

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 Education & Employment

AUDIENCE Secondary and postsecondary educators, career guidance counselors and placement specialists, and disability support providers, as well as researchers, and employers of persons with disabilities.

ISSUE

Only 29% of adults with disabilities, ages 18-64 years of age work full- or part-time, compared with 79% of the non-disabled population. Despite federal legislation (Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1992 and the Americans with Disabilities Education Act) people with disabilities continually encounter various forms of discrimination in critical areas such as postsecondary education, transportation, health care, and employment. It is important that we understand present and future needs for full participation of persons with disabilities in all aspects of society, including postsecondary education and other life-long learning and employment roles.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What are the issues facing persons with disabilities as they approach postsecondary education and subsequent employment?
- What emerging strategies are available to enhance access and participation of persons with disabilities in postsecondary education and subsequent employment?

- What research is needed to address the needs of persons with disabilities seeking to participate in postsecondary education and subsequent employment?

METHOD

An extensive literature review was conducted to examine current perspectives regarding postsecondary education and subsequent employment for persons with disabilities. In addition, the authors reviewed a proposed research agenda underway at the Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Postsecondary Educational Supports at the University of Hawaii at Manoa.

KEY FINDINGS

- Data show a consistent positive correlation between valued employment prospects and higher levels of education, yet persons with disabilities enroll and maintain their participation in postsecondary education at a much lower level than the general population.
- Students with disabilities need more and better services, supports, and programs to successfully access and complete postsecondary education.
- A number of social and cultural factors play a major role in discouraging students with disabilities from pursuing postsecondary education, including media stereotypes depicting persons with disabilities as victims, low expectations on the part of teachers and

- counselors, and a lack of positive role models in
- Students with disabilities transition from a secondary school environment where personnel are legally responsible for identifying and providing appropriate services under the IDEA to an environment in which students are expected to advocate for themselves, by requesting specific accommodations and supports to address their learning needs.
 - Students with disabilities need to be prepared for the “shift in culture” when making the transition from secondary to postsecondary educational programs; this shift is characterized by decreases in contact among teachers and students, increases in academic competition, changes in student support networks, and a greater expectation that students are responsible for their own learning.
 - Services, supports, and programs for students with disabilities in postsecondary education (1) vary extensively across states as well as campus to campus, (2) are not well developed as a program, and (3) tend to lean toward advocacy, information services, or remediation of content.

IMPLICATIONS

Recommendations for a research agenda addressing issues surrounding students with disabilities in postsecondary education, include:

- postsecondary education settings.
- (1) Need to examine the current status of educational supports provided in postsecondary settings,
 - (2) Need to determine the effectiveness of support provision and models of support delivery as they are related to improved access, performance, and completion of postsecondary educational programs by students with disabilities,
 - (3) Need to identify specific barriers to the provision of disability related services, including barriers linked to policy and funding requirements,
 - (4) Need to identify types of educational and transitional assistance provided by postsecondary educational programs to improve educational and subsequent labor market success.

REFERENCE

Stodden, R.A., & Dowrick, P. Postsecondary education and employment of adults with disabilities. (In Press, *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*, April 2000)

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