Problem to be addressed
Descriptions of work behavior from the past were based on roles, tasks, and activities of people without disabilities. These descriptors have been presented in standardized reference works, such as the Dictionary of Occupational Titles, and are defined the structure and content of occupations (United States Department of Labor, 1991). People with disabilities may or may not accomplish or perform work in similar ways to those descriptions, and this study may be able to shed some light on divergences.

Specifically, persons with disabilities are more likely to have the characteristics that reduce labor force participation (Yelin, 1996). Individuals with disabilities entering the work force are less likely to be employed in executive/professional, technical/sales, and administrative occupations. Disabled populations are more likely to receive employment opportunities as craft workers, operatives, transportation workers, and laborers (Yelin & Trupin, 1999). Less than one half of one percent of employed persons with disabilities are pharmacists, lawyers, judges, physicians, dentists, health workers, firefighters, or fire prevention workers (Stoddard, Jans, Ripple, & Kraus, 1998). The assumption that people with disabilities are unemployable creates difficulties in finding employment, while discrimination against people with disabilities at work, and the need for special accommodations offer unique challenges for the employee with disabilities at work (National Center for the Study of Postsecondary Educational Supports, 2000). This study is designed to examine how young people with disabilities acquire jobs, how level of support effects employee performance level, and how employers operate in hiring and maintaining people with disabilities.

“What is work? No definition is satisfactory because work relates to all human activities, and one would have to exhaust all such activities to exhaust the provinces of work. Modern terminology uses the word occupation to identify work activities. It is a functional term describing what people do to ‘earn a living,’ emphasizing that it is work which sustains life (Applebaum, 1992, p. 36).” Work has progressed through history with changing responsibilities. Employees with disabilities seem to be caught in the secondary phase of work which is characterized by industrial period, while people without disabilities have progressed to...
the tertiary phase of postindustrial, computer-based careers (Applebaum, 1992).

In order to successfully guide people with disabilities into a productive and successful career path, postsecondary support services need to be in place to encourage career exploration and adaptation. For example, identifying successful role models, encouraging students to volunteer, arranging for internships or “shadowing experiences, encouraging students to work during the summer, and conducting student tours of industry and business can promote students interest in their occupational future and give them the confidence they need to enter the work force (Maddy-Berstein, 1997). Although Individuals with Disabilities and Education Act (IDEA) promotes academic and career development and school-to-work transition for secondary youth, it is important to recognize the differences between a job and a career.

A bachelor’s degree is a prerequisite to many career opportunities. Yet, students with disabilities are often unsuccessful in postsecondary education. Employment rates for people with disabilities are closely linked to their level of education (Stodden & Dowrick, 2000), but they have a lower rate of postsecondary enrollment relative to the general population (Office of Special Education Programs, 1992). The differences between the populations with and without disabilities persist into the employment arena (Benz, Doren, & Yovanoff, 1998; National Center on Secondary Education and Transition for Youth with Disabilities, 2000). Therefore, students with disabilities at a college level planning to pursue a career are a minority population that is often overlooked. This study is going to explore the transition of supports from postsecondary education not only to the work place, but to a career.

Furthermore, the meaning people attribute to their work is to be sought. Applebaum (1992) compares work to “the spine which structures the way people live, how they make contact with material and social reality, and how they achieve status and self-esteem” (p. 5). These complex relationships have been skillfully and artistically captured by writers, such as Studs Terkel (1974) in his classic book, “Working”. Ethnography too has often captured the lives of people in a community in such ways that a great deal of light is shed on work and attitudes towards work (Lareau and Shultz, 1996). Some ethnographic accounts specifically focused on workplace settings giving detailed accounts of the microsystem setting of work (Baba, 1991; Darrah, 1996). There have been many rich program descriptions dealing with efforts to enable people to get work and meaningful jobs (Bernick, 1987; Bullock, 1985). It is the goal of this study to explore “work” in a holistic manner, looking at the importance of support transition from postsecondary education to the workplace, life in the work place for employees with disabilities, and the role of employers in this process.

Research Questions
1. What supports are offered to assist transition from postsecondary education to the workplace and how effective are they?
2. What have been the experiences of young people with disabilities who have obtained and participated in planned, competitive jobs in their career field?
3. How does participation in a career impact an individual’s life outside of work?

Methods
The proposed study will be conducted in three phases. Phase I will incorporate a
survey of individuals with disabilities that have obtained work in the respective careers to assess the presence and quality of supports. Phase two will consist of a long-term ethnographic study of several career environments where individuals with disabilities are working. The third phase of the study will build upon the information already gathered to design a survey. The survey will assess the quality of employment situations, and the quality of life outside of work for people with disabilities. Information gathered from these three phases will be combined to present a complete picture of working behavior by young people with disabilities.

**Phase I**
To quantitatively assess the presence and effectiveness of transfer supports from postsecondary education to work, approximately fifty people with disabilities who successfully obtained employment in their career of choice will be surveyed. Twenty-five disabled individuals from the DO-IT Program in Washington State and twenty-five students who have graduated from postsecondary institutions in Hawaii will comprise the pool of participants. (What about using the Minnesota people?) The participants will be surveyed to assess the presence and effectiveness of transfer supports from postsecondary education to the workplace. The participants will be located by project staff through phone contact with disabled student services coordinators on college campuses throughout Hawaii and through contact with DO-IT staff members. The surveys will be conducted in an on-line format, via the Internet.

**Phase II**
To qualitatively assess the experience of an individual with disabilities in the workplace, an ethnographic study of several work sites will be conducted. The work sites will be located in Hawaii and chosen based on availability and cooperation of both the employee and employer. The ethnographic method has been well described and offers an important point of view essential to understanding a setting and the activities of people in that setting. Maanen (1988) for example, wrote that “Impressionist tales, with their silent disavowal of grand theorizing, their radical grasping for the particular, eventful, contextual, and the unusual, contain an important message. They protest the ultimate superficiality of much of the published research in social science – ethnographic or otherwise” (pg. 199). Getting beyond the superficial for people with disability in a work setting is basic to design and development of programs of support.

**Phase III**
The vehicles for measurement in Phase III will be a survey based upon findings from the previous phases. The goal for Phase III will be to assess the quality of the employment situation and the quality of life outside of work.
### Timeline/Benchmarks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Events</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>March 15, 2001</td>
<td>• RRTC research brief completed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Draft of literature review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 15, 2001</td>
<td>• Final draft of Phase I survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Recruitment of participants for Phase I survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August, 2001</td>
<td>• Final draft of survey posted on Internet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Data collected and analyses began</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• <strong>Begin</strong> recruitment of participants for Phase II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 30, 2001</td>
<td>• Draft of Phase I results</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Final draft of Phase I results</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October, 2001</td>
<td>• <strong>Begin</strong> Phase II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Draft of literature review for Phase II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Submit Phase I to a Journal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March, 2002</td>
<td>• <strong>Presentation at Pac Rim</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Complete collection of Phase II resent preliminary results</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The project will result in at least the following products:

- Published article(s) targeted at student services officers for students with disabilities at postsecondary institutions of higher education, postsecondary administrators, postsecondary student services personnel, rehabilitation professionals, and/or employers.
- Research brief(s).
- Finding brief(s)
- At least one conference presentation

Completion of this research project will increase the understanding of the career path of individuals with disabilities. Specifically, three areas will be targeted: (1) the transition from postsecondary institutions to the workplace, (2) the employment context, and (3) the impact on quality of life outside of work. This study will present a holistic and complete view of career mobilization for individuals with disabilities utilizing several different measurement techniques. This information is vital in identifying promising practices for helping to ease the transition from postsecondary institutions to the workplace, lead to improved practices at postsecondary institutions and arenas of employment, and ultimately lead to more career outcomes and more fulfilling lives for people with disabilities.
References


Rehabilitation Research.