

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.

Topical Review: Postsecondary Supports

AUDIENCE Postsecondary disability support providers, faculty members, students with disabilities, secondary school teachers of students with disabilities, and disability researchers and policy makers.

ISSUE

Legislation and practice in the provision of supports to students with disabilities in postsecondary educational settings is fairly recent and undocumented. Current research does not provide a clear picture of the availability and effectiveness of educational supports necessary for students with disabilities to successfully complete postsecondary education programs and obtain/sustain employment relative to training. Due to the piecemeal and unorganized nature of the information available, it is difficult to formulate conclusions and recommendations leading to improved postsecondary education and subsequent employment outcomes for people with disabilities.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What legislation impacts upon the provision of educational supports within postsecondary programs for students with disabilities?
2. What is the impact or value of postsecondary education and other life-long learning for students with disabilities?
3. What are the barriers to postsecondary education for students with disabilities?

4. What is the role of self-determination in obtaining educational supports within postsecondary programs?
5. What is the future research agenda concerning the provision of educational supports for students with disabilities in postsecondary programs?

METHOD

An extensive literature review was conducted to examine existing knowledge and perspectives on the provision of educational supports to students with disabilities in postsecondary educational settings. In response to issues identified within the existing literature, researchers formulated a future research agenda, which serves as the strategic program of research underway within the Rehabilitation Research & Training Center (RRTC) on Educational Supports at the University of Hawaii at Manoa.

KEY FINDINGS

- The number of students seeking access to postsecondary educational programs has increased dramatically, climbing from 2.6% in 1978, to 9.4% in 1995, to nearly 19% in 1996.
- Since 1990 there has been a 90% increase in the number of colleges/universities, technical institutions, community colleges, and vocational technical centers offering educational opportunities for persons with disabilities.

- Labor force participation rates increase significantly with levels of education for all persons; rates increase even more sharply when compared for persons with disability. A University education is highly correlated with improved vocational options and financial success for persons with disabilities.
- 19% of students with disabilities, as opposed to 56% of students without disabilities, attend a postsecondary school within the first two years of exiting high school.
- Under current legislation, interpreters, assistive listening systems, captioning, readers, audio recordings, taped texts, Braille materials, large print materials, adapted computer terminals are examples of auxiliary aids and services provided in postsecondary programs.
- Barriers for persons with disabilities seeking to access and participate in postsecondary educational programs include: low expectations and negative attitudes on the part of counselors and faculty, lack of role models who are successful in postsecondary settings, lack of coordinated educational supports and services, and difficulties obtaining and balancing related support services such as transportation, health, and living arrangements.
- Self-advocacy/self-determination or the ability to express one's needs and make informed decisions about supports and services to address those needs is a critical skill required of students with disabilities in postsecondary programs.
- Faculty members in postsecondary programs are important contributors to the success of students with disabilities; currently, faculty members possess little awareness of students with disability or their diverse requirements to be successful learners.
- Critical questions raised by students include: (1) which services and supports are most effective,

(2) what are ways that students would like to see services and supports delivered, (3) how can postsecondary programs accommodate student needs in ways that are empowering for students as well as being efficient and effective for everyone involved.

IMPLICATIONS

- Need to identify emerging and effective strategies, technologies, and services and supports that are successful in (1) facilitating the transition of students with disabilities from secondary to postsecondary educational settings, (2) improving student performance and graduation rates within those settings, and (3) promoting personally satisfactory employment outcomes.
- Need to explore barriers and issues related to current policy and funding requirements that impact upon students with disabilities access, retention, and graduation in postsecondary programs.
- Need to explore the impact of training students in self-determination/self-advocacy skills upon access and success in postsecondary education programs and subsequent labor force participation.
- Need to examine the current status of educational support provision in postsecondary education programs, and the effectiveness of support practices and models of delivery that contribute to access, performance, and retention/completion of postsecondary programs.
- Need to identify the types of educational and transitional assistance those postsecondary programs provide to improve educational and subsequent labor market success.

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The [RRTC] has established the leading database of articles, books, reports, videos, and other materials related specifically to practices, policies, and findings in postsecondary education for people with disabilities. Hundreds of references have been compiled, over half of them fully annotated. This searchable database is publicly available at www.rrtc.hawaii.edu/ - just click on "Search Research Database."