PHASE II
PROPOSAL BRIEF #18
(MS#061a(1)-H01

University of Hawai`i at Manoa Center on Disability Studies
National Center for the Study of Postsecondary Educational Supports
A Rehabilitation Research & Training Center
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A Success Story: The Participant's Experiences and Perceptions as Well as Supporting Parents and Teachers in Post-Secondary Education to Employment

Statement of the Problem
Secondary students with disabilities (SWD) continue to lag behind their non-disabled counterparts in education and employment. Youth with disabilities have been educated in increasingly inclusive settings for the past 25 years. During the past 15 years, there has been an array of many school-to-work programs funded by the federal government (RRTC, 2000). Concurrently, transition to work is a priority of Rehabilitative Services, as stated in the 1992 Rehabilitative Amendment (PL102-569), yet youth with disabilities complete public education and enter uncertain futures. A survey commissioned by the National Organization on Disability (1998) concludes that only 29% of persons with disabilities of working age are employed full or part-time, as compared with 79% of those who don't have disabilities. Of the people with disabilities who are not working, 72% report that they would prefer to have a job. One avenue to secure better skills and higher wages is through higher education, and the enrollment rates for students with disabilities are increasing at the post-secondary level (Stodden, 1998).

| Percentages of Employment and High School Graduation of Disabled and Non-Disabled Students |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|---------------|
| Full and Part-time Employment                                  | 29%           | 79%           |
| High School Completion                                         | 80%           | 90%           |
| Attend Postsecondary Institution                              |               |               |
| 1-2 years after high school                                    | 19%           | 56%           |
| 3-5 years after high school                                    | 27%           | 68%           |

(Stodden and Dowrick, 1999; Blackorby and Wagner, 1996)

Students with disabilities are often not prepared to enter college. Many students with disabilities have not had the opportunity to learn the skills to
advocate for themselves in secondary school. Legally, parents have mandates under IDEA to direct curriculum, placement and supports until students with disabilities are 18 years old or exit public school. Students are confronted with many different expectations as they enter postsecondary educational institutions when they find themselves on their own. They are expected to make choices between colleges, and courses, and need to negotiate their own supports. Their experience during the transition year from high school to college does not give them the abilities to direct their education. Then, during the fall of that same year, students with disabilities have the full right and responsibility to identify and negotiate all of their accommodations. Antidotal evidence suggests that students perform better when parents advocate for them during secondary school (S. Burgstahler, Personal communication, September 21, 2000), but this does not necessarily prepare the students for the tasks that follow.

**Research Questions**

1. What have been the experiences and perceptions of this one person “M”, with a learning disability, her family members, and her postsecondary educator (who was pivotal in her success), in providing supports for her completion of postsecondary education, and her employment as a teacher?
2. What are the unique experiences and perceptions of each of the individuals involved?
3. How important a role did family play?
4. How important a role did “M's” postsecondary support educator/coordinator play?

5. What or who was “M's” empowering force?

In secondary education students are surrounded by a variety of supports, but their learning opportunities continue to "lack the variety, frequency and latitude of learning opportunities that would allow them to experiment with behavioral options" (Ward, Kohler, 1996, p.288). In postsecondary education the opposite is true, students are surrounded by less supports and have more learning opportunities available to them (Rumrill, 2001). The goal is to create balance between opportunities and supports.

**Sample**

There are three participants: “M”, a person with a learning disability (her success story) a family member who supported her, and a postsecondary educator, who “M” believes was pivotal to her success.

**Study Method**

The method used will be qualitative, in case study report form, using interview results. Specific formats to be used for examination of the interviews are described by Guba and Lincoln (1985), as "a slice of life" and "depth examination of an instance". To understand what has happened with the participant and her supports throughout the course of her postsecondary studies, "a slice of life" format will be used (Guba & Lincoln, 1985). Another method to be used will be the “talk-story” format, which is specifically to talk to the focal person by starting with "tell me something about yourself" (Paulo, et al, 1999). Then, the focal person is asked for other informants that have helped them toward success, and
then interviews are conducted with these individuals.

The Case-Study Method will be used because our research questions are more explanatory in nature and are conceptualized as "how" and "why" questions (Yin, 1994, p. 6). A case study also can illustrate certain topics within an evaluation in a descriptive mode.

**Data Collection**
The case study will examine the experiences and perceptions of “M”, a person with a learning disability, a family member, and a teacher who supported her completion in postsecondary education and continues to support her employment as a teacher. Permission for this research will be obtained from the University of Hawaii's Internal Board of Review. Consent for the study has been obtained in written form from the subjects. The interviews, in "talk-story" format will be audio taped, transcribed, and shown to all persons interviewed to add to or delete as they wish, in order to clarify their meaning.

The goal is to find grounded theory of successes (the how and what decisions) made by the participants.

Graduate Assistants versed in data analysis will help in analysis of the findings, and will use qualitative software that is compatible with this format. They will search for salient themes using analytical inductions and the constant comparative method. This will produce validity and enhance dependability of the findings.

**Products**
A research brief or journal article is anticipated. A presentation at a National conference by the participant is also anticipated.

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**WORK PLAN**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Activity</th>
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| April 2001 | Research Brief submitted  
|          | IRB approval  
|          | Interviews begin  |
| May 2001   | Content analysis completed  
|          | Findings validated  |
| June 2001  | Brief/Journal article  
|          | Presentation at Pac Rim Conference 2002 |