Transition from Two-Year to Four-Institutions for Students with Disabilities

Issue

Students with disabilities in two-year colleges face challenges as they transition to four-year schools. Some are similar to those faced by their non-disabled peers, however some are related to their disabilities. This study was undertaken to determine the concerns of students with disabilities in two-year institutions of higher education (community and technical colleges) as they transfer to four-year schools, and steps that can be taken by both two-year and four-year institutions to improve the postsecondary outcomes of these transfer students.

Targeted Audience for Findings

Postsecondary disability support providers, admission counselors, and faculty members; postsecondary academic, community and technical teachers, counselors and administrators; postsecondary students with disabilities.

Research Questions

1. What are students most concerned about when they are transferring from a two-year to a four-year postsecondary program?

2. How can two-year and four-year institution help students with disabilities successfully transfer to four-year schools?

Method

To answer the research questions posed in this study, quantitative and qualitative research methods were utilized. Methods included a quantitative survey of one hundred and nineteen disabled students from nineteen colleges in Washington State to explore the concerns of students with disabilities as they transfer from two-year schools to four-year institutions. After filling out the survey, they were also given a chance to respond to the question in an open-ended format. Furthermore, a qualitative survey was distributed to the directors of disabled student services offices at 2409 postsecondary institutions with a 15% return rate. The survey asked the directors to identify programmatic characteristics that enable students with disabilities to successfully transfer from two-year to four-year schools. In addition, a total of twenty-one faculty
and staff from seven postsecondary institutions in Washington State participated in focused discussions to supplement the responses from the survey and explore practical interventions for institutions to implement.

Significant Findings

Concerns of college students with disabilities regarding the transfer from two-year to four-year schools

- Students rated the top concerns when transferring to a four-year institution in the following order: the cost of the program, skills in self-advocacy, differences in social life (making new friends), availability of educational accommodations, access to technology, differences in academic requirements (keeping up with other students academically), and availability of tutors. These were rated from most important to least important, respectively.
- In a separate open-ended response, students listed concerns such as differences in disabled student services, inadequate financial support, the entire transferring process, housing/transportation difficulties, and differences in academic requirements.

How Two-Year Institutions Can Increase the Transfer Success Rate

- Make sure that campus recruiters, admissions staff and academic counselors are knowledgeable about disabled student services.
- Include information about services for students with disabilities in all general student orientations, student handbooks and other publications and programs.
- Attend two-year college career/transfer “fairs” to share information about services and programs for students with disabilities.
- Educate faculty and staff about disability and transfer issues, accommodation strategies and resources. Create summary sheet of all intake and documentation requirements for all state schools and standardize if possible.
- Address campus access issues (dorm rooms, transportation, technology) proactively.
- Create a publication and World Wide Web pages with procedures and campus map/overview.
- Have separate orientation sessions for students with disabilities.
- Simplify the process when possible.

How Two-Year Institutions Can Increase the Transfer Success Rate

- Disabled student services and other campus staff should become more familiar with four-year colleges’ policies, procedures, programs, and services.
- Educate the faculty and staff about disability and transfer issues, accommodation strategies and
resources (e.g. new faculty orientations).

- Share information about transfer strategies and steps using publications and the World Wide Web.
- Assure documentation used is acceptable to most four-year schools and give students a copy of their disability documentation to take to four-year schools.
- Provide academic and career counseling to students with disabilities, which may include how a four-year degree might support their goals.
- Encourage transfer students to select four-year schools early and help them make good choices.
- Help students develop transition plans and work through the transfer process (e.g. has to fill out financial aid forms).
- Help students develop self-advocacy skills.
- Arrange visits to four-year schools for students with disabilities so they can learn about services, sit in classes, talk to faculty, and meet other students with disabilities.

**How Two-Year and Four-Year Schools Can Work Together to Increase Transfer Success Rate**

- Visit each other’s campuses to become more aware of campus climate, offerings, and services.
- Develop a cooperative relationship between disabled student services offices; coordinate activities; cooperate and follow through; share resources.
- Coordinate acceptance of documentation.

- Create a state/regional advisors group of faculty, staff and students from two-year and four-year schools to advocate for transfer students with disabilities and discuss program and policy issues.
- Cosponsor transfer fairs that include disabled student services information.
- Coordinate campus visits between two-year and four-year students with disabilities.
- Facilitate contact between two-year and four-year students with disabilities; coordinate peer mentoring.
- Develop a one-on-one handoff system for students with disabilities.

**Implications for the Targeted Audience**

- There is a need for two-year and four-year student support staff to do more to ease the transition for postsecondary students with disability. Specific examples for four-year staff and two-year staff are given.
- There is a need for skill improvement by students with disabilities in such areas as self-advocacy, requesting accommodations, and study/time management/organization.
- There is need for further research in this area. The present study was limited by response rate to staff
survey and a narrow participant population. Generalizing these results is not suggested.

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