



RESEARCH FINDINGS BRIEF

APRIL 2000 • STUDY AREA 4a, VOLUME 10

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 – Present and promising Practices In Postsecondary Education for Students with Severe Cognitive Disabilities

AUDIENCE AHEAD, Advocacy Groups, Educator, Rehabilitation Professionals.

ISSUE

Students with significant cognitive disabilities are underrepresented but consistent members of the postsecondary educational environment. A postsecondary education is one of the most significant ways in which an individual can increase their employability (NCES, 1999; U.S. Department of Labor, 1999; Roy, Dimigen, & Taylor, 1998; GAO, 1997). Educational attainment closely relates to lifetime earnings and economic self-sufficiency, two of the hallmarks of successful employment (Disability Rights Advocates, 1997; HEATH, 1996). Seventy-eight percent of high school graduates enter into some type of postsecondary education compared to 37% for individuals with disabilities (Blackorby & Wagner, 1996). It is critical to understand the barriers that deny access and completion of a postsecondary education and, ultimately, in securing employment. In an effort to better understand the services and accommodations that can lead to better student retention and employment options this article will provide descriptive data analysis on accommodations offered to students with significant disabilities in the community college setting in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

RESEARCH QUESTION

- What types of service options exist at community colleges (e.g., inclusive, substantially separate, mixed, none)?
- How many students are enrolled that have TBI or significant development disabilities such as mental retardation?
- How many colleges have discontinued programs because of lack of funding?
- How are programs funded?
- What types of academic accommodations are offered?
- What types of teaching accommodations are offered (e.g., project based instruction, differentiated instruction, universal design)?
- What are the typical areas of study for students with disabilities such as mental retardation and traumatic brain injury?
- Are students with significant disabilities being taught by separate faculty?

METHOD

An extensive literature review was conducted to explore and document the knowledge base associated with minority culture and disability status, as it interacts with the work of disability researchers, rehabilitation service providers, and postsecondary education personnel.

KEY FINDINGS

General findings

- Academic Accommodations do not insure access to and lack of teaching accommodations present a barrier to student retention.

Significant findings

- Estimated number of students in the Commonwealth attending school with (e.g., MR TBI) or significant disabilities.
- Number of separate programs being offered statewide.
- Funding source for disability service programs identified.
- Supplemental programming identified at colleges for students with significant disabilities such as TBI or Mental Retardation.
- Frequency and types of academic and pedagogical accommodations are identified.

IMPLICATIONS

- More effective communication methods are needed to convey information about services available to students with significant disabilities.
- Broadening teaching methodologies to enhance opportunities for all students including those with significant disabilities.

REFERENCE

Stodden, R.A., Stodden, N.J., Kim-Rupnow, W.S., & Ah Sam, A. Challenges to and Recommendations for providing effective support services for minority people with disabilities. (Submitted for publication, April, 2000)

**For further information on this brief, please contact
Norma Jean Hemphill (808) 956- 4454;
nemphil@hawaii.edu**

The RRTC on Postsecondary Educational Supports is supported by grant #H133B980043 from the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research (NIDRR) within the U.S. Department of Education. Opinions and perceptions as shared in this document are those of the researchers involved and no endorsement is implied by the funding agent.

Central RRTC Contact Information:

Center on Disability Studies • University of Hawai‘i at Manoa
Director – Robert Stodden • (808) 956-9199 • stodden@hawaii.edu
1776 University Avenue, UA 4-6 • Honolulu, HI 96822
WEB: www.rrtc.hawaii.edu • EMAIL: rrtc@cds.hawaii.edu
Administrative Assistant, Juana Tabali Weir (808) 956-3975 • juana@hawaii.edu