Implications Brief #1
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National Center for the Study of Postsecondary Educational Supports (NCSPES)
University of Hawai‘i at Manoa

**Issue Area:** Self-determination and self-advocacy strategies are now being positioned within postsecondary settings in an attempt to increase the number of students with disabilities who attend colleges and universities and improve graduation rates. Researchers suggest using self-determination curriculum as a cultural empowerment strategy to enable students with disabilities to persist in a postsecondary education, and graduate with a degree. Study 1

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**Summary of the Issue**
Secondary students with disabilities:
- Continue to lag behind their non-disabled counterparts in education and employment;
- Have poor post-school outcomes. An average of 22% of all students with disabilities drop out of school compared to only 12% of their peers without disabilities (Benz & Halpern, 1987);
- Lack the variety, frequency and latitude of learning opportunities that allow them to experiment with behavioral options (Ward and Kohler, 1996, p. 288).
- In postsecondary education, while improving, are still 50 percent lower than that of the general population (Stodden and Dowrick, 2000; OSEP, 1992).
Education and support strategies
Have failed to produce coordinated and integrated improvements that accommodate and support students with disabilities in learning rigorous, standards-based curriculum (Berliner & Biddle, 1996; Edgar, 1997; Hatch, 1998; USDOE, 1995, 1996; Waldron & McLeskey, 1998)
Have been unable to integrate students with varying abilities into core high school academic programs have been hindered: by a shortage of financial and professional resources; and an inadequate research base (Jorgensen, 1997; Oakes & Wells, 1998; Vaughn, Schumm, & Brick, 1998).

Study Questions/Method
What skills do students with disabilities need to possess to successfully advocate for their own educational supports and subsequent workforce settings?
What skills do students with disabilities need to possess to develop internal locus of control and increase cultural capital in postsecondary settings?
What is the impact of a locus of control/cultural capital intervention during postsecondary education upon the development of individual empowerment and self-advocacy skills in students with disabilities?
Qualitative Instruments. The qualitative method will also be used to understand the effect of the intervention—self-determination curriculum by listening to the voices of students with disabilities. Case studies will be used in conjunction with life course charting.
Quantitative Instruments. Two quantitative instrument will be used, a “self-awareness instrument” and an “internal locus of control assessment.”

Anticipated Findings
Assisting students with disabilities in postsecondary education involves more than implementing a curriculum. Four responses are needed to effect positive outcomes: implementation of a curriculum that supports students with disabilities; faculty become the important link between the student and the institution, improvement of the range of related supports and services; and development of a seamless system of coordinated support that originates within the classroom.

Develop a curriculum designed to fit existing courses and established curricula with the tools and teaching strategies necessary to enhance a student’s self-determination and self-advocacy skills.
• Self-determination and self-advocacy strategies need to become mainstreamed and communicate perspectives in prime time campus venues.
• As students with disabilities transition out of secondary education it is important to continue to increase the variety, frequency and latitude of learning opportunities to reinforce the concept of self-determination
and self-advocacy and enable students to continue to create successes in their lives.

- Include choice and control in programming for students with cognitive and developmental disabilities. Provide unsheltered settings so students with disabilities can experience success in competitive and natural environments.

Teach using a philosophy that celebrates the disability culture and knowledge, promoted by faculty [across departments] who are empowered to support a student’s sense of worth and academic ability and strengthen a student’s sense of control over their environment.

- Faculty are the primary agents that build student involvement. In order for these students to get involved in the college or university community, the involvement may have to begin and be sustained in the classroom.
- Students who feel valued by their institution may have a stronger commitment to the institution and graduation than individuals who do not feel valued. Non-traditional students, in particular, need someone to take the initiative and reach out to engage them.
- Frequent student-faculty interactions appear to have positive effects on student retention.
- The classroom becomes the common ground for all students, academic learning may open doors to social integration is one key to retention and graduation.

Develop related services and supports available on campus for students with disabilities.

- Unlike secondary students who are identified as having a disability, postsecondary students can remain invisible on a campus. It is necessary to have a range of service options available to serve a student population that is hard to reach and may not know how to reach out.
- Non-traditional students appear to expect institutions to take the initiative in assisting them. In order to support postsecondary students, institutions need a range of supports—reinforced through services, curricula, and pedagogy—designed to reach out to, engage and teach students with disabilities.
Create a seamless system of coordinated services.

- The University of Hawaii (UH) does not have special admission policies to assist in the recruitment and retention of students and support services. The retention and persistence of students needs to become a campus-wide priority that must be backed by the institution with a funding commitment.
- Service support mechanisms exist on college campuses and programs may appear at-odds or uncoordinated because they are made to compete among themselves for limited funds. It is critical for students to have a range of supports at their disposal—supports that appear seamless and mutually reinforcing.

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