



## 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.

## National Survey: Support for On-campus Advocacy Organizations

**AUDIENCE** Disability Support Coordinators, Career Placement Specialists, Faculty Instructors, Teaching Assistants, Students with Disabilities, Administrators, Related Agencies (Vocational Rehabilitation), Employers, Other Researchers, Policy-makers (Federal and State Agencies).

### ISSUE

There is scant literature regarding current practices of providing educational supports to students with disabilities at the postsecondary level. A national survey was conducted which provides crucial information for researchers seeking to ascertain the current status of educational supports offered in postsecondary programs. Information shared in this Brief contributes to one of the four priority areas as identified in the Strategic Program of Research for the RRTC on Postsecondary Educational Supports. The survey and the sub-analyses will provide a comprehensive baseline of data to address issues concerning educational support provision in postsecondary programs. One area of support provision of importance to students with disabilities is the offering of a range of advocacy services, especially those services focused upon self-advocacy.

### RESEARCH QUESTION

Do postsecondary institutions across the nation sponsor and/or provide support for on-campus advocacy organizations focused upon students with disabilities?

### METHOD

A survey instrument was developed and distributed to a national sample of more than 1500 disability support coordinators working in different types of postsecondary educational institutions. More than 650 respondents completed the survey. The respondents were profiled as follows: 422 were from public schools vs. 193 from private schools; 246 were from two-year or less than two-year schools vs. 369 from four-year schools.

The survey asked the following questions focused upon advocacy:

“Is there an advocacy organization on campus for students with disabilities?”

“If yes, does your institution support this organization with financial, advisory, or other means of support?”

### KEY FINDINGS

- Analysis of data for this question yielded the following findings: Less than 25% or fewer than one out of four postsecondary institutions offered, sponsored or have an on campus advocacy organization for students with disabilities.

- Of those postsecondary institutions indicating sponsorship or support for advocacy organization on campus, only 25% or one out of

four of those programs offered the organization financial, advisory, or other means of support.

## IMPLICATIONS

- Findings for this set of questions indicate an apparent lack of interest on the part of postsecondary institutions in providing or supporting on campus advocacy organizations with a focus on students with disabilities. Responses to this question may also indicate that disability support offices on postsecondary campuses may not view self-advocacy as a service or support they should provide. In contrast, a national focus group project seeking the perceptions of students with disabilities found that self-advocacy skills and supports were one of the most critical needs for students when they seek to access and participate in postsecondary education programs. The importance of possessing self-advocacy skills and having access to an organization that understands postsecondary educational settings is viewed as very important to students with disabilities. Further, having access to an advocacy organization focused upon the interests and needs of students with disabilities is considered a valuable resource.
- Those postsecondary programs that do sponsor or have an advocacy organization on campus seem to provide little financial, advisory or other support for that organization. It is difficult for a student-focused organization on

campus to survive or be effective without some support from the host institution. Through advocacy organizations, students with disabilities can have a unified voice that may influence administrators in funding and policy decisions that may improve the provision of educational supports and services on campus.

- Given the importance of this support to students with disabilities in postsecondary programs, this area of study is recommended for further research, focused on the following questions:
  - How do university administrators and student governance groups in postsecondary programs perceive and value on campus disability organizations?
  - What are the attributes of on campus advocacy organizations or groups that have value and are effective in supporting students with disabilities to be successful?
  - What are other means of supporting the development of self-advocacy skills in postsecondary programs?

**For further information on this brief or for an executive summary/full report on the National Survey of Educational Supports Provision, please contact Tom Harding at (808) 956 – 5344, [tharding1@yahoo.com](mailto:tharding1@yahoo.com), or go to the Center website [www.rrtc.hawaii.edu](http://www.rrtc.hawaii.edu).**

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