

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.

Case Reports on Students with Disabilities in Postsecondary Education

AUDIENCE Students with disabilities, researchers, educators and policymakers.

ISSUE

There is a need to put a "human face" on postsecondary education issues. Case reports can offer details not available in surveys or aggregated data. They can be the source of information that might otherwise be overlooked.

RESEARCH QUESTION

What are the personal perspectives of our immediate network of students, graduates, and collaborators issues regarding postsecondary education supports and students with disabilities?

METHOD

A protocol was drawn up as follows for case reports of 500-1500 words:

1. Refer to factors affecting the *four areas of study* in our Research Center:
 - a) What was the nature and scope of supports received?
 - b) Was technology used and what were its effects?
 - c) What was the effectiveness of the supports, i.e., how did the supports contribute to educational outcomes?
 - d) What were the outcomes related to employment?

2. Include related details to enable comparison across cases:

Organizational: For example, who coordinated the supports?

Generalization of effects: For example, did the supports generalize to other studies or to worksites?

Policies: What policies helped or hindered the supports? One case, for example, focused on SSI, PASS plans, and business policies to support car loans.

3. Give full voice to the student-consumer perspective:

Refer to student-identified issues not usually identified as "support." For example, one of our students who uses a wheelchair said he chose classes scheduled in rooms with access in the back, so he wouldn't feel "on display" when he entered. Include the student as an author when possible and appropriate.

4. What external factors were present that assisted or challenged the process of postsecondary supports and transition to employment? For example, what natural supports were present? Were there mentor relationships? What were the family attitudes?

5. Beyond summarizing, what main conclusion can be drawn from the events of this case? Is there an

unusual, challenging, or triumphant aspect for readers to retain? Include some recommendations for research, or policy, or training, etc., as applicable.

KEY FINDINGS

1. One student “Jennifer” attributes her success in postsecondary education to “desire, tenacity, and determination” rather than external supports. She now has a B.A., her own business, and is active in the community.
2. Internship experience could be crucial to preparation for employment. “Bill” (with psychiatric disabilities) benefited from working through situations (with support) that differed in the work place from college.
3. “Steve” elected not to disclose his disability (depression and attention deficits, following a car accident) to employers. University staff provided case-management-type support. Networking, leading to job shadowing, enabled Steve to secure work in a competitive profession.
4. “Dawn” benefited from early job success in launching her career. She illustrates how prior employment can help employers focus their attention on previous work success, instead of worrying about the disability.
5. “David” (hard of hearing) benefited from counseling and, in particular, from a dedicated teacher, “Teresa.” Among other things, Teresa collaborated with the rehab counselor to arrange a PASS plan that would enable David’s purchase of a car without losing other benefits. The car allowed David to attend welding classes, and then helped in securing and maintaining employment.
6. After “Brian” experienced damage to his spine during surgery, his life dramatically changed.

However, he attempted to pursue his work and studies in theatre, but found support sparse and difficult to obtain. What he did obtain was considerable knowledge of the system and the law

7. “Brian” enrolled in the law school at the University of Hawaii, eventually gaining his doctorate and admission to the bar. He is inspired to teach others about legal rights, self-advocacy, and, above all, how to succeed.

IMPLICATIONS

A theme for several of the case reports concerns the importance of actively making connections with early employment experiences. In the majority of the cases, *education-based* staff initiated either programmatic or individual experiences that proved substantially responsible for the success of the graduating student in the workplace. Another theme is the students’ considerable inner strength, perhaps the biggest factor in achieving an education.

Another view is the consideration of the value of case reports, such as these, to the field at large. Our findings, and the reactions we have received, clearly indicate the way in which these reports give voice to individuals in the system, and their contribution to knowing what is “important.”

If there is a single thread, it would be that the system can work better for students than may be evident to them. Thus, unless there is a mechanism or individual supporter to enable the “right moves”, the opportunity may pass, and the student may experience a poor outcome. What does the system need to do to make available supports effective and timely?

For further information on this brief, please contact Peter Dowrick, (808) 956-8741; dowrick@hawaii.edu

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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) 956-2075 • jtabali@hawaii.edu

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."