researcher's thoughts that the "documentation divide" will continue to get larger for students with learning disabilities unless changes are made. This study confirms and extends the previous research conducted by Gormley et al. (2005) and Hatzes et al. (2002). These findings can serve as a starting point for others who wish to explore this issue of criteria for documentation for students with learning disabilities in higher education. The findings can also be used to encourage groups such as AHEAD to make changes to their policies in order to ensure that all students with learning disabilities receive the proper accommodations in a timely manner. It is also anticipated that results from studies such as this one will show legislatures that this truly is a problem for many students and that something needs to be done in order to ensure that they receive appropriate postsecondary accommodations when they need them.

Interpretation of Research Questions

Research Question 1

How recent must the documentation be in order for students with learning disabilities to become eligible for services? Over half of the postsecondary institutions

that responded to the survey either require or prefer disability documentation from the past three years in order to make a student eligible for their services. The second largest recency requirements were five years or less (23.5%). To be considered "current," Educational Testing Service (2007) states that documentation "must generally have been completed within the past five years." AHEAD's Best Practices Regarding Disabilities in Higher Education (1997) states that documentation should have been completed within three to five years in order to be considered current.

The most recent amendment of IDEA (2004) states that reevaluations should occur "at least once every 3 years, unless the parent and the local educational agency agree that a reevaluation is unnecessary." If a student is benefitting from the special education services that are being provided, it would not seem prudent to reevaluate him or her. Consequently, there are going to be more and more students entering postsecondary education with only an initial evaluation that was conducted when they were young, possibly in grade school. These students will likely come to college with only a Summary of Performance, an Individualized Education Program, and an evaluation that was conducted more than three or five years prior. Based on the results of this study, it is clear that none of these three things will be enough to procure support services at most postsecondary institutions.

Another potential problem with the difference in recency requirements is that the same student may be accommodated at one institution but be required to obtain more recent documentation at another. Some students may opt to attend an institution that is lower down on their list simply because they will not be required to obtain a new

evaluation. This could result in an unnatural influx of students with learning disabilities at the institutions with the more lenient recency requirements.

Research Question 2

Are adult measures generally required in order for students with learning disabilities to become eligible for services? Forty-nine percent of the institutions surveyed stated that they require adult measures to be used in the evaluation in order for a student to become eligible for support services through the DSS offices. Since the majority of students will likely be entering higher education with assessments from when they were children or adolescents, many of them may be within the recency requirements but may not have the appropriate adult-based measures and norms. A similar shifting of the student population for those with learning disabilities could occur with some students opting for institutions that do not require adult measures rather than choose those that do.

Research Question 3

Which tests and scores are required, recommended, accepted, or discouraged, or not accepted in order for students with learning disabilities to become eligible for services? The results related to this research question were equally devastating for students with learning disabilities. The WISC, which is one of the most frequently used assessments for determining whether or not a child has a learning disability, is "not accepted" by 24% and "discouraged" by an additional 24% of the institutions surveyed. This could result in many problems for transitioning students due to the mismatch between what disability documentation is provided and what is expected.

Results also showed that oftentimes the same assessment would be required at some institutions but not accepted at others. For example, with achievement tests, the

Wide Range Achievement Test (WRAT) is required by 4.1% of institutions but not accepted by 17.7%. There are other examples of this sort of discrepancy. This could mean that a student wishing to consider more than one institution or wanting to transfer to a different college may need to obtain yet another assessment in order to ensure eligibility for accommodations at all institutions that he or she is considering. This is an undue burden for the student and families, and the consequences could be disastrous.

Research Question 4

Are temporary academic accommodations generally given while a student makes an attempt to gain up-to-date and complete documentation? When asked whether or not they would provide provisional or temporary accommodations for students who came with either an out-of-date assessment or only an IEP, the variance of the responses was quite large. The standard deviation for both of these questions was greater than one on a five-point scale. Additionally, the 25th percentile and 75th percentile for both questions contained a different response than the median. For the "only have IEP" question, 9.3% stated that accommodations were never provided, 17.3% stated rarely, 20.4% for sometimes, 27.2% for frequently, and 25.9% for always. This is a huge discrepancy.

Many students are exiting high school believing that they will be able to obtain similar accommodations at the postsecondary level. Since they have become accustomed to the schools bearing the responsibility of diagnosis and identification, many students and their families will expect similar treatment and guidelines at the next level. It would be very unfortunate for a student to begin classes at an institution that does not provide temporary or provisional accommodations to those students while they obtain a current assessment or if they only have an IEP. This could result in a student not being able to

obtain the needed accommodations in time, perhaps leading to poor grades, dropping out of school, feeling that they cannot handle higher education, etc.

Research Question 5

Are there any significant differences between disability documentation criteria for institutions when examining size, type and funding source? The results of the regression analysis indicated that the size of the institution was a much better predictor than the funding source or type of the institution when looking at criteria for disability documentation for students with learning disabilities. This was surprising since it was anticipated that the type of the institution would be a better predictor of the documentation requirements. However, it appears from the results of this study that, in general for example, a public community college with a student population of 30,000 would have more in common with a private 4+ year institution with a population of 30,000 than it would with a public community college with a student population of 1,000. The smaller institutions seemed to be less reliant on standardized or rigorous assessments (e.g., many accepting an IEP as documentation). They also more readily accepted evaluations that did not have adult-based norms such as the WISC.

Other Significant or Relevant Findings

High schools are beginning to use Summary of Performances (SOPs) as a means to provide what they consider to be recent and relevant information about a student and how his or her disability impacts academic performance. Unfortunately, when disability support service programs were asked how often SOPs were used as a basis for determining eligibility for a student with a learning disability, the most common answer was never! Due to this trend towards SOPs, more and more students will be entering

higher education with a document that many colleges and universities feel is not useful in determining eligibility.

Limitations

One of the limitations of this study is the inability to accurately determine the true sample of the population. Because the researcher was not given direct access to either the AHEAD members or the members of the DSSHE-L listserv that were invited to participate in this survey, it is not possible to obtain true demographic information about these groups or a true response rate. Additionally, because many individuals (such as the researcher herself) are members of both groups, the total number of recruitment emails sent out is going to be inflated. Also, there could be more than one representative from an institution who has a membership to either AHEAD or DSSHE-L. However, the researcher felt that the benefits of reaching a larger population outweighed the issues that were created by recruiting participants from both groups. Another problem with sending out the invitation through AHEAD and DSSHE-L is that some individuals do not regularly read their emails from these groups. Because these are not addressed specifically to the individual or institution, they may not be aware that there is a survey invitation in there that they may have otherwise been interested in participating.

A second limitation is that reminder emails were not sent out as it was previously stated to the researcher by the AHEAD collaborative research coordinator. The number of respondents could possibly have been greater if these reminder emails had been sent out a week prior to the deadline. In an effort to minimize differences among the AHEAD and DSSHE listserv participants, the researcher decided against sending a reminder email to the DSSHE listserv since this was not done for the AHEAD members.

A third limitation is the fact that several instruments were listed in the survey by their previous versions (e.g., WISC-R). While this does not appear to have been the case, some individuals could have been confused about the different versions. This was an oversight on the researcher's part, but could have been eliminated by rewording the questions as follows: "Please identify how the following APTITUDE tests are used for determining eligibility for a student with a learning disability. (Note: Assume the most current version has been used.)" Or, the researcher could have asked about two versions of the same assessment to see if institutions were still accepting the less current one.

A fourth limitation is the low participation rate for the second round of the Delphi process. Only one out of nine experts responded during this phase. It is hypothesized that some members may not have felt the need to respond to the second phase if they responded to the first phase. Perhaps this is because the directions were identical for both phases and the only changes that were made between round one and round two were those small suggestions made by the experts during the first round.

Implications and Recommendations for Future Research

The first recommendation is to further explore this documentation divide. A two-part survey could be conducted; one exploring this phenomenon from the secondary schools side and another from the side of the post-secondary schools. This would provide more detailed information about the discrepancies that were not specifically identified through the current study. It would also be interesting to compare the criteria for disability documentation with the types and quality of disability support services that are offered. It could be hypothesized that the more comprehensive the support services, the less lenient the documentation criteria. Also, a longitudinal study examining the

increase or decrease of students with learning disabilities in comparison to the institution's criteria would be beneficial. Another interesting angle could be to explore response to intervention (RTI) diagnoses in secondary school students with learning disabilities and comparing those to the ones found in later adult-normed assessments. It would be interesting to note any differences in diagnoses between these two methods.

It is imperative that all parties involved begin to work together to close this gap that has been formed for students with learning disabilities as they attempt to gain academic accommodations at institutions of higher education. One suggestion is to have one standard by which each institutions must adhere to. This will ensure that documentation will only need to be obtained once for each student. Another potential solution is to provide up-to-date, adult-normed assessments for students with learning disabilities wishing to transition to institutions of higher education. This updated evaluation could be specified in the transition plan to prepare the student for postsecondary education. There would need to be a funding source in order to make this a feasible option, and oftentimes that is the bottleneck between good solutions and proper follow-through.

Conclusions

Based on the results of this survey, it became even more evident how pervasive this documentation divide can and may become for students with learning disabilities transitioning to higher education. Instead of working towards a seamless transition, secondary and postsecondary institutions seem to be creating a wider gap. It is the students who are failed in this situation. Some may not receive any accommodations while others may resign to "shop" around for a more lenient documentation policy that

fits what they can currently provide without any additional assessments. Potentially, a student could forfeit his or her dream school to attend another one a few blocks away simply due to this discrepancy.

More and more students will be entering postsecondary education with out-of-date or incomplete assessments as students who are being served at the secondary level by IDEA 2004 begin to trickle through the system. If postsecondary institutions are not going to accept the SOPs and previous assessments that the students are coming with, then provisional or temporary accommodations should be provided while these students obtain a current and complete evaluation. Institutions such as AHEAD should promote the use of provisional accommodations and should also reexamine their recommendations for disability documentation in light of the current research.

All students should be given an equal opportunity to participate in and benefit from higher education. The divergence in disability documentation expectations and current practices has created an unstable equilibrium for many students with learning disabilities as they attempt to gain access to appropriate academic accommodations and succeed in college. These issues that these students are facing should not be ignored and proper attention should be given to ensure equitable access to higher education.

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Appendix A

Delphi Round 1: Introductory Email

From: Allison Shipp
To: Delphi Group Members
Date: Monday - December 10, 2007 8:03 PM
Subject: AHEAD - criteria for disability documentation for students with LD
Attachments: Round 1 survey.pdf (37521 bytes)
Round 1 Instructions.pdf (10952 bytes)

Dear Dr. XXXX,

Hello. My name is Allison Shipp, and I am working on a collaborative project with AHEAD to examine the criteria for documentation for students with learning disabilities as they transition to higher education. The purpose of this study is to deliver an electronic survey to all of the AHEAD members in an attempt to glean information about each institutions' current practices for determining eligibility for transitioning students with learning disabilities. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) at my university has approved this study.

With the most recent passage of IDEA 2004 amendments, more and more students will be exiting high school without a current or comprehensive psychoeducational evaluation. Oftentimes, students and their parents are unaware of the differences between secondary and post-secondary education, so it is easy for these students to get passed over if their documentation does not specifically meet the institution's criteria. This can be very unfortunate for these students, who may have been more successful with the appropriate accommodations. For this reason, I am also interested in finding out whether or not post-secondary institutions are providing temporary or provisional accommodations for these students who may have incomplete or outdated data that is supportive of a learning disability.

Prior to disseminating my survey, I wish to make sure it covers all aspects of this area of disability documentation. You have been specifically selected by AHEAD as an

expert in this field. For this reason, I would like to invite you to participate on an expert panel for the survey development. The time commitment from you will be approximately 30-45 minutes once a week for a total of three weeks/rounds. With each round, you will receive an instruction sheet.

I have attached the first instruction sheet and the survey for you to take a look at should you choose to participate. Round 1 edits should be completed and returned to me via email (ashipp@auburn.edu) no later than Wednesday, December 19th. The second round will begin after the holidays. If you would not be willing to participate, please let me know so that I can remove you from my list.

Thank you for your time and cooperation in this project. I am looking forward to working with you.

Very sincerely,

Allison Shipp, MBA, ATP, CRC
Assistive Technology Specialist, III
Program for Students with Disabilities
1244 Haley Center
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Appendix B

Instruction for Round 1 of the Delphi Process

Instructions for Round 1
Disability Documentation Criteria for Students with Learning Disabilities
Collaborative project between AHEAD and Allison Shipp

Thank you for taking time to participate on this expert panel. Your suggestions and input are invaluable in creating a survey that gathers the most appropriate information about the criteria for disability documentation for students with learning disabilities in higher education. This survey will be deliver online through an accessible survey design. For the purposes of this review, please note that the "checkboxes" represent that more than one answer may be selected, and the "radio buttons" allow for only one answer to be selected.

Round 1

1) Carefully read over the survey.
2) Select "acceptable without revisions," "acceptable with revisions," or "not applicable / relevant" for each question.
3) Provide an edited question if you have chosen "acceptable with revisions."
4) Provide a reason for any questions that you have deemed "not applicable / relevant."
5) Add any questions that you feel would be beneficial or appropriate for this survey.
6) Provide any additional comments or suggestions.

Once all of the responses have been received, I will compile them and make the appropriate changes and suggestions. Round 2 will begin shortly after the holidays. Thank you again for agreeing to participate in this study. Your input is an important part of this process.

Sincerely,

Allison Shipp, MBA, ATP, CRC
Assistive Technology Specialist, III
Program for Students with Disabilities
1244 Haley Center
Auburn University, AL 36849-5250
Phone: (334) 844-0868
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Email: ashipp@auburn.edu

Appendix C

Delphi Round 1: Survey

Disability Documentation for Students with Learning Disabilities

Please provide some demographic information about the institution and disability support services.

1. Institution type:

○ technical or trade school
○ 2-year institution
○ 4-year institution
○ 4+ year graduate-degree-granting institution
○ professional school only (e.g., medical, law)

2. Institutional funding source:

○ public
○ private

3. Please indicate the number of students for each category:

total student body enrollment _____
students with disabilities _____
students with learning disabilities _____

4. Which staff member(s) are primarily responsible reviewing documentation and making the final decision regarding eligibility for students with learning disabilities?

☐ director
☐ assistant director
☐ program coordinator
☐ LD specialist
☐ counselor
☐ AT specialist
☐ Other: _____

Please answer these questions as accurately as possible regarding your criteria for disability documentation for students with learning disabilities.

5. Does the disability support services program provide "in house" testing for students with learning disabilities?

○ yes ○ no

6. Does the disability support services program have written guidelines for appropriate documentation for determining eligibility status for students with learning disabilities? (NOTE: Please use these guidelines to answer the following questions on this page.)

○ yes, available through our website
○ yes, available upon request
○ currently in development
○ no

7. Is the disability support services criteria for documentation of a learning disability based on any of the following? (Please check all that apply.)

☐ AHEAD's Best Practices Regarding Documentation of Disabilities in Higher Education
☐ Educational Testing Service (ETS)
☐ State-wide guidelines
☐ Other: _____

8. How recent must documentation be in order to be used for determination?

○ no specific requirements ○ within 2 years
○ within 5 years ○ within 1 year
○ within 4 years ○ other: _____
○ within 3 years

9. Does the disability support services program require "adult" measures and norms to be used?

- ○ yes
- ○ it depends (please specify): _____
- ○ no

10. Suppose a student was diagnosed with a learning disability in high school, but the report (while complete and supportive of the diagnosis) is out-of-date. Does the disability support services program provide temporary accommodations for these students while they obtain an up-to-date report?

- ○ always
- ○ frequently
- ○ sometimes
- ○ rarely
- ○ never

11. Suppose a student was diagnosed with a learning disability in high school, and the only documentation you have is an IEP that states the diagnosis and accommodations that were provided. Does the disability support services program provide temporary accommodations for these students while they obtain a complete report?

- ○ always
- ○ frequently
- ○ sometimes
- ○ rarely
- ○ never

12. How often are each of the following used as a basis for determining eligibility for a student with a learning disability?

	always	frequently	sometimes	rarely	never
History of learning disability	○	○	○	○	○
IEP / Section 504	○	○	○	○	○
Plan	○	○	○	○	○
Professional judgment by disability services staff	○	○	○	○	○
Rationale for diagnosis	○	○	○	○	○
Report writer's specific diagnosis	○	○	○	○	○
Report writer's suggestion of a diagnosis	○	○	○	○	○
Student input	○	○	○	○	○
Summary of performance	○	○	○	○	○
Test scores	○	○	○	○	○

13. Which of the following diagnostic areas are used to diagnosis a student with a learning disability?

	required	recommended
aptitude	○	○
achievement	○	○
processing	○	○

14. Please identify how the following APTITUDE tests are used for determining eligibility for a student with a learning disability:

	required	recommended	accepted	discouraged	not accepted
Differential Aptitude Test (DAT)	○	○	○	○	○
Kaufman Adolescent and Adult Intelligence Test (KAIT)	○	○	○	○	○
Kaufman Assessment Battery for Children (K-ABC)	○	○	○	○	○
Kaufman Brief Intelligence Test (K-BIT)	○	○	○	○	○
Slosson Full-Range Intelligence Test (S-FRIT)	○	○	○	○	○
Slosson Intelligence Test (SIT)	○	○	○	○	○
Stanford-Binet	○	○	○	○	○
Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale (WAIS)	○	○	○	○	○
Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children (WISC-R)	○	○	○	○	○
Woodcock Johnson Cognitive (WJ-R COG)	○	○	○	○	○

15. Please identify how the following ACHIEVEMENT tests are used for determining eligibility for a student with a learning disability:

	required	recommended	accepted	discouraged	not accepted
Gray Oral Reading Test (GORT)	○	○	○	○	○
Nelson-Denny Reading	○	○	○	○	○
Scholastic Abilities Test for Adults (SATA)	○	○	○	○	○
Stanford Diagnostic Math Test (SDMT)	○	○	○	○	○
Stanford Diagnostic Reading Tests (SDRT)	○	○	○	○	○
Stanford Test of Academic Skills (TASK)	○	○	○	○	○
Test of Written Language (TOWL)	○	○	○	○	○
Wechsler Individual Achievement Test (WIAT)	○	○	○	○	○
Wide Range Achievement Test (WRAT)	○	○	○	○	○
Woodcock Johnson Achievement (WJ-R ACH)	○	○	○	○	○
Woodcock Reading Mastery Test (WRMT)	○	○	○	○	○

16. Please identify how the following INFORMATION PROCESSING tests are used for determining eligibility for a student with a learning disability:

	required	recommended	accepted	discouraged	not accepted
Bender Visual-Motor Gestalt Test	○	○	○	○	○
Detroit Tests of Learning Aptitude (DTLA)	○	○	○	○	○
Rey-Osterrieth Complex Figure Test	○	○	○	○	○
Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale subtest (WAIS)	○	○	○	○	○
Wechsler Memory Scale (WMS)	○	○	○	○	○
Woodcock Johnson Cognitive subtest (WJ COG)	○	○	○	○	○

17. Please identify how the following SCORES are used for determining eligibility for a student with a learning disability:

	required	recommended	accepted	discouraged	not accepted
age equivalent	○	○	○	○	○
grade equivalent	○	○	○	○	○
percentiles	○	○	○	○	○
quartiles	○	○	○	○	○
standard scores	○	○	○	○	○
stanines	○	○	○	○	○

Appendix D

Delphi Round 2: Survey

Disability Documentation for Students with Learning Disabilities

Please provide some demographic information about the institution and disability support services.

1. Institution type:

○ technical or trade school
○ 2-year institution
○ 4-year institution
○ 4+ year graduate-degree-granting institution
○ professional school only (e.g. medical, law)

2. Institutional funding source:

○ public
○ private

3. Please indicate the number of students for the 2006-2007 academic year in each category:

total student body enrollment _____

students with disabilities _____

students with learning disabilities _____

4. Which staff member(s) are primarily responsible reviewing documentation and making the final decision regarding eligibility for students with learning disabilities?

☐ director
☐ assistant director
☐ program coordinator
☐ LD specialist
☐ counselor
☐ AT specialist
☐ Other: _____

Please answer these questions as accurately as possible regarding your criteria for disability documentation for students with learning disabilities.

5. Does the disability support services program provide "in house" testing for students with learning disabilities?

○ yes

○ no

6. Does the disability support services program have written guidelines for appropriate documentation for determining eligibility status for students with learning disabilities? (NOTE: Please use these guidelines to answer the following questions on this page.)

○ yes, available through our website

○ yes, available upon request

○ currently in development

○ no

7. Is the disability support services criteria for documentation of a learning disability based on any of the following? (Please check all that apply.)

☐ AHEAD's Best Practices Regarding Documentation of Disabilities in Higher Education

☐ Educational Testing Service (ETS)

☐ State-wide guidelines

☐ Other: _____

8. How recent must documentation be in order to be used for determination?

○ no specific recency requirements

○ within 5 years

○ within 4 years

○ within 3 years

- ○ within 2 years
- ○ within 1 year
- ○ other: _____

9. Does the disability support services program require "adult" measures and norms to be used?

- ○ yes
- ○ no
- ○ It depends (please specify): _____

10. Suppose a student was diagnosed with a learning disability in high school, but the report (while complete and supportive of the diagnosis) is out-of-date. Does the disability support services program provide temporary accommodations for these students while they obtain an up-to-date report?

- ○ always
- ○ frequently
- ○ sometimes
- ○ rarely
- ○ never

11. Suppose a student was diagnosed with a learning disability in high school, and the only documentation you have is an IEP that states the diagnosis and accommodations that were provided. Does the disability support services program provide temporary accommodations for these students while they obtain a complete report?

- ○ always
- ○ frequently
- ○ sometimes
- ○ rarely
- ○ never

12. How often are each of the following used as a basis for determining eligibility for a student with a learning disability?

	always	frequently	sometimes	rarely	never
Professional judgment by disability services staff	○	○	○	○	○
IEP / Section 504 Plan	○	○	○	○	○
History of learning disability	○	○	○	○	○
Rationale for diagnosis	○	○	○	○	○
Report writer's specific diagnosis	○	○	○	○	○
Report writer's suggestion of a diagnosis	○	○	○	○	○
Student input	○	○	○	○	○
Summary of performance (SOP)	○	○	○	○	○
Test scores	○	○	○	○	○

13. Which of the following diagnostic areas are used to determine eligibility for accommodations?

	required	recommended
aptitude	○	○
achievement	○	○
processing	○	○
student narrative or interview	○	○

14. Please identify how the following APTITUDE tests are used for determining eligibility for a student with a learning disability:

	required	recom-mended	accepted	discou-raged	not accepted
Differential Aptitude Test (DAT)	○	○	○	○	○
Kaufman Adolescent and Adult Intelligence Test (KAIT)	○	○	○	○	○
Kaufman Assessment Battery for Children (K-ABC)	○	○	○	○	○
Kaufman Brief Intelligence Test (K-BIT)	○	○	○	○	○
Slosson Full-Range Intelligence Test (S-FRIT)	○	○	○	○	○
Slosson Intelligence Test (SIT)	○	○	○	○	○
Stanford-Binet	○	○	○	○	○
Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale (WAIS)	○	○	○	○	○
Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children (WISC-R)	○	○	○	○	○
Woodcock Johnson Cognitive (WJ-R COG)	○	○	○	○	○

15. Please identify any additional APTITUDE tests (not listed above) that are used for determining eligibility for a student with a learning disability:

16. Please identify how the following ACHIEVEMENT tests are used for determining eligibility for a student with a learning disability:

	required	recom-mended	accepted	discou-raged	not accepted
Gray Oral Reading Test (GORT)	○	○	○	○	○
Nelson-Denny Reading	○	○	○	○	○
Scholastic Abilities Test for Adults (SATA)	○	○	○	○	○
Stanford Diagnostic Math Test (SDMT)	○	○	○	○	○
Stanford Diagnostic Reading Tests (SDRT)	○	○	○	○	○
Stanford Test of Academic Skills (TASK)	○	○	○	○	○
Test of Written Language (TOWL)	○	○	○	○	○
Wechsler Individual Achievement Test (WIAT)	○	○	○	○	○
Wide Range Achievement Test (WRAT)	○	○	○	○	○
Woodcock Johnson Achievement (WJR ACH)	○	○	○	○	○
Woodcock Reading Mastery Test (WRMT)	○	○	○	○	○

17. Please identify any additional ACHIEVEMENT tests (not listed above) that are used for determining eligibility for a student with a learning disability:

18. Please identify how the following INFORMATION PROCESSING tests are used for determining eligibility for a student with a learning disability:

	required	recom-mended	accepted	discou-raged	not accepted
Bender Visual-Motor Gestalt Test	○	○	○	○	○
Detroit Tests of Learning Aptitude (DTLA)	○	○	○	○	○
Rey-Osterrieth Complex Figure Test	○	○	○	○	○
Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale subtest (WAIS)	○	○	○	○	○
Wechsler Memory Scale (WMS)	○	○	○	○	○
Woodcock Johnson Cognitive subtest (WJ COG)	○	○	○	○	○

19. Please identify any additional INFORMATION PROCESSING tests (not listed above) that are used for determining eligibility for a student with a learning disability:

20. Please identify how the following SCORES are used for determining eligibility for a student with a learning disability:

	required	recommended	accepted	discouraged	not accepted
age equivalent	○	○	○	○	○
grade	○	○	○	○	○
equivalent	○	○	○	○	○
percentiles	○	○	○	○	○
quartiles	○	○	○	○	○
standard scores	○	○	○	○	○
stanines	○	○	○	○	○

Appendix E

Final Survey

Disability Documentation Criteria for Students with Learning Disabilities

Demographic Information – Please provide some demographic information about the institution and disability support services.

1. Institution type:

- ○ Technical, trade or online school
- ○ Community college / 2-year institution
- ○ Traditional 4-year institution
- ○ Graduate-degree-granting institution, 4+ years
- ○ Professional school only (e.g., medical, law)

2. Institutional funding source:

- ○ Public
- ○ Private

3. Please indicate the number of students for the 2006-2007 academic year in each category:

Total student body enrollment _____

Students with disabilities registered with the DSS office _____

Students with learning disabilities registered with the DSS office _____

Criteria for Disability Documentation for Students with Learning Disabilities – Please answer these questions as accurately as possible regarding your criteria for disability documentation for students with learning disabilities.

4. Which staff member(s) are primarily responsible for reviewing documentation and making the final decision regarding eligibility for students with learning disabilities?

☐ Director

☐ Assistant director

☐ Program coordinator

☐ LD specialist

☐ Counselor

☐ AT specialist

☐ Other (please specify): _____

5. Is disability documentation testing for students with learning disabilities provided by any programs on campus?

○ Yes, within our department

○ Yes, but not within our department

○ No

6. Does the disability support services program have written guidelines for appropriate documentation for determining eligibility status for students with learning disabilities? (NOTE: Please use these guidelines to answer the following questions on this page.)

○ Yes, available through our website

○ Yes, but not available through our website

○ Currently in development

○ No

7. Is the disability support services criteria for documentation of a learning disability based on any of the following? (Please check all that apply.)

☐ AHEAD's Best Practices Regarding Documentation of Disabilities in Higher Education

☐ Educational Testing Service (ETS)

☐ State-wide guidelines

☐ Institutionally designed

☐ Vocational rehabilitation

☐ Other (please specify): _____

8. How recent must documentation be in order to be used for determination?

○ No specific recency requirements

○ Within 5 years

○ Within 4 years

○ Within 3 years

○ Within 2 years

○ Within 1 year

○ Other (please specify): _____

9. Does the disability support services program require "adult" measures and norms to be used?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No
- ○ It depends (please specify): _____

10. Suppose you receive a complete psychoeducational evaluation from a qualified professional with a diagnosis of a learning disability. The aptitude scores place this individual in the above average range (e.g., IQ of 120). The achievement scores are in the average range (e.g., basic reading of 100, reading comprehension of 99, etc.). Would you accept this student into your program as one with a learning disability?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No
- ○ It depends (please explain): _____

Criteria for Disability Documentation for Students with Learning Disabilities – Please answer these questions as accurately as possible regarding your criteria for disability documentation for students with learning disabilities.

11. Suppose a student was diagnosed with a learning disability in high school, but the report (while complete and supportive of the diagnosis) is out-of-date. Does the disability support services program provide temporary or provisional services and accommodations for these students while they obtain an up-to-date report?

○ Always

○ Frequently

○ Sometimes

○ Rarely

○ Never

12. Suppose a student was diagnosed with a learning disability in high school, and the only documentation you have is an IEP that states the diagnosis and accommodations that were provided. Does the disability support services program provide temporary or provisional services and accommodations for these students while they obtain a complete report?

○ Always

○ Frequently

○ Sometimes

○ Rarely

○ Never

13. How often are each of the following used as a basis for determining eligibility for a student with a learning disability?

	always	frequently	sometimes	rarely	never
Professional judgment by disability services staff	○	○	○	○	○
IEP / Section 504 Plan	○	○	○	○	○

	always	frequently	sometimes	rarely	never
History of learning disability	○	○	○	○	○
Rationale for diagnosis	○	○	○	○	○
Report writer's specific diagnosis	○	○	○	○	○
Report writer's suggestion of a diagnosis	○	○	○	○	○
Student input	○	○	○	○	○
Summary of performance (SOP)	○	○	○	○	○
Test scores	○	○	○	○	○

14. Which of the following diagnostic areas are used to determine eligibility for accommodations?

	required	recommended
Aptitude	○	○
Achievement	○	○
Processing	○	○
Student narrative or interview	○	○

15. Please identify how the following SCORES are used for determining eligibility for a student with a learning disability:

	required	recommended	accepted	discouraged	not accepted
Age equivalent	○	○	○	○	○
Grade equivalent	○	○	○	○	○

	required	recommended	accepted	discouraged	not accepted
Percentiles	○	○	○	○	○
Quartiles	○	○	○	○	○
Standard scores	○	○	○	○	○
Stanines	○	○	○	○	○

16. From which of the following individuals would you accept a diagnosis of a learning disability if the documentation met all other criteria? (check all that apply)

☐ Counselor (not vocational rehabilitation)

☐ Family physician

☐ Medical specialist (not a neurologist)

☐ Neurologist

☐ Nurse

☐ Nurse practitioner

☐ Pediatrician

☐ Physicians assistant

☐ Psychiatrist with an M.D.

☐ Psychologist with a Ph.D.

☐ Rehabilitation counselor

☐ Social worker

☐ Special education teacher

☐ Vocational evaluator

17. Are there any other individuals that you would or would not accept a diagnosis of a learning disability if the documentation met all other criteria?

Diagnostic Assessments

18. Please identify how the following APTITUDE tests are used for determining eligibility for a student with a learning disability:

	required	recommended	accepted	discouraged	not accepted
Differential Aptitude Test (DAT)	○	○	○	○	○
Kaufman Adolescent and Adult Intelligence Test (KAIT)	○	○	○	○	○
Kaufman Assessment Battery for Children (K-ABC)	○	○	○	○	○
Kaufman Brief Intelligence Test (K-BIT)	○	○	○	○	○

	required	recommended	accepted	discouraged	not accepted
Slosson Full-Range Intelligence Test (S-FRIT)	○	○	○	○	○
Slosson Intelligence Test (SIT)	○	○	○	○	○
Stanford-Binet	○	○	○	○	○
Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale (WAIS)	○	○	○	○	○
Wechsler Abbreviated Scale of Intelligence (WASI)	○	○	○	○	○
Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children (WISC-R)	○	○	○	○	○
Woodcock Johnson Cognitive (WJ-R COG)	○	○	○	○	○

19. Please identify any additional APTITUDE tests (not listed above) that are used for determining eligibility for a student with a learning disability and indicate if they are required, recommended, or accepted: _____

20. Please identify how the following ACHIEVEMENT tests are used for determining eligibility for a student with a learning disability:

	required	recommended	accepted	discouraged	not accepted
Gray Oral Reading Test (GORT)	○	○	○	○	○
Nelson-Denny Reading	○	○	○	○	○
Scholastic Abilities Test for Adults (SATA)	○	○	○	○	○
Stanford Diagnostic Math Test (SDMT)	○	○	○	○	○
Stanford Diagnostic Reading Tests (SDRT)	○	○	○	○	○
Stanford Test of Academic Skills (TASK)	○	○	○	○	○
Test of Written Language (TOWL)	○	○	○	○	○

	required	recommended	accepted	discouraged	not accepted
Wechsler Individual Achievement Test (WIAT)	○	○	○	○	○
Wide Range Achievement Test (WRAT)	○	○	○	○	○
Woodcock Johnson Achievement (WJ-R ACH)	○	○	○	○	○
Woodcock Reading Mastery Test (WRMT)	○	○	○	○	○

21. Please identify any additional ACHIEVEMENT tests (not listed above) that are used for determining eligibility for a student with a learning disability and indicate if they are required, recommended, or accepted: _____

22. Please identify how the following INFORMATION PROCESSING tests are used for determining eligibility for a student with a learning disability:

	required	recommended	accepted	discouraged	not accepted
Bender Visual-Motor Gestalt Test	○	○	○	○	○
Delis-Kaplan Executive Function Scale (D-KEFS)	○	○	○	○	○
Detroit Tests of Learning Aptitude (DTLA)	○	○	○	○	○
Rey-Osterrieth Complex Figure Test	○	○	○	○	○
Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale subtest (WAIS)	○	○	○	○	○
Wechsler Memory Scale (WMS)	○	○	○	○	○
Woodcock Johnson Cognitive subtest (WJ COG)	○	○	○	○	○

23. Please identify any additional INFORMATION PROCESSING tests (not listed above) that are used for determining eligibility for a student with a learning disability and indicate if they are required, recommended, or accepted: _____

24. Please provide any additional information or comments that you feel would be helpful for this research. _____

Thank you for taking our survey. Your response is very important to us.