

# RESEARCH FINDINGS BRIEF

APRIL 2000 • STUDY AREA 4d, VOLUME 9

## 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.

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## National Survey: Profile of Disability Support Coordinator Characteristics

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**AUDIENCE** Disability Support Coordinators, Career Placement Specialists, Faculty Instructors, Teaching Assistants, Students with Disabilities, Administrators, Related Agencies (Vocational Rehabilitation), Employers, Other Researchers and 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 and provides crucial information for researchers seeking to ascertain the current status of educational supports 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 Support.

A survey was conducted of a representative national sample of disability support coordinators as found in two-year and four-year postsecondary educational programs, as well as private and public institutions. An overall cross tab analysis was conducted with sub-analyses to provide a comprehensive baseline of data regarding the characteristics of disability support coordinators found in postsecondary education. Further efforts

were undertaken to coordinate this data with other information collected within the survey to address a range of issues surrounding educational support provision for students with disabilities.

### RESEARCH QUESTION

What are the demographic and professional characteristics of Disability Support Coordinators working in postsecondary educational settings?

### METHOD

A survey instrument was developed, piloted, and distributed to a national sample of more than 1500 Disability Support Coordinators. More than 650 respondents completed the survey, providing a profile of educational support provision within postsecondary educational programs in the United States. 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. Survey questions focused upon the characteristics of Disability Support Coordinators provided information regarding the level of training and experience of personnel working these roles in the postsecondary education.

## KEY FINDINGS

### 22a. As a Disability Support Coordinator, how many years have you worked in your present position?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Less than 5 years	301	46.3	48.2	48.2
	5 - 10 ten years	169	26.0	27.0	75.2
	More than 10 years	155	23.8	24.8	100
	Total	625	96.2	100	
Missing	0	25	3.8		
Total		650	100		

**Discussion:** Almost 50% of the Disability Support Coordinators surveyed have been employed in their current position less than five years. This finding illustrates the “newness” of disability support provision in postsecondary educational settings and that coordinators are often uncommitted in their career plans.

### 22b. How many years have you worked in the area of student support services in a postsecondary educational program?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Less than 5 years	155	23.8	24.9	24.9
	5 - 10 ten years	202	31.1	32.5	57.4
	More than 10 years	265	40.8	42.6	100.0
	Total	622	95.7	100.0	
Missing	0	28	4.3		
Total		650	100.0		

**Discussion:** Over 40% of the respondents indicated they had more than 10 years experience working in postsecondary education student services programs (working with all students, but could include students with disabilities). Since all respondents were currently in disability support coordinator roles, it appears many such persons have past experience with the provision of educational services for all students.

### 22c. In what discipline or field did you receive your training?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Education	165	25.4	28.9	28.9
	Arts & Sciences	81	12.5	14.2	43.1
	Counseling/Psychology	204	31.4	35.7	78.8
	Vocational/Adult	31	4.8	5.4	84.2
	Related Disability Services	90	13.8	15.8	100.0
	Total	571	87.8	100.0	
Missing		79	12.2		
Total		650	100		

**Discussion:** Over 50% of the responding Disability Support Coordinators obtained degrees in the areas of education and counseling or psychology, fields directly related to the provision of supports. The field of disability support provision does not exist as a university degree program (similar to special education in lower education), yet around 15% of the respondents indicated they had taken degree training in a disability related field such as, physical therapy, speech pathology, disability studies, or adaptive physical education.

**22d. What's your highest degree earned?**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Less than a baccalaureate	11	1.7	1.8	1.8
	Baccalaureate	52	8.0	8.6	10.4
	Master's	442	68.0	72.9	83.3
	Doctoral	101	15.5	16.7	100.0
	Total	606	93.2	100.0	
Missing		44	6.8		
Total		650	100.0		

**Discussion:** Almost 90% of the respondents indicated they had obtained a Masters Degree or higher at the time of the survey (73% with a Masters Degree and 16% with a doctoral degree). This data indicates that the majority of Disability Support Coordinators in postsecondary education settings have a high degree of professional training, although in many cases the training was not in a field focused upon the provision of educational supports for students with disabilities in postsecondary education settings.

For further information on this Brief or for an Executive Summary/Full Report on the National Survey of Educational Supports Provision, please contact Chuan Chang at (808) 956 – 2898, [chuanc@hawaii.edu](mailto:chuanc@hawaii.edu) or go to the Center website [www.rrtc.hawaii.edu](http://www.rrtc.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.

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