Summary of the Issue

Although there has been an increase in the number of students with learning disabilities entering colleges and universities, limited numbers of students are completing their programs (Wille-Gregory, Graham, & Hughes, 1995). There are several factors that contribute to low retention and completion rates (Aune, 1991), which make it exceedingly challenging for these individuals to complete postsecondary educational programs. In many instances, students may be hampered by varying or limited support services, large student-instructor ratios, and limited direct student-instructor contact which results in insufficient individualized attention (Stodden, 1999). Additionally, students with learning disabilities in higher education settings often face obstacles in the form of negative or prejudicial attitudes held by faculty members, administrators, and
other members of the student body (Greenbaum, Graham, & Scales, 1995; West, et al., 1993).

To help students with learning disabilities participate in higher education programs, three primary considerations emerge: obtaining detailed information on the unique characteristics of the students, developing specific educational interventions based on the students' characteristics, and providing information and support to students on effective educational strategies. In an effort to ensure that these areas are fully addressed at VCU, an Educational Intervention Model for students with learning disabilities has been developed.

**Study Questions/Method**

1. What is the range of educational supports needed by students with learning disabilities to successfully complete their postsecondary education program?
2. What are the barriers for succeeding in a postsecondary environment as perceived by students with learning disabilities?
3. What strategies or accommodations do students believe work in overcoming these barriers?

The study will use an intact cohort design to obtain data on the success of the educational intervention strategies. A cohort of 60 students will be recruited to participate in the study. All participants will receive assistance over the course of the study. Data will be collected through the use of an Academic Support Plan, which is developed by the student with assistance from the research staff. The frequency and intensity of the educational supports will be documented on this plan. At the end of each academic year, the cohort will be divided into two groups based on the intensity and frequency of services. A comparison will be made between the two groups to determine the level of success (i.e. GPA, academic progress, retention) among the group participants. In addition, because of the individualized nature of this study, developing and implementing specific educational supports for students with learning disabilities, the study requires a method that captures the individualized nature of the supports provided and the students' satisfaction with the interventions designed. Focus group procedures have been selected as the primary method for collecting information (Krueger, 1994; Marshall & Rossman, 1995; Wheeler, 1996). This method was selected because focus groups allow for a detailed, more in-depth process to collect information on the students with learning disabilities (Patton, 1990).

Detailed case studies will also be developed to document the specific educational supports and accommodations that were provided during the study. The case studies will help to illustrate the range of supports provided and how these supports were implemented.
Findings
The study has begun compiling initial data on the educational strategies that have thus far been developed for students.

Implications by Audience
The study will provide specific information on successful educational interventions used by students with learning disabilities in college. Retention and graduation rates of all students are national concerns for colleges and universities. These rates are particularly discouraging for students with learning disabilities. By using an educational coaching model where students receive structured support by staff, data collected on the frequency and intensity of services and their impact will provide a wealth of information on effective approaches that enable students with learning disabilities to achieve academic success in higher education.

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