

Funding and Accommodations

Key Points

- **Funding**
 - *Ineligibility*
 - Full-time requirements
 - Standardized Test Exemptions
 - Work-Study Requirements
 - Minimum-Credit Stipulations
 - Four year expiration
 - *Lack of Viable Options*
 - No exceptions to the rule
 - Loan risk
 - Lack of health insurance
- **Accommodations**
 - *Legislation changes over the lifespan*
 - *Problem of self-advocacy*
- **Educating Others about those with Disabilities**
- **Future Recommendations**

Receiving adequate funding and obtaining sufficient accommodations in post-secondary education are immense obstacles for students with disabilities. Often times, disabled individuals are ineligible for scholarships and federal grants and cannot receive financial aid. In cases where they are awarded, the sum is insufficient to cover their added needs and services. Furthermore, proper accommodations are difficult to secure due to the fact that campuses lack universal accessibility regulations and students are ill-prepared out of secondary school to speak knowledgably and specifically about their disability and self-advocate for their right to particular and necessary accommodations.

Defining the Issue

Funding

Financially supporting post-secondary education is no simple feat for the average family and it continues to worsen as tuition rises and available federal funds diminish. For families that have been supporting a child with special needs for a number of years, the task of providing financial support for college is often too daunting. In their search for federal financial support, they run into serious problems such as ineligibility and a lack of viable options.

Ineligibility is a large issue for those with disabilities because if and when there is federal funding available for post-secondary education, disabled individuals often do not fulfill the necessary requirements in order to receive sufficient support. In fact, a smaller percentage of disabled individuals receive aid than do the non-disabled and when they do receive it, they are more likely to receive less of a reward than their non-disabled counterparts (NCES, 1999). There are several key reasons why those with disabilities are consistently ineligible for financial aid. For instance, many grants and scholarships require that the student attend class full-time. This is often too difficult for disabled students who already spend a great deal of time arranging for classroom accommodations, attending to medical needs and catching up to their often “better” educated peers.

Furthermore, many monetary rewards examine standardized test scores as a measure of intellectual ability and educational success. Some students with disabilities are exempt from taking these exams and because they cannot present their scores on an application and are consequently ineligible. Additionally, many students with disabilities do not have adequate time to work in addition to attending class and studying. This becomes an issue when scholarship and funding sources require that students perform work-study duties. In fact, some disabled students are physically incapable of doing the work required and clearly are at a disadvantage when it comes to receiving scholarships or grants contingent upon a work-study commitment. There are certain limitations placed on scholarship monies as well. Often, they entail minimum credit stipulations. While this may seem equitable, in reality, disabled students often need more money in terms of living expenses than the average college-age individual. Medical care, equipment maintenance, transportation and aide salaries are only a few of the added expenses and scholarship committees do not generally take this into account. Not only does the amount of money have specific limitations, but the length of time that one is eligible to receive the reward has certain restrictions. It is not uncommon for a disabled individual to take longer than four years to complete his/her post-secondary degree. Extra time is needed for catching up to those who have not been specially educated in secondary school and for working around often-inadequate teaching styles. Ironically, many financial aid packages will not extend beyond the four-year mark.

With all of these rules and stipulations, those with disabilities need to be presented with more options in terms of educational supports. However, this is not the case. There are no real exceptional circumstances, as far as funding is concerned, that allow those with disabilities to work at a slower pace than their non-disabled peers. This is not fair because some individuals

with disabilities need extra time in various aspects of their everyday life. Some require additional time to take care of their daily physical needs, others must make arrangements for every class and work extra long hours to keep up academically with their non-disabled peers.

Additionally, there are financial and insurance risks that individuals with disabilities face if and when they decide to enroll in post-secondary education. There is a certain amount of loan risk for anyone. However, those with disabilities are less likely to secure stable employment at the end of the educational training, in which case they are even less likely to be able to get out of debt. “The unemployment rate for people with disabilities is unacceptably high, as shown in the 1994-95 National Health Interview Survey. This survey found that 79 percent of adults without disabilities were working at the time they were interviewed and only 37 percent of those with disabilities were employed” (U.S. Dept. of Labor website). This fact often makes student loans unfeasible for the disabled. In addition, if a disabled individual were to receive a federal grant or scholarship, often times, it would not come with health insurance. Many students, and certainly those harboring disabilities, need regular medical and pharmaceutical care and health insurance is under these circumstances.

Youth with disabilities need support and advocacy in many environments. While they certainly need medical coverage in order to maintain their physical health, an effective learning environment is required for their educational development and overall well-being. Each individual has the right to his/her specific and necessary environmental accommodations that will allow him/her to learn and grow most effectively.

(NCD Funding Section)

Accommodations

There are a wide variety of accommodations that are required in and outside of the classroom or workplace for those with disabilities. These include but are not limited to:

- ◆ Housing Accommodations
- ◆ Language Accommodations
- ◆ Test-taking/Course Accommodations
- ◆ Alternate Transportation
- ◆ Adaptive Equipment/ Technology

In all of these domains, individuals with disabilities require an advocate to explain the specific accommodations that are required for either a classroom or employment environment. The individual with the disability can advocate for him/herself, but a lack of self-determination skills is sometimes an issue. This lack of skills is a direct result of years spent in an educational system that rarely teaches those with disabilities the ability to advocate independently for their own needs and classroom/workplace accommodations.

Furthermore, the breadth and type of accommodations that are required to be provided to youth with disabilities within the educational system significantly change as they move from secondary to postsecondary education to employment. These changes are a direct result of the

separate federal regulations that exist in these different domains. In order, from secondary school through employment, these regulations are:

- *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)*-- Effective through high school graduation or 21 years of age, whichever occurs first. This Act provides services and federal money based on Individual Education Plans (IEP) and the child's individual needs and right to a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE).
- *Rehabilitation Act (Section 504)*--Federal law that was put to use before the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was enacted. This act only applies to public entities or those receiving federal funds. Institutions involved are held accountable via litigation exclusively. This law is used through post-secondary education and employment.
- *Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)*--Civil Rights Act which encompasses both the public and private sectors to protect those with disabilities. It is a requirement that the individual must self-identify as being disabled and provide documentation of their disability. Entities, again, are held accountable via litigation and are only obligated to provide "reasonable" accommodations that do not "impose hardship" on the organization. This piece of legislation is used through post-secondary education and employment.

Most of the difficulty with obtaining proper accommodations lies in the fact that the method of obtaining them changes drastically over the student's educational career and with seemingly no warning.

- *Secondary School*-- Throughout secondary school, students are provided services to fit their needs after having an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) made up by their teachers, administrators and parents. In some cases, the child is asked to help plan his/her IEP at age 16, but the student feels no need to aid in planning because they have never before been included, do not understand where to begin, and find comfort in the plan that has been in place for so many years. The case for more direct student involvement in IEP has certainly been made. This type of student empowerment, beginning as soon as he/she understands the implications behind the individual education plan, could certainly improve self-determination skills (Pearson, 2000). However, as a result of the current lack of direct involvement during secondary school, he/she virtually never has to self-advocate until reaching post-secondary school. At this point, it is often difficult to learn these skills and obtain proper accommodations on his/her own.

- *Post-secondary School and Employment*--Accommodations are given on a "reasonable" scale and the student must not only claim but prove their disability. It is up to the disabled individual to know what types of services he/she needs to function in the environment. Frequently, personalized assistance is not available and the only accountability lies in litigation. Furthermore, many of the people that are there to assist the student in this process are not comfortable dealing with disability issues, and often avoid trying to help altogether (mainly in employment situations).

(Stodden, Jones, & Chang, 2002)

Future Recommendations

Important changes certainly need to be made in the fight for equality for those with disabilities. Individuals with disabilities not only need to be educated about the different federal regulations that often play large role in their lives, they have a right to be. Access to pertinent information regarding the various transition issues discussed is simply not all that readily available and further research needs to be conducted in this area. For example:

- Transition classes as well as self-determination training are just two suggestions about what could be done to increase awareness of the difficulties involved when moving from secondary to post-secondary school and then on to employment.
- More research needs to be conducted in the area of disabled individuals and their experiences within the school system, particularly within post-secondary education.
 - Need to find ways to better educate and prepare those with disabilities to self-advocate in educational as well employment environments.
 - Possible legislative changes need to be made in order to allow the transition from secondary to post-secondary education to employment to operate more effectively and logically.

Definitions/Keywords:

Accommodations: any changes in normal operation that the facility in question must make for the disabled individual.

Services: a more proactive term for what is provided during secondary education in which the facility creates special environments specifically for the disabled individual instead of viewing it as an augmentation of the “normal” environment.

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