

RESEARCH FINDINGS BRIEF

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Overview of RRTC's Purpose

The purpose of the Rehabilitation Research and Training Center (RRTC) is to conduct a strategic program of research, training, technical assistance, and information dissemination focused upon educational supports that increase access and improve outcomes for persons with disabilities in postsecondary education programs and subsequently, in the labor force. Addressing this priority, the primary goals of the RRTC are as follows: 1) To identify the nature and range of educational supports 2) To identify new technologies that improve postsecondary outcomes for students with disabilities; 3) To identify effective supports and models of support delivery that contribute to improved outcomes for students with disabilities; 4) To investigate methods by which the supports in postsecondary programs can be extended to the employment environment, including students with severe disabilities; and 5) To provide training, technical assistance and information to educational support personnel, public and private rehabilitation personnel, career placement specialist, and students with disabilities concerning the effectiveness of specific educational supports and models of delivery in improving postsecondary educational and career outcomes of the people with disabilities.

Focus Groups: Coordination of Support Services

AUDIENCE Postsecondary school disability support providers, VR, medical personnel.

ISSUE

Students with disabilities receive supports from a variety of support systems (VR, DSS, welfare agencies, medical) but they are not streamlined and coordinated to provide a seamless network of support.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- 1) What are the experiences and perceptions of students with disabilities regarding their access to and participation in postsecondary programs?
- 2) What educational supports are available, effective, and/or necessary for students with disabilities?
- 3) How well do their postsecondary experiences prepare students with disabilities for employment, and what are their perspectives concerning transition to the workplace?

METHOD

Focus groups composed of prospective, current, and former students with disabilities were conducted at 10 sites nationally. The groups were designed, with participant input, to elicit student-consumer perspectives regarding the issues of supports and

barriers in the postsecondary setting and the workplace. Researchers generated a list of main issues from each focus group that were then grouped into four general categories of supports and barriers: 1) peer, 2) faculty, 3) administrative, and 4) workplace/employment. The results at each site were then analyzed across the groups to reveal both recurring and site specific issues.

KEY FINDINGS

- Students feel their lives are “micromanaged” by support services, rather than having service providers focus on individual needs. Student needs must be determined by the students themselves, rather than administrators.
- Students long for a “partnership” between disability services on campus, university administration, and the students themselves.
- Lack of access to assistive technology is perceived as a political problem rather than a logistic one: students feel that there is administrative unwillingness to fund assistive technology they are legally entitled to, which could be resolved by increased cooperation between administration and students. Students have to fight for their entitlements.
- Medical and disability support service personnel must agree on a “common language” when describing or categorizing disability needs, so

that students receive appropriate accommodations in a timely fashion.

IMPLICATIONS

- 1 – There is a need for a comprehensive network of support services that work cooperatively.
- 2 – Disability support service providers should focus on the needs of individual students, without micromanagement. This may require increased staffing levels.

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