

THE ROLE OF THE REHABILITATION COUNSELOR IN PROCURING ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY TO FACILITATE YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES' SUCCESS IN POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION

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STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Business leaders across the country are clamoring for highly skilled workers in all industries to fill the large voids left by the retirement of the boomer generation and to meet the increased demands of a technological global economy. The U.S. Department of Education in their Strategic Plan of 1998-2000 has reported that postsecondary education is the entryway to professional and technical training and higher wages. Thus, in order for the U.S. to sustain the economy and remain competitive in the world market, it is imperative that young adults pursue some form of education and training beyond high school in order to meet the present workforce demands and to achieve economic independence. Furthermore, Bush's New Freedom Initiative 2001 delineates that all Americans with disabilities have the opportunity to learn and develop skills and engage in productive work. This means that postsecondary institutions are faced with the challenge of finding ways to successfully educate all youth including those with special needs.

According to Blackorby and Wagner (1996) youth with disabilities are pursuing postsecondary education in greater numbers climbing from 2.6% in 1978, to 9.4% in 1995, to nearly 19% in 1996. The most recent statistics reported by Henderson 1999 in HEATH Resource Center's Statistical Profile on College Freshmen indicated that the number of students with learning disabilities enrolling in higher education has increased 173% between the years of 1989 to 1998. In spite of students with disabilities increased access to higher education they have met with limited success in community college programs, resulting in poor employment outcomes (Stodden, 2000). In an article on postsecondary education and students with disabilities Burghstahler, Crawford, and Acosta (2000) report that only 25% of students with disabilities who have entered community colleges have earned an Associates Degree after five years. In a survey conducted by the National Organization on Disability (1998) only 29% of persons with disabilities, ages 18-64 works full or part-time. This statistic becomes even more alarming when considered in relation to the estimated size of the U.S. population of persons with disabilities, i.e., 10-15% of the population or approximately 28-32 million people (NOD, 1998). Given the present vacancies in the workforce and the projected future needs, it is critical that persons with disabilities enter and be able to succeed in postsecondary education and training in order to access high-skilled jobs and compete in the workforce. According to Burgstahler (2002) access to electronic and information technology has the capability to facilitate positive postsecondary educational and career outcomes for students with disabilities thereby strengthening the possibility of their entrance into these high skilled jobs.

Therefore, there is a compelling need for strong transition programs and practices to address the issues of postsecondary education and services including assistive technology for youth with disabilities. In the revision of the IDEA 1997 the definition of "transition services" is very similar to the definition of in the Rehabilitation Act of 1992. According to Kohler (1998) the

intent of aligning these two laws was to remove the barriers to school/agency collaboration and facilitate a coordinated transition from school to postschool services and clear the way for the early involvement of Rehabilitation Counselors with high school students with disabilities. The active involvement of Rehabilitation Counselors in transition planning is crucial in assisting students with disabilities in identifying postschool goals and the supports necessary to achieve them including assistive technology. Collaboration and coordination at the interagency systems level between the secondary special education teacher, the rehabilitation counselor and the college disabilities counselor is critical (Kohler, 1998). Further, IDEA 1997 mandates that assistive technology be considered at Individual Education Planning Committee (IEPC) meeting for students with disabilities. In view of these changes in IDEA promoting the early involvement of Rehabilitation Counselors in providing transition services to high school students with disabilities for postsecondary education and employment, many questions arise regarding their role within both of these educational settings. Additional questions surface regarding the types of services and supports necessary for students with disabilities to experience success in post secondary education and the workplace. According to Burgstahler (2002) access to high tech tools including computers is crucial for students with disabilities to pursue postsecondary education programs towards professional careers.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

How does a rehabilitation counselor support students with disabilities enrolled in postsecondary education?

What support/services including technology do students with disabilities believe are necessary to succeed in postsecondary education?

In order to begin to address these questions a qualitative research project was designed. The purpose was to develop a case study of best practices of Rehabilitation Counselors, who have successfully transitioned youth with disabilities through postsecondary education to employment. One way of defining a successful transition from high school to adult life is the completion of postsecondary education/training and subsequent employment, since the disabilities population has such a high unemployment rate and only a small percentage complete postsecondary education/training.

While the legal mandates (IDEA 1997 and ADA 1992) specify that agency counselors are to provide transition services for youth with disabilities in high school through postsecondary education, little is known about the complexity and processes involved in providing these transition services. This study investigated how the counselor viewed their role with the student in the transition process and what students identified as the most beneficial supports provided or purchased by their counselor in completing postsecondary education and attaining employment.

RESEARCH METHOD

The qualitative method is interactive and therefore better able to provide insights into the complexities and processes involved in providing transition services (Marshall and Rossman, 1995). Since the transition planning and the implementation of transition services is process

oriented a qualitative approach enabled the researcher to look at the context and the players from a holistic perspective without reducing them to variables and view them and the process as a whole (Taylor and Bogdan, 1984). Further, the qualitative method may be more effective when used to identify the links and the correlations that exist within and between groups rather than causations (Geertz, 1973). The case study method was most appropriate for this study because the research questions are more explanatory in nature and the explanations will link the transition services and supports with the effects of postsecondary/training and employment. The research questions were asked about a contemporary set of events, i.e., the transition process, and the role of the rehabilitation counselor in supporting this process, over which the researcher has little or no control (Yin, 1994). According to Borg and Gall, (1989) a qualitative inquiry methodology is appropriate when attempting to understand what is happening in a field, in this case the rehabilitation field and transition services.

Three guidelines govern the value and usefulness of this type of study: credibility, dependability, and transferability (Guba, 1981). Credibility refers to the congruence between the intended meanings of the participants and those meanings interpreted and represented by the researchers. Having two researchers read and analyze the data and agree on the interpretations increased the study's credibility. An additional check on the interpretation of the data was including the rehabilitation counselors in the initial phases of the analysis. "Crucial to inter reliability is inter-rater or inter-observer reliability--the extent to which the sets of meanings held by multiple observers are sufficiently congruent so that they describe the phenomena in the same way and arrive at the same conclusions about them" (LeCompte and Goetz, p.41).

Dependability involves maintaining stability and consistency while allowing for an emergent study design. This project's dependability was strengthened through multiple researcher verification and by recording and transcribing the interviews. Further, Lincoln and Guba (1985) also recommend triangulation of data as a way to build the credibility and validity of data. Triangulation of data involves collecting multiple sets of data to develop accurate representations for corroboration. The key participants, rehabilitation counselors and students with disabilities, were interviewed separately about their experiences in the transition process and their transcriptions were used to corroborate the role of the Rehabilitation Counselor and the supports necessary for successful transition of students with disabilities. It is believed that these measures to ensure credibility and dependability diminish the drawbacks cited about case study methods, i.e., a perceived lack of rigor because the researcher may allow "biased views to influence the direction of findings and conclusions" (Yin, 1994, p.9.)

Transferability refers to the generalizability of the results, whether they will be applicable to another situation. Since all rehabilitation agencies are required to offer services and supports to youth with disabilities transitioning to postsecondary education and employment, a case study describing the best practices of a rehabilitation counselor will be of interest to all rehabilitation agencies interested in improving the practice of their counselors and the transition services they provide youth with disabilities

DESIGN OF THE STUDY AND SITE SELECTION

This study was designed to take an in depth look at the role of counselors and the nature of these relationships through a careful examination of the counseling practice of 4 rehabilitation counselors employed by Michigan Rehabilitation Services (MRS). These counselors were designated to provide transition services to youth with disabilities in 36 school districts encompassing urban, suburban and rural settings in a tri-county area in Michigan. The intent was to identify a site that would be enough of a cross section of school districts in various settings, so that the results of the study was more readily transferable at the state and national levels.

Sampling Procedures/Recruitment

The employment of the four counselors varies in both their length of employment and their time in serving youth customers. These variations made it impossible for each of the counselors to identify the same number of clients who had completed postsecondary education and secured employment. See Table Below.

Table 1

Counselor	Setting	Number of years transitioning youth
Candy	Suburban/Rural	7 years
Fiona	Rural	3.5 years
Wanda	Urban	3 years
Kate	Rural	9 months

The four counselors were asked identify clients who had been on their caseload that had completed postsecondary education (2 /4 year degree or certification program) and were employed. Candy identified eight students; Wanda and Fiona one student each, and Kate because of her limited time in the position (9 months) did not have a client meeting the criteria. In spite of this it was felt that her views on the role of the rehabilitation counselor in transitioning youth would be worthwhile to the study.

An attempt was made to identify nearly equal numbers of male and female students with various disabilities (learning and emotional, physical, sensory etc.) schooled in urban, suburban, and rural settings, and as ethnically diverse as possible. However, this was impossible, since the 36 school districts in this tri-county area were at various stages in providing transition services to secondary students. See Table 2 for listing of students.

Data Sources and Collection

The four rehabilitation counselors were interviewed separately about their role in the transition process and the supports/services they provided the students on their caseload through postsecondary education and employment. The ten students with disabilities were interviewed about the role of their rehabilitation counselor in transitioning them through postsecondary education/training to employment and the supports they believed necessary for their success.

The counselor interviews consisted of 20-25 questions. Six of the questions pertained to the role of the rehabilitation counselor and were asked of both the counselors and the student. The remaining questions were tailored to the individual on specific issues related to their part in the transition process. For example, rehabilitation counselors were asked about the specific supports and services they provided individual students with disabilities on their caseload and the students were asked what supports/services they believed were necessary to succeed in postsecondary education/training.

Data Analysis Procedures

The interviews were audiotaped and transcribed. In addition, the researcher took detailed notes during the interview as another source of verification for accuracy. Two researchers analyzed the data. For the first level of analysis one researcher read each of the transcriptions and summarized the content of the interviews. Then, the other researcher read the interviews and initial summaries and revised the summaries, if necessary. Together the researchers developed a final summary. The summaries were shared with the counselors and the students when possible for verification and corroboration of the content of their interviews.

Since the raw data of interviews consisted of quotations and first hand experiences, the second level of analysis involved examining the content of the interviews to determine what issues or behaviors surfaced most frequently regarding the role of the rehabilitation counselor for most participants. Quotations and key words were grouped and catalogued according to the main topics and issues that emerged related to the role of the rehabilitation counselors, the nature of the relationships, and the transition supports and services and other major topics that were unanticipated (Seidman, 1991, p.12.). The researchers worked together to develop common categories from their analyses

Limitations of the Study

In spite of these procedures in designing the study, gathering and analyzing the study had some limitations. First, the study focused on four rehabilitation counselors and ten students with disabilities who had completed college programs and are employed. Such a small sample raises questions about the generalizability, credibility, and dependability of the findings. The intent of the study, however, was less to produce generalizable results and more to learn about the nature of the human relationships in the transition process, the beliefs of rehabilitation counselors concerning their roles in the transition process, and the students' perspective about the supports provided by their counselors that contributed to their success in postsecondary education and employment.

A second limitation was that the author of the paper had a working relationship with the four rehabilitation counselors that may compromise the objectivity and credibility of the findings. However, several measures were taken to moderate the bias, the data was analyzed by both the author and a research assistant and the counselors were given opportunities to verify the findings. In addition, a transcriber was employed to transcribe the audiotaped interviews to ensure that the transcriptions were as close as possible to the original conversation.

FINDINGS ABOUT THE ROLE OF THE REHABILITATION COUNSELORS IN TRANSITIONING YOUTH

In the data analysis of the rehabilitation counselor's four major responsibilities emerged regarding their role in transitioning youth:

1. Collaborating with special educators to transition youth
2. Serving as a vocational counseling resource to teachers and students
3. Fostering students self-determination and self-advocacy skills
4. Using their resources to assist students in overcoming barriers to postsecondary education and employment.

The fourth responsibility in the data, overcoming barriers, is the major interest for this paper as it most directly relates to the acquisition of assistive technology. According to policy makers funding for assistive technology is the major barrier in providing access to these resources (National Council on Disability, 2000). Students with disabilities report that both lack of funding and knowledge of educational professionals regarding assistive technology are the major obstacles (Fichten, Barile, & Asuncion, 1999; National Council on Disability). Consequently, this study was interested in what, if anything, counselors reported about their role in relation to purchasing technology for their youth clients and what students reported about technology as a factor in their success.

Using Rehabilitation Resources to Overcome Barriers to Transition

In an analysis of the counselors' interviews two of the counselors talked about their role in terms of using their resources in non-traditional ways to overcome barriers that students encounter in completing postsecondary education and attaining employment. These barriers included the acquisition of assistive technology. Fiona expressed the following.

I think that the agency role is to overcome barriers, whatever the barrier is. If there is a lack of resources within the family for being able to send a student for college training we can support with financial assistance, with that training. We can assist in some of the non traditional ways like if the family or financial aid is paying for all of the tuition and books we can provide transportation and some of the costs that are more hidden. Tutoring is one, if there is a training program that is at the community college and they get one hour of tutoring for every class and that is not enough, than we can extend that tutoring for them. If they have a special need, say they need a computer, for example, in order to do the writing for a class and that is related to their disability we can provide that kind of technology (Fiona, Interview, 2/8/02, p.9).

Candy shared similar thoughts in her interview.

I see myself offering the above and beyond services that people aren't able to receive either in the college arena or in the workplace. I think that that is one of the nice things about the role of the counselor is the flexibility to kind of go above

and beyond to make a difference. And by that I mean assistive technology. It is something that doesn't always fall under the responsibility of the college, but it is something that we can do. People do need to apply for financial aid, but we can pay for tuition and for some books and supplies even dorm costs and personnel assistance and things like that. So we have a huge variety and a huge latitude to provide support in many different ways (Candy, Interview, 2/4/02, p.9).

Three of the four counselors indicated that before authorizing the purchase of assistive technology students needed to request the computer or software or if they could not articulate their needs they would arrange for an assistive technology evaluation. According to IDEA 1997, students with disabilities should graduate from high school knowing what assistive technology accommodates their disability. This knowledge makes their self-advocacy in college and in the workplace much easier. Additionally, if they know what type of technology accommodates their disability they can more easily request support for its purchase from their rehabilitation counselor.

However, it is essential that the rehabilitation counselor views this as part of their role and that the agency has the resources to authorize the purchase. If the student or the special education teacher neglect to discuss assistive technology as an accommodation during transition planning then the rehabilitation counselor should assume this responsibility ideally when the case is opened or at the latest at the exit transition planning meeting. This is crucial since access to assistive technology can impact success in postsecondary education and employment. According to Kaye (2000) less than fifty percent of students with disabilities are likely to have a computer compared to their non-disabled peers. Currently, the full potential of using technology for young people with disabilities is not being addressed (National Council on Disability & Social Security Administration, 2000). Therefore, it is paramount that the issue of assistive technology be addressed by the professionals responsible for students with disabilities in the transition process, if not by the special education teacher then the rehabilitation counselor.

In sum, these findings about the role of the rehabilitation counselor in particular the dimension of overcoming barriers to transition begin to provide the field with a more definitive picture of what aspects of the counselors' role in the transitioning of youth with disabilities are most critical. Since acquisition of appropriate assistive technology has been cited by both policy makers and consumers as a major barrier to successful transition, then this is an area that is most critical to address at the exit transition meeting and students' subsequent meetings with both the rehabilitation counselor and the college disabilities professionals.

Services and Supports for Postsecondary Success

What services and supports do students with disabilities believe are necessary to succeed in postsecondary education? In the analysis of the ten students' interviews nine supports were identified which naturally divided into three categories: Psychological Supports, Academic Supports, and Employment Supports. The major focus of this paper is on the academic supports that the students identified in particular the assistive technology. The two major areas of academic support were Assistive Technology 90% (9/10 students) and Funding for Tuition, Books, and Supplies 70% (7/10 students). The two other areas of support, Linkage to the

College Support Services and Specialized Tutoring were both reported as critical by 40% of the students (4/10 students). This paper will focus on the assistive technology.

Assistive Technology

The greatest area of support that college students reported as very beneficial was the purchase of assistive technology by their rehabilitation counselor. For most students assistive technology was primarily a desk or laptop computer with specialized software to accommodate reading and writing difficulties in other instances it was a palm pilot and a specialized keyboard.

Tom's Story

Tom graduated with a Bachelors Degree in Fine Arts. He has a learning disability in the area of reading and written language. At his exit IEPC he requested: a laptop computer, a word processing program with a grammar and spell check, a reading program, a printer, and a scanner. His family paid for his tuition and books. In his interview, Tom talked about the value of having a computer of his own to work in the privacy of his room anytime of the day.

Well, just having the opportunity to have a computer at my access 24 hours per day any time I wanted in my own setting in my own environment. If you're a person who struggles and is kind of embarassed about their disability, well sitting in your apartment or by yourself where you don't have to worry about that sometimes that will take off some of the pressure of your disability. Maybe the student on the next computer is looking over, or you feel like they are watching and making judgements. Maybe they aren't, but you feel that (Tom, Interview, 1/3/02, p.2)."

He reported further about his feelings in using the laptop in class for notes and to accommodate his writing difficulties. "So the laptop was bought to take into the classroom and take notes but throughout the last five years students did not take laptops into class. Right now they don't do that. So, I probably should have used a regular desktop computer. The grammar and spell check worked very well, although I still had someone else read my work for a final edit (Tom, Interview, 1/3/02, p.11)." Obviously, given Tom's major sensitivity about accommodating his disability in front of his peers having access to his own technology was critical to his success in college. This seems like an additional factor for rehabilitation counselors to weigh in determining the necessity to purchase assistive technology for a client.

A second unanticipated outcome of having his personal computer was a tool for career exploration.

I had this awesome computer that I had complete 100 per cent control of and I could just work on the ins and outs of. So then I started enjoying being on the computer, the programs, software, games. I knew I was an artist when I was in high school and I knew college was very challenging in terms of reading with great amounts of writing. So I put the two together and came up with graphic

arts. I couldn't be more happy. I can set at a computer and design something in 4 hours and it's beautiful (Tom, Interview, 1/3/02, p. 2-3).

In Tom's case the purchase of assistive technology through his rehabilitation counselor was critical to his academic success as well as an instrument of career exploration. Tom is now employed as a graphic artist with an advertising company in Chicago.

Curt's Story

Curt expressed similar thoughts about the value of having his own computer for learning as well as career exploration. " I needed help getting a computer, as a learning tool for voice recognition for writing, and a grammar and spell check for when I used the keyboard. Also looking at my career goal in technology they helped me get a computer so I could start working on it, start sharpening my skills. Once I got into a position where I liked the computers, I knew I wanted to go on this area (Curt, Interview, 1/2/02, p.2)." His majors were Network communication and Microcomputer Support. Since his case was opened, the Rehabilitation Counselor purchased a desktop computer, software to accommodate his disability, and later a laptop for work.

Over the years of support I got a laptop and a desktop. One allows me to travel, take it to school and work there because the labs (in college) fill up and you can't get one. It is nice to be able to open the bag up and just go to work. Having it (the computer) I have taken a lot of my classes on-line and on the campus, or some were actually campus classes but they were like Internet design, web paging. So I did a lot of my work at home and then posted it on to the board via the Internet. It was critical because so many of my classes were technology and software base they gave me the tools to work on right there (Curt, Interview, 1/2/02, p.8-9)."

Curt, a student with a learning disability in writing and a mild visual impairment really used his computer to maximize his time and be more productive. He has completed two Associate Degrees in technology in four years while working full time as a computer support person. He was able to accomplish these goals not only because he was motivated, but also because he had the computers available to him, which enabled him to use his time to the fullest extent.

Comments from Students on the Impact of Technology

The other students who received computers through the support of their rehabilitation counselor reported similar thoughts about the necessity of a laptop for accommodating their writing, reading with special software, or taking courses on-line. Jeremy talked about he value of using both his tape recorder and laptop purchased by his counselor in lecture classes, "I tape the lectures as much as possible, and I use a laptop if I feel the lecture is something I can't write because I have terrible handwriting (Jeremy, Interview, 1/2/01, p.3)." Ryan reported, "Access to the computer helped me get my A+ certification (Ryan, 4/20/02 p.10).

However, Kathryn identified a palm pilot purchased by her counselor as the most valuable assistive technology for her success. "MRS bought me a palm pilot last summer. It was

incredibly great because I can keep my medication straight every day and gives me another way to organize my class. I can write down all of that kind of thing and keep it right there. I have it right now; I can flip it open and know exactly what my schedule is during the day and when I have time to rest and things like that. It has been extremely, extremely helpful (Kathryn, Interview, 1/1/0/02, p.8).”

Erin had a different need. Since she wanted to work in medical records and had the use of only her right hand, she needed a one handed keyboard to complete her certificate program and secure employment. Her rehabilitation counselor authorized this purchase at the beginning of her program and by the time she interviewed for a position in the records department of a large hospital she could enter data at the same speed as most people using both hands.

Both Josh and Chad stated that their computer and the software programs purchased by their counselor were the most critical to their college success. With the help of technology Chad completed a Bachelors of Arts in Finance and is now working in an Accounting Office for a nonprofit company. Josh has completed his EMT certification and has completed a two-year degree in criminal justice and is waiting to enter the police academy. Josh said, “The computer was very helpful. I typed everything on the computer. The technology and software support made a huge difference (Josh, Interview, 5/28/02, p.9).

In sum, the majority of college students with disabilities in the study indicated that assistive technology was very important to their academic success and in some instances was a venue for their career exploration. Even though college campuses offer access to computers all the time, one student made the point that having his own computer in his own space diminished the pressure he felt publicly in a lab about his disability because he could work at his own pace without feeling like he was being observed and his disability was on public view.

The transition to college for a person with a disability can be more emotionally challenging as they work to become their own advocate and the increased demand of the academic work adds a tremendous amount of pressure. According to these successful college students with a disability having their own assistive technology, i.e., a computer with the software to accommodate their needs or a palm pilot to help the organize made a difference in their ability to succeed. However, the assistive technology was customized to the individual’s needs often requiring an assessment purchased by their counselor rather than providing a computer with like software for each client.

Discussion on Dilemmas Counselors Encounter in Purchasing Assistive Technology

While this study clearly indicated that access to appropriate assistive technology is one of the most beneficial supports that rehabilitation counselors purchased for students with disabilities to complete their postsecondary education program, several dilemmas emerge for counselors to resolve in providing these supports. One dilemma is determining which technology is most appropriate and necessary for students’ success in their education/training program. Three of the rehabilitation counselors reported that in most instances they referred their student customers for an assistive technology evaluation in order to determine their specific needs. In other instances, if the student indicated at their transition meeting the technology that was most beneficial and the special education teacher corroborated their need and use of the technology, then the counselor

purchased it without an evaluation. However, if special education teachers provided students with disabilities both the access and training in using the technology that accommodated their learning as specified in IDEA 1997, then they would exit high school with the knowledge and skills about their technology needs and an evaluation would be unnecessary. One tool that has been developed by Zabala (1995) is the SETT framework (Student Environment Task Tool) for determining the most appropriate technology tool for the student in a particular environment to complete the task required. If students with disabilities would exit high school skilled in using this framework, they would be better prepared for the learning challenges they encounter in postsecondary education programs and the demands of the workplace.

A second dilemma for rehabilitation counselors is their limited knowledge about assistive technology and the range of the devices and software programs that can positively impact the performance and success of students with disabilities in school and the workplace. This limited knowledge makes it difficult for counselors to suggest technological options ranging from low technology to high technology to support students with disabilities in meeting their vocational goals. This problem could be addressed through pre-service and in-service training on assistive technology. Furthermore, training in assistive technology needs to be ongoing as the field is constantly evolving as new technologies are developed or improved.

A third dilemma faced by rehabilitation counselors related to assistive technology is access to the monetary resources to support students with disabilities technological needs. While the rehabilitation agency generally expects clients to pay what they can for their education and training for employment, this is often difficult or impossible for students with disabilities exiting high school. Yet, rehabilitation agencies and their counselors are expected to increasingly serve a greater percentage of youth clients than in the past years without an increase in government funds. This situation of limited funds means that students with disabilities entering postsecondary education may have to use the student computer labs on the college campus, rather than their personal computer. This is especially true if students with disabilities exit high school with limited knowledge and experience in using assistive technology. Counselors may delay a purchase until an assistive technology evaluation is completed and the student has time to experiment with various technologies to determine which will be most beneficial. One solution to this monetary dilemma is for rehabilitation counselors and college disabilities support staff to collaborate about the assistive technology available in colleges and universities and the process for accessing the equipment. Another solution may be the incorporation of the principles of universal design for instruction by college faculty. Universal design provides each student with access to the curriculum through multiple means of representation and engagement (<http://www.cast.org>). According to Burgstahler (2001) the application of universal design principles in curriculum planning will assure accessibility to the content for the majority of students and may minimize the need for special accommodations.

Summary

In summary, one responsibility in transitioning youth identified by two rehabilitation counselors in the study was to utilize their resources in non-traditional ways to overcome barriers that students with disabilities encounter in postsecondary education. One major barrier for students with disabilities is the acquisition of assistive technology appropriate to their needs. Nine of the

ten students interviewed in the study reported that access to their own assistive technology was one of the most valuable supports for completing their postsecondary college/training program provided by their rehabilitation counselor. However, rehabilitation counselors encounter several dilemmas in providing students with disabilities assistive technology, i.e., both the students' and their own limited knowledge about the most appropriate technology to accommodate their needs and the limited monetary resources that counselors are provided to meet their client's needs.

IMPLICATIONS

Implications for policy

1. More resources need to be allocated for the assessment and purchase of appropriate assistive technology for students with disabilities in order to promote their success in postsecondary education and employment.
2. Policy makers need to provide ongoing training for rehabilitation counselors on assistive technology, so they will be able to suggest appropriate technology for their clients.
3. Guidelines for the purchase of assistive technology need to be developed **so** that there is equity between the counselors in purchasing technology for their clients especially youth.

Implications for practice

1. This study has implications for universities involved in training pre-service special education teachers, transition specialists, special education administrators, and rehabilitation counselors. Consideration needs to be given for joint training to develop greater understanding of the laws governing assistive technology and the range of technology available to accommodate the needs of students with disabilities.
2. Joint training of these professionals would facilitate a greater understanding of the roles of these professionals in the transition process and would foster the development of more collaborative relationships so that service providers could identify ways of working together to address the technological needs of students with disabilities.
3. Studies that investigate the successes of youth with disabilities in postsecondary education and employment need to be funded in order to gain an in-depth perspective of the types of supports they identify as most critical to their success.

In the final analysis the voice of a successful college student with a disability captures the value of rehabilitation counselor's purchase of assistive technology, "Having a computer helped me be successful. It has been one of the most helpful things for me to complete my degree (Chad, Interview, 12/27/01, p. 10).

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TABLE 2: PROFILE OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES COMPLETING POST SECONDARY EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT						
STUDENT	GENDER	DISABILITY	COMMUNITY TYPE	DEGREE OR CERTIFICATE	TIME TO COMPLETE	EMPLOYMENT
Tom	M	LD (Writing)	Suburban	BA Fine Arts	4 years	Full-Time Advertising Company
Chad	M	LD/ADD (Speech, Finemotor)	Suburban	BA Finance & Accounting	4.5 years	Full-Time Accounting Position
Nick	M	LD (Reading, Writing)	Rural	BA Business Admin / Accounting	4 years	Full-Time Assistant Manager Restaurant
Kathryn	F	T.B.I. (2nd-Year College)	Suburban	BA Business / Hospitality	6 years	Full-Time Hotel Events Coordinator
Curt	M	LD/VI (Writing)	Suburban	AD Management, AD Network / Microcomputer Support, Completing 4-year degree.	4 years	Full-Time Manager Technical Support
Kim	F	Mild Cerebral Palsy	Suburban	General AD, Transfer for 4-yr degree in Occupational Therapy	3 years	Full Time College Student Part Time Personal Assistant for Adult with disability
Erin	F	Mild Cerebral Palsy	Suburban	Certification Medical Billing	2 years	Full Time Medical Billing Clerk
Ryan	M	LD/ADD (Math)	Suburban	Certification PC Specialist A+ Certification	2 years	Full Time Technical Assistant
Jeremy	M	LD (Reading, Math)	Rural	Certificate Emergency Med. Tech. Working on Criminal Justice Degree	3 years	Full Time College Student Part Time Radio Shack
Josh	M	LD (Reading, Writing)	Urban	3 years Mathematics / Technology	3 years (In progress)	Part Time College Student Full Time Surveillance Security