Two-year Follow up Survey of the National Survey of Support Services for Students with Disabilities

Audience

Students with disabilities, family members of students with disabilities, disability support coordinators, administrators, state and federal policy makers, and other researchers.

Issue

Little is known regarding current practice concerning the provision of educational supports to students with disabilities at the postsecondary level. Two years ago a national survey was conducted and provided crucial information for researchers seeking to ascertain the current status of educational supports in postsecondary programs. The survey and the sub-analyses provided a comprehensive national baseline of data to address issues concerning educational support provision. In concordance with the grant by the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research (NIDRR) that funded this project, a second national survey was conducted in an effort to identify any potential trends regarding institutional offering of support services for students with disabilities.

Information shared in this Brief contributes to one of the four priority areas as identified in the Strategic Program of Research for the RRTC on Postsecondary Educational Support.

Research Question

Have there been any changes (increase/decrease) in the offering of supports to students with disabilities over the past two years? If so, in what areas?

Method

The same survey instrument that was developed for the original survey was distributed to the same randomized and regionally stratified national sample of 1600 disability support coordinators (DSC) created for the original survey. The survey was distributed nationally via two methods. The first method involved the participation of a partnering organization, the Association for Higher Education and Disabilities (AHEAD).
The AHEAD membership list was composed of Disability Service Coordinators of both public and private postsecondary institutions, as well as two-year and four-year institutions. A total of 800 paper copies of the survey were mailed to AHEAD members across the nation on the original sample list. A second institution list of 800 non-AHEAD participants of postsecondary institutions selected from the 1995 Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) CD ROM database, maintained by the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES), U.S. Department of Education. It also consists of public and private institutions, as well as 2-yr. and 4-yr. institutions.

418 respondents (26%) completed the survey providing a profile of characteristics. The previous survey had a response rate of 41%; it is believed that this survey had a lower response rate due to the events of 9/11 especially the Anthrax scare in the U.S. Postal System, which was the same approximate time that the survey was being mailed out across the nation. Although there were fewer respondents, the same percentages of AHEAD and non-AHEAD respondents remained the same. Moreover the same percentages of public and private institutions responded. And lastly, the numbers of 2-yr. vs. 4-yr. Institutions were within 4% of the original survey. Fortunately, these nearly identical percentages in types of respondents have provided researchers with stability and confidence in the samples taken from the national population.

Respondents were asked in survey question #1, “What is the capacity of your institution to offer the following supports or accommodations as needed by students with disabilities?” Question #1 consists of 34 sub-items referencing a specific type of support, and was structured as an ordinal-scale type question, where respondents were to indicate how often during a normal school year, indicated by % of time, that their institution offered each of the 34 different supports or accommodations. The response options were as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of Supports Frequency Count</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 = not offered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 = offered less than 25% of time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 = offered 25-50% of time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 = offered 51-75% of time</td>
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<tr>
<td>4 = offered more than 75% of time</td>
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**Significant Preliminary Findings**

- Of the 33 support services surveyed in Question #1, 21 support services (64%) showed an increase in institutional offering of supports services.
- Areas that improved were items such as AT supports across campus and learning center labs with items such as developmental/remedial instruction that go with these types of services.
- Interpreters, Note takers, and tutors are becoming more available to students with disabilities.
- Transition from school to work increased in areas such as work experience opportunities, internships/externships, and job placement services.
- There is an increase of availability of funds for students with disabilities in the form of disability specific scholarships,
and an increase in support for study abroad.

- Personal counseling and career/voc. Assessment counseling are on the rise.
- Only 1 support (summer orientation program) had a decrease in offering. All others (11) remained approximately the same. These are in areas such as skill building (study, memory, time management).

Preliminary findings indicate that there is an upward trend in support services across the nation; which translates into more frequent offerings of support services for students with disabilities.

**Preliminary Implications**

- Students with disabilities have better access to supports than they did two years ago.
- Students with disabilities and their Families may have more options as to where they might want to pursue their postsecondary education.
- Because the original survey report was disseminated in a wide array of technical reports, journals, and brochures in an effort to ‘get the word out’ as an effort to improve the sequelae of students with disabilities during their postsecondary education, advocates for ‘dissemination of information’ will most likely find this report favorable towards their attitudes and beliefs.

**Contact Information**

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