

Research to Practice Brief

A comparison of accommodations and supports for students with disabilities in two-year versus four-year postsecondary institutions

By Megan A. Conway and Kelly B.T. Chang

The problem

Under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of (1973), and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), both two and four-year post-secondary institutions are required by law to make their programs and services accessible to students with disabilities. These institutions are obligated to provide students who have documented disabilities with auxiliary aids and services in order to meet this requirement.

The number of students with disabilities entering postsecondary institutions is increasing—from 6% in 1995 to 9.3% in 1999 (US Department of Education, NPSAS 1996, 2000). However, there is evidence that upon graduating from secondary school, of students entering postsecondary education, students with disabilities are less likely to attend public and private 4-year colleges and universities than are students without disabilities (39% versus 47%, respectively), and more likely to enter public and private less than 4-yr institutions (including 2-yr institutions) (61% versus 54%, respectively) (NPSAS, 1996). Table 1 presents data from the National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (2000) on students with disabilities attending public 4-year and 2-year institutions.

Table 1: Percentage of undergraduates who reported a disability or difficulty and among those who did, percentage distribution by type of disability and type of institution.

| Disability Type | Public 2-year Institutions | Public 4-year Institutions |
|------------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| Any Disability | 10.7 | 7.5 |
| Visual | 5.8 | 4.1 |
| Hearing | 7.1 | 6.9 |
| Speech | 0.2 | 0.3 |
| Orthopedic | 30.3 | 25.3 |
| Specific Learning Disability | 4.9 | 5.8 |
| Attention Deficit Disorder | 5.4 | 8.1 |
| Mental illness/depression | 17.1 | 21.1 |
| Health impairments/problems | 15.3 | 13.7 |
| Other | 13.9 | 14.7 |

SOURCE: U.S. Department of education, national Center for Education Statistics, 1999-2000 National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS: 2000).

A larger percentage of undergraduates in public 2-year institutions reported having a disability than undergraduates in public 4-year institutions. Among students entering postsecondary institutions in 1989-1990, students with disabilities were less likely than students without disabilities to complete an associate's degree (6% and 12% respectively)

or a bachelor's degree (16% and 27%) (U.S. Department of Education, 1999). In the same report, both students with and without disabilities were more likely to complete a bachelor's degree if they started in a 4-year institution than if they started in a 2-year institution. Of those who started in public 2-year institutions, students without disabilities were more likely to complete an associate's degree (18% over 7%), while students with disabilities were more likely to complete a vocational certificate (21% over 12%).

Although all postsecondary institutions are required by law to provide reasonable accommodations, the types and frequency of services and supports actually offered vary across institutions (NCSPEs, 2000). Black, Smith, Chang, Harding, & Stodden (in press) suggest that supports offered by two-year institutions may be a critical reason why many students with disabilities choose to attend two-year or community colleges. This brief presents the findings of a national survey of types and frequency of supports provided in different colleges across the country. Two-year and four-year institutions are compared in terms of the kinds of services they are more likely to offer.

Research findings and implications

The National Survey of Educational Support Provision to Students with Disabilities in Postsecondary Education Settings (NCSPEs, 2000) was sent to 1,500 disability support coordinators across the United States. Of these, 650 responded, including 246 two-year, or less than two-year, institutions and 369 four-year institutions. The survey asked about the frequency and types of support offered. The following list illustrates the difference between two-year institutions and four-year institutions in terms of services and supports provided.

Table 1: Comparison of percent of two-year versus four year institutions by selected types of services offered to students with disabilities

| Service | Two-year Institutions | Four-year Institutions |
|---|-----------------------|------------------------|
| • Community outreach | 88.2 | 70.5 |
| • Summer orientation | 42.7 | 43.4 |
| • Priority registration | 75.2 | 78.9 |
| • Class relocation | 79.7 | 88.9 |
| • Testing accommodations | 97.6 | 97.6 |
| • Disability-specific scholarship | 41.1 | 41.7 |
| • Disability-specific assessment/evaluation | 52 | 43.4 |
| • Advocacy | 89.8 | 94 |
| • Supports for study abroad | 17.1 | 51.8 |
| • Learning center laboratory | 83.3 | 69.1 |
| • Instruction in special learning strategies | 88.2 | 89.2 |
| • Remedial instruction | 94.3 | 60.4 |
| • Personal counseling | 95.1 | 95.1 |
| • Accessible transport on-campus | 34.1 | 49.9 |
| • Interpreter | 85.8 | 79.4 |
| • Notetakers/Readers | 88.6 | 94.9 |
| • Tutors | 90.2 | 86.4 |
| • Real-Time Captioning | 28.5 | 31.4 |
| • Assistive technology (AT) evaluation | 52.8 | 36.3 |
| • AT training | 80.9 | 68 |
| • AT provision | 73.2 | 61.8 |
| • AT campus supports | 84.6 | 72.4 |
| • Adaptive furniture | 83.7 | 75.1 |
| • Document conversion | 72 | 62.9 |
| • Self-advocacy skills | 94.3 | 89.2 |
| • Career counseling | 84.6 | 87.3 |
| • Work/study | 84.6 | 88.3 |
| • Job placement | 82.9 | 79.1 |
| • Facilitate transfer of supports to work setting | 51.6 | 43.6 |

Highlights include:

- According to results from the NCSPEs 2000 survey, the services that the four-year institutions surveyed are more likely to provide are generally adaptations to what already exists, such as making on-campus transportation accessible; or, they are services offered to all students, such as career counseling and work study. Whereas, according to the survey, the services that two-year institutions surveyed provide are more likely to be specialized, varied, and focused on serving students with disabilities specifically.

- Two-year institutions serve more deaf or hearing-impaired students than do four-year institutions, and provide more interpreter services, while four-year institutions in this sample serve more students with learning disabilities than do two-year institutions, and provide more meta-cognitive, study-skills, and memory-skills training.
- The two-year institutions surveyed in the NCSPEs 2000 also differ from the four-year institutions surveyed in community outreach for students with disabilities; in other words, the degree to which they facilitate students' linkages to outside organizations and personnel such as federal programs, employers, family organizations, and consumer advocacy groups (Harding & Chang, 2001). The results of the survey indicate that two-year institutions (88.2% of those surveyed) generally provide students with linkages to outside organizations and personnel more often than do four-year institutions (70.5% of those surveyed). Outreach and collaboration between high schools, colleges, and employment support personnel can improve transition experiences for students with disabilities (Whelley, Hart, & Zafft, unpublished).

Implications:

- These research findings show the disparity in the use of on-campus and community resources to support postsecondary students who attend two-year and four-year institutions. For students with disabilities trying to decide between two-year and four-year institutions, it is critical that they know what kinds of services and accommodations they need. With this information in mind, they should consider a wide range of postsecondary options and the scope of support that is provided.
- There is a need to further develop services at four-year institutions in order to attract and better serve students with disabilities. For example, models could be described and further developed from exemplary two-year institutions (e.g., the use of assistive technology), and applied to four-year institutional settings.
- In light of the difference in the level of community outreach between two-year and four-year institutions, careful consideration should be given to the student's need for continuity between community and college programs when selecting a college.

Innovative practices

Project Access is a model demonstration transition project at Howard Community College in Columbia, Maryland. This project was developed and supported through OSEP funding, and it has been sustained after the end of the demonstration project. The primary purpose of this project is to improve the delivery and outcomes of postsecondary education for individuals with disabilities through a Summer Institute; social events on campus; an annual college fair for students with disabilities; and in-service training for Howard County Public School counselors and special educators. The project can be accessed at: <http://www.howardcc.edu/resources/projacce.htm>

The Cooperative Program for the Deaf and the Blind has a mission to maximize opportunities for competitive employment and successful transition of citizens who are deaf/hard of hearing and blind/visually-impaired from throughout South Carolina. Through a partnership between the South Carolina School for the Deaf and the Blind and

Spartanburg Technical College, the program provides postsecondary educational programs, learning resources, assistive and adaptive technology, career and counseling services, residential and independent living services, transportation services, and transition services to help state residents who are deaf/hard of hearing and blind/visually impaired to maximize their potential for independent living. For more information go to: <http://www.scsdb.k12.sc.us/academic/postsecondary.html>

HEATH Resource Center is the national clearinghouse on postsecondary education for individuals with disabilities. It serves as an information exchange about educational support services, policies, procedures, adaptations, and opportunities at American campuses, vocational-technical schools, and other postsecondary training entities. The HEATH Resource Center clearinghouse is authorized by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and funded by the US Department of Education. Publications, news, and other resources can be accessed at: <http://www.heath.gwu.edu/index.html>

References

Black, R. S., Smith, G., Chang, C., Harding, T., Stodden, R. A. (in press). Provision of educational supports to students with disabilities in two-year postsecondary programs. *Journal for Vocational Special Needs Education*.

Harding, T., & Chang, C. (2001). *Research Findings Brief: Comparison of 2-year institutions versus 4-year institutions in offering supports and accommodations for students with disabilities*. National Center for the Study of Postsecondary Educational Supports, Honolulu, HI. Available online [http://rrtc.hawaii.edu/products/phaseII/pdf/021b\(1\)-H01.pdf](http://rrtc.hawaii.edu/products/phaseII/pdf/021b(1)-H01.pdf)

NCSPES (2000, June). *National Survey of Educational Support Provision to Students with Disabilities in Postsecondary Education Settings*. Honolulu, HI, University of Hawai'i at Manoa. Available online <http://rrtc.hawaii.edu/products/phaseI.html>

Stodden, R.A., Jones, M.A., & Chang, K.B.T. (2002, March). *Services, supports and accommodations for individuals with disabilities: An analysis across secondary education, postsecondary education, and employment*. Paper presented at the Capacity Building Institute, Honolulu, HI. Available online http://ncset.hawaii.edu/Publications/Pdfs/services_supports.pdf

U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 1995-96 *National Postsecondary Student Aid Study* (NPSAS: 96), Undergraduate Data Analysis System.

U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, (1999) *Students with Disabilities in Postsecondary Education: A Profile of Preparation, Participation, and Outcomes* (NCES 1999-187).

U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 1999-2000 *National Postsecondary Student Aid Study* (NPSAS: 2000).

Whelley, T., Hart, D., & Zafft, C. (2002). *Coordination and management of services for individuals with disabilities in the transition from secondary to participation in postsecondary education and employment*. Paper presented at the Capacity Building Institute, Honolulu, HI. Available online
<http://ncset.hawaii.edu/Publications/Pdfs/coordination.pdf>

Additional Resources

National Survey of Educational Support Provision to Students with Disabilities in Postsecondary Education Settings

Contact:

Juana Tabali Weir

CDS/UAP National Center for the Study of Postsecondary Educational Supports

University of Hawaii at Manoa

1776 University Avenue, UA 4-6

Honolulu, HI 96822,

Phone: 808-956-3975

Email: juana@hawaii.edu

Website: <http://www.rrtc.hawaii.edu>

Moving on: The 2-4 Step (1998) [videotape].

Created to accompany the DO-IT handout of the same name, this video helps to explain suggestions and steps to successful transition from 2-year to 4-year colleges for students with disabilities. .

Contact:

DO-IT

University of Washington

Box 354842

Seattle, WA 98195-4842

Phone/TTY: 206-685-DO IT

Email: doit@u.washington.edu

Website: <http://weber.u.washington.edu/~doit/>

Literature and data used in the development of this Brief was provided by the National Center for the Study of Postsecondary Educational Supports at the University of Hawaii at Manoa, funded by the National Institutes on Disability & Rehabilitation Research (NIDRR) within the U.S. Department of Education, under grant number H133B980043. The contents of this Brief do not necessarily reflect the official opinion of any sponsoring agency.