

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.

Focus Groups: Transition to Employment

AUDIENCE Students, employer associations, postsecondary school disability support providers.

ISSUE

Students with disabilities feel supported in their postsecondary education environment but fear the transition to employment. They fear workplace discrimination and employer refusal to accommodate their needs.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- 1) What are the experiences and perceptions of students with disabilities regarding their access to and participation in postsecondary programs?
- 2) What educational supports are available, effective, and/or necessary for students with disabilities?
- 3) How well do their postsecondary experiences prepare students with disabilities for employment, and what are their perspectives concerning transition to the workplace?

METHOD

Focus groups composed of prospective, current, and former students with disabilities were conducted at 10 sites nationally. The groups were designed, with participant input, to elicit student-consumer perspectives regarding the issues of supports and

barriers in the postsecondary setting and the workplace. Researchers generated a list of main issues from each focus group that were then grouped into four general categories of supports and barriers: 1) peer, 2) faculty, 3) administrative, and 4) workplace/employment. The results at each site were then analyzed across the groups to reveal both recurring and site specific issues.

KEY FINDINGS

- Students fear the transition to employment because they expect workplace discrimination. They expect to be denied special accommodations, and thus prepare to self-advocate more aggressively.
- There is a general sense that postsecondary education does not directly prepare for specific occupations or provide a transition for employment, but that it mainly increases self-confidence and marketability ("selling yourself") which are important assets in the workplace.
- Working in family businesses is a good entry into employment ("gets your foot in the door") because family members are aware of both abilities and disabilities, and do not hold discriminatory attitudes.
- Some students see telecommuting as a viable alternative to regular employment and thus want to become more computer literate

- There is a conflict between the expectation that postsecondary education will prepare students for employment and general assumptions that people with disabilities are unemployable. Students who succeed at postsecondary education still expect employers to question their qualifications based on their disabilities.

IMPLICATIONS

- 1 – The main barriers in the transition from postsecondary education to employment are discriminatory attitudes and assumptions about abilities and accommodations. The transition to employment is still difficult for most students.
- 2 – There is a need for more public awareness about the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act, with special attention to small and family businesses.
- 3 - Students should be placed in competitive employment after completing college degrees to start on a trajectory of success.

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