Study Report

Personnel And Student Perceptions About The Role Of The Postsecondary Disability Support Provider

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ABSTRACT

This report presents the results of a descriptive study that examined how postsecondary disability support personnel and students with disabilities at the University of Hawaii view the role of the postsecondary disability support person. The results are based on five interviews with personnel and students, and are interpreted using qualitative/descriptive methodology. During the interviews, participants were asked to describe their perspectives and experiences about (a) the disability experience and the postsecondary disability support process in general, (b) the role of postsecondary disability support personnel, and (c) suggestions for improving postsecondary support and the personnel/student relationship. In addition to highlighting the importance of various aspects of the postsecondary disability support provider role, the results of the study point to the need for specific improvements in the postsecondary support process for students with disabilities. In particular, there is some indication that conflicting role expectations between students, personnel and administrators could impact the quality of service provision and the support person/student relationship. Implications of the study for policy, practice and research include the need to clarify the role of postsecondary disability support personnel, the need to enhance the range of supports and support personnel that can be accessed by students with disabilities, and the need to better educate the university community about viewing disability as a diversity issue rather than as an issue of competition and compliance.
INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade the world of work, and the educational requirements of its workforce, have changed dramatically. Advancements in technology and changes in the economy have shifted employers’ attention from long-term, highly focused, technically-trained workers to those who are transitory, adaptable, posses interpersonal and critical thinking skills, and have a postsecondary degree (Grzeda, 1999; *Ladders of Opportunity*, 2001). These changes in the expectations of employers means that workers today must be more highly educated than were the workers of yesterday. This is especially true for individuals with disabilities. For individuals with disabilities, there is a stronger positive correlation between level of education and rate of employment than is found in statistical trends for the general population (Stodden & Dowrick, 2001).

Proper supports, services and accommodations are critical to the postsecondary preparation and participation of many students with disabilities (Benz & Kochhar, 1996; National Council on Disability, 2000, November; Stodden, Jones, & Chang, 2002). With adequate support, students are more likely to be successful academically, which also gives them the confidence to explore their opportunities and other activities. Many colleges and universities have support personnel who are responsible for managing the support needs of students with disabilities. These personnel are, in many cases, a critical link between the university and programmatic and physical accommodations for the student. Given that there is increasing evidence that the provision of supports, services and accommodations is an important component of postsecondary success for many students with disabilities, it is important that the relationship between support personnel and students with disabilities be one of mutual respect and shared goals. One important factor in the personnel/student relationship is how both parties view the role of the support person. Organizational theorists have long indicated the importance of role expectations in organizational and relationship outcomes (Barnes, Mercer, & Shakespeare, 1999; Scott, 1992).

This report describes a study that used open-ended interviews to (a) explore how five participants, postsecondary students with disabilities (learning and physical) and disability support personnel at the University of Hawaii, view the role of the postsecondary support person and, (b) how an exploration of these perceptions might be used to improve service provision. Specifically, the study asked participants to describe their perceptions about the role of support personnel in the context of the following research questions:

1. What experiences have participants had, and what are their perspectives about, the disability experience and the postsecondary disability support process in general?
2. How do participants view the role of support personnel in the postsecondary support process?
3. What suggestions do participants have for improving the postsecondary support-provision process and the student/personnel relationship?
4. Are there indications that how the role of support personnel is defined impacts disability-related support and the personnel/student relationship?

The interview questions were developed based on a review of the literature, as presented in the
The interviews were analyzed using QSR NVivo qualitative analysis software, and this process is explained more fully in the “methodology” section. The "results" and "discussion" sections support previous research that suggests the importance of various aspects of the postsecondary disability support provider role to student success. These sections also highlight areas that need improvement in the postsecondary support process for students with disabilities.

The results indicate that conflicting role expectations between students, personnel and administrators may effect the quality of service provision and the support person/student relationship. These expectations concern the role of the student as well as that of the support provider. Implications of the study for policy, practice and research are then described, including the need to clarify the role of postsecondary disability support personnel, the need to enhance the range of supports and support personnel that can be accessed by students with disabilities, and the need to better educate the university community about viewing disability as a diversity issue rather than as an issue of competition and compliance.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Importance of Postsecondary Education for Individuals with Disabilities

Federal legislation such as the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 (PL 101-336), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, and the reauthorized Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Amendments of 1997 (PL 105-17), have increased accessibility for youth with disabilities to postsecondary education. As a result, the number of postsecondary students reporting a disability has increased dramatically (Horn & Berktold, 1999). The proportion of first-time, full-time students with disabilities attending colleges and universities tripled between 1978 and 1994 from 2.6% to 9.2% (Henderson, 1999; Leahman, Davies, & Laurin, 2000; National Council on Disability, 2000; Vogel, Leyser, Wyland, & Brulle, 1999). By 1998, the full range of students with disabilities (including part-time students and students enrolled in graduate programs) had risen to 10.5% of the postsecondary student population (Gajar, 1998). And in their report, the National Council on Disability (2000) reveals that as many as 17% of all students attending higher education programs in the United States are now identified as having a disability (learning disabilities are by far the most common type of disability reported by college students). Further, more than one half of all the students with disabilities who enroll in postsecondary education persist in the completion of their program of study. Within five years of starting postsecondary education, 41% of students with disabilities report they had earned a degree or credential, and another 12% remained enrolled in their course of study (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 1999, August).

However, despite indications that individuals with disabilities are participating in postsecondary education in greater numbers, they are still significantly less likely to be employed than are individuals without disabilities. In fact, data from the U.S. Census shows that only 49% of individuals with disabilities are employed versus 79% percent of individuals without disabilities (U.S. Census, 2000), and this is considered to be an “optimistic” statistic. The employment rate for individuals with cognitive impairments and mental retardation are even lower (Kiernan, 2002).
Any type of postsecondary education benefits students by allowing them to explore their interests and by teaching them skills they might not gain in high school or subsequent work experiences. The American labor force has been shown to benefit as a result of people's pursuit of postsecondary education, because these workers participate in the labor force at a higher rate and generally have higher earnings than those who do not continue beyond high school (NCES, 1997). Labor force trends and increased enrollment in postsecondary education demonstrate that students also see further education as a benefit to their earnings level and career success (NCES, 1997).

For people with disabilities, the importance of enrolling in and completing a postsecondary education program is magnified in relation to employment outcomes and earnings. The National Longitudinal Transition Study (Blackorby & Wagner, 1996) indicates that despite recent trends that indicate higher postsecondary participation rates by individuals with disabilities, people with disabilities still participate in postsecondary education in smaller numbers than do people without disabilities. This discrepancy leads to low participation in competitive employment and much lower earnings than average for people with disabilities (Stodden & Dowrick, 2001). However, for people with disabilities, there is a 50.4% labor force participation rate for those who have completed at least four years of college (Getzel, Stodden, & Briel, 2001, March). In fact, Stodden presents information indicating a stronger positive correlation between disability and employment and level of education than the trend for the general population (Stodden, 1998). People with disabilities with even less than four years of postsecondary education are employed at double the rate of those with just a high school diploma (Getzel et al., 2001, March). These findings show that access to the opportunities afforded by a postsecondary education makes an enormous difference in the employability of people with disabilities.

**Disability Support Provision and Postsecondary Participation**

*How Support Impacts Postsecondary Participation*

Under Section II and Section III of the ADA, postsecondary institutions “are required by law to provide any reasonable accommodation that may be necessary for those persons with an identified disability to have equal access to the educational opportunities and services available to their non-disabled peers” (Stodden, Jones & Chang, 2002). Access to technology and other learning supports is critical to the success of students with disabilities in postsecondary education. Advances in information technology and assistive devices have made a considerable contribution to persons with disabilities seeking to access postsecondary education (Luetke-Stalman, 1998). These devices may be as basic as a page-turner or as involved as a computer assisted communication device. It is well documented that these devices and services improve the physical and learning capabilities of individuals with disabilities (Cunningham & Coombs, 1997; Thompson, Bethea, Rizer, & Hutto, 1997). Other types of supports include, but are not limited to, exam modifications, priority enrollment, sign language interpretation or other communication assistance, the provision of notetakers, tutoring, academic or career counseling, transportation bus lift, orientation, provision of accessible on-campus housing, lab and library assistance, the provision of readers, advocacy, peer mentoring, and transcription into alternative formats (Stodden, Jones & Chang, 2002).
Importance of Support Personnel in the Support Provision Process

Unquestionably, postsecondary students with disabilities are charged with the bulk of the responsibility for initiating, designing, and ensuring their own educational accommodations (Battle, Dickens-Wright, & Murphy, 1998; Gajar, 1998; Tucker, 1997). It is their responsibility to inform school officials of their disability, provide documentation of the disability, and propose viable options for meeting the unique accommodation needs specific to their disability (Izzo & Lamb, 2002; Lamb, 2002; Stodden et al., 2002). However, disability support personnel also play a critical role in the support-provision process. Most postsecondary institutions now have someone who is charged with the task of accommodating students with disabilities. How schools structure this responsibility varies across institutions. Some schools have a “disability service” or other office with several personnel who address the needs of students with disabilities, while other schools assign a single individual to this task. Still others may assign the job of disability support to an individual who has many other responsibilities as well, such as to the director of student affairs, the Dean's office of individual colleges, etc. These personnel are at the “front-lines” of the support provision process. Their attitudes, skills and working relationship with students, faculty and administrators can impact the kinds of supports that students receive and the efficiency and effectiveness of service delivery (National Center for the Study of Postsecondary Educational Supports [NCSPES], 2000a; Shields, 1987).

A national survey of postsecondary educational supports found that alongside specific accommodations, personal counseling, advocacy assistance, and skills training were in high demand at disability services offices (NCSPES, 2000, April). In most cases, at least 60% of 650 disability support coordinators indicted that they offered these services more than 75% of the time. However, 12-45% of them still said that they offered them less than 25% of the time or not at all. And despite the high rate of advocacy reported by personnel, a national focus group project reported that students felt the type and timing of advocacy assistance was problematic (NCSPES, 2001).

Roles and Relationships in Service Provision

How Definitions of Roles Shape Relationships and Impact Service Provision

Scott (1992) defines a “role” as: “Expectations of or evaluative standards employed in assessing the behavior of occupants of specific social positions” (Scott, 1992). He goes on to discuss how organizations, such as colleges and universities, create formalized “role expectations” (expectations for the behavior that is linked with each position/stakeholder within the organization) that maximize predictability of action and minimize individual decision-making.

Our perceptions about our own roles and the roles of others can affect our expectations about how we, and others, should behave in professional and other relationships (Barnes et al., 1999). It can also affect the way we actually behave. Confusion about roles, and interactions that do not meet our expectations can create conflicts between individuals and within organizations (Scott, 1992). For example, there is evidence that within counseling relationships, counselors perceive their clients as having unrealistic expectations about counseling and as underestimating the
contribution that they (the client) are required to make (Tinsley, 1993). There is also evidence that people with disabilities have traditionally been viewed as societal “outsiders” who are expected by society, and by organizations, to play the role of the “sick person” (i.e. exhibit behaviors such as passivity and gratefulness) (Barnes et al., 1999).

Concepts of formalization, expectations and roles can be applied in the context of postsecondary support provision to individuals with disabilities. As noted above, postsecondary institutions are organizations in which each individual who has a stake in the disability support provision process (personnel, administrators, students, faculty, etc.) is expected by the institution and by other stakeholders to act according to a specific role. For example, administrators may be expected to establish policies around support for students, personnel may be expected to carry out these policies, and students may be expected to follow certain procedures in order to obtain supports. However, how these role expectations are laid out, and played out, may be less clear.

Defining the Disability Support Person’s Role

There is limited literature around the role of the postsecondary education disability support person, though there is some evidence that this role is not always clear (Dukes, Lyman, & Shaw, 1999; NCSPES, 2000b). The role of the postsecondary disability support provider is relatively new, emerging in the past several decades with the passage of civil rights legislation that has expanded access to postsecondary education to individuals with disabilities. Between 1978 and 1999, the membership of the Association on Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD) grew from 32 to 1,900 people. Disability support personnel come from varied backgrounds including counseling, law, social work, special education, and higher education (Dukes et al., 1999), and almost half of them have been in their position less than five years (NCSPES, 2000, June). This wide variety of backgrounds and relative newness of this type of position implies that the profession needs definition and clarification of roles and responsibilities (Dukes et al., 1999; NCSPES, 2000, June; Norlander, Shaw, & McGuire, 1990; Stodden et al., 2002).

With the growth of the field come advances in professional development and personnel preparation. In order for these training efforts to be most effective, the role of disability support personnel must be explored and defined. AHEAD recently produced professional standards to help define the role of the service provider (AHEAD, 2003). These standards list 51 activities that the postsecondary disability service provider is expected to perform. The question remains which specific personnel should assume various aspects of these activities, and to what extent. For the purpose of analysis, we divided these activities into the role categories of “counselor,” “service provider” and “customer service person.” All of these roles can be linked with similar human services positions to that of postsecondary disability support provider. A counselor is generally expected to nurture, listen, and offer advice; a service provider is expected to intake information and arrange for or provide specific services based on their assessment of that information; and a customer service person is expected to listen and take action to provide a service based on the customer’s assessment, in order to maintain business relationships and prevent lawsuits against the organization (Carkhuff, 1969; Gonzalez, 1994; Kelly, 1994; National Organization for Human Services Education, 2003). While these positions have similarities, there are also many differences in what is expected of them. Confusion about how the postsecondary disability support person’s role is defined could result in conflicts in the
student/personnel relationship, and other problems with support provision such as delays in provision or inappropriate support.

Also, because of the rapid growth of the field, it may be difficult to find personnel who are skilled in all of these areas. The wide variety of academic backgrounds and interests exhibited by postsecondary disability support personnel is an indication that many of them are not trained in all of these roles (Bigaj, Shaw, Cullen, McGuire, & Yost, 1995; Dukes, Lyman, & Shaw, 1999; NCSPES, 2000, June). Unfortunately, one of the biggest challenges to providing services reported by postsecondary disability support personnel in the United States is lack of funds, staff and resources (Michael, Salend, Bennett, & Harris, 1988; NCSPES, 2000, June).

Based on our review of the literature, described in the section above, we developed a matrix that explores how the expectations of an individual’s role translate into expectations and actions in the context of postsecondary disability support provision. Service provision is perhaps the most obvious role of a service provider. Counseling is often an important part of any human services profession. At the same time, since service provision positions are often created out of an institution’s need to comply with section 504 and the ADA, customer service may also be an important role in the profession. Note, however, that the results of this study did refine our conception of these roles somewhat so that “customer service” was absorbed into other role categories and the roles of “advocate” and “educator” also became important (see Table 4 of the Discussion section).

### Table 1: Matrix of roles of the postsecondary disability support person

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Counselors</th>
<th>Service Providers</th>
<th>Customer Service</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Expected activities</strong></td>
<td>Listen, advise, train or conduct assessments</td>
<td>Provide physical and active means for solving problems and improving outcomes</td>
<td>Respond to customer complaints in ways that satisfy the customer (i.e., via allowing returns and exchanges)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Expected results</strong></td>
<td>Student feels assured, more in control and capable, and understands his or her situation better</td>
<td>Student has barriers removed in an effective and efficient manner</td>
<td>Student’s complaints are heard, the situation corrected, and lawsuits avoided</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Training</strong></td>
<td>Therapy, social skills, empathy, problem solving, psychology, assessment, etc.</td>
<td>Knowledge of available accommodations and services, their use and fit for specific situations; knowledge of laws and policy</td>
<td>Social skills, troubleshooting, knowledge of organization’s and student’s rights and responsibilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Who’s in control?</strong></td>
<td>Counselor and student</td>
<td>Service provider</td>
<td>Customer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Who’s responsible?</strong></td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Service provider</td>
<td>Customer service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>View of students</strong></td>
<td>Whole person with mental, social, physical,</td>
<td>Person who has a qualifying disability and</td>
<td>“Customer is always right:” person to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Counselors</strong></td>
<td><strong>Service Providers</strong></td>
<td><strong>Customer Service</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>spiritual, and emotional needs</td>
<td>a right to services</td>
<td>appease</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Possible negative view of students</strong></td>
<td>Person who is emotionally needy</td>
<td>Person who is trying to take advantage of the system</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>First contact question</strong></td>
<td>“How are you doing?” “What do you need?”</td>
<td>“How can I help you?”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Who evaluates effectiveness of service?</strong></td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Provider</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Who pays for the service?</strong></td>
<td>Sometimes client, sometimes institution</td>
<td>Institution</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Who suffers from inadequate service?</strong></td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Who benefits from quality service?</strong></td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Student and context (i.e., professors, peers, etc.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Desired bottom line</strong></td>
<td>Positive evaluations and referrals</td>
<td>Low-cost adherence to laws</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Who initiates contact?</strong></td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Who decides when the role has been fulfilled?</strong></td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Service provider</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Whose schedule dictates contact?</strong></td>
<td>Counselor office</td>
<td>Service office</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>METHODOLOGY</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This study used qualitative, descriptive methodology. The texts, *Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods* (Patton, 2002) and *Education Research: Competencies for Analysis and Application* (Gay, 1992) proved helpful in designing the study. The results were analyzed using NVivo qualitative analysis software.

Megan NIDRR does not appreciate qualitative research and we need to be as rigorous as we can. Also journals need to appreciate the rigor that we use to obtain our results.
Data Collection

Participants

Recruitment

Both personnel and student participants were recruited through enquiries via email and telephone with staff at the Center for Disability Studies at the University of Hawaii, Manoa, and through enquiries with disability support personnel at several University of Hawaii campuses. Personnel were required to be in a position devoted solely or mostly to the support of students with disabilities on their campus. Student participants were required (a) to be currently enrolled in an undergraduate or graduate program at one of the University of Hawaii campuses and (b) to be receiving or seeking to receive support services related to a disability (except cognitive impairment or mental incompetence). An attempt was made to recruit students who varied in terms of disability (i.e. sensory, mobility, learning) and course of study, and personnel who varied in terms of experience and focus (i.e. working with students who have a specific type of disability). However, due to limitations in the number of participants who were recruited, this diversity was not as well represented as would have been hoped.

Demographics

The participants include three students who have a physical or learning disability and two disability support personnel at the University of Hawaii (total of five participants). Participants represent three University of Hawaii campuses. It is interesting to note that none of the students attend a campus where either of the personnel are employed. This is because personnel who work at the campus' attended by student participants refused to participate in the study. Participants range in age from their twenties to their fifties. Most of the participants are Caucasian, although one participant is of Pacific Island heritage. A description of each participant is given below. It is recognized that normally in qualitative research a rich description of the participants adds an important dimension to the findings. However, because of the limited number of students with disabilities and support personnel in the UH system, descriptions of participants in this study are quite brief, in the interest of maintaining confidentiality.

1 Susan is an advanced degree student who has a learning disability. She returned to school to pursue a postsecondary education after a number of years in the workforce.

2 Lehua is a student in a professional program and has a learning disability. She returned to school after obtaining her undergraduate degree and working for several years.

3 Michael is an undergraduate student who is Deaf. He will soon graduate and is not sure if he will be pursuing an advanced degree.

4 Mary provides supports to students with disabilities on her campus. She has been in her current position for several years.

5 Nani also provides supports to students with disabilities on her campus. She has been in
her position for a number of years.

Confidentiality and Consent

There were no known risks or benefits associated with participating in this study. However, the study has the potential to contribute to society’s understanding about the importance of service provision and the student/personnel relationship to the success of students with disabilities in postsecondary education. The confidentiality of all participants was maintained via code names and general descriptions. All participants were given a complete description of the project and were asked to sign a letter of consent prior to their participation that assured them (a) that their participation in the study will constitute no known benefits or risks, and (b) that their confidentiality will be maintained throughout the study and in any published work that results from the study. Participants were informed that they would be provided with alternative formats of any project descriptions or consent forms as appropriate (Braille, large print, disk, etc.).

Instruments

Because of the exploratory nature of this study and because of restraints on time and scope, open-ended interviews were the only instrument employed. Each participant, students and personnel, were interviewed for approximately one hour at a location of the participant’s choice. Interviews were conversational in style, but an interview guide was employed to provide structure to the interviews (see Table 2). With the permission of participants, the interviews were audio-taped and transcribed. Each interview began with general questions about the participant’s background and proceeded with open-ended questions structured around the interview guide but with room for elaboration and new directions based on the participant’s responses. The questions were guided by the concepts discussed in the literature review, with a view to describing how participants view the role of support personnel and how these perceptions might potentially impact the personnel/student relationship and the provision of supports. The interviews explored participants’ goals and objectives, views of the value of a postsecondary education, general experiences with postsecondary education and disability support provision (as a student or employee), perceptions about the role of disability support provision and the student/personnel relationship, and past and current experiences with student/personnel interactions.

Table 2: Interview Guide

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Describe your academic Background (where, yrs).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Describe your career Background (where, yrs).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Describe your disability, if applicable (what, when).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Describe services that you currently provide/receive in postsecondary education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>What is the role of the support provider in service provision?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>What should the role of the support provider be? Why?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>How do you think people’s definition of this role may impact service provision?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>How does/should this role differ from that of the student?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>What are your experiences with service provision? With students, staff, administrators?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Data Analysis

Coding

Analysis of the data was descriptive and consisted of coding data first by hand and then using NVivo qualitative interpretation software. Interview transcripts were read through several times and coded by hand by the principal researcher and two graduate student assistants in order to develop a general sense of the data and begin developing codes around emerging themes. Data was then coded and grouped according to more specific themes using NVivo software. A coding sheet was used for the analysis. Coding evolved around primary themes, which then led to sub-themes (called “nodes”). Each code on the coding list was followed by a specific description of that code. Some examples of primary codes appear in the table below (Table 3).

Table 3: Examples of Codes (“Nodes”)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Concept</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional Role</td>
<td>Counselor</td>
<td>Coun</td>
<td>Expectations for a counseling role, including personal problems, a relationship of trust, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Role</td>
<td>Service Provider</td>
<td>Serv</td>
<td>Expectations for provision of services as main role</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Role</td>
<td>Customer Service</td>
<td>Cust</td>
<td>Expectations for a customer service role, including listening to complaints, adjusting accommodations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Role</td>
<td>Trainer</td>
<td>Train</td>
<td>Expectations for training in self-determination, using accommodations, or navigating the system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Role</td>
<td>Advocate</td>
<td>Adv</td>
<td>Provider seen as advocate or needing to advocate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Role</td>
<td>Active</td>
<td>Act</td>
<td>Expectations for student to be active in advocating, and willing to go out and search for assistance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Role</td>
<td>Passive</td>
<td>Pass</td>
<td>Students accept what given</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship Characteristics</td>
<td>Availability</td>
<td>Avail</td>
<td>Availability of the service provider is an important part of the relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship</td>
<td>Initiative</td>
<td>Init</td>
<td>Showing initiative (i.e., to know students, start, suggest and maintain services) versus passivity, comfort, status quo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship</td>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>Trusting or trustworthy versus mistrust, taking advantage, getting away with something, suspicion</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Relationship            | Reliability  | Reliab | Reliable versus unreliable, uncommunicative, inconsiderate. Expectations for reliable service, follow the rules, show up to class.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Concept</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relationship</td>
<td>Accountability</td>
<td>Account</td>
<td>Accountable versus saying but not doing, appear to take action or hold beliefs but not follow through</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship</td>
<td>Responsibility</td>
<td>Respons</td>
<td>Take responsibility versus pass the ball, make excuses for not following through (i.e. cost, other activities)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation of services</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>Eval-</td>
<td>Aspects of services and supports that were not helpful or that hindered students’ learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation of services</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>Eval+</td>
<td>Positive evaluation of services</td>
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<td>Services comply with ADA, or services stop at compliance</td>
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<td>Need</td>
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<td>Describe accommodations/supports that are needed or are important</td>
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<td>Supports</td>
<td>Importance</td>
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<td>Attribute importance to or describe why accommodations/supports are important</td>
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<td>Provider Feelings</td>
<td>SP Feel</td>
<td>Provider’s feelings regarding their position</td>
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<td>Positive</td>
<td>AAD+</td>
<td>When others perceive disability as normal and positive</td>
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<td>Negative</td>
<td>AAD-</td>
<td>When people do not accept individuals with disabilities or refuse to make accommodations</td>
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<td>Attitudes towards people with disabilities on campus, i.e. faculty, other students, administration</td>
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<td>Interviewee attitudes about people with disabilities or their own disability</td>
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**Reliability and Validity**

Reliability of the data was achieved through (a) some variation in participants’ type of disability and area of study (students) and experience and focus (personnel), and (b) recognition that the results of the study are exploratory and applicable within a limited context but could be used to direct a broader level of enquiry. Validity was achieved through triangulation in data analysis (i.e. multiple interpreters, multiple coding methods).

**RESULTS**

The results of the study are divided into the following three sections:

1. Experiences and processes – This section details how participants view the experience of
disability, it’s impact upon postsecondary participation, and the postsecondary support provision process. There is also a brief section on participants’ experiences with community supports that effect postsecondary students with disabilities, such as the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation. Overall, participants indicate that disability affects many aspects of a person’s life, from daily tasks that most people take for granted to the cognitively demanding tasks inherent in postsecondary environments. Students talk about difficulties they've had with the disability support-provision process. Both students and personnel talk about experiencing apathetic or negative attitudes about disability on campus.

2. Role of support personnel – This section details what participants say about the role of the postsecondary disability support provider, often identifying roles such as advocate, counselor, service provider, educator, or a combination of roles. Participants talk about the need for advocacy; the importance of counseling and social support for students; and the need for someone to educate students about the impact of their disability, accommodations, and self-advocacy. But participants also say that there is a heavy focus on eligibility determination and service provision.

3. Suggestions for improving the service provision process – This section briefly summarizes what participants say about improvements that need to be made, both to improve the success of students with disabilities and to improve the ability of personnel to provide needed services. Students and personnel have different perspectives about many areas, but also agree on several points, including that accommodations and supports are important to the success of many students with disabilities, and that there is a need to improve the attitudes and awareness of faculty, administrators and other students on campus about disability.

Experiences and Processes

The section below details what participants say about (a) what it is like to experience a disability, (b) their experiences with the university and the disability support-provision process, and (c) some of their experiences with community supports that impact postsecondary students with disabilities.

Experiencing Disability

“A person with a learning disability has trouble organizing their life... [and] when I’m in new environments something happens. What I’ve since discovered is that there are environments that I can’t function in at all. There are environments where I need accommodations. And then there are environments where the sky’s the limit…”

-Susan-

Students report that their disability impacts many areas of their lives, including the “simple” aspects of daily living and learning. Susan describes how her learning disability, which effects her audio discrimination, reading comprehension, and comprehension of spatial relationships, effects her ability to organize her life and deal with new situations:
“I’m not able to drive, because it’s too chaotic for me. So a simple thing like that, which everybody can do, can cause me problems.”
-Susan-

Lehua also has a learning disability and she describes the effect of her disability on processing information:

“Sometimes when I speak, I’m processing some of it in my head but I don’t say it out loud so I jump from A to D, and everybody’s going ‘what the hell is she talking about?’”
-Lehua-

Another aspect of the disability experience for students is the feeling that they are alone with the task of trying to figure out how to cope with the daily challenges resulting from their disability, particularly just after their disability is diagnosed or when they are undergoing a transition from one environment to another. Susan describes this experience, saying:

“[When I first started work] I couldn’t identify what [the problem] was, but it was a transition. And I did fall on my face…Once you’re tested, and you’re given the information, there’s no counseling. That’s another piece of the puzzle that’s not there…You feel like you can barely tie your shoelaces, and what is that going to mean for you in the future?”
-Susan-

Michael talks about how the experience of disability, or the way that it affects life, may be different across individuals and different types of disabilities. Even though he is Deaf, he says:

“Others definitely have different experiences from me. I mean everybody’s different. I can’t really judge the things [other people] require. You know, someone with a wheelchair, someone [who can’t see]…that kind of thing…For me, I need to be talking. Simple.”
-Michael-

Personnel describe the disability experience somewhat differently than do students. What they see of disability is its effect on students’ self-confidence and ability to do things for themselves:

“When I started [this job] I used to have students come and put an envelope on my desk and go, ‘I need help with that.’ And I’d look at it and I’d go, ‘It’s not even open yet.’ And they’d go ‘Yeah, but, I don’t know what it is.’ [I would say,] ‘Well, you need to open it! Why don’t you try to open it and see if you can figure it out?’”
-Mary-

“Those that succeed, I think that they probably have it in them but they didn’t know it. And those that didn’t know it, they see it in others, and others bring it out of them.”
-Nani-
Experiencing the University and Postsecondary Support Provision

“My experience has been with accommodations [that people say], ‘Well, you’re learning disabled, we don’t really know how to accommodate you, so all we’re really going to do is give you double time.”

-Lehua-

“We’ve had a little bit of problem with instructors wearing [assistive listening devices for students with hearing impairments]…there’s some resistance. And [the student’s] afraid to face up to the resistance, afraid of retaliation, or not quite getting as good of a grade.”

-Mary-

Impact of Disability on Postsecondary Participation

One issue that several participants talk about is the conflict between the university’s need to have documentation of a student’s disability and the student’s need for privacy about their disability:

“People are kind of intimidated, I guess, to self-identify until they fail a couple of classes or a couple of tests… [But] by law, you’ve got to self-identify. You’ve got to be the one to walk in and say ‘I have a disability’, first of all. Second of all you have to provide the documents…This is where I have the biggest barrier because very few come back with documentation.”

-Nani-

“I only disclosed to one professor that I actually had dyslexia. And that’s only because she’s the only one that asked.”

-Lehua-

All of the participants feel that students with disabilities face many difficulties when they are adjusting to the postsecondary setting, particularly because of differences between secondary and postsecondary environments, or in some cases undergraduate and graduate environments, in the level of academics, the pace, and the level of integration in the classroom (mix of disabled and non-disabled students):

“[When I first started graduate studies], because of how high or how much the workload was, I was in way over my head, I had seven weeks of anxiety.”

-Susan-

“When I started doing the work, it was really hard because, just the amount of reading was so difficult, and I was finding that I was falling behind. It would take me two times the amount of time to read what other people are reading like in one day…I was finding I was falling behind in class and I would just totally stress out. I just couldn’t handle them calling on me ‘cause even if I read it, I didn’t totally understand it.”

-Lehua-

“I just see that students who are coming here under-prepared are sometimes very under-prepared, in both English, math, and then just the ability to keep going…Having the stamina to get through
the course, deal with a couple of blows, ‘I failed the test or I didn’t do that well or I’m frustrated’ and [then] get the help that they need and keep going…it’s tough.”
- Mary-

“[Speaking about a Deaf student who went from a classroom with all Deaf students to a classroom where he was the only Deaf student]… He said, ‘There’s no other Deaf student in that class, it’s just me, and everyone’s looking at the interpreter, and they’re looking at me, and I feel so funny, I feel so isolated, I don’t have anybody to talk with if I don’t understand the problem.’ He had nobody to kind of chat with and he found it very difficult.”
- Mary-

“I don’t see [any other Deaf students at my college]… I think it’s the nature of the [environment] and the higher level of curriculum.”
- Michael-

Another important issue about the postsecondary environment, particularly for personnel, is that personnel feel that students with disabilities often come to college without knowing enough about their disability, what they need in terms of accommodations, and how to express these needs to others:

“Most of [the students with disabilities] are completely unaware of any services at all. They didn’t know there was such a thing. And sometimes they think they don’t need it… [We did a workshop on self-advocacy] and it’s just amazing what we found out about [students’] lack of being able to just speak up for themselves. I thought, ‘How many times are they sitting there in that class completely blown away not knowing what’s going on, and not even knowing what question to ask? Or maybe being fearful of raising their hand [especially when there’s a communication juggle that has to go on].’”
- Mary-

“Someone who’s blind knows how they learn. ‘This is how I can do it best’. They’ve done it and they acquired the skills but someone who has a learning disability doesn’t necessarily know what works, and what doesn’t… [The students say] ‘Wow, I don’t know [how I learn]; nobody ever asked me that before.’”
- Nani-

Nani believes that one problem is that students are not given enough information about their disability in secondary school and that secondary schools do not properly document students’ disabilities:

“[Many students who come to me for services] receive special ed services but they’re not necessarily given accommodations. Every school, every teacher, every classroom is different. Some students may have had a notetaker and not know it. And some teachers would just change the way they require the student to do their work and the student never knows it. And, some students never had accommodations, but they were certified for special ed services. So even though I get documents from the Department of Education and the student had special services in [secondary school], I don’t know what accommodations they gave and I don’t know if they even
had any, and the student doesn’t know [either].”
-Nani-

However, both Susan and Michael talk about how their needs change depending on the learning environment and the professor’s style of teaching:

“[What I need] depends on what’s being taught and how it’s being taught. Again, I’m still learning about accommodations. The more structured something is, the more problems I will have. That’s why [a major in the Social Sciences] was good for me, because it was holistic, and I could find my way around…Something where you design your way through the class…I think that’s why I’m so creative.”
-Susan-

“Because each teacher is different, it’s very hard to [anticipate what you will need]. [Some teachers] I can understand fine, there’s a lot of movement and movement hinting. But a lot of the teaching, it’s not pedantically oriented. [They don’t use slides or] PowerPoint. If I can download the notes off the web…I find that to be much more useful because I can process the information on my own time…Some classes, I can write notes. Some others, there’s no point, it’s more memory retention.”
-Michael-

Students also describe how they try to cope with their disability in order to get by in the postsecondary setting:

“I learned coping skills. When I entered college, something I never thought I could do, undergrad was kind of easy in a way because it’s not as detailed, and especially in [the major that I chose which was] the best major for me because it was much more abstract, and so I could actually cope with it and I had coping mechanisms where even in English they don’t look at your grammar.”
-Lehua-

“[During my undergraduate studies] I asked people [friends] for help if I really didn’t understand…and I would pick professors that I knew were much more abstract and theoretical, so that they wouldn’t dock me on the specific details…I remember I took one professor specifically because he was so theoretical that I could pretty much, as long as I stuck with, somewhere within the area of what he is talking about, I could still get a good grade.”
-Lehua-

“So what I really need is a person to email me the information, and then I can go back and look. And I know it’s accurate because I didn’t take [notes on] it. So these are just tricks that I’m learning myself, at this age!”
-Susan-

“I worked hard, both at the community college and [at the University]… I developed a lot of confidence in myself…I want to do my own thing.”
-Michael-
Student Experiences with Support Provision

Although students say that they believe that disability support personnel and other personnel at the university are “nice”, mean well, and are making an effort to provide a basic level of service to students with disabilities, they also express the need for better information about what is available, more comprehensive services, more dependable services, and greater attention to students’ individual needs. Students also feel that they are sometimes treated with caution or as “trouble makers” if they ask for services other than those that they have been directly offered by personnel. They feel that personnel are overly-concerned with the issue of providing students with accommodations for their disability without “special treatment.”

Students feel that there is a lack of information about the availability of services for students with disabilities on campus, but also that even when they sign up for services support personnel do not give them much information about what services and accommodations might help them:

“If I knew that they had registration services before, I would have asked them for that. But now technology has forced me to do that. I don’t think I realized what they offered in terms of service…I didn’t know what to ask for…I mean I just figured out recently that a class I took in 1992, what I needed was a note taker.”
-Susan-

“I knew that they had tutors and that’s about it. I didn’t find out until my last year about [services available to students with disabilities] because [another student with a learning disability] was in my class.”
-Lehua-

“It’s not like [student services] actively seeks out students to say ‘do you have a disability? Do you need services? What more can we do?’…They didn’t sit down with me and say, ‘these are the list of services you could have.’ The school doesn’t really sit down with us either. I mean they sit down and they ask, ‘Oh, are you O.K., you know, do you think you need more help?’ But they don’t say that here’s some other things that you could have…”
-Lehua-

Lehua also says that the student is often passed over in the assistance-provision decision-making process:

“I went to see an interviewer [at student services], and we sat down and talked for a bit, and then they got the documentation, and then what they did is they, they kind of went back and forth with the school administration, to set up services…The [school] admin and [student services], are the only ones that keep in touch. [Student services] doesn’t respond to the professors directly…When finals come around, [student services] relies on the school to initiate the set up of finals, and then once the school contacts [student services] then they do it. But [student services] refuses for students to call them to set it up.”
-Lehua-
Michael has experienced problems with the dependability of his services:

“I would say that [other support programs I experienced] were like a Mercedes Benz, and this is like a Volvo. Dependable…that’s the difference. Mercedes Benz. Volvo.”
-Michael-

“They tried to call me up to find out if I’m coming to class. [They know I’m Deaf and they don’t use a TTY or Relay Services but] they call me directly. I have no idea that they have called. Typical. Another thing is they send a note taker for my class. I have class on Tuesday, Thursday. They send a note taker on Monday, Wednesday, Friday. Duh…I [also] had some problems with the quality of the interpreter…Then, note taking, I’ve always had a constant struggle getting a note taker.”
-Michael-

Students also talk about service limitations for advanced degree students:

“I said [to the support provider], ‘I may need help with comps. I’ll probably have to take them out of the classroom with an extended time and a different way to learn. And I’m worried about quantitative, because math isn’t my area.’ But ‘I don’t think we have tutors at that level,’ is what she told me.”
-Susan-

“I’m finding that [even with some accommodations], it’s much harder for me to function in [graduate] school than it was as an undergrad.”
-Lehua-

Students feel that when they experience problems with accommodations or services, or have the need for additional services, they are perceived as being a trouble maker. Susan says that when she goes into the disability support office to ask for services, she can “feel [her] face drooping”:

“[They’re cautious…] And [when I asked for more services the support provider said], ‘You do not demand.’ I still remember it…You’re handed this information that you have all of these disabilities. You’re trying to figure out how you can…I mean…I guess I got a little demanding?”
-Susan-

Students also get the impression that personnel expect them to feel grateful for the accommodations that they do receive:

“They make you feel that you should be grateful to receive services. That’s the main feeling that I got, and that’s probably why I don’t ask them for a lot.”
-Susan-

Students said that, overall, the university and support personnel have a reactive approach to provision:
“[Student services] do the emotional check-in, when I do see [them], but I’ve only seen [them], out of the two years I think I’ve only seen [them] twice. And that was mostly in the beginning.”

-Lehua-

“Our admin [is hands-off] when it comes to accommodations… They wait to see if someone has a problem, and then they ask if you have a disability… [And then they look at the student in terms of] what’s the easiest way to deal with this…let’s just, hook them up to [student services] and then let go.”

-Lehua-

“[The other programs that I attended were designed for students who are Deaf]. Here, it’s more for any disability, so you become homogenized, one-thing-fits-all. So, they’re continually having to adapt, and they’re slow to adapt.”

-Michael-

Underlying many of the students’ comments about what they perceive as passivity on the part of support personnel is the issue of accommodations versus “special treatment.” Personnel who participated in this study also raised the issue of providing accommodations versus special treatment:

“I just don’t agree with providing services when the student didn’t show up. I don’t think they should get the notes. Unless, there are situations, I mean if it has to do with the disability, that’s different.”

-Mary-

“[I usually don’t provide notetakers to students with learning disabilities because] they do ok with a tape recorder and we try to have them be as independent as possible. The documentation has to be really…there…for me to give a notetaker for someone who has a learning disability, and it’s not usually adequate. [The documentation] would need to tell me what kind of learning disability - a math disability, reading disability, writing disability- I don’t know what that learning disability is [without the documentation].”

-Nani-

**Attitudes of Faculty, Administrators and Students**

With the exception of Michael, who says that he experiences few problems with professors, administrators and other students over his Deafness, participants are all concerned about the attitudes of others in the campus community about disability. Students and personnel talk about apathy, lack of understanding and blatant discrimination as being a pervasive problem in the postsecondary setting.

Participants agree that many professors view students who have a disability with suspicion and misunderstanding:

“I have had professors make me cry…Because I was not prepared for the response. And I was sent out there to get this particular class or talk to this professor, not knowing how I was going to
[talk to them]. [Professors would say], ‘How did you get this far?’ and, ‘Get out of my office.’”
-Susan-

“Students with LD probably have the least...faculty do not like to deal with people with LD. They don’t understand it. They can’t see it. They don’t know how to help. And that’s the fastest growing disability right now.”
-Susan-

“Some professors just thought I was like slacking, or stupid…A majority of professors don’t really ask [about your disability]. Part of it is because it’s a little bit of a sore issue…the accommodations in our school…I had the people that are mad at me for getting the double time, then I had the people that were treating me like I was retarded. ‘Are you O.K., can you understand? Do you want me to explain what this word is? Do I need to go slower?’ I’m like…I’m not slow, it’s just, give me the time to put it together, I’m not slow!”
-Lehua-

“Sometimes I’ve had people just say, flat out, ‘[Disabled] people can’t take this class…The way my class is designed it just wouldn’t work.’…It doesn’t matter that they have a Ph.D.”
-Mary-

“A lot of times the professors just don’t know [that they are required to use certain accommodations]. They think that it’s their choice…[They’ll say,] ‘It’s not comfortable’ or ‘I’ve done this before and it got in my way’…They just don’t want to be bothered.”
-Mary-

“It’s the mentality of some of the older faculty that don’t come to workshops, don’t think it’s an issue, don’t believe there’s such a thing as a learning disability, still use the word ‘handicapped’, still tell a student, ‘You’ll never get a job in this field’. There’s still a handful, a good sized handful, of those that just don’t get it…When they were in school [a disability] was a sign of laziness or lack of motivation…‘You shouldn’t even be in school if you couldn’t keep up’, that kind of attitude.”
-Nani-

Both students and personnel also said that administrators don’t take the needs of students with disabilities seriously, and that apathy on the part of the administration is reflected in the attitudes of others on campus:

“Basically, what [the Dean] said to me is, ‘You’re clever. You’re smart. You can figure it out.’ That’s what he told me…I said, ‘No, I can’t figure it out. That’s why I’m here.’”
-Susan-

“I found someone to help me with one of my writing classes. And then the Dean that I see for [support], she was asking me why I hadn’t found tutors for other students that didn’t have disabilities.”
-Lehua-
“What I notice [when I give awareness talks to administrators and faculty is that] the same people show up: the people who are interested and the people who are doing pretty well.”
-Mary-

“It’s been the college’s feeling that as long as the federal government will pay, then they don’t have to worry about [accommodations]...They recently moved me to a different building than the other counselors, so I don’t have any clerical support, and I operate off of a two phone line with a message machine.”
-Nani-

“My administration has not been supportive at all, when it comes to disability training. Because they don’t come to it, so, it’s not seen as a value.”
-Nani-

Of particular concern to Susan and Lehua is that other students feel that accommodations give students with disabilities an unfair advantage:

“…The big thing that’s been a worry for a lot of people with learning disabilities is people are going to say, ‘Who’s that person in the class?’”
-Susan-

“At first I felt bad about even having the double time, because of the reactions that I got… I actually had bad feedback about getting the double time from my classmates…When you take the finals at school, and people know you’re not there, and they know you’re at ‘[name of student services program]’, and a lot of students have voiced that it’s unfair, that people with learning disabilities are faking it to get the double time, which really kind of screws up the curve.”
-Lehua-

“There’s this whole secrecy thing in school about finding out who has, who’s the one with the learning disability…The ones with the learning disabilities are always trying to hide [because] there’s that fear that, if they see you at [name of student services program] then they’ll tell the other people.”
-Lehua-

“Overall, my experience with school has been that people tend to think that people with learning disabilities have mental issues. They don’t think of it as an actual disability. They think of it as just, ‘They’re retarded’ or, ‘They have emotional problems’ and ADD is, ‘Oh, those people are on drugs. Those people are faking it ‘cause they want more’…I did have a classmate that said, ‘Oh we should file a lawsuit about this double time privilege’!”
-Lehua-

Experiencing the Community

“It’s difficult for me to work one on one with a student and see them jumping through hoops and not getting services from the only agency in the community that is state-
funded, designated for people with disabilities, and they're just, not able to get that service.”  
-Nani-

Although participants were not asked specifically to describe their experiences with disability-related services outside of the university, some participants did talk about outside services provided by the Department of Rehabilitation, employers and other community agencies that affect student participation in postsecondary settings.

Mary and Nani note that students are limited by the fact that they have to be already successful in order to receive services from the Department of Rehabilitation (a government agency designed to assist individuals with disabilities in obtaining the education and skills that they need in order to work and participate in the community):

“Most of the [students with disabilities] need Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) support, and so they have to prove themselves. You have to show that you’re doing something to make it [and that it’s] beneficial to move on.”  
-Mary-

Mary also says that Department of Rehabilitation (VR) personnel tell her that resources are limited so she needs to move students quickly through the postsecondary system:

“[In some states] VR’s were going, ‘Why are we paying for [accommodations]? Shouldn’t it be the university’s responsibility?’ They’re willing to pay for [accommodations in Hawaii], but we’ll see. [I had a meeting where the VR counselor] was basically saying, ‘Why aren’t you graduating people sooner?...There’s more students than ever and it’s costing us so much and…’ I said, ‘Yeah, but that’s good news isn’t it? Isn’t that what we want?’”  
-Mary-

Susan talks about her experience with trying to improve services for adults with learning disabilities in the community, where organizations are afraid to “open the floodgates”:

“When I talk to people in the community, ‘Well, we’d love to help, but if we open up our doors, we’ll be flooded.’ The LD association of Hawaii doesn’t even help adults. So, it’s like, all of a sudden you graduated from high school, and you don’t have LD anymore. Well, guess what? You end up in jail, ‘cause you can’t hold down a job. Or you end up in prostitution, or who knows, on drugs.”  
-Susan-

An interesting finding is that Susan, in particular, has had better luck receiving accommodations and supports from her employers than from the university or community resources:

“I went to [my boss] and said, ‘You know what, I need help.’ And ‘Can you help me?’ So now I have a student worker, who does things in twenty-five minutes that would take me three and a half hours to do. And I’m supposed to be getting assistive technology with a computer talking back to me, and different things, and organizing. I wish [the computer] would organize my head,
but it organizes what I’ve got there.”

-Susan-

“[At work I have an assistant who] proof reads. She [helps me with] my school-work too, which [my boss] said was fine. [She does things like] inputting information into technology. She [gets] frustrated, too. But it would have taken me [a day] and a half to do it. It took her two hours to do it…”

-Susan-

Role of Support Personnel

The section below details what participants say about the multiple roles of the support provider, and the need for these different roles. The most common functions mentioned are (a) advocate, (b) counselor, (c) service provider, and (d) educator. Students indicate the impact on their academic success when one of these roles is not fulfilled. Personnel indicate that the multiple roles are important, but sometimes confusing.

Advocate

“If [the support office] and the [graduate] school would do more than just set up. Like if they would do more interaction with each other…And I think for [the support office], if they would be more like an advocacy unit, as opposed to, just a service provider [that would really help me.]”

-Lehua-

The role of advocate is prominent in terms of the activities that personnel describe, such as communicating with faculty about students’ rights, sending letters to validate services, and awareness training. Students also express a need for advocacy when faced with attitudinal barriers and complex systems of service.

Students talk about a lack of advocacy in the support office:

“I realized that [student services is] not really an advocacy…they’re not geared towards saying ‘let’s expand it’… My experience with them is they’re very pleasant, really nice people, but they’re not the type of people that you’d stick out there to advocate for you.”

-Lehua-

“I don’t think it should be the student’s responsibility to solve every problem.”

-Susan-

Lehua talks about why there is a need for someone with system knowledge to help students advocate:

“It would have been much easier if [someone was helping me]…sometimes I would think, ‘I could advocate for this,’ but then I would think, ‘How does that work within the system of the…school?”

-Lehua-
Bridging the gap between students and professors seems to be an important part of the service provider’s role. Personnel talk about sending letters to professors about students’ needs, conducting awareness training, and intervening when professors discriminate.

“It’s [a student’s] right [to decide when we intervene], because as much as you say people can’t discriminate, they do…So we wait, ask [the student], several times she said just go ahead, so we’ll intervene.”

-Mary-

“[When professors say that they can choose whether to accommodate a student, I say] ‘You don’t have a choice, this is accommodations, this is their right, this is the law, you have to’…‘Excuse me, but they have every right to take this class, it will work, it’s worked before, here’s HOW. Let me explain to you’. So there’s a lot of that…just dealing with people’s complete ignorance.”

-Mary-

“For our students we usually try to have an awareness meeting with the faculty… We do send out notification…‘We have a student in your class…who is utilizing these services.’”

-Mary-

“And then the instructor knows from getting that letter the first week that the student is part of our program, and…they can call me.”

-Nani-

However, personnel also discuss issues that restrict their capacity as advocates, such as an administration that expects them to protect the institution first (i.e., from law suits), and a dependence on documentation in order to meet students’ advocacy needs:

“If there’s a problem on campus it comes to me, so I guess I put out fires…put out the fires of civil rights, then everybody else can go out and continue to make their mistakes because [Nani’s] going to put out the fire.”

-Nani-

“And I say, ‘Fine. If he wants to get the documentation to me, then I can provide the letter…’ And she goes, ‘…I was wondering why he didn’t get one of those letters’. And I said, ‘that’s because I don’t have the documentation to support his request.’” [Speaking about a faculty member with a question about accommodating a student who says that he has a disability]

-Nani-

“If they have documents on file with me then I would advocate for them to get the chance to make up that test.”

-Nani-

Another conflict within the advocacy role is whether or not the support provider should provide advocacy services or training so that the students can advocate for themselves. Personnel talk
about the lack of “self-determination,” including qualities such as self-knowledge and self-advocacy skills, which students exhibit. Personnel attribute lack of self-determination to the fact that for many students with disabilities, “Everything was done for them in special education.” Personnel feel that students need to learn to do things for themselves:

“I’m right in the stage of going ‘There’s this fine line between doing things for them—which is the way I think special education is set up, and which I think causes a lot of problems for our students—and [having them do things for themselves]. I think my main role is to teach them how to be assertive, self-directed. So, I’m not teaching them if I do it [myself]… I think there’s been a lot of, maybe a lack of feeling like they could do—that they have the potential to do—and a lot people doing for them. And so now it’s switching that table around and it’s tough, it’s tough.”
-Mary-

“When [students with disabilities] get to these instructors at the college level, the instructor goes, ‘Well how can I help you?’ And they’re like, ‘I don’t know.’ ‘Then why do you think I need to give you extra time for your test?’ ‘Oh, I don’t know.’ They don’t come across as self-advocates. I think that would be a real important part of the preparation [in secondary school]…understanding their disability and advocating.”
-Nani-

“Dependency is] just not something that we encourage…Because otherwise you get a lot of…other students coming in going, ‘Well, I need a note taker too.’ And that’s not what I want our program to portray, our service as just being note taking, you know. I’d like to think that we are the type of program that’s going to teach you how to be a good student, and understand your disability.”
-Nani-

_Counselor_

“I was really vulnerable. I had just been tested two months before…I still was vulnerable. And I knew that if someone had helped me through that process…to get to the point where I could go out and just find environments that I could function in. That’s not easy to do when you have to support yourself.”
-Susan-

Counseling appears to be an important role for personnel, especially when students need help coping with the effects of their disability on their postsecondary experience. While most schools have counselors available to all students, participants suggest that a counselor’s knowledge of disabilities makes a significant difference in the effectiveness of counseling:

“Once you’re tested, and you’re given the information, there’s no counseling. That’s another piece of the puzzle that’s not there…I mean, you can go see a therapist, but therapists don’t know about learning disabilities.”
-Susan-

“I went to the [student support] office and talked to my counselor…And I told him I have so
much anxiety, and I don’t know what to do. It’s so overwhelming. So what he did was he gave me names and numbers of places to go. One…was to see a therapist at the Student Development Center. I went to see this therapist. He told me, ‘There’s nothing wrong with you. You just need to calm down. You don’t need any medication, or anything like that. You just need to deal with what the learning disability is manifesting, which is anxiety.’ So that’s basically the help that I got, was to go to different places. [But] I’m thinking someone who’s not as motivated or self-directed as I am would have difficulty with that.”

-Susan-

Mary talks about students who are Deaf needing a counselor who can sign so that they don’t have to have a third party in the room when they discuss personal issues, and Michael also says it would be better if student services had a staff person who was Deaf and could understand his needs:

“Some of it is that [students who are Deaf] don’t have that good of communication with their parents, and may never have had, and so they never have had the chance to kind of deal with some [adolescent] issues. When they’re able to get a counselor who can sign, it’s like they got it, they can tell it all.”

-Mary-

“The guy [counselor] in the wheelchair doesn’t know about me being Deaf. I’m dying, you know.”

-Michael-

Both students and personnel agree that counseling is an important role for the service provider, not only for academic counseling, but also for personal issues, anxiety and frustration, and even daily tasks that students need help understanding:

“If they need counseling, they would come and see me.”

-Nani-

“A counselor, you know, is more of one-on-one. We meet and we talk about classes and where are you going and tell me what’s bothering you…”

-Mary-

 “[We have students] who are moving out, for the first time… while trying to deal with their first or second year of college, so all of that [is what I deal with]—the friendship ups and downs…and this and that…”

-Mary-

Personnel mention that another function of the support provider as counselor is to help students connect to the social support they need. They see this as a vital component to students’ success in school:

“Connectedness is essential for them to get a good education, in my mind…That’s a big job, too, is try to find things on campus, so they’ll stay here and feel connected here.”
“It’s just a matter of trying to get a good enough support group going for them to go. ‘O.K., well, we’re all in this together, you can do it.’”

“And so there’s…a little support network that, because [they] hang out by [my] office…[they] meet other people with disabilities and…have that support.”

Participants also suggest that providers need to have a trusting counseling relationship with students in order to meet their needs.

“So they need [to have a relationship where they say], ‘Hi, so-and-so’…Because at this point, I don’t think they know what’s happening to their students.”

“I would prefer as a counselor to be seen as someone that they could trust.”

“[Students] come in and discuss their progress with me, and it’s like we have this little bit closer relationship.”

“You have to have trust and understanding.”

All of the participants agree that the provision of accommodations and services is a major role of the postsecondary disability support person. However, while personnel seem to focus on documentation and compliance with policy, students talk about the need for individualized services.

Students encounter inflexibility in the service provision process, where the services office will do only what they’ve done before for certain categories of disabilities, and not pay much attention to the students’ actual individual needs:

“They’re comfortable…they do serve a purpose, and they do offer services which I am thankful for what I get. But I think they’re in a niche where they [say], ‘This is how our office functions,’ and it doesn’t really push them.”
“My experience has been, ‘O.K. you have a disability, this is what we can offer you.’”
-Lehua-

“And the focus, I think, seems to be on the student’s [failure]—well the student didn’t make it. Whereas, if they were able to be more proactive and [focused] a little more [on] retention, then I think it would be a better program.”
-Susan-

“[I need the support provider] to be able to offer more support, and that would be very individual. My disability is very different from my friend’s in [graduate] school. So those accommodations that she gets may not be the ones that I need. So it’s kind of a dual relationship. They need to be open to new ideas.”
-Susan-

“[The disability support office needs] more assessment around what the real needs were as opposed to ‘this is what we’ve done in the past.’”
-Lehua-

Mary describes a case of providing for a student according to individual needs in different situations:

“There’s one student who uses amplification, she sometimes uses Computers As Notetakers. She’s learning ASL, so she sometimes uses an interpreter. It depends on the class, exactly what she thinks she needs. Like if it was a real technical class, she doesn’t know those signs, so she either has to use CAN or sometimes she’ll do both the CAN and the amplification.”
-Mary-

Nani describes her role in terms of “gatekeeping”—eligibility assessment from documentation—in order to provide services and keep the institution in compliance with the laws. Nani says that documentation is necessary in order to determine students’ needs and to validate services to the faculty:

“I take a look at the documentation and find out if it’s something that would warrant an accommodation...We ask them a series of thirty questions, to try to screen students, to see if they have learning challenges or a disability, so that we can bring them into the program.”
-Nani-

“I have to stick to my policies as far as what I understand them to be, across the nation for higher education and disability accommodations. You need to have documentation.”
-Nani-

“If your disability definitely is saying you can’t take notes, then we need the documents and we’ll support the accommodation.”
-Nani-
“I think that I keep the college in compliance to disability-related issues as far as access.”
-Nani-

Students talk about how compliance can be a limitation to service-provision:

“They are for the most part in compliance with ADA.”
-Michael-

“But I think they could offer a lot more besides status quo legal stuff that they have to offer.”
-Susan-

“I know I’m generalizing, but, they don’t do anything other than what they think they need [to] be in compliance… [The ADA] helps in the sense of, some education around people’s needs, and I think some people have pushed it where, it gave a little bit more. But… having the ADA doesn’t necessarily ensure that you get what you need.”
-Lehua-

“I think [support services] tries, and I think [support services] cares, but …I think to a certain extent they’re just going to comply…I think [support services] does the, ‘Are we in compliance? Are we at least giving what we’re supposed to give?’ …If they were thinking beyond compliance, they would advocate. Or they would push the envelope and create new services.”
-Lehua-

Often, students need more services than the school’s disability support office provides, in which case, referrals to outside agencies such as the Department of Rehabilitation is another function of the service provision role:

“Many, many, many students are talking about going someplace else…whether or not they get there, most of them need VR support.”
-Mary-

“I make a lot of referrals to Vocational Rehabilitation that are not necessarily successful and they’re not good experiences for these students. And…knowing how valuable vocational rehabilitation can be for a person with disability who wants to train for a goal at a job, and then when I don’t see them getting that support, it frustrates me a lot…I think that’s one of my most difficult areas… trying to get them linked up to community services, and agencies and support services that can help.”
-Nani-

_Educator_

“I think my main role is to teach them how to be assertive, self-directed, and so, I’m not teaching them if I do it.”
-Mary-

Education is regularly mentioned as a responsibility or goal for service providers. From giving students information about what services are available to showing them how to navigate the
school system, to self-determination training, service providers are educators. While personnel stress the importance of teaching students self-advocacy and self-determination, students express a need for training in daily access issues, and especially for information about what kind of services and accommodations could help them:

“I was offline. I was cut off. So they sat me down and they went over, this is how you do the new email. So [I need] things like that, helping me through the process to get access.”
-Susan-

“Mainly [I wish they would do] more with educating students about the services offices do offer…if I knew that they had registration services before, I would have asked them for that.”
-Susan-

“My first semester here, it was way over my head. I didn’t have appropriate advising from anyone. And I didn’t know what to ask for… in ways that could be seen as self-determination, ‘This is what I need.’ But you have to know what it is you need to ask. And they’re not really forthcoming with, ‘Well, we can offer this, this, this, and this.’ You’re not really schooled in that area, in terms of what they have to offer. So I think you’re pretty much on your own. It has to come from you to ask.”
-Susan-

“I’m still learning about accommodations.”
-Susan-

“In retrospect, I should have asked for something that had to do with reading…some kind of help in that.”
-Lehua-

Personnel talk about the different ways they try to educate students:

“I say, ‘Well, I just want to let you know that college is different than high school, you know. A lot of your high school teachers are made very aware of your needs…Professors are all over the place…’ I try to give them a sense of what it would be like.”
-Mary-

“We tell them other ways they can be an independent learner, not just depending on someone to take the notes for them.”
-Nani-

“Many of [the students with disabilities] come back and actually work at the [student services] center for employment experience. And then they learn leadership opportunities and they get experience to put on their resume.”
-Nani-

Personnel consider self-determination training to be an important role within their position, encompassing teaching students to do things themselves and to solve problems without help:
“You can’t just jump in and resolve everything, you know, it’s not really helping. It means you resolve that particular situation at that particular time, but they don’t know how to do it the next time…that’s probably the main role [of the support provider], I would say, is to get them to know what to do when you’re not there.”
-Mary-

“[I try] to keep them interested, motivated, and learning how to ask for help when they need it.”
-Mary-

“Sometimes it reminds me of working with little kids…you know we’re…trying not to give answers, we’re saying… ‘Well, what do you think? What would you do? How would you get that information? Where would you find it?’”
-Mary-

“I try to help them advocate, and learn advocacy skills.”
-Nani-

“I’d like to think that we are the type of program that’s going to teach you how to be a good student, and understand your disability.”
-Nani-

Students agree that self-determination and self-advocacy are important. However, while personnel imply that they struggle not to do too much so that students can learn self-determination, students say that service providers need to do more than they are doing, so that students have the support to be self-determined.

“I think the student needs to understand their disability and how it impacts, or how it affects their learning. And that would be on the job or in class. They need to be able to be self-determined enough to advocate for themselves: ‘This is what I need,’ and should be persistent with that. And then I think on the other side, the disability office needs to be more forthcoming and proactive, especially with students with LD because they get lost.”
-Susan-

“I didn’t advocate enough for myself, and…because of the experience, I’m learning…when I get out, I’ll be able to do that.”
-Lehua-

Another responsibility of service providers is educating the college community about disability issues (see also quotes under “Advocate”):

“I would think that both [support services] and the [graduate] school would know enough about learning disabilities and would … do continual education with each other, about what that is, and with the staff…to really understand what the services are that are needed, and to understand the challenges.”
-Lehua-
Michael is the only participant who does not mention education as a major role for the service provider at this stage in his education. He attributes his confidence to early education and good support programs before college, as well as to knowing how his disability affects him, what accommodations he needs, and when. In fact, he mentions times when he is the one who educates the student support office:

“I explain to them, ‘Oh, you need to call the …[Relay] computer system…or use a TDD.’ Or, ‘Hey, I want that notetaker on Tuesday, Thursday [not Wednesday, Friday].’ You know, they think I have to tell them.”

-Michael-

*Combination of Roles*

“I’ve had that combination role…sometimes I am both their teacher, and their counselor, and I’m the director…that’s a different relationship…” --Mary

Personnel comment about their multiple roles and sometimes say that they have a difficult time keeping their relationship with their students clear:

“They were seeing me in the office, and sometimes they’d talk about the class… like an office hour, and they’d go into counseling issues, and I would just switch hats. But I didn’t know that they got that they were talking to basically two different people…and I try really hard to keep that distinct … If they ask me a counseling question in class, I say, ‘You have to see me afterwards’… Or they’ll say, ‘Oh, I needed to tell you something,’ and I’ll go, ‘No, don’t talk to me about that now, I’m teaching right now.’ So, it’s confusing.”

-Mary-

“They have to separate my counseling efforts from my advocacy efforts.”

-Nani-

Synthesis of Suggestions for Improving Service Provision

*Professional Perceptions about Areas of Improvement*

Service providers identify aspects of their professional situation that could be improved to better support students:

1. Job security, rather than temporary part-time funding for a full-time job.
2. Better support to students from other agencies (i.e., Vocational Rehabilitation).
3. More participation of faculty and administration in awareness training.
4. More support staff with clear roles (i.e., counselor, service provider, director, etc.), instead of one person with many roles.
Student Perceptions about Areas of Improvement

Students identify aspects of the support process that could be improved:

6 Information about what kinds of supports are available that students might not have known about otherwise. Students report not knowing about certain supports until late in their schooling that could have helped them avoid unnecessary hardship.

7 Specific support for advanced students. Graduate students cannot make use of some services (i.e., tutoring) because of their advanced subjects.

8 Availability of the service provider to “walk through” general problems (i.e., learning a new email program).

9 Opportunity for feedback from students, as well as a greater amount of communication between support personnel and students, faculty, and other campus entities.

10 “Proactive” rather than “reactive” service (i.e., being open to new ideas, or investigating and providing types of services that they haven’t before).

11 Access to the system. Students indicate that they are unable to contribute to the process because of rigid lines of communication (i.e., between the support office and certain schools).

Areas Where Professionals and Students Agree

Students and professionals strongly agree that:

12 Accommodations and supports are important to student success in postsecondary education.

13 Communication and trust between students and professionals is important to the success of service provision.

14 Faculty, administrators and other students need to be better educated about disability accommodations and experiences.

DISCUSSION

Differences in Expectations of the Overall Professional Role

An important finding of the study is that participants who are postsecondary students see the overall role of the postsecondary disability support person differently than do participants who are actually disability support personnel. In discussing the role of the support provider, students talk about their own needs; individuality, the need for more information about services, and the need to succeed in the postsecondary environment. They see support personnel, accommodations and service provision as one important vehicle to their success. Support personnel also talk about their own needs as a professional. But they focus on issues of the various players in support provision, students, faculty, administrators, and their role as a professional who, they feel, is required to meet the different expectations of these various players.
Perceptions of Students

Although students feel that professionals are sympathetic to the experience of disability, they also feel that personnel withhold information about services from the student because of lack of funds and/or time, and are focused on compliance rather than upon the student’s individual needs. From the perspective of the student participants in the study, the role of the professional appears to be a three-part process involving:

1. Looking at the student as an individual who has individual strengths, challenges, environments, needs, preferences and goals.
2. Giving the student information about the kinds of supports and accommodations that might assist them to meet their goals in various contexts, and
3. Providing the student with the services and accommodations of the student’s choosing.

Perceptions of Support Personnel

Support personnel who participated in the study are overwhelmed by the perception that administrators, students and their professional colleagues all have different expectations of what their role should be. Participants who are personnel seem to feel that:

1. Administrators want them to be a “compliance officer.” Related expectations of fulfilling this role include keeping a low profile/towing the line, avoiding law-suits, being reactive rather than proactive, making the “problem” go away, spending as little money as possible, and maintaining the validity of service provision to faculty and the college community through an excessive focus on documentation.
2. Students want them to be “counselors.” Related expectations of fulfilling this role include making decisions for the student about what they need, providing a sounding board for student problems, doing things for the student rather than making them do it themselves, advocating on campus regarding student needs and disability issues in general, and providing services/interventions that will help the student to succeed.
3. Professional colleagues (i.e. the field of disability support provision, some faculty) want them to be “service providers.” Related expectations of fulfilling this role include providing access to postsecondary education for students with disabilities, advocating for students through educating the faculty and campus community, teaching students to do things for themselves, implementing the ADA and 504, and including students with disabilities in campus life and the outside community.

Ambiguity of a Multitude of Roles

It is apparent from these results that the role of the postsecondary support person is, in fact, an ambiguous conglomeration of many roles. All of these roles seem to be necessary for students to have access to and succeed in postsecondary education. In addition to expectations from others in the campus community, students may expect different roles at different times. Some students may expect more advocacy (i.e., for specific accommodations in certain classes) while some
students may expect more counseling (i.e., for confusing and frustrating situations). Students definitely expect to be treated as an individual rather than as a disability label or a potential time bomb. Support personnel indicate a need to consciously “change hats” in order not to confuse their relationship with students in certain settings.

The Roles of Advocate and Educator

Based on the results of this study, the roles of advocate and educator are described more frequently than are the role of customer service representative (as described in the matrix in Table 1). The responsibilities of compliance with laws and avoiding lawsuits seems to fit under the role of advocate, perhaps because many of the problems participants discuss have to do more with the attitudes of faculty and students than with a faulty product. Also, the function of a customer service worker that involves investigating and solving problems to the satisfaction of the customer appears to be lacking in participants’ experience, since students found services to be inflexible and personnel found that limited resources and administrative support restricts what they could do or change.

Advocacy appears to be vital to service provision because the attitudes and ignorance of faculty and staff remain a pronounced barrier to equal access to education experienced by students with disabilities. This finding is in opposition to reports that faculty willingness to make accommodations has increased in the last decade (Bourke & Andrew, 2000; Nelson, Dodd, & Smith, 1990).

The role of educator also emerges as one that is important to postsecondary access for individuals with disabilities. This may be because of recent movements in the field related to self-determination training stemming from the discrepancies students experience when they move from secondary to postsecondary educational settings (Stodden et al., 2002). However, while service providers focus on educating students to function without them, students express the need to be educated about how to function with them—citing a lack of information about what accommodations are helpful and available.

The Roles of Counselor and Service Provider

The roles of counselor and of service provider appear to be salient, as expected. One notable finding is that students with learning disabilities may need counselors who have specific knowledge about disabilities because of the disability-related anxiety and challenges that students face. All of the participants identify counseling as an important role for the service provider, indicating an awareness that accommodations alone are not enough to support students to access and succeed in postsecondary education. Along similar lines, participants suggest that service provision must be proactive and flexible in order to truly meet individual needs.

How Different Roles Meet Different Student Needs

Although role-confusion could lead to ineffective communication and inadequate support, it seems that a variety of support roles are necessary in order for students with disabilities to have access to and succeed in postsecondary education. Students are whole people. They are not
order slips, record charts, patients, or children. In order to fully participate in postsecondary education, postsecondary students with disabilities must have their civil rights, socio-emotional, physical, and growth needs met, especially where their disability makes those needs more difficult to manage than others. See the table below (Table 4) for a description of how each of the salient roles that emerged in this study (advocate, counselor, service provider, and educator) may be important.

Table 4: How the roles of advocate, counselor, service provider and educator meet student needs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student needs</th>
<th>Advocate</th>
<th>Counselor</th>
<th>Service Provider</th>
<th>Educator</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Everyday frustrations related to postsecondary institutions and disability (i.e., email system, registration, etc.)</td>
<td>Helps alleviate difficult situations and makes sure accommodations are appropriate</td>
<td>Helps student manage emotional consequences and gives hope and motivation for perseverance</td>
<td>Provides alternative means of accomplishing tasks (i.e., accessible computers, registration service, sign language interpreters, etc.)</td>
<td>Helps students “access the accommodations” by teaching them to use technology or to self-advocate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific learning barriers</td>
<td>Helps communicate with faculty to provide material and examinations in an accessible way, validate accommodations, and ensure student rights</td>
<td>Helps students pinpoint specific ways disability effects learning and cope with discouragement</td>
<td>Provides alternative means of processing information (i.e., note takers, tutors, assistive technology, books on tape, etc.)</td>
<td>Helps students learn to communicate with professors and use effective strategies for processing information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to postsecondary community</td>
<td>Helps students communicate needs with college community in order to gain access (i.e., to recreation, clubs, events, etc.) Builds awareness of disability</td>
<td>Helps students assess their social needs, the effects of their disability on community interaction, and strategies for specific situations Provides means</td>
<td>Provides students with a means for interacting with the community (i.e., wheelchair accessible locations, communication</td>
<td>Trains students to know themselves—their likes, dislikes, strengths, weaknesses, effect of their disability on activities, and means of</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The results of this study provide further evidence that the role of postsecondary disability services personnel includes varied responsibilities, knowledge, and skills. The AHEAD professional standards for postsecondary disability service personnel that were briefly discussed in the literature review, also reflect the multifaceted requirements of the job. Some examples of standards requiring advocacy, counseling, service provision and education follow (for the complete list, see [http://www.ahead.org/publications/standards.html](http://www.ahead.org/publications/standards.html)).

### Advocacy
- Provides information to students regarding their legal rights and responsibilities.
- Serves as an advocate for students with faculty or administrators.
- Serves on campus committees to develop institutional policies and procedures regarding students with disabilities.
- Responsible for organizing training for campus personnel regarding the legal requirements of serving students with disabilities.

### Counseling
- Provides personal/individual counseling to students relating to disability issues.
- Provides academic advisement to students relating to disability issues.
- Provides counseling/advisement to enhance student development (e.g., self-advocacy).
- Assists students in self-monitoring the effectiveness of accommodations.

### Service Provision
- Determines program eligibility for services based upon documentation of a disability.
-Communicates information regarding program activities and services to students.
- Arranges individualized accommodations for students (e.g., testing accommodations).
- Evaluates program services.

### Education
- Consults with faculty regarding the instructional needs of students.
- Consults with institutional administrators regarding the needs of students (e.g., department directors).
- Distributes program brochure or handbook to campus departments (e.g., health services, counseling services).
• Conducts campus-wide disability awareness activities (e.g., disability awareness day).

The results do not indicate that any one aspect of the postsecondary support provider role is more important than any other. Rather, the indication is that many aspects of a variety of roles must be addressed. As discussed in the literature review (Bigaj et al., 1995; Dukes et al., 1999; National Center for the Study of Postsecondary Educational Supports (NCSPES), 2000, June) the question still remains how to adequately train personnel to perform all of these roles, and how services and personnel can be structured in order to ensure maximum support for students with disabilities.

Differences in Expectations of Responsibility and Initiation

Another important finding of the study is that students and professionals have different expectations of who is responsible for initiating and managing accommodations and disability awareness. It appears that both groups of participants expect the other to:

• Initiate services
• Initiate communication
• Pinpoint the accommodation needs of the student
• Advocate for the student, and
• Advocate about general disability issues in the campus community.

Some of the expectations of support personnel regarding initiation are based on their understanding of Federal mandates, such as the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Rehabilitation Act (Sec. 504), which have been interpreted so that the responsibility to self-identify as having a disability, document that disability, and request services related to that disability fall on the student. Additionally, expectations of support providers who participated in this study mirror accounts in the literature where the provider expects students to tell them what they need and to follow a preset menu of supports (Stodden et al., 2002). This perspective is contrary to the expectations of students who participated in this study, who expect the provider to inform them of, and to provide, the services, support and accommodations that will help them to negotiate their postsecondary education.

In some cases, a menu of services and supports may be appropriate, but it is apparent from this study that sometimes even a basic menu of services are not provided. Students may not know about registration services, notetaking services, etc. Students with the same disability may need different types of supports, depending on their classes and other aspects of the learning situation. In such cases, the menu-approach will likely not be enough to appropriately support and accommodate a student.

Perspectives About Student Self-Understanding and Self-Advocacy

It is interesting that support personnel who participated in the study see students as lacking self-determination and self-advocacy skills. Yet all of the students interviewed can clearly describe their disability, its impact upon their learning, strategies that they use to cope with their disability, how they learned about their needs, and how they advocate for their needs. Drawing
conclusions from this finding should be approached with caution, as the students who were interviewed for this study were upper-division or graduate students. Students do mention feelings of having been “lost” when they first started postsecondary school, and describe not having known what accommodations to ask for or that they even could ask for accommodations. However, none of the students mention postsecondary disability support personnel as having contributed to self-understanding (students mostly attribute their self-understanding as resulting from experiencing failure and discrimination, or from support from friends and family).

A common theme that appears in the study is the conflict between the role of advocating for students and the role of training them to advocate for themselves. Students feel that they have enough to struggle with besides asking unwelcoming professors for accommodations. Providers feel that students are not served if they do not learn to manage such situations themselves. Yet all agree that faculty, administrators and other students are in need of a great deal of education about the disability experience and related accommodations. Unfortunately, the tendency may be for overworked, understaffed disability support services offices to neither advocate for students (in the name of self-determination), nor to train them in self-advocacy (because it is time-consuming). In such cases, the students’ need for advocacy intervention and the campus community’s need for education are not met.

IMPLICATIONS

The implications of this study center around the overwhelming need to provide quality supports to students with disabilities in postsecondary education, and the need for the relationship between students and personnel to be one of shared goals and expectations. In order to be sure that students with disabilities truly have access to postsecondary education, the feasibility and effectiveness of addressing several roles by a collection of specified staff (i.e., counselor, advocate, service provider, etc.) should be explored. It is also necessary to ensure adequate fiscal and legislative support for postsecondary institutions that are aimed at meeting the needs of students with disabilities.

Implications for Policy

One option for change at the policy level is to better support models that distribute some roles related to supporting students with disabilities across the campus community (i.e. train counselors about disability related counseling issues, financial aid about disability specific financial issues/support, career guidance centers about job accommodations). The disability support office can act as a point of referral and resource management as well as provide direct services not offered by other entities. The potential hazard of this model is that services may become too dispersed and uncoordinated, and students may loose the sense of “connectedness” and common ground that may be found at the disability support office. However, with careful planning and coordination, there is also the potential under this model for students to become more involved in campus life and to have better access to the greater resources that are available to all students.

Another option is to create mandates and provide funds so that the postsecondary support provision process is aligned more closely to the secondary school and Individualized Education
Plan (IEP) process. For example, a group of staff with various skills (i.e. advocacy, counseling, etc.), a faculty member, an administrator and a student might sit down once a year and discuss the student’s needs, goals and preferences, and then how each member of the team can support the student in meeting the goals set out in the “IEP.” Of course, at a large university with hundreds of students who have a disability, this could prove cumbersome. There is also the issue that postsecondary students are adults, not minors, and cannot be required to disclose their disability or to attend a meeting to discuss service options. However, most postsecondary institutions do provide general or comprehensive counseling and advising services to students on an as-needs basis. It is not unreasonable to expect that students with disabilities should receive the same attention to their disability-related needs as to their programmatic needs.

Implications for Practice

Services should be designated based upon the interaction between the learning situation and a student’s disability, not simply upon the student’s disability “category.” In order for such a process to take place, there must be open communication between the provider, the student, and anyone else involved in the postsecondary process (i.e., faculty, administrators, etc.) The relationship between the student and the provider, and the provider and the administration, needs to be one of trust. Meetings need to be frequent and proactive, rather than being delayed until the student is overwhelmed by a difficulty that could have been avoided. This requires assertiveness on the part of both the student and personnel, and it also requires a commitment on the part of the institution to give personnel the resources and backing that they need in order to support students on a more individualized basis.

Another recommendation is that in order to balance effectively between advocacy and self-advocacy training, providers should first assess whether or not the student’s needs are being met, and from there determine—with student input—whether the student needs training or intervention. Students, in turn, need to be able to articulate their needs and to ask for help when they need it.

Finally, providers should utilize available resources, such as student support groups, advisory panels, professors and programs that have an interest in disability, to fulfill some of the expectations of the provider role. For example, personnel can provide their time/support/guidance and a space for a group of students who are interested in advocacy to meet and talk about issues on campus and how they can work to address them. Or personnel can form an advisory group of professors, students and administrators to tackle certain access, educational and advocacy issues. Personnel can help to form, or refer students to a mentorship program that matches postsecondary students with disabilities with successful adults with disabilities who “know the ropes.”

Implications for Research

The participants of this study agree that supports that are provided to students with disabilities are an important component to their postsecondary success. There is a need to continue to fund research that explores the importance of supports for postsecondary students with disabilities, and the important role that the support provider contributes to this process. Additionally,
although the sample in this study was small, the dichotomy between student self-perception and personnel perceptions of student self-understanding was interesting. Further research should explore personnel perceptions about the self-understanding of students versus actual level of student self-understanding on a wider scale. Finally, it would be valuable to create a quantitative analysis of role expectations and the degree to which various aspects of these roles actually are important to student success in postsecondary education.

SUMMARY

The results of this study indicate that postsecondary students with disabilities and postsecondary disability support personnel may have different perceptions about:

(a) The role of support personnel - Students who participated in the study expect personnel to focus on their individual needs and preferences, and provide them with information and supports that will help them to succeed. Personnel feel that they are pulled in several different directions by the differing expectations of administrators and colleagues as well as by the expectations of students. These various role expectations fall into the role categories of counselor, educator, advocate and service provider, and the results point to the importance of all of these roles to a student’s success in postsecondary education.

(b) Responsibility and initiation - Both students and personnel expect the other to initiate and take responsibility for supports and accommodations, which has the potential to result in miscommunication between personnel and students, and support gaps for students.

(c) Student self-understanding and self-advocacy - Personnel who participated in the study believe that many students with disabilities do not have the self-understanding and self-advocacy skills that are needed to negotiate postsecondary education, while the students who participated in this study exhibit both self-understanding and self-advocacy skills.

Implications of the findings for policy, practice and research encompass (a) changes in the way in which postsecondary supports are structured, for example integrating services or modeling some aspects of the postsecondary support process after the secondary support process, (b) changes in the way in which students and personnel communicate and consider the needs of each individual student, (c) changes in the utilization of existing resources, such as students and faculty who are interested in disability issues, and (d) conducting further research to identify ways to better support students with disabilities in postsecondary education, including both quantitative and qualitative examinations of student characteristics and personnel roles.

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