Transition from Two-Year to Four-Year Institutions for Students with Disabilities

Issue:

Students with disabilities in two-year colleges face challenges as they transition to four-year schools. Some are similar to those faced by their non-disabled peers, however some challenges are related to their disabilities. For example, some lack skills in self-advocacy and some have difficulty adjusting to the differences in disabled student services between the two types of schools. To improve the postsecondary outcomes and ultimately, career outcomes for students with disabilities, two-year and four-year schools should take actions to make their campus services more supportive of this important transition between their schools.

Most postsecondary students with disabilities register with and receive the majority of their support from their campus disabled student services offices. These offices are charge with assuring that reasonable accommodations for access to classes and to campus services are provided. Some provide academic advising, tutoring, career planning, and college transfer services as well. As they plan their service offerings, it would be helpful for disabled students services staff to have more complete information to increase their understanding of students concerns and institutional roles in education. A qualitative and quantitative research understanding will help to identify the most important concerns and challenges for transfer students with disabilities, as well as the ways in which two-year and four-year schools can work separately and together to ensure success in postsecondary education.

Research Questions:

1. What are students most concerned about when they are transferring from a two-year to a four-year postsecondary program?

2. How can two-year and four-year institutions help students with disabilities successfully transfer to four-year schools?

Methods:

The proposed study will incorporate quantitative and qualitative methods.
The quantitative methods will be utilized to assess student concerns. The qualitative methods will include focused discussions among faculty and staff from postsecondary institutions to deliberate methods for more successful student transfer.

**Student Concerns:**

To quantitatively assess student concerns approximately one hundred twenty disabled students from twenty colleges in Washington State will be surveyed to assess the most important aspects of concern when transferring from a two-year to a four-year school. Student participants will be asked to indicate on a Likert scale from 1 (not important) to 5 (very important) the importance of specific transfer related issues. They will also be given a chance to respond to the question in an open-ended format after filling out the survey. The participants will be located by project staff through phone contact with disabled student services coordinators on college campuses throughout Washington State. The groups will meet for one to two hours in an informal, drop-in format to fill out surveys.

To qualitatively assess what two-year and four-year schools should do to aid students with disabilities in transferring to a four-year school, a survey will be sent out to approximately 2400 postsecondary institutions. A mailing list will be established through the use of the Higher Education Publications (HEP) database. Surveys ask in an open-ended question for characteristics of a program that successfully helps students with disabilities to transfer from two-year to four-year schools. The surveys will be mailed to postsecondary schools with enrollments of 1,000 or more, and envelopes will be addressed to "Disabled Student Services".

To further assess what two-year and four-year schools should do to aid students with disabilities in transferring to a four-year school, approximately twenty faculty and staff from seven postsecondary institutions in Washington State will participate in focused discussions. These discussions will supplement the ideas submitted by survey respondents and provide suggestions for interventions in a mutually stimulating environment. Faculty and staff from both two-year and four-year schools will be included. Participants will be invited based on their diverse geographic locations across the state, diverse institutional characteristics, and variety in specific professional positions. A director of disabled student services will be conducting the focused discussions.
Timeline/Benchmarks

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Events</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>October 1, 2000</td>
<td>• Summary publication created and distributed at AHEAD 2000; SB and colleague presented preliminary results at AHEAD conference</td>
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<tr>
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<td>• Draft provided to NCSPCS working on completing research review, presenting data, and developing draft of research brief</td>
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<tr>
<td>November 1, 2000</td>
<td>• Draft article for DSQ due to RRTC</td>
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<tr>
<td>January 1, 2001</td>
<td>• RRTC research brief completed</td>
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<td>• Follow-up research study proposed for funding by FIPSE</td>
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<tr>
<td>April 1, 2000</td>
<td>• Summary results distributed at PacRim</td>
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<td>• Conference proposal(s) submitted</td>
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<tr>
<td>October 1, 2001</td>
<td>• Results disseminated at AHEAD and other conferences</td>
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Products and Impact

The project will result in at least the following products:

- Published article(s) targeted at disabled student services officers at postsecondary institutions of higher education, postsecondary administrators, and/or postsecondary student services personnel.
- Research brief(s).
- At least one conference presentation.
- Research summary publication and project videotape distributed to AHEAD and elsewhere.
- At least one grant proposal for future work in this area.

Completion of this research project will increase the understanding of the concerns of students with disabilities as they transition from two-year to four-year postsecondary institutions and identify promising practices for helping to ease their transition. It will also lead to improved practices at postsecondary institutions and ultimately result in more successful academic and career outcomes for people with disabilities.

References


