Summary of the Issue:

There is very little known regarding current practice concerning the provision of educational supports to students with disabilities at the postsecondary level. A national survey was conducted and provides crucial information for researchers seeking to ascertain the current status of educational supports in postsecondary programs. The survey and the sub-analyses have provided a comprehensive baseline of data to address issues concerning educational support provision.

Study Questions/Method:

Do colleges across the nation offer advocacy organizations for Students with Disabilities?

A national survey instrument was developed and distributed to a national sample more than 1500 disability support coordinators (DSC). More than 650 respondents completed the survey providing a profile of characteristics. The respondents within the sample was profiled as follows: 422 were from public schools vs. 193 from private schools; 246 were from two-year or less than two-year schools vs. 369 from four-year schools. Respondents were asked:
“Is there an advocacy organization on campus for students with disabilities?”

Findings:

One of the most striking findings of the survey is that only 1 in 4 schools offers an advocacy organization on campus for students with disabilities, and of those that do, only 1 in 4 offer the organization any financial, advisory, or other means of support.

Implications by Audience:

Findings for this question indicates an apparent lack of interest on the part of postsecondary institutions in providing or supporting on campus advocacy organizations with a focus on students with disabilities. Responses to this question may also indicate that disability support offices on postsecondary campuses may not view self-advocacy as a service or support they should provide. Students with disabilities and those who provide them with secondary transition services, need to be aware that on-campus advocacy organizations are generally not available at postsecondary institutions.

In contrast, a national focus group project conducted by the RRTC seeking the perceptions of students with disabilities found that self-advocacy skills and supports were one of the most critical needs for students when they seek to access and participate in postsecondary education programs. The importance of possessing self-advocacy skills and having access to an organization that understands postsecondary educational settings is viewed as very important to students with disabilities. Further, having access to an advocacy organization focused upon the interests and needs of students with disabilities is considered a valuable resource; a resource that is generally not offered. As such, it is incumbent upon students and those who serve them develop a knowledge base about the level of services available to facilitate the transition to postsecondary education.

Those postsecondary programs that do sponsor or have an advocacy organization on campus seem to provide little financial, advisory or other support for that organization. It is difficult for a student-focused organization on campus to survive or be effective without some support from the host institution. Through advocacy organizations, students with disabilities can have a unified voice that may influence administrators in funding and policy decisions that may improve the provision of educational supports and services on campus. However, at this point, a unified voice of students with disabilities at postsecondary educational settings is most unlikely.

Contact Information: Tom Harding, PhD Candidate, (808) 956-2890 Tharding1@yahoo.com