

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: Facilitating Information Access for Postsecondary Students with Visual Impairments Who Use Braille: Issues and Promising Practices

AUDIENCE Postsecondary school disability support providers and faculty members; researchers; secondary teachers of students with visual impairments.

ISSUE

This article provides an overview of problem of accessing information for postsecondary students with visual impairments. It examines the promise of current and future technologies in providing postsecondary students with visual impairments with "virtual, real-time" access to information, particularly Braille.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What are current technologies that can provide postsecondary students with visual impairments with "real-time" access to information, particularly Braille?
- What research and demonstration approaches should be employed to maximize our understanding of the types and range of technology supports that will optimize a student's access to and participation in postsecondary programs?
- To what degree does the availability of instructional materials in Braille at the postsecondary level, or lack thereof, have on the

independent functioning and self-determination characteristics of students with visual impairments?

METHOD

An extensive literature review was conducted to examine current perspectives on the issue of information access of students with visual impairments in postsecondary settings. In addition, case studies and information obtained by teachers of students with visual impairments via national "listserv."

KEY FINDINGS

How students learn challenging academic curriculum

- There is a critical need for research and demonstration efforts to identify and test a range of technology supports that optimizes access to and participation in postsecondary programs for students with visual impairments.
- This article also stresses the importance of transition planning in assisting youth with visual impairments in identifying the range supports needed prior to enrolling in postsecondary education programs.

How do teachers/service providers learn and use research-based practices

- Disabilities related services providers at the postsecondary level who serve students with visual impairments can use the information in this article to examine current practices about how students with visual impairments currently use assistive technology and what options are available to them to facilitate information access.
- Secondary teachers can use the information in this article to help them develop and implement transition plans that will ensure that students with visual impairments are provided with the supports necessary to succeed in postsecondary settings.

How do contextual factors influence teaching and learning

- Postsecondary services that recognize the significant barriers experienced by students with visual impairments in gaining access to information can proactively take steps to ensure that technologies are available to students, including the training of faculty to improve accommodations and adaptations needed by students.
- Lack of adequate transition planning at the secondary level contributes to information access barriers that students with visual impairments experience at the postsecondary level.

IMPLICATIONS

- There is a need for more research and development activities that will contribute to our understanding of assistive technologies currently available that will provide students with visual impairments with “real-time” access to information and which help them to become independent, self-determined learners.
- There is a need to provide professional development activities that will help secondary and postsecondary support staff to develop and implement effective transition plans for students with visual impairments.
- There is a need to provide postsecondary faculty with information and training that will help them plan and implement effective instructional accommodations and adaptations that meet the needs of students with visual impairments.

REFERENCE

Sharpe, M. & Johnson, D.R. Facilitating information access for postsecondary students with visual impairments who use braille: Issues and promising practices. (Submitted for publication to *Journal of Visual Impairments and Blindness*, April 2000)

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