Exploring Barriers to College Student Use of Disability Services and Accommodations

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Abstract

Federal legislation requires most colleges and universities to provide equal access and reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. However, many students do not fully avail themselves of college disability services and accommodations. It is important for Office of Disability Services (ODS) personnel to understand the reasons for this, as they attempt to best assist students with disabilities at their institutions. In this qualitative study, 16 college students with disabilities at a medium-sized state university were interviewed. Five major thematic categories emerged from the data analysis, which were identified as barriers to why some students might not seek-out or more fully utilize disability services and accommodations in postsecondary education: (a) identity issues, (b) desires to avoid negative social reactions, (c) insufficient knowledge, (d) perceived quality and usefulness of services, and (e) negative experiences with faculty. Suggestions for ODS personnel to eliminate institutional barriers and to help students overcome personal barriers are provided.

Postsecondary education is increasingly regarded as a critical component in gaining suitable and meaningful employment, especially as our economy has become more knowledge based (Carnevale & Desrochers, 2003; National Organization on Disability, 2001). However, it is disheartening that as of 2005, individuals with disabilities in the U.S. were still much less likely than those without disabilities to possess a college degree (13% vs. 30%) (Houtenville, 2007). People with disabilities continue to face challenges that result in lower attendance and graduation rates when compared to people without disabilities (Dowrick, Anderson, Heyer, & Acosta, 2005; Henderson, 2001; Kober, 2002). The reasons cited for students with disabilities not obtaining postsecondary degrees in greater numbers have included such issues as: academic dismissal, dropping out for personal reasons, family responsibilities, and the lack of assistance on campus.

Over the past couple of decades, legislation has been regarded as one very important aspect in attempting to diminish the barriers encountered by postsecondary students with disabilities. National legislation such as the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (including the recent 2008 ADA Restoration Act) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 are in place to require most postsecondary institutions to provide equal access and reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. More specifically, Section 504 requires postsecondary institutions to provide equal access to all aspects of a college campus and its programming. And the ADA requires postsecondary institutions to provide "appropriate academic adjustments as necessary to ensure that it does not discriminate on the basis of disability" (Office for Civil Rights, 2005).

Although such federal legislation is in place in an attempt to ensure the availability of reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities on college campuses, many students either do not make regular use of their accommodations or do not seek out an awareness of the array of resources that could be made available to them (Ferrell & Marshak, 2004; Jackson & Ferrell, 2000; Marshak, Ferrell, & Dugan, 2004). Learning to

locate and make use of supportive services is vitally important for students with disabilities who may struggle in a postsecondary educational setting (Field, Sarver, & Shaw, 2003). In fact, one of the primary questions explored in a sub-study about postsecondary education participation of youth with disabilities, as part of the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2), was: "To what extent do those who enroll [in postsecondary education] receive supports and accommodations…?" (Newman, 2005, p. 2). Results of the NLTS2 study found that only 40% of postsecondary students who received special education services while in secondary school identify their disability to their postsecondary institution. Of these identifying postsecondary students, 88% actually then receive supportive services, accommodations or learning aids (Newman, 2005). A critical question to consider then is why so few postsecondary students with disabilities choose to seek out and make use of supportive services and accommodations.

There have been numerous studies that focused on the types of accommodations that are provided to college students, as well as how well these provisions are provided. These studies have explored topics such as: faculty knowledge and practices regarding students with disabilities and their willingness to make needed accommodations (e.g., Hill, 1996; Houck, Asselin, Troutman, & Arrington, 1992; McEldowney-Jensen, McCrary, Krampe, & Cooper, 2004; Leyser, Vogel, Brulle, & Wyland, 1998; Rao, 2004; Vogel, Burgstahler, Sligar, & Zecker, 2006); the perceptions of college students with disabilities of the value and effectiveness of institutional disability interventions, services, and policies (e.g., Hill, 1996; Kurth & Mellard, 2006; Suritsky & Hughes, 1991); and the quality of campus disability services (e.g., Graham-Smith & LaFayette, 2004). However, in addition to these issues, it is also important to understand broader factors that may prevent students with disabilities from choosing to actively seek out or make regular use of disability services on campus.

A general lack of knowledge regarding the nature of their disabilities, their rights, or their accommodation needs seems to be one type of barrier faced by some college students with disabilities in seeking out or making regular use of accommodations (Ferrell, Marshak & Dugan, 2003; Ferrell & Marshak 2004; Palmer & Roessler, 2000). In a review of the literature regarding help-seeking behaviors of college students with disabilities, Trammell and Hathaway (2007) found many different and sometimes contradictory findings among the studies, concluding that a student's decision to seek help is "complex, multilayered, and highly correlated to the climate and disability environment on campus, as well as to personal factors related to motivation, which vary from student to student" (p. 6). Ultimately, Trammel and Hathaway concluded via their literature review that the "…stigmatizing effect of disability seems to be a significant factor in all of the studies, and likely influences when college students with disabilities go for help and when they do not" (pp. 6-7).

The purpose of this study is to contribute to the ongoing exploration of barriers (institutional and personal) that may prevent college students with disabilities from seeking or making regular use of the disability services and accommodations that are available to them on college campuses. An exploratory, qualitative design was chosen in order to focus on gaining a holistic understanding and meaning of this phenomenon (as opposed to testing any particular predictions or hypotheses about this phenomenon). This was accomplished through in-depth guided interviews with several current college students with various types of disabilities. Based upon the insights gained from these interviews, a number of common themes emerged. Implications and recommendations for postsecondary Office of Disability Services (ODS) personnel are also provided.

Method

Participants

This study was conducted at a medium-sized state university in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States. A convenience sampling design was utilized through working in conjunction with the school's ODS. Recruitment letters were sent once to all presently active students at the university who had previously registered with the ODS by providing documentation of a disability. Letters were sent to 327 students. All students who responded to the letters as willing to participate in the study were scheduled for interviews. The interviewed group consisted of 16 college students with disabilities. The sample included a mix of freshmen, sophomores, juniors, seniors, and one graduate student. Approximately 80% of the participating students were female, and 20% were male. All of the participants were Caucasian. Disability types as reported by the participants included specific learning disabilities (math, reading, and writing), Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD), seizure disorder, arthritis, cerebral palsy, severe mental health

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Subject	Gender	Age	Race	Semesters	Disability
1	F	21	Caucasian	5	Juvenile Arthritis
2	F	22	Caucasian	9	Learning Disability
3	M	20	Caucasian	6	Cerebral Palsy
4	M	21	Caucasian	7	Learning Disability
5	F	19	Caucasian	2	Learning Disability
6	F	22	Caucasian	8	Learning Disability
7	F	20	Caucasian	3	Learning Disability
8	F	20	Caucasian	6	Seizures
9	F	19	Caucasian	2	Learning Disability
10	F	18	Caucasian	2	Learning Disability
11	F	44	Caucasian	Graduate Student	Learning Disability
12	F	20	Caucasian	4	ADD
13	F	24	Caucasian	12+	ADD
14	M	53	Caucasian	Unknown	Schizophrenia
15	F	24	Caucasian	12	Blindness
16	F	22	Caucasian	8+	Learning Dis. & ADD

disorders, speech disorders, and visual impairment. See Table 1.

Interview Procedures

The information gathered for this study was part of a larger body of data obtained from semi-structured (or focused) interviews with the 16 participants. A semi-structured interview guide was developed by two of the researchers, based on their prior professional experiences in the fields of Special Education and Vocational Rehabilitation. The guide essentially consists of a list of topics or questions that were to be covered with each participant, encouraging them to talk freely and to record all their responses (see Appendix). For purposes of collecting unstructured self-report data, semi-structured interviews are the most widely-used method (Polit & Hungler, 1999).

Two of the researchers (who have prior experience conducting semi-structured interviews for research purposes) co-interviewed each of the 16 participants, with each interview lasting approximately one to two hours. Each interview was audio-taped and later transcribed for data analysis.

The interview responses used for this particular study were those drawn from a subset of the semi-structured interview guide, part 2. Topics covered in this area included whether the participants felt they were prepared during high school to seek needed services, the students' experiences on campus, the use of services from ODS. etc. Within this context participants described their experiences with seeking and utilizing available services and accommodations.

Data Analysis

The researchers made use of an editing analysis style in order to interpret the qualitative data gained from the interviews. Such a style involves reading through transcripts in search of meaningful fragments. These fragments are then reviewed and utilized to develop a categorization scheme and matching codes. The codes are then used to sort the qualitative data so that structures and patterns can be sought to better understand the thematic categories (Polit & Hungler, 1999).

Through the use of multiple researchers to analyze the data, investigator triangulation was utilized in order to reduce the possibility of interpreter bias. Two of the study's experienced researchers conducted the comprehension portion of the analysis by independently reviewing the transcripts in order to make initial sense of the data. The two researchers then communicated with each other in order to conduct the synthesis portion of the analysis, identifying and coming to a consensus on overarching and generalized categorical themes. At this point, level I coding occurred for five categorical themes, each representing the main overarching barriers experienced by the study's participants in seeking and using available accommodations in college. Each participant statement that related to one of these five categories was then coded and extracted by a third researcher. The recontextualizing portion of the analysis was then conducted by three of the researchers, who independently reviewed the coded transcripts. The researchers then communicated with each other in order to synthesize and identify common sub-themes for each of the five main categorical themes. A total of eleven sub-categories were eventually agreed upon by the three researchers. In this manner, synthesis occurred and an in-depth, holistic understanding of the participants' responses was obtained. Level II coding was then conducted by the third researcher in order to identify and extract all of the sub-category data and statements from the transcripts.

Findings

Five major thematic categories emerged from the data analysis, which were identified as barriers to seeking and utilizing disability support services in college: (a) identity issues, (b) desire to avoid negative social reaction, (c) insufficient knowledge, (d) perceived quality and usefulness of services, and (e) negative experiences with professors. As will be subsequently discussed, the findings were clustered in 11 subcategories, which fell within the five overarching themes (see Table 2).

Identity Issues

Issues related to identity were the most frequent barriers that students reported kept them from choosing to seek the services and accommodations available to them through ODS. Within this larger category, three more specific identity-related sub-themes emerged. These were (a) a desire for self-sufficiency, (b) a desire to shed the stigmatized identity they had in high school, and (c) a desire not to integrate the presence of a disability into their college identity.

Desire for self-sufficiency. Many students commented on their need to feel as though they could do things on their own. The desire to prove their self-sufficiency frequently took precedence over expediency. Often this required great effort by the individual student. For example, one student who has cerebral palsy and uses a wheelchair related how he responded when he found that his final exam was scheduled on the second floor of an old, inaccessible building on campus, and also why he did not use the informational handbook on disability services, published by the ODS:

> *…so my first semester here, I had a final on the second floor of one of the older academic buildings on campus. Now, there is no elevator in this building …so, I got out of my manual wheelchair, grabbed a hold of it and crawled up the steps with my wheelchair on my back for the exam.*

Referring to the informational handbook from ODS, he said:

> *I got it in my freshman year in my first fall semester and it was there and it was big and bright and yellow and I didn't look at it. I knew it was there, but I wanted to know that I could do it on my own.*

Table 2

Summary of Student Identified Barriers by Category

Category	Barrier (sub-category)
Identity issues	- Desire to shed stigma of high school identity - Desire to not integrate the presence of a disability into their identify - Desire for self-sufficiency
Desire to avoid negative social reactions	- Fear of resentment of other students for special treatment - Not wanting to be singled out
Insufficient knowledge	- Question fairness of receiving accommodations - Confusion about accessibility and ODS services - Lack of training in how to explain their disability to others
Perceived quality and usefulness of services	- Expediency of service delivery - Lack of compatibility with accommodations
Negative experiences with professors	- Negative experiences with professors

Desire to shed stigmatized high school identity. Many students commented on previous negative experiences during high school where they felt humiliated by other students because of their disabilities. The transition to college brought the prospect of starting over in terms of a fresh social identity. Many of the college students interviewed spoke of wanting to shed their former identities.

For example:

> *…throughout middle school and high school, for people who had learning disabilities, we went to different rooms and stuff and just got looked at weird and stuff like that, and so it just got me to the point of thinking, "I don't want to tell anybody."*

Desire not to integrate the presence of a disability into their identity. Many students commented on believing that others think that having a disability is unacceptable in some way. Students also stated that getting used to the idea and accepting that they have a disability has been a difficult task:

> *…I was able to get note takers most of the time. Basically, that's the only accommodation I know of because I still have not come to the acceptance that, "Oh, I really do need accommodations" I just figured I have gotten along for so many years, I really do not need them. But now I realize that I do need them, but it is kind of hard for me to accept it…*

Desire to Avoid Negative Social Reactions

This second major category included barriers that related to the reactions and treatment received from other students. Within this category, two more specific sub-themes were revealed, including: (a) fear of resentment of other students for special treatment, and (b) not wanting to be singled out.

Fear of resentment of other students related to special treatment. Many students commented on particular situations in which college peers treated them differently when their disability was revealed – often because their disability was not physical and peers could not plainly see how it affected them. In addition, several students reported believing their peers were thinking that the disability would aid in receiving special treatment or that the disability was simply being used as an excuse to receive accommodations. For example, one student stated:

> *I just don't think people understood why I deserved extended test times…and I think they looked upon it as me thinking, "Oh, I just don't want to take them [tests] yet, I'm not ready for them. So because I have a disability, I can use this as a way to, you know, work around it, like whenever I'm ready to take it [the test] is when I'll take it."*

Another student commented on a situation in which she heard a fellow student criticizing that she used accommodations:

> *You know, there was one instance when I heard a graduate student say about me, "Well, I don't know what her problem is, I've got a disability too, I know I do, it's been validated. But you don't see me run-*

ning for this and that [i.e., using accommodations]. I worked hard to get where I'm at."

Not wanting to be singled out. Students frequently commented on thinking that if they used accommodations, their peers would look at them differently or that they would not feel as if they were like everybody else. Most of the comments related to this theme were centered on feeling embarrassed or being stared at by peers. For example, one student with a hearing impairment remarked,

> *…I've been using it [i.e., a hearing aid] since I was in 5th grade, and this year, I really don't want to try it because people do stare at you. You are the only one wearing it and they stare at you, and I'm 20 years old, and do not want to have to deal with that…they just stare at me and I can't stand that anymore since I've gotten older.*

Insufficient Knowledge

This third main category included student-identified barriers relating to not knowing what services are available, not knowing how to explain their disability (and in some cases, not even knowing what specific disability they have), and believing that in some way using services takes away from other students who are "more entitled" to receive such services. Within this category, three sub-themes emerged: (a) questions of fairness, (b) confusion about accessibility services, and (c) lack of training in how to explain their disability.

Questions of fairness. Several students commented on feeling guilty for using accommodations, in relation to other students, those with disabilities and not. Many students questioned the perceived fairness of receiving special services and accommodations. One student commented on why she never asked for accommodations in the classroom:

> *…I never wanted my disability to take over my life, and I have never asked for [accommodations]. I hate asking for special services because I feel guilty towards the 20 other people in my class who cannot, are not given it [accommodations or services]…*

When students were asked why they did not use the accommodations provided by ODS, some responded that they did not know specific services existed or that they did not know how to access the services. Also, many students mistakenly believed that the campus Learning

Center (another office on the campus for general population students, which assists with college-level learning skills) was the same entity as ODS. Some students with disabilities were concerned that they were receiving their disability-related accommodations through the Learning Center (as opposed to the ODS), or that they were accepted into the university because of their learning disability, all of which are not true. The student who crawled up to the second floor for a final exam illustrates this confusion. In his small high school, services offered were few and were not provided to him as "special education" or through an Individual Educational Plan. Therefore, he was not prepared to seek assistance as he had never read the ODS manual.

Lack of training in how to explain their disability. In the beginning of the interview, each student was asked what type of disability they had registered with ODS. Three themes emerged from the answers to this question: (a) the student knew what their disability was and how to clearly explain it; (b) the student did not know what their specific disability was; or (c) they did not understand the impact of their disability in the college setting. One student described an incident when she was told to talk to her professor about her disability and accommodations, but she ran into difficulties trying to explain such:

…I was [only taking one class]…so I didn't come in and advocate for myself, and they [ODS], they were telling me, "Just explain it [i.e., disability and accommodation requests] to your professors. Talk to them on the first day of class. They have the letter [i.e., letter from the ODS verifying the accommodations the student is entitled to]. You can just basically go by it." No you can't go by it, because no one's ever sat down and explained to me in the first place [my disability and need for accommodations]…

Another student describes not having a clear understanding of her disability:

I was just told that it was a cognitive disability due to seizures. I don't know what that means…I just think it's my inability to grasp material due to the fact that because of seizures it gives me basically a harder time to remember things and the long time it takes me to study and pick things up…

Perceived Quality and Usefulness of Services

This fourth main category included barriers that related to the quality of service delivery, and the compatibility of accommodations to students' needs. Within this category, two sub-themes emerged: (a) expediency of service delivery, and (b) lack of compatibility with accommodations.

Expediency of service delivery. This subcategory included problems encountered when students attempted to get their requests for accommodations filled, and specific problems related to the note taker services provided on campus. The specific problems with note takers that students encountered included problems with anonymity, having unreliable students serve as note takers, and thinking that note takers are only for students with traditional and more obvious disabilities such as hearing impairments. Several students commented that they were apprehensive to use note taker services because they either knew of someone who had been accidentally identified in class as a student receiving note taker services, or they had a similar personal experience with lack of anonymity. In addition, students found it difficult at times to get their service requests filled. One student commented on an experience involving a problem getting a note taker request filled in a timely manner and what needs to change to improve the service:

…even though I was offered them [i.e., note takers], I think I went to sign up for note takers and it's kind of hard and I don't think it's very fair for people who need note takers and either they [i.e., ODS] do not have them for you or you have to wait a half a semester to get them…You're saying they're entitled to it but then you're saying…we can't provide it. So don't say you're entitled to it if you can't provide it.

Lack of compatibility with accommodations. This subcategory dealt with specific barriers students faced with recorded books and testing accommodations. Many times these students were eager to use the accommodations provided on campus, but once they began using them they ran into difficulties. For instance, one student commented on the difficulties encountered when trying to use recorded books to accompany the assigned chapters, and what should be done to help others in the future:

…they [i.e., ODS] had gotten me books on tape which helped me a little bit. But, if you're not

trained early in that and you're used to reading everything….and even my OVR [Office of Vocational Rehabilitation] counselor, she told me, "Had we given you these [i.e., book on tape] in 9th or 10th grade, then they would be of great help to you right now, but do you realize they might not do anything for you now?" And they haven't done anything for me. I ordered them my freshman and sophomore year for my classes where there was a lot of reading. Did I use them? Two, three times maybe, when I had trouble with chapters and then after that, I haven't ordered them since…I really think the books on tape would have been a great help to me, a great help, if I had started learning how to use them earlier….

Students also commented on the barriers they faced when attempting to utilize the testing accommodation services provided on campus. One student experienced a situation in which she took a test with accommodations outside of the classroom, and when she was gone the professor significantly helped the rest of the class with some of the answers on the test. However, because the student was not present when the professor was helping the rest of the class, she did not get the same help for those questions. She answered the questions incorrectly, and then had to fight with the professor to get credit for the questions on which everyone else in the class had been given assistance.

Negative Experiences with Professors

Issues related to interactions with professors were the second most highly referred to group of barriers that students reported. Several students were confronted with situations in which a professor would not fully believe that the student truly had a disability (even though documentation was provided) or would not believe that the student's disability was the reason they missed a class. One student discussed a situation in which she missed class because of her disability and the professor did not believe her:

…I tried to tell him…with the labs, you have to go because they are only once a week. And so I told him that I didn't make it to the quiz because I had a seizure and his response was, "Well, okay, now will you tell me the real reason why you weren't in class?"

Other students encountered situations in which they would ask the professor for copies of the class lecture notes or overhead slides, because they had a difficult time balancing taking notes and paying attention in class, but the professor would give them excuses as to why they could not make them available. For example, one student reported:

Then I asked him [the professor]…cause he types his notes and then he reads from them in class. So I said, "Well couldn't you just print me a copy of your notes, just for me to use. I still take notes just so I pay attention, but…" And he replied, "No, that wouldn't be fair to the other students"….So anyway, he was giving me crap about how his lecture notes are copyrighted and I might pass them out to the other students, or whatever….

Despite the fact that faculty members receive confidential letters that address specific accommodations are to be provided or allowed, some faculty do not follow through. The ODS has sometimes needed to communicate to specific faculty members that the "reasonable accommodations" are not a luxury but are mandated by federal law. Some students did not insist on the accommodations in light of faculty dismissal of the issues.

Discussion and Implications

This exploratory study focused on many of the self-reported reasons why students do not avail themselves of some potentially beneficial accommodations. The findings provide examples of barriers that may inhibit some college students with disabilities from choosing to seek out or more fully engage in using potentially beneficial disability services and accommodations. An understanding of these barriers has implications for postsecondary ODS providers as well as those professionals involved in transition services to secondary school students.

According to Trammel and Hathaway (2007), the decision of whether or not to seek help is complex and multilayered. This was reflected in this study's findings that identified several different themes pertaining to the reasons why students reported that they did not utilize sources of help. The findings of this study also add support to previous observations that stigma influences some student decisions regarding seeking help or using accommodations.

(Hartmann-Hall & Haaga, 2002; Trammel & Hathaway, 2007). Several of the barriers discussed by the participants in this present study reportedly stemmed

from a desire to shed their high school identities in which they might have been regarded as "the disabled kid." The results of this study's data analysis highlight the importance that students place on wanting to make a "clean start" in terms of social identity and no longer wishing to be singled out or labeled. This finding is relevant to the work of high school counselors, transition coordinators, and ODS providers. It is important that they find opportunities to explain that college environments are often different than high school environments in several significant ways. For ODS providers this might be accomplished during interactions with prospective students and their families, with freshmen when they first matriculate to campus, and through any mailings, brochures, or web site information that ODS provides about itself to students and the public. ODS personnel may sometimes mistakenly assume that new or prospective students facing transition understand the environmental differences between high school and college. But, prospective or new college students may be quite unaware that they are likely to experience a far greater degree of social anonymity in college than they did while in high school. Many high school students, in transition to postsecondary educational settings, recall with embarrassment being seen by others going into resource rooms. In contrast to high school, they may not realize that in college not everyone "knows your business".

Although educators and ODS can emphasize the relative increase in social privacy, they also need to be careful to not inadvertently foster the sense that the disability *should* be kept hidden. Some students, such as those with specific learning disabilities, are faced with a choice regarding whether to acknowledge their disabilities in ways that might foster attention. For example, students who need note takers in college courses are faced with deciding whether the help is worth other students perhaps noticing the accommodation.

Prospective and new college students also need to recognize that when matriculating to a college campus, the choice to register with the ODS does not define them in a way that they may have been defined in grade or secondary-school years. ODS providers can help students understand that in college they will not be put in a "disabled" academic track or "special" program as they may have been in high school under the auspices of special education and the IDEA. In this manner, disability service providers can help students understand that self-disclosing by registering with the ODS enables them to simply access and make use of reasonable accommodations under the ADA and Section 504, rather than limiting their academic options or self-definition in any way.

Section 5 (Counseling and Self-Determination) of AHEAD's Program Standards and Performance Indicators (PSPI) directs that an ODS should "use a service delivery model that encourages students with disabilities to develop independence," including "educat[ing] and assist[ing] students with disabilities to function independently" (AHEAD, 2007). This would seem to dovetail with the above-referenced issue of ensuring that prospective and new college students are aware of the environmental and cultural differences pertaining to disability between high school and college campuses, as well as interacting with students regarding disability identity issues.

The results of this study indicated that some students with disabilities come to college unprepared to handle situations that may require them to explain their disability and need for accommodations. As discussed by Trammel and Hathaway (2007), some students with disabilities may benefit from being coached in how to explain their need for help. When interacting with prospective or new college students with disabilities, ODS personnel can help them to be prepared for these types of situations that they are likely to encounter. Based on the experiences of our research sample, these situations include being faced with faculty who are willing to accommodate but do not understand how a student's disability may need to be accommodated as well as faculty who are simply resistant and do not fully believe a disability is present. This latter type of situation seems to occur relatively more often when there are learning disabilities or other "hidden" disorders that are not readily apparent to a faculty who might be unfamiliar with disability issues. It must be noted that students may also be challenged by peers who question whether accommodations simply give them an unfair advantage. For students who are willing to disclose the nature of their disability to faculty and peers, ODS personnel can help such students with learning how to explain, in layperson's terms, what their disability entails, how it interferes with functioning in an academic environment, and how certain accommodations are necessary.

Campus-wide awareness efforts should also be made by the ODS, in an attempt to create a campus climate amongst students, staff, and faculty that values students with disabilities and is as generally educated

and understanding as possible about disability and accommodation issues.

In addition, when interacting with new and prospective students with disabilities, it is necessary for ODS personnel to ensure that such students understand their [i.e., the student's] integral role in making use of their accommodations in the postsecondary environment. Students need to understand that barriers such as the ones described in this article can be impediments in a far greater way than in high school, as both the ADA and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act rely on the student to proactively seek and initiate the use of accommodations.

Adjusting to the unfamiliar college environment is a challenge for any student. Adding to that the use of new adaptive equipment or services (e.g., assistive technology software, recorded texts, note takers, adapted tests, etc.) can be overwhelming for the student with a disability who might not have had prior experience with such in high school. This was expressed by some of the students interviewed in this study. If a particular student expresses an apprehension to "dive in" to the use of a particular adaptive device or service that is new to him or her, and is therefore reluctant to make any use at all, the ODS personnel could suggest they simply "try it out" it out for a few classes in order to gain a feel for whether or not it could potentially be useful. When students are given permission to "experiment" with a piece of equipment or service, the anxiety associated with "committing" can sometimes be diffused. This could be considered part of an ODS personnel's responsibility in best meeting Section 4 (Academic Adjustments) of the PSPI, specifically sub-section 4.2, when "determin[ing] with students appropriate academic accommodations and services."

The findings indicate that some students do not utilize potentially beneficial accommodations or services because they are frustrated with the expediency of service delivery or perhaps become overwhelmed with the procedures involved in initiating such. This would seem to underscore the need for ODSs to continuously seek honest feedback from the students they serve in order to keep a "pulse" on their perceptions of quality and usefulness of services. This is underscored by Section 7 of the PSPI (Program Administration and Evaluation), particularly sub-sections 7.3, which recommends "collect[ing] student feedback to measure satisfaction with disability services" and 7.4, which recommends "collect[ing] data to monitor use of disability services."

Limitations

As with any study, this one possesses some limitations that should be identified and acknowledged. The most obvious limitation would be the small sample size (16 participants). It would be ideal to conduct additional studies and to recruit a greater number of participants. Another obvious limitation would be the rather homogenous nature of the study's participants (i.e., all were from the same university, all were Caucasian, etc.). Additional studies should attempt to gain greater demographic diversity amongst participants, including race, disability, school affiliation, etc. One additional limitation to make note of is a common concern of qualitative interview studies, response bias – the tendency of participants to represent themselves in a favorable image and thus distort some information.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this exploratory study provided further insight into the viewpoints of college students with disabilities regarding why they did not use accommodations. These included a desire to redefine personal identity, to avoid social stigma and negative peer and faculty reactions, difficulty explaining their disability-related needs, and being disappointed with the utility of accommodations received. The majority of the barriers that inhibited the use of accommodations and services were internal ones. More specifically, students often expressed the belief that the use of such services might erode their sense of self-sufficiency or make them more vulnerable to social disapproval from peers and faculty. The specific comments of the participants who shared their perceptions provide further clarity on the concerns of some college students with disabilities. This information can be used by ODS personnel as well as those working in transition in order to diminish some of the barriers that students encounter that negatively influence their decisions to utilize the valuable sources of help available on college campuses.

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Appendix

Structured Interview Guide

Before the structured interview, the following demographic data will be obtained:

1. Number of semesters completed at college (or status):
2. Disability:
3. Gender:
4. Age:
5. Present major:

PART ONE (academic planning):
Questions in this first part of the interview will focus on the career decision-making process with regards to the choice of academic major.
We are interested in learning about your choice of majors. Could you describe how you went about choosing a major and your feelings about your major?

A. Rationale for choice of major(s):
   What specific factors led to choice of major?
   Which specific factors were most influential?
   How was the decision made?
B. Impact of counselors, family, peers on the decision-making process:
    Who was the most influential and why?
C. General career plan regarding eventual degree and choice of major:
    What do you plan?
D. Extent to which disability was a factor in the decision-making process:
    How has your disability affected your decision?
E. History of choice of major:
    Were there previous majors?
    Why did you change your major?
F. Feelings about choice of major:
   How do you feel about your present choice?
   Is this what you really want to do?
G. Did you have an IEP in High School?
H. Transition planning in high school:
    Was there transition planning?
    If so, is the choice of major related to earlier transition plans?
I. Interest/Ability Testing:
   Did you have any of this type of assessment in High School?
   Did the results of the test affect the career decision-making process?
J. Was there sufficient planning prior to entering college?
   Is there anything the student wishes had been known earlier?

PART TWO (academic plan implementation):
Questions on experiences during college while student pursues their academic/career plans.
Can you describe how college has been for you so far?

A. Coursework
B. Experience with faculty; including relations to disability related requests
C. Experiences with peers, roommates, etc.
D. Use of accommodations and Disabled Student Services
E. Experiences related to accessibility
F. Ability to manage academic, social, and other demands
G. Experiences in internships, practicum, student teaching, etc.
H. Need for any additional help that does not seem to be available
I. Relative difficulty of academic versus social aspects of college
J. Specific experiences that stand out in your mind that helped or hindered adjustment to college (academic and social)
K. What you found to be most difficult?
L. What you found to be most helpful?
M. What advice you would give students with similar problems?

PART THREE (future plans):
 Questions focus on feelings/thoughts about their post-college plans:
What do you want to do when you graduate?

A. Extent to which this goal is related to academic major?
B. Thoughts and feelings about the probability of achieving this goal?
C. Anticipation of problems entering this career or feelings about career future?
D. Extent to which you feel prepared for transition from college to work or graduate school?
E. Extent to which you feel your disability may have an impact on your career?
F. What you view as your greatest assets regarding career future?
G. What student views as largest obstacle regarding career future?

PART FOUR:
Questions apply to seniors and focus on job seeking or application to graduate school

A. What are your plans following graduation?
B. What are the initial results of job seeking (within career) or applications to graduate school?