

Research to Practice Brief

A comparison of accommodations and supports for students with disabilities in two-year versus four-year postsecondary institutions

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The problem

For high school students everywhere the decision of which college to attend is very important. For students with disabilities, this decision is even more important, and also more complex for the following reasons:

- 1) There is a significant difference between support for students with disabilities in high school than in college. In college, there are different laws and practices shaping what kinds of support are available, who makes decisions, who pays for services, and who is responsible for initiating support (Stodden, Jones, & Chang, 2002)
- 2) Postsecondary education is directly related to employment opportunities, and even more so for individuals with disabilities (Blackorby & Wagner, 1996)
- 3) The type and frequency of disability services are different from college to college (NCSPES, 2000).

For these reasons, it is important for students with disabilities to know what kinds of assistance colleges provide when deciding where to enroll.

Research shows that there is a difference between two-year and four-year institutions in the type and frequency of support offered to students with disabilities (NCSPES, 2000). Black, Smith, Chang, Harding, & Stodden (in press) suggest that supports offered by two-year institutions may be a critical reason why many students with disabilities choose to attend two-year or community colleges. This brief presents the findings of a national survey of types and frequency of supports provided in different colleges across the country. Two-year and four-year institutions are compared in terms of the kinds of services they are more likely to offer.

Research findings

The National Survey of Educational Support Provision to Students with Disabilities in Postsecondary Education Settings (NCSPES, 2000) was sent to 1,500 disability support coordinators across the United States. Of these, 650 responded, including 246 two-year, or less than two-year, institutions and 369 four-year institutions. The survey asked about the frequency and types of support offered. The following list illustrates the difference between two-year institutions and four-year institutions in terms of services and supports provided.

Table 1: Comparing two-year and four-year institutions: Services offered more frequently at one than the other.

Two-year institutions are more likely to provide:	Four-year institutions are more likely to provide:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Linkages with community resources • Faculty/staff workshops and information • Evaluation: student satisfaction, job placement rate, and alumni follow-up • Written policy on access to technology • Disability-specific assessment/evaluation* • Learning center laboratories • Developmental/remedial instruction • Assistive technology: provision, support, skills training, and evaluations* • Accessible web-based courseware for blind or deaf students • Adaptive furniture • Self-advocacy skills development • Interpreter 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Class relocation to accessible venues • Supports for study abroad* • Accessible transport on campus* • Advocacy • Note takers/scribes/readers • Skills development: study skills, memory skills, and meta-cognitive strategies • Career/vocational assessment and counseling • Work experience, work-study, internship/externships

* However, about 50% of all institutions do not offer this service

Highlights include:

- The services that four-year institutions are more likely to provide are generally adaptations to what already exists, such as making on-campus transportation accessible; or, they are services offered to all students, such as career counseling and work study. Whereas the services that two-year institutions are more likely to provide seem to be more specialized, varied, and focused on serving students with disabilities.
- Two-year institutions serve more deaf or hearing-impaired students than four-year institutions do, and provide more interpreter services, while four-year institutions in this sample serve more students with learning disabilities than two-year institutions do, and provide more meta-cognitive, study-skills, and memory-skills training.
- Two-year institutions differ from four-year institutions in connection to the community (Harding & Chang, 2001). Collaboration between high school, college, and employment support personnel can improve transition experiences for students with disabilities (Whelley, Hart, & Zafft, unpublished). The following table shows the difference in community outreach.

Table 2: Outreach to the community: The difference between two-year and four-year institutions

Services		Two-Year Institutions (N=246)	Four-Year Institutions (N=369)
Facilitation of students' linkages with other community resources		88.2%	70.5%
Outreach services	High school counselors or transition coordinators	87.4	63.1
	Special education teachers	76.8	49.3
	State vocational rehab personnel	87.4	66.4
	Other rehab professionals	76	50.7
	Federal programs	50	30.1
	Businesses/employers	45.1	26
	Parent/family organization	51.2	43.6
	Consumer/advocacy groups	45.9	38.5
	Other	6.9	5.7
Negotiated and/or interagency agreements with vocational rehabilitation		59.3	44.4

Note: The study does not provide examples of these programs.

Implications:

- In light of the difference in the level of community connection between two-year and four-year institutions, careful consideration should be given to the student's need for continuity between community and college programs when selecting a college.
- These research findings show the disparity in the use of community agencies and others in supporting postsecondary students between two-year and four-year institutions. For students with disabilities trying to decide between two-year and four-year institutions, it is critical that they know what kinds of services and accommodations they need. With this information in mind, they should consider a wide range of postsecondary options and the scope of support that is provided.
- There is a need to further develop services at four-year institutions in order to attract and better serve students with disabilities. Models could be developed from two-year institutions (e.g., about assistive technology), and applied to four-year institutional settings.

Innovative practices

Project Access is a model demonstration transition project at Howard Community College in Columbia, Maryland. The primary purpose of this project is to improve the delivery and outcomes of postsecondary education for individuals with disabilities. Project Access reaches out to high school students through a Summer Institute; social events on campus; an annual college fair for students with disabilities; and in-service training for Howard County Public School counselors and special educators. The

program also works with the faculty and staff, providing staff development and ongoing support and consultation. They provide students with a study skills class and additional educational assessments, as well as mentors/tutors who are successful students with disabilities. They train students and area employers in the provision of reasonable accommodations through computer technology, and through the provision of enhanced career counseling and job placement services.

The Cooperative Program for the Deaf and the Blind has a mission to maximize opportunities for competitive employment and successful transition of citizens who are deaf/hard of hearing and blind/visually-impaired from throughout South Carolina. Through a partnership between the South Carolina School for the Deaf and the Blind and Spartanburg Technical College, the program provides postsecondary educational programs, learning resources, assistive and adaptive technology, career and counseling services, residential and independent living services, transportation services, and transition services to help state residents who are deaf/hard of hearing and blind/visually impaired to maximize their potential for independent living.

This brief is based on survey data and findings briefs from the National Center for the Study of Postsecondary Educational Supports. For more in-depth analyses of these findings, go to: <http://www.rtc.hawaii.edu>

References

Black, R. S., Smith, G., Chang, C., Harding, T., Stodden, R. A. (in press). Provision of educational supports to students with disabilities in two-year postsecondary programs. *Journal for Vocational Special Needs Education*.

Blackorby, J., & Wagner, M. (1996). Longitudinal Postschool outcomes of youth with disabilities: Findings from the national longitudinal transition study. *Exceptional Children*, 62(5), 399-413.

Harding, T., & Chang, C. (2001). *Research Findings Brief: Comparison of 2-year institutions versus 4-year institutions in offering supports and accommodations for students with disabilities*. National Center for the Study of Postsecondary Educational Supports, Honolulu, HI.

NCSPEs (2000, June). *National Survey of Educational Support Provision to Students with Disabilities in Postsecondary Education Settings*. Honolulu, HI, University of Hawai'i at Manoa.

Stodden, R.A., Jones, M.A., & Chang, K.B.T. (2002, March). *Services, supports and accommodations for individuals with disabilities: An analysis across secondary education, postsecondary education, and employment*. Paper presented at the Capacity Building Institute, Honolulu, HI. For a copy, contact: Megan Jones at meganj@hawaii.edu.

Whelley, T., Hart, D., & Zafft, C. (2002). *Coordination and management of services for individuals with disabilities in the transition from secondary to participation in postsecondary education and employment*. Paper presented at the Capacity Building Institute, Honolulu, HI. For a copy, contact: Megan Jones at meganj@hawaii.edu.

Resources

National Survey of Educational Support Provision to Students with Disabilities in Postsecondary Education Settings

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Moving on: The 2-4 Step (1998) [videotape].

Created to accompany the DO-IT handout of the same name, this video helps to explain suggestions and steps to successful transition from 2-year to 4-year colleges for students with disabilities. There are two 11.5 minute versions. The second is an audio described version for those who are blind.

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