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Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

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Utilization of Disability Services by
Students With Nonvisible Disabilities

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

by

Cristina A. Figueroa

May 2021

Dedication

To my husband, Alex, for your encouragement and peace throughout this process. Your love and laughter kept me grounded. I could not have achieved this without you, and this accomplishment is as much yours as it is mine.

To Rosa, Nico, and Rocky Lu, for your joy and love. May this work serve as an encouragement to work hard and follow your dreams wherever they may lead you.

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Abstract

A qualitative case study was conducted to examine ways to increase the use of disability services at 4-year universities. Individual interviews were conducted to see how students and staff members felt the use of disability services could be improved. Five students with nonvisible disabilities and four disability and student services staff members participated in the study. Interviews focused on transition, use of campus services, self-advocacy, and knowledge of disability services. A thematic analysis was conducted on the data, and a total of 20 themes were derived from the interviews. Themes focused on the following topics: self-identification is personal, faculty attitude and communication style, staff to student ratio, communication and third-party help, staff members need better job training, departmental collaboration is necessary, and positive faculty relationships are important. Themes also included topics like convenience, stigma, self-advocacy, lack of knowledge, and limited resources. The data indicated students and staff members felt the use of disability services could be increased by improving communication between students, faculty, and staff. Another important factor in increasing the use of disability services was collaboration between departments and between faculty and staff members. Results further indicated participants believed reducing stigma, raising awareness of disabilities, and improving knowledge and faculty and staff training about disabilities were ways to increase the use of campus disability services.

Keywords: nonvisible disabilities, disability services, self-advocacy, students, faculty and staff, universities

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Chapter 1: Introduction

For nearly 50 years, legislation for people with disabilities has and continues to provide students with specialized programs and supports to help them succeed in school. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEIA) entitles students with physical, psychological, and learning disorders to receive accommodations for their disability. IDEIA provides further assistance to students with disabilities by requiring special education at the primary and secondary levels. Students with disabilities from ages 3–21 are identified and provided with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) through the public school system. IDEIA does not, however, apply to students at the postsecondary level. The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, which prohibit discrimination against individuals with disabilities, are instead applied to provide eligible students with reasonable academic accommodations (Kaplin & Lee, 2014).

With IDEIA not governing disability services at the university level, students must self-identify as a student with a disability and request accommodations to receive disability services. Once students initially identify and register as a student with a disability, they must continue to identify themselves to their professors to establish accommodations for each course they take. One out of five students with disabilities who receive disability services in high school continue to receive disability services in college (Horowitz et al., 2017; Sanford et al., 2011). This percentage is low, considering over 90% of students with a learning disability receive disability services in high school (Cortiella & Horowitz, 2014). Additionally, only 58% of students at 4-year colleges or universities who identify as having a disability actually receive accommodations and supports (Sanford et al., 2011).

When it comes to completion rates, about 60% of all students graduate in only six years (Snyder et al., 2019). Comparatively, about 40% of students without a disability graduate from a 4-year university, and slightly less than one-third of students with a disability graduate within six years. (Sanford et al., 2011). Students with disabilities are also more likely to drop out of 4-year universities. The discrepancy between the percentage of students with disabilities who graduate and the percentage of students who use disability services indicate disability services are underutilized.

The differences in disability services at the postsecondary level can make it difficult for students to transition from high school to college and university. Students with disabilities sometimes want to establish a new identity, feel stigmatized, do not know where to find help, or struggle with self-advocacy (Couzens et al., 2015; Deckoff-Jones & Duell, 2018; Hadley, 2017; Hong, 2015; O'Shea & Kaplan, 2018). Furthermore, students with visible disabilities are viewed by students, faculty, and staff more favorably than students with nonvisible disabilities (Sniatecki et al., 2015).

For this study, the focus was only on nonvisible disabilities such as learning disabilities, ADHD, and mental health conditions. Approximately 19.4% of undergraduates report some type of disability (Snyder et al., 2019). Over half of these identified students are classified as having either ADHD, a mental health illness, or a specific learning disability (U. S. Department of Education, 2017b). Students with nonvisible disabilities were also examined because of the multiple barriers and greater stigma they face when attending a university (Deckoff-Jones & Duell, 2018; Hong, 2015). Additionally, Newman and Madaus (2015) found students with nonvisible disabilities are less likely to receive disability-related supports than students with visible disabilities.

Statement of the Problem

In recent years, postsecondary institutions have seen a rise in the enrollment of students with disabilities (Hadley, 2017; Squires et al., 2018), with approximately half of all high school students with disabilities enrolling in classes after graduation (Sanford et al., 2011). Data from the U.S. Department of Education indicates the percentage of undergraduate students with disabilities increased from 11% to 19.4% from 2011 to 2015 (Snyder et al., 2018; Snyder et al., 2019). Postsecondary institutions have especially seen an increase in enrollment of students with nonvisible disabilities like Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), emotional/behavioral disabilities, autism spectrum disorder, learning disabilities, and intellectual disabilities (Sanford et al., 2011). As rates of students with disabilities increase, a concern campuses encounter is that campus disability services are underutilized (Abreu et al., 2016; Fleming, Oertle, & Plotner, 2017; Hong, 2015).

Only about 24% of college students with disabilities seek out campus disability services (Horowitz et al., 2017). This low percentage is not surprising considering students encounter various barriers to seeking out disability services like struggling to self-advocate and feeling stigmatized (Deckoff-Jones & Duell, 2018; Fleming, Oertle, & Plotner, 2017; Hong, 2015; Kranke et al., 2013; Squires & Counterline, 2018). Students may also encounter faculty members who have limited knowledge of disabilities and accommodations (Fleming, Oertle, & Plotner, 2017; Gokool-Baurhoo & Asghar, 2019; Sniatecki et al., 2015). Students with nonvisible disabilities may struggle with identity and not want to disclose their disability status to others (Cox et al., 2017; Hadley, 2017; O'Shea & Kaplan, 2018).

The underutilization of disability services has been found to lead to academic distress (Fleming et al., 2018). In contrast, students who utilize accommodations have more contact with

faculty and are less likely to struggle with assignments (McGregor et al., 2016). Students with disabilities who use supports were found to be more likely to experience positive postsecondary outcomes (Newman et al., 2020). Additionally, students who self-advocate experience a reduction in academic distress (Daly-Cano et al., 2015; Fleming et al., 2018). Faculty and staff help students with self-advocacy, and while barriers to seeking out disability services have been examined at length, there is a need to further study ways university leaders can increase self-advocacy in students with nonvisible disabilities, thus increasing the utilization of disability services (Daly-Cano et al., 2015; Fleming et al., 2018).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine ways to increase the use of disability services at 4-year universities as perceived by students with nonvisible disabilities and by university disability and student services staff members. The perspectives of students and staff members at a mid-sized 4-year Southwestern U.S. public university were explored to provide suggestions to increase the utilization of disability services at 4-year colleges and universities. Research indicated students with disabilities encounter a variety of barriers to establishing disability services and accommodations (Deckoff-Jones & Duell, 2018; Fleming, Oertle, & Plotner, 2017; Hong, 2015; Yssel et al., 2016). Therefore, learning more about the perceptions of students and staff can provide university leaders with knowledge regarding ways to increase the use of campus disability services.

Research Questions

The following research questions were the focus of this study:

RQ1: How can university disability services be more utilized as perceived by students with nonvisible disabilities?

RQ2: How can university disability services be more utilized as perceived by university disability and student services staff members?

Definition of Key Terms

Accommodation. In education, accommodation is the way the existing facilities are made readily accessible to students with disabilities. Accommodations can include the use of equipment or devices, as well as the use of modifications to tests and course materials (Black et al., 2015).

Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA). The Americans with Disabilities Act is a piece of civil rights legislation that was signed into law in 1990 by President George H. W. Bush (U.S. Department of Justice, 2020). The ADA prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities and guarantees they have equal opportunities in all areas of mainstream life like employment, education, and government programs. The ADA does not provide an exhaustive list of qualifying disabilities. A disability is, instead, described as any physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities (ADA, 1990).

Eligibility. Before a student can receive disability services, it must be determined that a student is a person with a disability. Eligibility criteria must be met to determine a student is eligible for services (U.S. Department of Education, 2017a).

Free appropriate public education (FAPE). According to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004, a free and appropriate public education is mandated for all students. Students with disabilities in a K-12 setting have the same right to education as students without disabilities. However, to access and benefit from education, students with disabilities may need specialized instruction and related aids/services. To be deemed “appropriate,” a student's education must be modified to meet their needs as determined

through proper evaluation and placement in a special education program. Overall, students with disabilities must be educated with students without disabilities to the maximum extent that is appropriate to meet a student's disability needs (U.S. Department of Education, 2020b).

Full and individual evaluation (FIE). Special Education and disability services in K-12 settings are based on an FIE (Walsh et al., 2014). FIEs include formal or informal assessment in the areas of cognitive ability, academic achievement, speech/language and communication, and development.

Inclusion. Inclusion in education is the opportunity for students with disabilities to learn alongside students without disabilities in a general education classroom setting (Special Education Guide, 2020).

Individualized education program (IEP). For students in K-12 settings who meet special education eligibility, an IEP is the planning tool for their education (Walsh et al., 2014). IEPs are developed collaboratively by a team of school officials and parents.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA). In 2004, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was amended and renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA; U.S. Department of Education, 2020a). IDEIA ensures all children with disabilities ages 3-21 have a right to a free appropriate public education. When a student is suspected of having a disability, IDEIA requires public schools to identify and evaluate a student in all areas of suspected disability. IDEIA also requires students who meet disability eligibility be provided with specialized instruction and related services as outlined in an individualized education plan. To protect the rights of parents and students, procedural safeguards are in place regarding who can access educational records, the need for informed consent and prior written notice of any changes to services, and a parent's right to

request an evaluation for their child. Additionally, IDEIA provides guidelines for the transition process, the reevaluation of a student's needs every three years, and the discipline procedures for students in special education.

Intellectual and developmental disabilities. Intellectual and developmental disabilities are characterized by limitations in both intellectual functioning and adaptive behavior that have an onset before the age of 18 years (American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities [AAIDD], 2020). Adaptive behaviors are the conceptual, social, and practical skills one learns that enables them to function in their environment. The term developmental disabilities covers a range of conditions, including both cognitive/intellectual and physical disabilities. Intellectual disabilities are often nonvisible, but developmental disabilities may be either visible or nonvisible, depending on the way the disability presents in the individual. Intellectual and developmental disabilities often co-occur (AAID, 2020).

Least restrictive environment (LRE). In K-12 settings, students must be placed in the LRE that is most appropriate for them. Students must be enabled to interact with their peers without disabilities as much as is appropriate concerning the severity of their disability (Walsh et al., 2014).

Nonvisible disability. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA, 1990) defines a disability as a physical or mental impairment that significantly limits at least one major life activity. Some disabilities are more visible like physical impairments, but many disabilities are nonvisible or invisible. While the terms nonvisible, invisible, and hidden can be used interchangeably, the word nonvisible will be used in this study. For the most part, nonvisible disabilities fall into one of three categories: Cognitive/neurological, which includes things like Specific Learning Disorders (SLD), Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), and Intellectual

Disability (ID); Psychological, which includes mental illnesses like depression, anxiety, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), and schizophrenia; and health-related, which includes chronic illnesses like diabetes, seizure disorders, and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). This list of disabilities is not exhaustive, though. The main characteristic of a nonvisible disability is that the disability is not obvious to onlookers while still resulting in challenges ranging from mild to severe and limiting daily activities (Invisible Disabilities Association, 2019). There is not a set list of nonvisible disabilities or a clear distinction between which disabilities are visible or nonvisible because each disability presents differently in each person.

Section 504 of the 1973 Rehabilitation Act. Section 504 is a federal law prohibiting discrimination against people with disabilities in programs that receive federal funds (U.S. Department of Education, 2020a).

Self-disclosure. Disability self-disclosure is defined as the sharing of personal information about one's disability (Barnard-Brak et al. as cited in Thompson-Ebanks & Jarman, 2018). Self-disclosure is usually done with campus staff members at the campus disability office, with professors when asking for accommodations, and with other students. Students must provide professional documentation of the disability and how it impacts their education when they self-disclose at the campus disability office.

Transition. According to Anderson et al. (2012), a transition is any event or non-event that leads to a change in routines, roles, relationships, and assumptions. Transitions can be both positive and negative experiences due to our expectations of the event or nonevent.

In relation to special education and students with disabilities, a transition is the process where a student with a disability moves from high school to either postsecondary education or

employment (U.S. Department of Education, 2017c). IDEIA made transition planning a mandatory process of special education services.

Summary

Students with nonvisible disabilities encounter a variety of barriers to seeking out campus disability services (Hong, 2015). These barriers lead to just under a quarter of college students with disabilities seeking out campus disability services (Horowitz et al., 2017), thus leading to the underutilization of disability services. Students with nonvisible disabilities may struggle with concerns about their identity and disclosure of their disability status to others (Cox et al., 2017; Hadley, 2017; O'Shea & Kaplan, 2018). Students may also shy away from seeking disability status due to feeling stigmatized (Deckoff-Jones & Duell, 2018; Hong, 2015). Third-party support from teachers and parents has been found to help students learn to advocate for themselves in seeking out disability services (Kimball et al., 2016; O'Shea & Meyer, 2016). Additionally, possessing self-determination and self-advocacy have been found to help students establish disability services (Chao, 2018; Daly-Cano et al., 2015; Fleming, Oertle, & Plotner, 2017; Fullarton & Duquette, 2015; Hadley, 2017; Holzberg et al., 2019; Prater et al., 2014).

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 is one of the first pieces of civil rights legislation designed to assist individuals with disabilities. Section 504 prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities in public and private programs that are financed through federal funds (U.S. Department of Education, 2020a). In education, Section 504 ensures qualified students have equal access to education, usually through the provision of accommodations and modifications of the learning environment. While both K-12 and higher education settings provide accommodations to help students with disabilities access the learning environment, K-12 settings are required to provide students with a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE; U.S. Department of Education, 2020a). Schools provide students with disabilities with a 504 plan that explicitly outlines a student's accommodations. Parents, teachers, and appropriate school personnel like administrators and counselors aid in the creation of 504 plans. Additionally, K-12 settings can extend accommodations to extracurricular and after-school activities.

The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 is another important piece of civil rights legislation for people with disabilities. ADA prohibits discrimination based on disability and ADA extends protections to people with disabilities in public school regardless of whether the school receives federal assistance (U.S. Department of Education, 2020a). In 2008, the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act (ADAAA) was signed, which changed the definition of disability from an impairment that "severely or significantly" affects one or more life activities to an impairment that "substantially limits" one or more life activities (U.S. Department of Justice, 2016). The change was intended to extend the coverage of disability services to more people.

A third critical piece of legislation is the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1990. IDEA applies to qualifying people ages birth through 21. Children with disabilities up to age two years and their families are provided with early intervention programs (U.S. Department of Education, 2020a). For students ages three to 21 years-old, IDEA requires students to be offered special education and be identified and evaluated for disabilities. IDEA further ensures students with disabilities receive a FAPE in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) that will meet their needs (U.S. Department of Education, 2020a). An Individualized Education Program (IEP) is created to assist students and provide them with a plan for specialized instruction. Parents, teachers, and school personnel participate in the creation of IEPs. IDEA was revised and reauthorized in 2004 as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA). The revision ensured a student's IEP is reevaluated yearly and includes measurable goals. Additionally, transition practices for helping students decide what to do after graduation were expanded.

Section 504, ADA, and IDEIA all apply at the K-12 level, but only Section 504 and ADA apply at the higher education level. Section 504 and ADA ensure students are not denied admission to schools and are not excluded from any course of study or extracurricular activity due to their disability (U.S. Department of Education, 2020a). Qualified students are ensured reasonable accommodations and modifications that will enable them to have access to, benefit from, and participate in the full range of educational programs and activities (Singh, 2019). The lack of IDEIA at the postsecondary level means university students are not identified by their school as eligible for services, are not ensured a free and appropriate public education, and are not entitled to specialized instruction. University students must self-identify, which requires students to register with their campus disability services office and inform their professors of

their disability status each semester. Students are not provided a 504 plan and, instead, agree upon their accommodations individually with each of their professors.

The changes experienced during the transition from K-12 to higher education can make it difficult for university students to set up disability services and supports for themselves. Once in an institution of higher education, the responsibility of establishing services and of providing adequate proof of the presence of a disability is on the student (Singh, 2019). This can be difficult for students who do not know they are the ones who need to disclose their disability status or who have previously had the help of parents and teachers to set up disability services (Couzens et al., 2015). A lack of self-advocacy skills has also been found to keep students from seeking out disability services (Daly-Cano et al., 2015). Additionally, some students actively choose not to disclose their disability status as a way of establishing their identity or avoiding stigma (Hong, 2015; Lyman et al., 2016). In a study by Aquino and Bittinger (2019), less than half of students who self-identified during their freshman year still self-identified during follow-up years. In effect, the underutilization of campus disability services at 4-year universities can be said to be the result of a variety of internal and external barriers students with disabilities encounter.

Conceptual Framework

The leading theory that made up the conceptual framework of this study was Schlossberg's transition theory (Anderson et al., 2012). Situation, self, support, and strategy, the four components of transition theory, provided a foundation for the discussion of the transition process students with disabilities experience when moving from high school to college. Self-advocacy, self-determination theory, and universal learning design were additional theories that were discussed in relation to how they fit into the four main components of transition theory.

Schlossberg's Transition Theory

Schlossberg's transition theory was developed to address and explain the constant change that is experienced in life. According to Anderson et al. (2012), adjusting to change is a normal part of present-day society. Schlossberg breaks up transitions into three different types: anticipated, unanticipated, and non-event.

Anticipated transitions are expected and allow people to plan for the change. These transitions are often self-initiated, enable people to consider multiple options, and allow people to rehearse their new roles before the changes, which can help ease the transition (Anderson et al., 2012). Unanticipated transitions are changes that are not scheduled and occur unexpectedly. People do not have time to plan for the change and must often make decisions about the change in an undesirable state of mind. At times, unanticipated transitions are events that were thought by the individual to be improbable. The third type of transition is the non-event, which is an event an individual expected to happen but did not end up occurring.

The context in which the transition occurs and its impact on an individual are often more important than the transition itself (Patton & Kim, 2016). A person's perception of a transition determines the impact the transition has on the individual and the specific coping needs of the individual (Anderson et al., 2012). Schlossberg's transition theory breaks down a transition into four components, termed the 4 Ss, which refers to situation, self, support, and strategies (Anderson et al., 2012).

Self and Strategies. In Schlossberg's transition theory, the component of self takes into consideration the characteristics of the individual and what the individual brings to the transition (Anderson et al., 2012). An individual's personality, demographics, and culture, as well as their values, spirituality, and outlook on life, are encompassed in the concept of self. The component

of strategies includes the coping mechanisms an individual uses to avoid the harmful or stressful effects of a transition (Anderson et al., 2012). For the most part, coping responses fall into one of three categories: Controlling the situation, controlling the meaning of the situation, and controlling the stress felt during the situation.

For this study, the self was examined through the characteristics of self-determination and self-advocacy. Some students with disabilities have been found to score low in self-determination and struggle with self-advocacy (Shogren et al., 2018; Squires & Counterline, 2018). Students who possess these two characteristics have been found to be more likely to seek out disability services (Fleming et al., 2018), so learning to self-advocate also serves as a potential coping mechanism for students with disabilities. Campus disability services and supports, as well as the Universal Learning Design (UDL), are also ways students with disabilities may cope with their academic needs.

Self-Determination. The self-determination theory is a theory of human behavior and personality development that focuses on the social factors that help or hinder human flourishing (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Competence, autonomy, and relatedness to others are the three basic needs of self-determination. Additionally, biological, social, and cultural conditions are seen to either enhance or undermine psychological growth and well-being. Students with disabilities have been found to score low in self-determination, indicating students report they lack of autonomy, empowerment, and self-regulation (Shogren et al., 2018). Students with low self-determination are not likely to seek out disability services. Self-determination has also been found to correlate positively with quality of life, indicating self-determination has a positive impact on the quality of life of students with disabilities (Chao, 2018). On the other hand, the desire for self-

determination and independence has been found to be a reason for not seeking out disability services (Yssel et al., 2016).

Self-Advocacy. According to Garner and Sandow (2018), self-advocacy occurs when a person takes action on their own behalf without the help or interaction of another person. Self-understanding is a necessary component of self-advocacy. In a study by Daly-Cano et al. (2015), learning to self-advocate was found to be essential for students with disabilities. Self-advocacy was also found to contribute to students' acceptance of themselves and their disability.

Furthermore, students with self-advocacy skills made more effective social connections and felt more confident in their ability to take care of themselves. However, students did not always self-advocate for disability services due to the possible negative perceptions of others. Students also reported feeling fear and insecurity when it came to self-advocating (Squires & Countermine, 2018). Fleming et al. (2018) found learning self-advocacy skills could help reduce academic distress because students with self-advocacy skills were more likely to seek out disability services. Prater et al. (2014) conducted a study examining self-advocacy training and found students felt self-advocacy training helped them get more class support and ask for more appropriate accommodations than they had asked for before the training. Students also reported their self-advocacy skills developed as they matured (Timmerman & Mulvihill, 2015).

Further research on self-advocacy training has been conducted by Holzberg et al. (2019). Four students with disabilities were given Self-Advocacy and Conflict Resolution training, and evidence was found that teaching students self-advocacy skills can increase the ability to request academic accommodations. In a qualitative study of 325 undergraduate students registered with their campus disability services office, students with self-advocacy skills were found to feel a greater sense of belonging and greater satisfaction with their college experience (Fleming,

Oertle, Plotner, & Hakun, 2017). Higher self-advocacy scores were also found to correlate with higher Grade Point Average (GPA) scores (Kinney & Eakman, 2017).

Universal Design for Learning (UDL). The concept of the universal design was originally formulated as a way of making products and environments usable to the greatest extent possible for all people regardless of disability status (Rogers-Shaw et al., 2018). In education, this concept was incorporated and termed the Universal Design for Learning. UDL provides students with alternatives to learning when they struggle to learn through more traditional means (Jimenez et al., 2007). UDL focuses on having the initial design meet the needs of all students in general instead of using individual adaptations for each student (Rose et al., 2006).

The three main principles of UDL are having multiple means of representation, multiple means of action and expression, and multiple means of engagement (Rose et al., 2006). Teachers are encouraged to reframe the way they view teaching and incorporate both existing classroom tools and new methods into their lessons. There is no single way of presenting information that is good for all students. UDL provides students with the flexibility that allows them to try out different methods of learning so they can find the right option for themselves (Rogers-Shaw et al., 2018).

Situation and Support. Situational factors are things like the event that triggered the transition, the timing of the situation as it relates to an individual's life, the level of control an individual has over the transition, and the individual's view of the situation as either positive or negative (Anderson et al., 2012). Another important situational factor is the duration of the transition and whether it is a permanent or temporary transition. Additionally, an individual's previous experiences with similar situations and whether the transition involves a role change are situational factors. The component of support deals with people like friends and family an

individual turns to for help in coping with their transition. According to Anderson et al. (2012), an individual having a social support system is instrumental in handling stress.

When looking at the components of situation and support in students with disabilities, the main situation students with disabilities deal with is their transition from a secondary to a postsecondary setting. A student's outlook about whether the transition process is a good or bad experience can be influenced by their educational transition process. During this time of transition, students with disabilities have been found to rely on the support of parents, teachers, and peers to help them learn about and navigate their changing roles as college students. Through their support system, students were taught self-advocacy skills, were provided with opportunities to practice self-advocacy, and were encouraged to seek out disability services in college (Daly-Cano et al., 2015).

Third-Party Support From Parents, Teachers, and Peers. Learning how to transition from secondary to postsecondary education successfully has been found to be important for students with disabilities. In a qualitative study of 111 students with nonvisible disabilities, students reported they learned skills like time management, note-taking, and writing as part of their transition process (Francis, Stride, & Reed, 2018). Students felt these skills had a positive impact on their college readiness. However, students reported they thought they would have benefited from learning about the logistics of college life, like registering for classes, budgeting, and talking to professors as part of their transition process.

Students have also been found to struggle with the transition process because they are unaware of the differences between disability laws governing secondary and postsecondary education and expect to receive the same services they received during their secondary school education while in college (Littlepage & Clemson, 2018). Additionally, developing student self-

advocacy skills during the transition phase has been found to be useful in improving university services for students with disabilities (Fleming, Oertle, Plotner, & Hakun, 2017).

In a qualitative study conducted with 26 parents of young adults with a disability who graduated from a postsecondary program, Francis, Stride, and Reed (2018) found collaboration between all stakeholders like parents, students, and staff members was an important part of the transition process. Parents reported feeling the transition process was stressful and felt starting the process earlier in their child's education would have made the transition to college easier. Francis, Stride, and Reed (2018) also found maintaining high expectations, promoting inclusion, maximizing the use of technology, and permitting students to engage in both independent and supported decision-making were believed by parents to be important components of a successful transition. Additionally, parents and educators expressed a desire for transition resources but were either not using or not aware of already available resources. While family interactions were found to be essential for students with disabilities, research also found students from non-Western backgrounds had more impactful family interactions than students from Western backgrounds (Francis et al., 2019).

Several studies have linked the development of self-advocacy with support from third parties like parents and K-12 teachers. According to da Silva Cardoso et al. (2016), family members can be both supportive and a barrier to the education of university students with disabilities. Parents help students learn basic advocacy skills (Kimball et al., 2016). Students report parents taught them about self-advocacy, encouraged them to ask for help, and provided them with verbal support that helped them know their family members believed they could succeed on their own (Daly-Cano et al., 2015). Students further reported parents taught them to self-advocate through tough love and having them fend for themselves. In some instances,

parents were also very clear about telling students they should go to the disability services office of their campus to ask for help. Couzens et al. (2015) similarly found students with disabilities relied on parents and friends to support them in asking for disability services. In a qualitative case study by Fullarton and Duquette (2015), it was found parents also sometimes served as models of advocacy for their children.

K-12 teachers were found to be especially supportive of students. Teachers helped students with transitioning from high school to college and often served as mentors for students during the transition process (Fullarton & Duquette, 2015). According to O'Shea and Meyer (2016), high school can be an important time when students develop the motivational processes to disclose their disability while in college and utilize disability services. Disability support while in high school also helped students learn about self-advocacy and develop self-determination. Positive experiences in high school contributed to students' motivation to succeed in higher education and to disclose their disability status as a way of seeking out disability support services (O'Shea & Meyer, 2016). K-12 educators also provided students with opportunities to practice self-advocacy before going to college, which helped them feel more comfortable with requesting services in college (Daly-Cano et al., 2015).

During the transition process, mentoring programs have been found to be beneficial for students with disabilities. In a study by Barnard-Brak et al. (2013), students who took part in a mentoring program were found to have decreased negative attitudes toward requesting accommodations. While decreased negativity was not found to lead to an increase in postsecondary enrollment, students with less negative views of accommodations were found to be more likely to seek out accommodations in higher education. Faculty mentorship programs at

the higher education level were also found to help students transition because of the added individual support students got from professors (Patrick & Wessel, 2013).

Barriers Students With Disabilities Experience in Higher Education

For the most part, participants in studies involving students with disabilities have been selected from pools of students who are registered with their university's disability services department. However, students do not always find it easy to seek out disability services. According to Black et al. (2015), students with disabilities usually do not speak up for themselves. Additionally, some students simply do not like asking for disability services on their own (Couzens et al., 2015). Students have struggled to set up services because they were no longer being helped by their parents in setting up services and sometimes did not have adequate knowledge of their disability (Lightner et al., 2012). Students also struggled because they did not have information about where to get services and information about available accommodations (Lyman et al., 2016).

Fleming, Oertle, and Plotner (2017) gathered survey data from 325 students with disabilities to examine student perceptions about campus climate, satisfaction with their university, and use of campus resources. Findings indicate students did not seek out services due to accessibility problems as well as negative faculty attitudes and lack of disability awareness by university staff. Hong (2015) conducted a qualitative study of 16 students with disabilities and had similar findings that indicated students did not seek out disability services due to negative past experiences, intimidating personnel, and possible stigma. Students also avoided seeking out disability services due to their desire to be more independent (Yssel et al., 2016).

Identity

Several studies focus on the impact identity formation has on students with nonvisible disabilities. Students with disabilities were found to struggle with a heightened sense of self-consciousness due to their disability (Hong, 2015). Fleming, Oertle, Plotner, and Hakun (2017) conducted research on the college experience of students with disabilities. It was found students who felt a greater sense of belonging were more likely to feel satisfied with their college experience. Furthermore, in a case study by Hadley (2017) outlining the experiences of a student with multiple learning disabilities, it was indicated establishing identity was important in helping develop purpose in the completion of a degree program.

In a study by Cox et al. (2017), the researchers looked at how 118 students on the Autism Spectrum made sense of their college experience. Findings indicated students' identity development involved tension between the inward acceptance of who they were and their outward presentation of themselves. Students reported struggling to reconcile their disability with who it was they wanted to be. Some students further reported consciously suppressing characteristics of themselves that went against the norm so they would appear more like the average student.

O'Shea and Kaplan (2018) conducted a qualitative study where five students with disabilities were interviewed and found college turned out to be a catalyst for identity formation. Students' interactions with those around them shaped the meaning of their identity. Students with a greater sense of identity were also found to be more likely to use campus support services. Furthermore, students with disabilities were found to compare themselves to their nondisabled counterparts.

Students with disabilities reported feeling conflicted between being disabled and wanting to be treated like an average student (Hong, 2015). College allows students to establish a new identity away from their disability label. Yssel et al. (2016) found students with disabilities had a desire to be independent like the average student. The desire for independence was found to keep students from requesting disability services. In a qualitative study by Lyman et al. (2016), interviews were conducted with 16 students registered with their campus disability services office. It was found students with disabilities did not seek out or use accommodations due to a desire to be independent. Additionally, in a qualitative study by Kranke et al. (2013), 17 undergraduate students were interviewed, and it was found students with nonvisible disabilities had a desire to be treated the same as their peers without disabilities. However, students with nonvisible disabilities have reported feelings of inferiority that may lead them to drop out of school (Thompson-Ebanks, 2014).

Students have also reported they do not identify as having a disability. Kendall (2016) found that not all students consider themselves to be a student with a disability and instead prefer to acknowledge they have a condition. One student, in particular, reported they saw a disability as something that held someone back, and since their condition did not hold them back, it was, therefore, not a disability.

Disclosing Disability Status

The disclosure of their disability was another important aspect and barrier for college students with nonvisible disabilities. Students with nonvisible disabilities have been found to go through a process of reflection about who they want to disclose to and what they want to disclose about their disability (Magnus & Tossebro, 2014). Unlike students with physical or sensory disabilities whose disability is obvious to others, students with nonvisible disabilities have the

option of not disclosing their disability status (Black et al., 2015). Professors and other school personnel usually do not know about the disability unless the student decides to disclose their disability to them.

Cox et al. (2017) found students often take a pragmatic approach to disclosing their disability, usually only disclosing when absolutely necessary. For students, it became absolutely necessary to disclose when they needed to request disability services or accommodations from professors. Even after disclosing the need for accommodations, some students did not go into detail about their exact diagnosis and only disclosed they had a disability that allowed them to use certain accommodations, leaving the disability services personnel as the only ones who knew their exact diagnosis. O'Shea and Meyer (2016) had similar findings where students only disclosed their disability status on an as-needed basis. Students also disclosed their disability status to roommates and classmates as a way of strengthening their relationships.

Kranke et al. (2013) found some students refrained from disclosing their disability status to maintain a sense of normalcy and to avoid unnecessary negative perceptions and stigma. Students did not want professors to remember who they were only because of their disability status (Timmerman & Mulvihill, 2015). Some students also reported not disclosing their disability as a way of getting a clean start in college (Hong, 2015). When students disclosed their disability status, it was either done immediately to raise awareness of their disability or delayed until the disability negatively affected them in their course work (Kranke et al., 2013). Additionally, students did not disclose their disability status when the possible negative perceptions of disclosing were a greater stressor for them than their academic load. Students who disclosed often did so when they were no longer able to manage the stress of their academic load, and out of fear, they would limit their academic achievement by not disclosing to professors.

Kendall (2016) conducted a qualitative study with 13 students with a declared disability and found students reported not disclosing their disability status due to concerns disclosure would negatively affect them in their future careers. Students who disclosed their disability status reported frustration at having to continuously disclose their disability and their need for accommodations to professors. On the other hand, some students reported they were open about disclosing their disability status because their disability was a part of who they are, and having others know kept them from being expected to do things they were unable to do as a result of their disability.

Aquino and Bittinger (2019) conducted a longitudinal study and found that of 1,670 students who self-identified as having a disability during their first year in college, 59% had unidentifed during the follow-up year. Overall, students who remained identified were older or had a sensory disability. While not statistically significant, students who remained identified were also more likely to be socially integrated than students who unidentifed.

Faculty and Staff

Faculty-student relationships were found to be important for students with disabilities (Yssel et al., 2016). Creating disability-friendly environments and having faculty and staff members who utilize inclusive teaching practices has been suggested to help improve university services for students with disabilities (Fleming, Oertle, Plotner, & Hakun, 2017). While students with disabilities reported a variety of experiences with faculty and staff that were both positive and negative, many agreed faculty and staff would benefit from additional or better training in how to help students with disabilities (Francis et al., 2019).

Faculty. According to Francis et al. (2019), students with disabilities reported professors providing academic accommodations and professors providing warmth and genuine care were

equally important. However, professors were found to lack preparation for how to deal with disabilities and were often unsure of how to provide or unwilling to provide appropriate accommodations for students. Students also reported faculty did not understand their need for accommodations and that, while faculty may not have been initially accepting of accommodations, most did eventually comply with requests for accommodations (Timmerman & Mulvihill, 2015). Another qualitative study by da Silva Cardoso et al. (2016) found students with disabilities often received both positive and negative responses from university faculty and staff about their disability.

Sniatecki et al. (2015) examined faculty perceptions of students with disabilities. It was found faculty members mostly viewed students with disabilities favorably, with students with physical disabilities being viewed more favorably than students with learning disabilities and mental health disabilities. Sniatecki et al. (2015) also found their results suggested a small proportion of faculty members still held negative views about students with disabilities, with the most negative attitudes directed towards those with mental illness. Faculty also reported uncertainty about ADA procedures and demonstrated misconceptions about services that were offered by disability services offices. Alternatively, Kranke et al. (2013) found students with disabilities felt faculty members were sympathetic to their needs and flexible with students. Students who disclosed to faculty early in the semester felt professors were more empathetic when there was a decline in academic achievement or class attendance.

In a study by Becker and Palladino (2016), 127 faculty members were surveyed regarding their perspectives working and teaching students with disabilities. Faculty members were found to be willing to engage with students with disabilities and willing to accommodate students beyond what was required by ADA standards. However, some faculty members also reported

only accommodating students with extended time on tests, and others reported believing accommodations were unfair. Faculty members further reported they were unaware of students who may not have been willing to disclose their disability status and reported they had limited knowledge about students with disabilities. Faculty members were most experienced with the needs of students with learning disabilities.

According to Dallas and Sprong (2015), faculty members reported being comfortable in their ability to accommodate students with disabilities but also reported being less knowledgeable of disability laws. Faculty members with disability-related training were found to have more supportive attitudes towards students with disabilities, and faculty members who had 24 hours or more of disability-related training had more favorable attitudes towards inclusive classrooms. Additionally, faculty members were more willing to provide accommodations for students with disabilities than for students without disabilities and had less favorable ratings on questionnaire items asking if they would be willing to provide flexible assignments and reduced reading for any student regardless of disability status.

Faculty members often served as mentors to students. In a study of 45 faculty mentors, Patrick and Wessel (2013) found faculty mentorship provided additional support for first-year students with disabilities and helped students transition because of the individualized support they received. Through mentorship, faculty members encouraged students to attend classes and build relationships with other faculty members, served as an academic resource in their field of study, and helped students self-advocate and adjust to college life. Timmerman and Mulvihill (2015) also found faculty mentorship helped students enhance their self-advocacy skills. Faculty mentors gave advice to students, helped them navigate college as a student with a disability, and

helped guide them in the right direction. Students also noted having someone to talk to helped them maintain a positive attitude when facing obstacles.

Students reported faculty members lacked knowledge about individual disabilities (Kendall, 2016; Squires & Counterline, 2018). Professors were also found to lack knowledge of policies and procedures involving students with disabilities (Sniatecki et al., 2015). Black et al. (2015) found students often received inappropriate services for their disability. Students felt professors did not have the necessary knowledge to work with students with disabilities. Hong (2015) found professors lacked knowledge about disabilities, did not trust students who claimed to have a disability, and had lower expectations of students with disabilities. Students did not feel professors were sensitive about keeping their disability status confidential and perceived professors had embarrassed them while in class. Some students also reported professors deliberately lowered their expectations of them after disclosing a disability (Hong, 2015). Students have also reported professors have expressed they did not believe the student could be successful in their program and had even recommended they change majors after disclosing their disability status (Squires & Counterline, 2018). Kendall (2016) reported students felt faculty members did not see past their disabilities.

In a study of 93 student participants, Abreu et al. (2016) found faculty members lacked an understanding of the different types of disabilities they may have encountered among students and that some students found it embarrassing and degrading to have to explain their difficulties to faculty members repeatedly. Students also reported dissatisfaction with how they were treated by faculty and reported encountering professors who were inflexible (Fleming et al., 2018). Students sometimes felt judged by professors when explaining their needs and felt professors did not see them as being as competent as students without disabilities. Furthermore, students with

disabilities felt professors needed continuing education and training on how to identify the needs of students with disabilities, on how to interact with them, and on how to handle academic and mental health issues more effectively (Francis, Duke, et al., 2018).

Minority Students. When examining students with disabilities from racial minority groups, students have been found to benefit from their relationships with university faculty and staff members because racial minority students tend to have fewer role-models than students in the general population (da Silva Cardoso et al., 2016). Minority students with disabilities have also reported having negative experiences, even when accommodations were provided by a faculty member, due to the faculty member giving the accommodation grudgingly or with skepticism.

Staff. When it comes to university staff members, those working in disability services have been found to play an important role in the lives of students with disabilities because they help foster positive academic outcomes (Chiu et al., 2019). Disability services staff members can foster positive outcomes by helping students with disabilities advocate for themselves as well as by making additional service referrals for students with disabilities. Students who work closely with their disability services staff members were more likely to meet with their professors and reported higher satisfaction with their services than students who did not keep in close contact with their disability services staff members. In a study by Fleming et al. (2018), students reported appreciation for the efforts of staff members and noted they benefited from staff members who were caring, responsive to their needs, and implemented accommodation requests.

While research confirmed the importance of the relationship of staff members with students with disabilities, students reported school personnel was not approachable or helpful (Hong, 2015). Additionally, staff members were not always aware of how difficult it was for

students with disabilities to make the transition from high school to college. Students reported they felt disability services personnel were ineffective and inefficient (Squires & Counterline, 2018). Research has also found students who felt staff members were impersonal and did not treat them with care or respect were unhappy with their interactions with disability staff (Fleming, Oertle, & Plotner, 2017). Students further reported staff members did not appreciate how uncomfortable it could be for students with disabilities to describe their limitations and to ask for help with school. Students believed staff did not always appreciate the effort students made in asking for help (Hong, 2015). Some students also reported they felt disability services office staff were not helpful and were more there to help faculty members than they were to help students (Abreu et al., 2016).

The lack of disability services staff members has also been a problem noted by students. With the increase of students with disabilities entering postsecondary institutions, some universities have found they do not have adequate disability staff members to fulfill the needs of their students with disabilities (Littlepage & Clemson, 2018). In a study by O'Shea and Meyer (2016), students have been found to be more likely to seek out disability services when disability services staff members were well-trained. However, disability services staff did not usually have professional preparation in disability services and came from a variety of different educational backgrounds and levels of experience, so they did not always have appropriate training (Fleming et al., 2018).

Stigma

Students with disabilities are often subjected to negative attitudes from peers, faculty, and staff (Fleming, Oertle, Plotner, & Hakun, 2017). Campus social and cultural climate has been found to be important in helping students with disabilities feel satisfied and be more likely to

persist in their education. Squires and Counterline (2018) conducted a qualitative study examining the barriers college students with disabilities face and found there was a lack of understanding from both students with disabilities and students without disabilities about disabilities. However, in a study of 1,762 undergraduate participants, Bogart et al. (2018) found students with disabilities had more favorable views of disabilities than students without disabilities.

According to Black et al. (2015), students with nonvisible disabilities had more of a choice when it came to self-disclosing their disability status than students with physical disabilities because their disability was not obvious to others. Students with nonvisible disabilities often preferred not to self-disclose to avoid the stigma that came from others knowing about their disability. Kendall (2016) and Thompsen-Ebanks (2014) had similar findings where students with disabilities were found to be reluctant to inform faculty and peers about their disability status as a way of avoiding stigma.

Students with disabilities also had a desire to avoid negative social reactions from others and did not seek out disability services as a way of avoiding being treated differently (da Silva Cardoso et al., 2016; Lyman et al., 2016). In a study by Thompson-Ebanks (2014), five students with nonvisible disabilities were interviewed and were found to withdraw from school because they felt embarrassed about speaking with faculty about their disability. Students further reported some disabilities were easier for them to disclose than others due to the varying levels of stigma and stereotypes that were connected with each disability (O'Shea & Meyer, 2016). For example, ADD/ADHD was typically easier for students to disclose than a disability like autism or traumatic brain injury.

Hong (2015) found students with disabilities felt students without disabilities resented them for getting extra help or, as they called it, “special treatment” from professors. Lyman et al. (2016) also found students with disabilities did not want others to think they were receiving special treatment. Students with disabilities, at times, felt like asking for services put a burden on others. Abreu et al. (2016) further noted faculty members played a role in helping students with disabilities not feel stigmatized when using accommodations for their classes.

Researchers like Magnus and Tossebro (2014) discussed how the system of individualized accommodations for each student, instead of a universal design of accommodations, was another barrier students with disabilities encountered. Magnus and Tossebro (2014) found students with disabilities were afraid of being stereotyped and refrained from using accommodations or assistive technology as a way of avoiding self-disclosure and stigma. Students with physical disabilities also reported feeling bad about being provided with certain accommodations when students with nonvisible disabilities were denied the same accommodations.

When it came to social situations, students with nonvisible disabilities feared disclosing their disability status to others would lead to exclusion. Students reported they did not let others know about their disability because people assumed they knew a lot about a person based on what they knew about their disability and because they did not want to be pitied by their peers. On the other hand, students also reported getting support from peers after disclosure, which helped them feel more connected.

Bullying. Students with disabilities were also found to encounter bullying, both in-person and in the form of cyberbullying (Green, 2018). A qualitative study of nine students with disabilities revealed students experienced bullying from peers, roommates, and professors, but

the bullying was not always related to their disability, especially for students with nonvisible disabilities. When students experienced bullying related to their disability, it was from professors who alluded to a student's disability impacting their intelligence and from peers who disclosed another student's disability status to make fun of them. Students further reported they did not report bullying to avoid any further negative consequences and instead coped with bullying by leaving negative environments, not taking classes with professors who had bullied in the past, and by moving to a new dorm. Additionally, students reported social support from trusted peers helped them deal with bullying and build confidence.

Student Perceptions Towards Disability Type

Akin and Huang (2019) conducted a study where the perceptions of undergraduate students without disabilities toward students with disabilities were examined. It was found participants believed students with visible disabilities were more sociable, had better academic ability, and performed better academically than students with nonvisible disabilities. It was also found students believed students with both visible and nonvisible disabilities were equally able to deal with their condition and were equally deserving of disability accommodations. However, when students with nonvisible disabilities were separated into students with psychiatric and cognitive disabilities, students were found to believe students with psychiatric disabilities should have been better able to deal with their condition and were less deserving of getting extended time or note takers than students with cognitive disabilities.

Students with psychiatric disabilities have been found to experience more difficulties than students with other types of disabilities. In a study of students with psychiatric and learning disabilities, students with psychiatric disabilities were found to be less likely to graduate than students with learning disabilities (McEwan & Downie, 2013). Significant differences were not

found between the GPAs and drop-out rates of the two groups of students, but students with psychiatric disabilities were more likely to self-refer to disability services later in the semester than earlier in the semester. Students with learning disabilities were more likely to have self-advocacy skills and to have an extensive history of receiving disability services than students with psychiatric disabilities (McEwan & Downie, 2013). Students with psychiatric disabilities were also more likely to be diagnosed after secondary school than students with learning disabilities. Additionally, students with psychiatric disabilities may not have sought out disability services because they may not have been aware of their right to receive disability services. The legitimacy of psychiatric disabilities was often questioned by those who did and did not have psychiatric disabilities (O'Shea & Kaplan, 2018). Students reported these perceptions about psychiatric disabilities as not being real negatively impacted their actions in seeking out disability services.

Bourdon et al. (2020) found exhibiting mental health symptoms related to anxiety, depression, and alcohol use disorder, as well as stressful life events and antisocial behaviors, predicted the use of disability support services. These findings indicated campus disability services support students' mental health needs. Additionally, Black et al. (2015) found, overall, students were less likely to use mental health services than other types of student services.

Students with nonvisible disabilities were found to withdraw from school as a result of the nature of their disability (Thompson-Ebanks, 2014). Students who had disabilities that caused difficulties maintaining attention, difficulties with memory, and unpredictable moods reported these characteristics of their disability led to their decision to withdraw from school. Thompson-Ebanks (2014) further found students with psychiatric disabilities did not use campus disability

services in favor of continuing to use outside community services like counseling they were already using.

In a study by Deckoff-Jones and Duell (2018), 223 students without disabilities were asked to rate the appropriateness of accommodations for students with both physical and nonvisible disabilities. Academic accommodations were viewed as more appropriate than accessibility accommodations for students with nonvisible disabilities than with visible physical disabilities. Additionally, students with psychiatric disabilities received the lowest academic accommodation appropriateness ratings indicating students felt accommodations for students with psychiatric disabilities were not appropriate.

Student Course of Study and Course Delivery Method

Education. In a study of online students with disabilities, Terras et al. (2015) found students with disabilities who were majoring in special education or who had previous work experience in the field of special education were likely to seek out disability services. The authors suggested students with this educational background and students in an online setting had a higher comfort level with requesting accommodations. Students majoring in education and special education were found to be more comfortable requesting accommodations (Timmerman & Mulvihill, 2015). Students without disabilities majoring in special education were also reported as being more accepting and understanding of students requesting and using accommodations.

STEM Fields. Students with disabilities in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) fields reported they experienced an additional barrier of dealing with the competitiveness of their field (da Silva Cardoso et al., 2016). The competitive nature of students in STEM fields can lead students with disabilities to experience more difficulties forming

relationships with peers and faculty than in less competitive fields. Taking into account the level of competitiveness in a degree program was found to be an important consideration for university faculty and staff because students with disabilities can benefit from alternate teaching methods. Students may also benefit from the incorporation of methods like group work that can encourage cooperation as well as interpersonal support that can help students with disabilities be more successful in the classroom (da Silva Cardoso et al., 2016).

Online Courses. For some students with nonvisible disabilities, attending online courses provided students with flexibility, comfort, reduced anxiety, and convenience (Murphy et al., 2019). Students also noted online courses allowed them to take a class that would be similar for all students in the course regardless of disability status. However, students with psychiatric disabilities reported difficulties at a higher rate than students without psychiatric disabilities with concentration, time management, and navigating the course website. Online learning for students with disabilities, in general, was also reported as a barrier to receiving disability services because students in an online environment may be isolated and unable to access supports only available to students while they are on campus (McManus et al., 2017).

Disability Services and Accommodations

Campus disability services offices offer a variety of supports and accommodations for students with disabilities like academic accommodations, support groups, executive functioning skills, and help with communicating with professors. Abreu et al. (2016) noted students reported the disability services office had been useful with helping them sort out accommodations, providing academic support, and giving them social/emotional support. Students believed the primary role of disability services offices was to help them establish accommodations. Students also reported they went to the disability services office to get advice and to get help with time

management and organization. Disability services offices were also reported to help students get information about their rights and the possible accommodations they could receive (Magnus & Tossebro, 2014).

Institutional supports and disability services were found to help students with disabilities develop positive self-perception (Green, 2018). Most disability services offices provided individual accommodations for students based on their disability needs. Still, institutions also offered universally available supports that were either available to all students with disabilities or all students in general. Students with disabilities believed disability services offices should provide students with support and advice and should vary exam conditions and restructure assignments for students with disabilities (Francis, Duke, et al., 2018). The most commonly used individual accommodations reported by students were extended time for tests and alternate testing environments (Francis, Duke, et al., 2018). Emotional and mental health support resources were also reported as needs for students with disabilities. However, students reported getting academic services also served as a means to help reduce stress. Additionally, students reported extended time for tests as the most effective accommodation they received (Francis, Duke, et al., 2018; Timmerman & Mulvihill, 2015).

Students were found to feel the disability services they received were not helpful and were not individualized to their needs (Black et al., 2015; Fleming et al., 2018; Kendall, 2016). Students reported accommodations provided to them were either useless or untimely because disability services offices took too long to get the accommodations set up (Squires & Counterline, 2018). Administrators also reported students with disabilities did not always know the difference between the provisions IDEA and ADA provided for them and had to be guided through the process of setting up services (Littlepage & Clemson, 2018). Students reported

having frustrating experiences with setting up disability services as well as wishing the process for setting up services was changed (Fleming et al., 2018). Students also wished different services than the ones offered were available for their use. Some students further reported not being aware of disability services upon entering college and feeling confused about the services and supports that were actually available for their use.

According to Wilke et al. (2019), students reported experiencing conflict when accommodations were not tailored to their needs. Inappropriate accommodations were also distracting to students (Black et al., 2015). Additionally, students felt the lack of appropriate accommodations kept them from being independent, and a universal design of learning and providing accommodations would help them gain independence and access to additional study resources.

Students reported disabilities present differently for each student, so services should be expanded upon so they can be more tailored to each individual. Students were also not always knowledgeable about the kind of help they personally required and may have found it difficult to find the location of the disability services office. Furthermore, establishing services and setting up accommodations sometimes took time due to the disability office's lack of availability of certain materials (Fleming, Oertle, & Plotner, 2017).

Some students did set up services with the disability services office but did not use any of the given accommodations. Students with disabilities reported having a strong need to feel independent, wanting to be self-accommodating, and wanting to use the campus accommodations only as a backup, if needed (Lyman et al., 2016). Students also reported being fearful accommodations would be taken away if they showed good academic performance and

reported not wanting to be a burden on others and, in some instances, not feeling they were disabled enough to use accommodations.

Reducing Isolation

For some students having a disability and seeking services can feel isolating. According to Francis, Duke, et al. (2018), students with disabilities were found to desire relationships with other students with similar disabilities as a way of helping reduce isolation. Students with disabilities can lack social skills, so social interaction may be difficult for them. Students reported the desire for schools to provide students with disabilities with support groups and other opportunities for networking with similar students (Francis, Duke, et al., 2018).

Inclusion and the Universal Learning Design

With IDEIA only applying to primary and secondary students, college students with disabilities do not have the option of a special education setting, so an inclusive classroom is usually the only available educational setting in postsecondary institutions. Gilson et al. (2020) found students and faculty agreed students with intellectual and developmental disabilities should have access to the same opportunities as students without disabilities and should be actively engaged alongside other students. Furthermore, students reported feeling inclusion involved not only classroom settings but also the feelings of belonging to a community. However, only 48% of the students in the study agreed they felt they themselves belonged to their university community.

With inclusive classrooms, some professors use Universal Learning Design to provide students with multiple methods of learning. Professors have reported positive attitudes towards using universal design concepts (Dallas & Sprong, 2015). Students, both with and without disabilities, also reported the principles of UDL were helpful for improving learning (Black et

al., 2015). Students felt they learned best when a combination of learning preferences was used and when they could practice and try things hands-on. Students stayed more engaged and focused in the classroom when UDL principles were used. Additionally, students with disabilities wanted to be treated like average students, and UDL is believed to help reduce stigma because students do not have to ask for individualized supports like lecture notes or screen readers because they are provided to all students.

Student Success

Individual interactions like self-advocating and preparing for class and institutional supports like disability services and accommodations were found to impact academic success for students with disabilities (Lombardi et al., 2016). Students reported accommodations and services were beneficial in helping them earn better grades and continue enrollment (Fleming et al., 2018). Academic success was also found to be impacted by the types and quality of relationships students with disabilities had with others in their lives (Lombardi et al., 2016). Additionally, students with disabilities reported feeling comfortable self-advocating and requesting accommodations and having knowledge about which accommodations were important to their college success (Terras et al., 2015).

Chiu et al. (2019) found students with physical disabilities had higher semester GPAs than students with cognitive disabilities. Students with disabilities who registered with their disability services office on campus had higher semester GPAs than students who registered later in their educational careers. Students were more likely to graduate when disability services were made available to them.

De Los Santos et al. (2019) examined accommodations use, social and institutional support use, and registration with the disability services office as a predictor of student success

as measured by grade point average (GPA). It was found most participants went to their professors for help with problems in their classes. However, academic accommodation and institutional and social support use did not predict academic success, which contradicted previous research on academic success in students with disabilities (De Los Santos et al., 2019).

Another study by Newman et al. (2020) provided conflicting evidence about the use of disability services. The effects of students with disabilities accessing universally available and disability-related supports were examined in relation to student retention. It was found retention rates were higher for students who only used universally available supports, which are things like tutoring and writing centers that are available to all students regardless of disability status and do not require self-disclosure.

Students with disabilities have also seen increased success when provided accommodations that were not just academic. For students with learning disabilities and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, getting help learning coping strategies and fostering time management and organization skills was beneficial to their success (Kreider et al., 2019). Being provided with information about their disability and their personal strengths also had a positive impact on student success.

Demographic Differences With Student Success and Use of Disability Services

Student success was found to vary by demographics like ethnicity, sex, and college major (Chiu et al., 2019). Black/African American students with disabilities reported lower semester GPAs than White/Caucasian students with disabilities. Female students with disabilities reported higher semester GPAs than male students, and students with disabilities in STEM fields reported lower semester GPAs than students in education, liberal arts, and social sciences fields. Chiu et al. (2019) further found students who registered with the disability services office early in their

educational career had higher semester GPAs than students who registered later. Overall, Asian students were less likely to seek out campus health and disability services than students of other ethnicities (Black et al., 2015).

First-Generation Status

Another barrier for students with disabilities was to be a first-generation college student. Students with disabilities who were first-generation college students had lower GPAs and less family and peer support than those who were not first-generation students (Lombardi et al., 2012). First-generation students with disabilities also had greater financial stress, which can lead to lower retention rates for students. On the other hand, first-generation students reported greater utilization of disability accommodations (Lombardi et al., 2012).

Age

When examining undergraduate students, students with disabilities were found to be slightly older than students without disabilities (Black et al., 2015). This was attributed to students with disabilities taking longer to graduate than students in general. However, in a qualitative study asking administrators about students with disabilities, traditionally aged students with disabilities were found to be more likely to require additional assistance than nontraditionally aged students (Littlepage & Clemson, 2018). A greater number of traditionally aged students sought out accommodations than nontraditionally aged students. Traditionally aged students also had elevated expectations of staff members' availability to help them and of the comprehensiveness of accommodations indicating they expected more services and help than older students.

Veteran Students

In a study of veteran students with disabilities by Kinney and Eakman (2017), students with higher self-advocacy skills were found to have higher academic performance as measured by GPA. Students with a higher number of attempted credits also had a higher GPA, which indicated students who acquired academic supports demonstrated greater academic success. Additionally, first-generation students were found to have lower self-advocacy scores. The findings of the study further suggested students with self-advocacy skills may be more likely to get and effectively use academic supports.

Transfer Students

Herbert et al. (2014) examined graduation rates of students with disabilities and found students with disabilities who began and remained at the same university were more successful in completing their degree programs than students who transferred. For students with disabilities, remaining at their starting university meant they could maintain already established relationships with faculty and staff and did not have to re-identify as a student with disabilities. Students who transferred had to rebuild these relationships, which can lead to anxiety and tension that may negatively affect the completion of their program of study.

Summary

The conceptual framework for this study was made up of Schlossberg's transition theory and the four Ss of self, strategies, situation, and support (Anderson et al., 2012). The self and strategies components were discussed in relation to self-advocacy, self-determination theory, and UDL. Situation and support were examined through the lens of transition and third-party support by parents, teachers, and peers.

Overall, students with disabilities faced a variety of barriers to establishing disability services. For some students with disabilities, the pursuit of their identity development kept them from seeking out disability services (O'Shea & Kaplan, 2018). Other students with disabilities struggled with developing self-determination and self-advocacy skills, both of which helped students with seeking out disability services (Daly-Cano et al., 2015; Shogren et al., 2018; Yssel et al., 2016). The relationships students with disabilities had with others was also a barrier because faculty reactions towards disabilities and accommodations as well stigma students experienced all influenced whether a student sought out disability services (Abreu et al., 2016; Fleming, Oertle, & Plotner, 2017; Hong, 2015; Lyman et al., 2016; Sniatecki et al., 2015). Additionally, student success was impacted by the use of accommodations and disability supports (De Los Santos et al., 2019; Lombardi et al., 2016).

While students with disabilities faced many barriers to utilizing university disability services, the literature also revealed positive aspects of the experiences of students with disabilities. At times, faculty members were found to be positive, flexible, and sympathetic to the needs of students with disabilities (da Silva Cardoso et al., 2016; Kranke et al., 2013). Furthermore, students with disabilities were found to benefit from being taught self-advocacy skills (Prater et al., 2014). Findings like these point us in the right direction of finding ways to increase the use of disability services. However, few studies have dealt with finding a solution to the problem of the underutilization of disability services at 4-year universities. This research, thus, provided possible solutions to increasing the utilization of disability services at 4-year universities.

Chapter 3: Research Method and Design

Disability services at postsecondary institutions are underutilized (Abreu et al., 2016; Fleming, Oertle, & Plotner, 2017; Hong, 2015). This study examined how university disability services can be more utilized as perceived by students with nonvisible disabilities and by university disability and student services personnel. The following is an overview of the research design and methodology that were used, along with information about the population, sample, data collection method, and limitations of the study.

Research Design and Methodology

A qualitative case study was conducted to examine perceptions of how to increase the utilization of disability services at a 4-year university. According to Yin (2017), a case study is most favorable when the main research question is a “how” or “why” question. In this study, “how” questions were examined to find out ways to increase the utilization of disability services. Case studies are also best conducted when there is limited control over the behavior of participants and when the study focuses on a contemporary issue as opposed to a historical issue. There were no variables or control groups put in place that influenced the behavior of the participants, and the study focused on a problem 4-year universities were currently dealing with, so the issue was contemporary. This study was, therefore, well-suited for the case study method.

Population

Data were collected at a mid-sized 4-year university in a southwestern state. The total undergraduate enrollment for 2018 was 4,744. The same year, 53% of the student population was made up of first-generation college students, and students were 59% female and 41% male. The majority of students in 2018 identified as Hispanic/Latino (47%) or White (38%). The remaining students identified as Black (6%), Asian (3%), or other (6%).

Sample

The participants for this study were 4-year university students with nonvisible disabilities and university disability and student services staff members. Student participants were primarily gathered through the university disabilities office as well as through word-of-mouth and social media outlets. Purposeful sampling, which involves selecting participants who are easy to reach, was used (Leavy, 2017). For student participants, students were gathered until data saturation was met. Data saturation occurs once the researcher gets to the point where new data starts to be redundant (Grady as cited in Saunders et al., 2018).

For staff participants, the campus staff directory was used to obtain names and job titles of employees who fit the parameters of the study. Staff participants were then invited to participate using email messages and phone calls. Both students and staff members were directed to email the examiner to set up an interview appointment if they wished to participate in the study.

Materials/Instruments

Both student and staff participants were interviewed through semistructured interviews. Semistructured interviews were used because they provide researchers with structure while still providing the freedom to adjust the course of the interview as needed (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018). The interview questions focused on how participants perceived their university could increase the use of disability services on their campus. Participants were asked about the roles they perceived had in helping increase the utilization of campus disability services. Semistructured interviews helped cover the proposed topics while also allowing topics presented by the participants to be further probed (See Appendix A and Appendix B). Interview questions were

field-tested by a staff member from the target population who was not included as a participant in the study.

Qualitative Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

Student participants were invited to participate through the disability services office as well as through word-of-mouth and social media. As a way of maintaining student confidentiality, the campus ADA Compliance Officer sent invitations to students with disabilities to participate in the study my behalf as the researcher. Staff participants were invited to participate through individual emails and phone calls. Once contact was made between the participants and me, an individual interview on an online video communication platform was scheduled. Interviews were conducted during the social distancing measures put in place during the COVID-19 pandemic, so it was safest to use an online video conferencing platform for interviews than meeting face-to-face. Seeing the participant's face through the online video communication interviews allowed the interviewer to build rapport with the participant before beginning with the semistructured interview questions. However, participants were given the option to turn off their camera if they preferred. Additionally, interviews were recorded and transcribed to facilitate the coding process.

Analysis

A thematic analysis method was used to develop themes from the interviews. The following six-step process was used to analyze the data (Attride-Stirling, 2001):

1. Code material
2. Identify themes
3. Construct thematic networks
4. Describe and explore thematic networks

5. Summarize thematic networks
6. Interpret patterns

As part of the coding process for step 1, the following three steps were employed to help develop codes: creating a storyline, coding the data, and using memos for clarification (Stuckey, 2015). Creating a storyline requires the researcher to read through and become familiar with the data. The interviews were transcribed, and a summary of the data was written for each interview. Next, the data were categorized into codes. For this study, the data were analyzed through In Vivo coding. In Vivo coding allows a researcher to code interviews using the participants' own words (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018). Themes can then be developed from the use of words or phrases that stood out from the responses given by the participants. After creating the initial codes, codes that could be expanded upon were marked for further analysis, and similar codes were grouped together. Once the codes were developed, the remaining steps in the thematic analysis approach were used to develop themes from the interviews.

Methods for Establishing Trustworthiness

According to Shenton (2004), credibility is established in part by establishing familiarity with the participants and by using triangulation techniques. To help establish familiarity, staff participants were directly contacted over email or phone before the interviews took place. For all participants, familiarity was also established by building rapport through informal conversation immediately before the interviews. All participants were individually interviewed. Triangulation, which involves using different methods like individual interviews and observation, was beneficial for this study because it allowed for confirmability. Confirmability occurs when the researcher ensures the findings are the result of the participants' experiences and not the result of the potential biases of the researcher (Shenton, 2004).

Shenton (2004) further noted the use of tactics that help ensure honesty in participants and the use of iterative questioning both help establish credibility. When it came to ensuring honesty, participants were informed and reassured their participation was voluntary, so any participants who remained in the study were ones who had enough interest in the topic to answer truthfully. Regarding questioning, the use of semistructured interviews allowed participants to be further probed on their answers to initial questions.

Credibility was also established through the use of well-established research methods, peer scrutiny, and frequent debriefing between me as the researcher and superiors (Shenton, 2004). Getting feedback from peers serves to bring a fresh perspective to the work and allows researchers to challenge their own assumptions about the research. When it comes to debriefing, researchers should discuss their research and vision with trusted superiors because doing so serves as a way of getting direction and widening their perceptions about the research. Collaborative sessions are used by researchers and superiors as a way of discussing alternative approaches to the research and as a way of drawing attention to any possible flaws or biases in the work. It is important for researchers to enlist the aid of others more knowledgeable in either their subject area or in conducting research in general because it helps the research and data collection stay on the right track throughout the entire process. Trusted peers like coworkers in the fields of higher education and special education and fellow students in the doctoral program were sought out for consultation on the subject matter to ensure the present research went through the process of scrutiny and debriefing. The report was also submitted to a faculty supervisor for frequent feedback, direction, and correction.

Researcher Role

As the researcher, I have a little over ten years of experience working in mental health and psychoeducational testing at both the higher education and K-12 levels. I have a long history with the university used in this study and have been both an undergraduate and graduate student as well as a staff member and part-time faculty member at the institution. As part of my work, I engaged students with a variety of nonvisible disabilities like learning disabilities, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, and mental health conditions. I conducted all of the interviews, so my experience working with sensitive populations was beneficial for me when collecting data for the study.

Ethical Considerations

Prior to beginning the data collection process, consent for the study was sought from the university Institutional Review Board (IRB). Before the research proposal was submitted for approval to the IRB, I completed training on the ethics of using human participants in research. An application with the research proposal was then be sent to the IRB. For this study, an expedited board review was conducted.

Once the study was approved by the IRB, an ethical research process was further ensured by providing participants with an electronic copy of the informed consent form. The consent form let participants know what was being studied and about any potential risks of taking part in the study. Participants were informed their data would be used only for educational purposes. Participants were further informed they would not be personally identified, and to maintain anonymity, their interviews would be coded numerically.

After the interviews, all participants were debriefed. Participants were given a brief explanation of the problem of practice, the purpose of the study, and the literature on the subject,

and a brief explanation of why certain questions were asked during the interview. For participants who were asked additional questions that were not in the interview script, an explanation was provided for the reason they were further probed on certain answers. Participants were also provided with information about how the interview questions would be used to find a resolution to the problem of practice. Participants were then given an opportunity to ask questions and were thanked for their participation in the study.

The study was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, so additional ethical considerations were made in light of the pandemic. Physical contact with participants was limited, and video communication was used to help maintain social distance between the participants and me. Social distancing recommendations were followed at all times, so participants were not potentially and needlessly exposed to COVID-19 as a direct result of this study.

Assumptions

Students with disabilities have been found to disclose their disability status only when necessary (Cox et al., 2017; O'Shea & Meyer, 2016). It was then assumed student participants would be difficult to obtain because students with disabilities may not have wanted to disclose their disability status to participate in research. Adding to this assumption, it was further assumed students who volunteered for the study would provide honest information during interviews. To help reduce the negative outcomes related to these assumptions, the methods used to establish trustworthiness, such as establishing familiarity, helped make it easier to find available participants.

Limitations

The study dealt with a single mid-sized university; therefore, the results will not be generalizable to other 4-year universities due to the varying resources that are available at larger or smaller universities. The study is limited by the location of the study because the area is predominately Hispanic/Latino. Most of the students who attend the university are local students, so the student population is also mostly Hispanic/Latino, followed closely by White. The lack of diversity in the area leads to a limited diversity participant pool, which further keeps the study from being generalizable to the population. Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic has caused limitations by making it more difficult to obtain participants due to students and staff members working and attending classes remotely.

Delimitations

The perceptions of students with nonvisible disabilities and disability and student services staff members regarding the use of disability services were examined. However, the present study did not examine faculty perceptions. The study also did not examine the perceptions of students without disabilities or the perceptions of students with visible disabilities.

Summary

A qualitative case study was conducted where students with nonvisible disabilities and disability and student services staff members were interviewed through semistructured interviews. The study was conducted at a mid-sized 4-year-university. IRB approval was obtained before beginning the data collection process.

Disability and student services staff participants were invited to participate in the study through emails and phone calls, and student participants were invited to participate in the study through the disability services department, word-of-mouth, and social media. Informed consent

was obtained, and possible risks were discussed before the interviews. Rapport was established before starting the interviews, and all participants were debriefed after their interview.

The study was limited because it was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic and in a predominantly Hispanic/ Latino area where most students are also Hispanic/Latino. The study focused on student and staff participants, but it did not focus on the perceptions of faculty members. The following chapter focuses on the collected data and reviews the various themes found during the interview process.

Chapter 4: Results

The problem studied was that campus disability services are underutilized. The main purpose of the study was to examine how university disability services can be more utilized as perceived by students with nonvisible disabilities and university disability and student services staff members. The interview questions were designed to see how students and staff members perceived the use of campus disability services through the lens of transition theory, self-determination theory, and self-advocacy. The following research questions guided the study:

RQ1: How can university disability services be more utilized as perceived by students with nonvisible disabilities?

RQ2: How can university services be more utilized as perceived by university disability and student services staff members?

Thematic Analysis

This chapter presents the results of the study and a breakdown of themes that were derived from the interviews. The participants in the study were individually interviewed over an online video conferencing platform. The interviews were recorded and later transcribed and coded using a thematic analysis process. According to Attride-Stirling (2001), thematic analysis is a way of organizing qualitative data so themes can more easily be derived from the information. A three-stage, six-step process was employed where there is a breakdown of the text, exploration of the text, and integration. The six steps are as follows: 1) code material, 2) identify themes, 3) construct thematic networks, 4) describe and explore thematic networks, 5) summarize thematic networks, and 6) interpret patterns.

During the breakdown stage, which includes the first three steps, a thematic network is set up. A web-like design is used to help summarize the main themes of a study. Basic themes

are derived from the textual data. The basic themes are then grouped into organizing themes that are then grouped into global themes. Global themes are the final themes and serve as the core of the thematic network. Global themes help summarize and make sense of the two previous clusters of themes (Attride-Stirling, 2001). During the exploration stage, which includes steps four and five, the text is revisited with the themes in mind so that patterns can be found that match the themes. A summary is created to better explain the themes and patterns that were derived. The final stage and step six of the process involves interpreting the patterns and connecting the themes to the original research questions.

For this study, the interviews were first transcribed and then reread to familiarize myself with the text. Codes were then developed using In Vivo coding. Data were separated by staff and student interviews, and major points were marked as important. Each of the major points was then grouped by similarity into code categories.

The codes that were created were grouped and organized into basic themes, which were rearranged and expanded to develop the organizing themes. The organizing themes were then reorganized, and global themes were developed. After the themes were established, the interviews were reread with the themes in mind, and possible patterns in the text were further explored and described. Summaries were then created to help explain the patterns found in the text to the audience. During the final step of interpreting the patterns, the research questions that were developed for the study were revisited. The way each theme answered the research questions was examined. The themes were then organized into a more cohesive format that allowed for a better narrative to be developed for how the data answered the research questions.

Participant Demographic Data

A total of nine participants were included in the study. The participants were separated into student participants (Table 1) and staff participants (Table 2). Participants were asked about demographics such as gender, classification, disability, major, race, age, title, and years in school.

Student Participant Demographic Information

Five students (mean age = 26.2 years) participated in the study. Two students reported to be male, two reported to be female, and one student's gender was unspecified. Three students were Hispanic, one was white, and one was biracial. Three students were psychology majors, one was a nursing major, and one was a child and family studies major. The students had been in school from 3 to 12 years ($M = 5.8$ years). Three students were registered with the office of disabilities, and two were not registered. Of the student registered with the office of disabilities, two had registered during their first year at the university and one during their second year. Two of the five students received disability services during secondary education. The following disability conditions were reported: learning disability/dyslexia, chronic pain, anxiety disorder, mood disorder (depression), and attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Three of the five students reported two disability conditions, and the other two only one disability condition.

Table 1*Student Participant Demographic Data*

Participant	Age	Gender	Race/ ethnicity	Class	Major	Registered for services	Total years in school	Disability
Student 1	23	Male	White	Junior	Nursing	Yes	3	Dyslexia /Learning Disability
Student 2	26	Unspecified	Biracial	Graduate	Psych.	Yes	7	Chronic Pain Anxiety Disorder
Student 3	28	Female	Hispanic	Sophomore	Child & Family Studies	No	4	Anxiety Disorder
Student 4	20	Female	Hispanic	Junior	Psych.	Yes	3	ADHD
Student 5	34	Male	Hispanic	Senior	Psych.	No	12	Mood Disorder (Depression) /Anxiety Disorder

Staff Member Participant Demographic Information

Four staff members (mean age = 42 years) participated in the study. One participant was male, and the other three were female. The staff members had worked at the university from 2.5 months to 25 years ($M = 7.67$ years). Two participants were Hispanic, and the other two were White. Three participants worked under the student services department. One worked under the office of disabilities.

Table 2*Staff Member Participant Demographic Data*

Participant	Age	Gender	Race/ethnicity	Department	Time at job
Staff Member 1	36	Male	Hispanic	Student Services	2.5 Months
Staff Member 2	30	Female	Hispanic	Student Services	5 Years
Staff Member 3	24	Female	White	Disability Services	6 Months
Staff Member 4	78	Female	White	Student Services	25 Years

Student Perspectives

Student interviews focused on student transition and perceived ways to increase the use of campus disability services. Student participants were also asked about barriers they experienced and their self-advocacy skills. The following codes were used to organize the student interviews into themes: transition, accommodations, faculty and staff, self-advocacy, student experience, secondary issues, lack of resources and knowledge, self-identifying, and finances. A total of 11 different themes were derived from the student interviews.

Transition and Individual Experiences.

Individual Experiences. The individual experiences of students were an important consideration in students' knowledge of disability services and transition. Student participants who received disability services during their K-12 education knew what they needed to do to set up disability services as opposed to student participants who did not receive K-12 services.

Student 1 reported:

When I first went to college, it was actually the doctor I went to in high school that ran us through what we would need, and he made sure we got all our documents. We had also done the tour of the campus and then talked things over with the disability office.

Three of the student participants were diagnosed with their disability as adults. Two of the three students were unaware their condition might qualify them for disability services. When asked why they did not seek out disability services, Student 3 reported, “I didn’t know I could get help like that,” and Student 5 stated, “I wasn’t aware I could do that.”

Additionally, the two nontraditional students in the study had to deal with returning to school after dropping out and experienced feelings of fear and uncertainty towards returning to college. Student 3 highlighted her feeling when she stated: “It felt like the right time to come back. I wanted to start over and do something for myself, so even though I was scared it was something I really wanted, so I started school again.”

Student 5 indicated similar feelings when he reported: “I ended up withdrawing due to difficulties, and I have a lot of anxiety about school. That’s why I’ve dropped out and restarted again so many times.”

Two of the students reported taking medication for their conditions. The students found medicine helpful and reported it helped them perform better in school despite their disability. Student 5 said that he “has anxiety, lack of focus, and mood swings,” without medication. Student 4 stated, “Medicine helped me focus, and I was less stressed about school all the time.”

All of the student participants in the study were not diagnosed with their condition until middle school or later. Student 1 reported the earliest diagnosis and stated, “[Getting diagnosed] was a process. Officially, I went in to get checked when I was 12.” Student 4 reported, “I didn’t get a diagnosis until I was a junior in high school. The other three students did not receive a diagnosis until adulthood. Student 3 highlighted this when she reported, “I didn’t have anxiety back in high school. The anxiety started a few years back.” Student 5 also did not receive a

diagnosis until adulthood but stated, “I was depressed as a teenager but didn’t get an actual diagnosis until just a few years ago.”

Preparation and Planning are Important. Based on student interviews, it was found preparation and planning were important during the transition phase. Student participants received help during their transition from family members. Student 3 felt comfortable with her transition into college and highlighted how her family experience helped her when she stated, “I kind of knew what to expect because my older sister had been through all of the college stuff already.” Student 1 also reported feeling comfortable with his transition because of the guidance he received. He stated, “Doctors told me what to do [to get disability services], and we did it.”

On the other hand, student participants who did not receive disability services during their K-12 education did not report doing anything special during their transition into college. Student 5 dropped out of school and restarted several times. He reported struggling with school and that lack of preparation hurt his chances of success: “I didn’t have preparation the first time. I just started school, and then I ended up withdrawing. There was no preparation for this last time I started school either. That’s part of the reason why I’m having difficulties now.”

Accommodations are Beneficial. For the most part, student participants found accommodations helpful. Student 2 reported accommodations like having a quiet room for testing, a recording device, or extra breaks helped them both with their classes and with their disability.

[Accommodations] have helped me at times when I need to step out and focus on my pain. They have helped me keep track of the lesson that’s gone on in the absence of concentration. They have also helped me stretch and relieve my pain, and the testing room has been very beneficial because my anxiety is definitely down.

Student 1 similarly reported accommodations were beneficial:

I get my own private room to do my exams, and that's really helpful. It's helpful in that I'm not looking at what the other students are doing, so I don't get distracted by who finished before me, and then with the extended time, I don't have to worry about the clock. As for the scribe, it's handy that I have someone else taking notes who would catch things that I don't write or don't hear in the moment.

Student 4 had waited to set up disability accommodations until her second year of college and reported: "I wanted to see what college was like first, but then I started having some trouble...It would have been smart to go [to the disability services office] when I first started...it probably would have helped me be less stressed."

Self-Identification is Personal. When it came to self-identification, it was found to be a very personal decision for student participants. For the most part, students reported they had told only family members and close friends and classmates about their condition. Student 2 reported, "I have friends who are aware of my difficulties both at school and in my personal life. Most of my support comes from my personal friends outside of school."

Additionally, professors and coworkers were told about disability conditions on an as needed basis. Student 4 stated she rarely self-disclosed because she did not want to talk about the traumatic life events that led to her anxiety disorder. She stated:

I don't really like to talk about it or anything because then I'd have to go into everything that happened, and I don't want to talk about that with anyone. I kind of just keep to myself...Just a few people at work know, [the ones] I've worked with the longest and my best friend, but it took me a while to open up. I needed some time off work to get things in order, so I had to let some of my coworkers know what was going on.

Reasons Students Do Not Set Up Campus Disability Services

Secondary Barriers. Student participants reported a variety of barriers that made it more difficult for them to succeed in school. For students with mental health conditions, it was reported anxiety was often a barrier for them doing things in class and participating in school activities. Student participants also reported anxiety made it more difficult to self-advocate. Student 4 highlighted this when she stated: “I know I get nervous when I have to talk to professors, just because I’ve always been kind of shy, and sometimes I’d rather just not ask questions or just keep things to myself.”

Students with depression, anxiety, and ADHD further reported difficulties concentrating while in class. Student 5 reported he struggled with self-sabotaging and lacked a support system due to his depression:

I self-sabotage and procrastinate and become overwhelmed. I convince myself that I can miss class and makeup assignments. I experience negative self-talk and the anxiety of failing again...It’s just difficult to do school sometimes with the time and emotions and the lack of motivation to do so...Sometimes, it’s harder because I don’t have anyone, no support system, no friends on campus, but that’s a direct result of my condition.

The COVID-19 pandemic in the past year also brought up various concerns for students. Students reported having to move to online courses and not being able to communicate with faculty and staff as easily due to university personnel working remotely. The pandemic also exacerbated students’ mental health struggles due to the overall changes experienced in the last year. Student 2 highlighted these difficulties when they talked about the changes to the class format:

COVID has definitely affected my performance at school. It's decreased my motivation because I've had to deal with things away from campus so getting back into school was almost impossible for me, but also, doing things online is much more difficult than actually meeting in person. Professors are just much harder to get a hold of. It is just a mess.

Student 2 also stated the pandemic had affected their accommodations:

COVID has messed up [my accommodations]. I get to take breaks if my classes are longer than two hours, but recently that has not been the case. Most of my classes are online now, and my only physical class is too important to miss to where I can't take a break, so that's been very hard on me.

Time management was another concern for student participants. All but one of the students worked as well as went to school. Students reported having to juggle their class and work time. Student 5 highlighted these difficulties when he stated a barrier he encountered was "time constraints with work and going to class." Student 3 also had difficulty balancing work and school and only went to school part-time. She stated, "My job keeps me pretty busy, and I just don't think I could add on even one more class."

Two students further reported it was difficult to attend university mental health counseling due to the difficulty of finding available time slots that worked with both their school and work schedules. Student 5 stated it was difficult "having time to go to counseling when it was available." Student 2 similarly reported, "the counselors are loaded with work, so it's hard for students to get appointments." Student 5 suggested "more time slots and more staff members" would help resolve the scheduling conflicts.

Lack of Knowledge. Some of the student participants were found to lack knowledge about disability conditions and services. The two nontraditional student participants were not registered with the office of disability services. These two students were unaware their conditions could possibly qualify them for disability services. Student 3 was unaware she might be eligible for disability services and stated:

I never really thought that was something that applied to me. Maybe if I knew before, like when I started school, maybe it would have been good. I'm not even sure how the school would help, though, with my condition.

Student 5 was also unaware he might qualify for disability services. He stated he might have asked for help if he had "overall knowledge of what services [he] could get."

Limited Resources. Student participants reported limited resources kept them from getting necessary supports. Students felt the university was poorly organized and had a high staff turnover rate. Due to the lack of staff, students did not always get the services they needed. Staff members were reported to send students to different departments instead of helping students directly, which caused students to become frustrated with university personnel. Student 2 described their experience trying to get help at the university:

When you need to call one department, you can never get a hold of anyone, and you get placed into a whole separate department that you didn't even mean to get a hold of with one call. So, you're pretty much doing a shuffle of trying to get a hold of the right person. It's a mess, and there's a high turnover rate, so they always lose workers.

Student 2 also reported there were fewer resources available for graduate students than undergraduate students stating the university "does not have good tutoring for graduate students, it's pretty much nonexistent. I had to pay for it myself." Counseling was also a universal support

that was reported to be limited due to a lack of staff members to serve students. Student participants felt additional staff members needed to be hired for them to get all their needs met.

Self-Advocacy. Self-advocacy was found to be necessary for setting up disability services. Students reported self-advocacy made it less difficult for them to ask for accommodations. When asked about self-advocacy, Student 1 stated: “It can definitely make things harder if I don’t [self-advocate], if I don’t go and talk to professors and the disability office to make sure things are happening.”

Students also reported negative experiences with professors made them realize the importance of self-advocating because it helped them stand up for themselves. Student 2 stated:

I’ve met with some resistance before, and I believe that resistance has made me learn how to speak about [my needs] faster and more efficiently so that professors can’t turn me away as much...There’s been a lot of learning from negative experiences.

Additionally, students felt it was important to know their own needs so that they could better advocate for themselves. Student 1 highlighted this when he stated, “I know what I need, and I make sure to get what I need.”

Students also reported struggling to self-advocate. Student 3, who struggled with anxiety, reported she became nervous at the thought of speaking to professors and preferred to keep her struggles to herself than ask for help. “I know that sometimes I have to stand up for myself, but that can be hard for me. It makes my anxiety really spike. It’s easier to just keep things to myself than to ask questions.” Additionally, Student 5 reported being unsure what exactly self-advocacy entailed and asked the interviewer, “What exactly is self-advocacy?”

Faculty and Staff

Faculty Attitudes and Communication Style. Students with disabilities were found to be affected by faculty attitudes and communication styles. Students reported mixed experiences with faculty with some students reporting faculty were mostly helpful with giving accommodations and other students reporting faculty members had poor attitudes towards students with disabilities. Student 1 said the faculty had “been understanding and willing to help. Student 4 similarly stated, “My professors have all been good about helping out.” Student 2 had a different experience and reported they “were disappointed in their department” due to a professor exhibiting “unprofessional behavior.” Student 2 believed professors should: “Be professional, learn not to put personal attitudes above the job, and treat everyone the same regardless of whether they like them or not.”

Student 4 reported she preferred when professors did not ask questions and simply provided the requested accommodations.

My professors have all been good at helping out, but I know I’ve heard that some professors are not all that helpful. Maybe it’s just the professors I have that have been nice, but I like that they didn’t ask any questions once I showed them my letter that I needed services. They just kind of did it, which was nice for me.

Additionally, it was believed to be important for faculty to have good attitudes towards students with disabilities because some students’ disabilities, like anxiety disorder, caused further difficulties speaking with professors. Student 3, who struggled with anxiety, reported: “I prefer sending emails because then I don’t have to talk to professors, but then if they don’t answer, that doesn’t really work. It’s hard to get things done when they don’t answer.”

Staff to Student Ratio. Students benefited from having a good staff-to-student ratio. The three students who received disability services reported the disability staff members they encountered were great to work with and provided good services to students. Student 2 noted, “The disability people themselves are great. They take care of things when you ask for them.” However, students also reported there were not enough staff members to provide services. This lack of staff was reported for both staff that provided disability services and staff that provided universal supports like counseling. Student participants also reported not feeling comfortable seeking out services like counseling due to having had the available counselors as professors. Students felt having more staff members would eliminate conflicts of interest with professors that had dual roles within the university.

Student 2 noted: “It’s tough for students to go to counseling because our professors want to be over it, but how am I supposed to go to counseling if I have to worry about my teachers and the ethical barriers?”

When asked about using campus counseling services instead of an outside counselor, Student 3 similarly reported: “I’d rather just pay and stay with the one I have...I had one of the campus counselors as a professor, and I don’t feel comfortable with people I know.”

Students felt there were not enough staff members to provide needed services and that sometimes student employees were used to provide services like note-taking. When asked about his note taker, Student 1 stated:

I preferred having a staff member because they would’ve been vetted for their ability at jotting down notes. That was their sole focus, taking down notes and focusing entirely on that, not another student who might be distracted by a variety of other things that were not as important.

Financial Barriers

Student participants reported several financial barriers that negatively affected their college experience. Student 3 dropped out during her first time in college due to financial concerns. She stated when she dropped out: “It was mostly due to money. It was just hard to work and go to school, so I stopped and then I just worked for a few years.”

Student 2 experienced financial barriers due to their disability. Regarding school, they stated:

I had to take a year off and had to give up a grant because I wasn't sure how to deal with and cope with my condition...When I returned, I had to take out loans because the grant wasn't available anymore, so it was a hard transition into school, accepting debt because I originally wouldn't have had to.

Student 2 also reported COVID affected them financially, stating, “I lost my job due to COVID, and it's been hard to get another one.”

Staff Perspectives

Staff interviews focused on student transition and perceived ways to increase the use of campus disability services. Staff members were also asked about their experience and comfort level with working with students with nonvisible disabilities. The following codes were to organize staff interviews into themes: Limited experience, secondary issues, self-identifying, lack of resources and knowledge, accommodations, stigma, communication and collaboration, faculty and staff, and self-advocacy. A total of 12 different themes were derived from the staff interviews.

Communication

Communication and Third-Party Help are Important During the Transition

Process. As part of the transition process, students learn about their disability and needs as a student. Staff participants reported students with disabilities were given support and preparation from parents, teachers, and high school personnel during the transition process. Students who received services in secondary school generally knew what they needed and how to get it because the necessary information had been communicated along the way. Staff Member 4 reflected this when she stated:

Students with real disabilities that come to college do quite well. They know what their disabilities are; they have the accommodations from whenever they were diagnosed.

Everybody followed them, supported them, made sure when they graduated, all of their documents were up to date and ready to go, so the transition to college was easy.

However, it could be more difficult for students who had not been identified as having a disability to get help because they were unfamiliar with the process and did not get third-party support while in high school. According to Staff Member 4, “The ones that leave high school and go to college that have never had accommodations, then it becomes a little bit tricky because they’re having to be diagnosed first.”

Staff participants also reported communication was important for helping students during the transition process. Having conversations with new students was an important part of the transition process. It was important to talk to students early and to have conversations with them about campus supports before they even started school. Staff Member 3 reflected this when she stated:

We typically try and onboard students before they get to campus...just having a good conversation with them about what they can expect from our office and have a support system already in place lined up for them...if we can have that, that really starts the support process and that often times help with the experience of going from high school to college.

Additionally, most students who sought out campus disability services were traditional students, so reaching out to high schools and working with students and high school personnel early was reported to be a good way to get more students to register for campus disability services. Staff Member 3 highlighted the benefit of this when she stated:

I think one of the things we can do better is catching students early. So, having more of a presence at orientation, having more of a presence in that transition process by connecting with some of our common high schools so that we can be working with guidance counselors and whoever's on the ground there to make sure that students feel really supported in their transition...doing those kinds of things so that we're starting those conversations early, so students know what's available to them.

Communication Between Stakeholders is Important for Student Success. Staff participants discussed the importance of having good communication between students and faculty, and staff. By talking to students, faculty and staff could better figure out the students' needs. Staff Member 4 believed it was important for professors to "sit down with students and ask them what's going on and find out what they need to do better in school."

Communication between staff and faculty was also reported to be important for student success when establishing accommodations. Staff Member 3 noted:

In general, our faculty is really kind and accommodating...So probably when we see the most feedback is when some accommodation we've put in place is altering the learning outcome. In those conversations, collaboration with faculty is important, especially when there is pushback about how to accommodate a student. We have to find the more reasonable accommodation that's going to protect the integrity of the course, so typically those conversations are collaborative.

Staff Needs

Staff Members Need Better Job Training. Staff Members 2, 3, and 4 were alumni of the university and had worked in at least two different departments throughout their time at the university. Staff Member 1 was new to working in higher education and had started his position just three months prior to the interview.

When asked about her experience working with students with disabilities, Staff Member 2 stated, "I've learned a lot since starting this job." Additionally, staff members reported they learned how to do their job through observation and by being mentored by a more experienced staff member. Staff Member 3's experience reflected this when she stated:

There were a lot of webinars and training, a lot of observation of my boss, just a lot of observation and learning...You kind of have to learn on the job. There's some really good principles, theories, and frameworks to know, but when you get in front of a student things are always a little bit different, so there's definitely a learning curve there.

Staff Member 3 further reported about her experience working with students with disabilities: "I think in the beginning, I was always second-guessing myself and wasn't totally sure, but I think my comfort level has grown a lot."

Departmental Collaboration is Necessary for Student Success. When it came to working with other departments, staff members reported it was important for different departments within the university to work together. Staff member 3 stated, “Collaboration between departments is important.” Staff participants reported it was important for departments to work together because staff members in different departments are unfamiliar with the work of other departments. Staff Member 2 stated:

Sometimes, students come in with paperwork and don’t know what to do about it, but we don’t either because it’s from a different office... We just send them where we think they need to go. Sometimes we see them again, sometimes we don’t. There’s a few times when we call other departments just to ask questions, but it’s definitely not that we all work together. It does feel separate from other departments... We tend to keep to our own departments.

Staff also reported it was important to seek to help students as much as possible and not deflect work to other staff members.” Staff Member 1 felt sending students to multiple departments made it more difficult for students to get the help they needed and said: “I don’t deflect; if a student comes to me for help, I’ll just try to fix it... I don’t care if it’s not my office, not my department. I just try to share as much information as I can.”

Faculty

Positive Faculty Relationships are Important. Staff participants reported the importance of good staff and faculty relationships. Professors sometimes recommended that struggling students seek out disability testing, so it was important for faculty to know about disabilities as well as know which staff members to direct students. Staff Member 2 stated:

Maybe we could do a better job of teaching what some of these disabilities actually look like. There are a few faculty members who refer more students to us than others, so maybe they need to learn more about what some things look like, like with ADHD. As soon as a student says they have trouble concentrating, they just jump to suggest ADHD when it could be other things.

Staff participants also reported professors sometimes called the disability and counseling departments for advice on how to deal with students with disabilities. Staff Member 2 reflected this when she stated: “We get professors call us asking for help with how to talk to their students or to make referrals to our office.”

Staff members further reported student and faculty relationships were important because professors helped provide student accommodations. While some professors were supportive and kind towards students with disabilities, others were less willing to help or simply did what was required of them by law. Staff Member 3 reflected this when she stated: “There are professors who are really supportive of our students, and then there are professors who accommodate students because it’s required by the law, not because they think students need accommodations.”

Staff Member 3 further noted the importance of faculty when she said, “faculty presence” was important for increasing disability service use because “professors are the ones who talk [to students] about resources on campus.”

Room for Improvement. For the most part, staff participants believed professors did a good job of providing accommodations for students. However, they also believed there was room for improvement on the part of professors. When asked about how best to help students, Staff Member 4 stated professors should “be more creative and figure things out” so that students

received appropriate accommodations. Additionally, Staff Member 4 believed professors could help students with disabilities even more by “improving the little things” they did in the classroom, like changing ways they taught to better help and accommodate all students.

Reasons Students Do Not Set Up Campus Disability Services

Self-Identification. Staff participants reported they had encountered students who were comfortable with self-identifying as well as students who were not comfortable self-identifying. Staff Member 2 recalled her experience with students when she stated:

I guess I wouldn't always know if I'm talking to a student with a disability because even when in counseling, there are some people who are open books and other people who don't always tell everything about themselves all at once. So, I guess I wouldn't always know if someone has a disability.

Staff Member 4 had a different experience and stated, “students would rather ask for help than struggle with their classes.” On the other hand, staff participants also reported students who preferred to not self-identify used universal supports, took online classes, or just did not ask for help to avoid having to self-identify. Staff Member 1 shared his thoughts on students self-identifying:

I feel like if they did need accommodations, and if it was going to be a difficult thing for them to be in school, they'd probably just do online classes. I don't think they would put themselves through that, and if they did, they would definitely hide it very well because I know there is a stigma.

Staff Member 3 further reflected reasons students do not self-identify when she reported:

We have some students who are struggling more with content-type things of a class, so they don't need disability accommodations. I really think it depends on the nature of the

student and what they need...students may just use departmental tutoring instead of accommodations. It just depends on what their struggle is.

Secondary Barriers. There were secondary barriers that added to the difficulties students with disabilities experienced. Staff participants reported freshman students often had the additional stressors of starting college. They dealt with family issues or identity issues that came with their transition from adolescence to adulthood. Staff Member 2 highlighted this when she reported, “With freshman, I deal more with counseling them on family issues or identity concerns, not with disabilities.”

Students who were veterans also had additional stressors from transitioning from military to civilian life. They may also have had additional needs due to their experiences while in the military. Staff Member 1 highlighted this experience when he reported:

It definitely is an older demographic of students. They're out of high school and went to the military, some of them only did four years, some 10...Their transition is not so much a transition because of a disability. It's more of a lifestyle change after being used to the military structure.

Staff Member 1 also indicated veteran students with disabilities may not always identify themselves when he stated:

The thing with veterans is that a lot of them don't self-identify as veterans. As much as some of them want to use their benefits, some of them don't because the minute someone finds out that they're a veteran, they get asked questions about things they don't want to talk about, like the kinds of things that trigger PTSD.

Another group of students who were reported to have secondary barriers were students with mental health disabilities. Staff participants reported students with depression had a tendency to drop out or just stop going to class. Staff Member 2 recalled:

I remember one student with really severe depression ended up having to drop out, but maybe that's why we don't get a lot of severe students because they stop coming after a while, or maybe they just drop out, and we don't even know about it.

Additionally, students with an anxiety disorder may have found it difficult to ask for help because talking to faculty and staff exacerbated their anxiety.

Lack of Knowledge. Lack of knowledge kept people from seeking out campus disability services. Staff participants reported university personnel's own lack of knowledge could negatively affect students. Staff Member 1 stated, "I wouldn't even know what kind of accommodations students need unless they specifically said something." This was reported to be especially true for mental health disabilities like ADHD and anxiety disorders because staff and faculty were sometimes unfamiliar with what the conditions entailed and how they presented in students. Staff Member 2 stated:

I know there are students I prefer working with. I feel I do better with cultural things and family issues, but anxiety is still something I ask a lot of questions about and look up books on the topic...I definitely feel we could do a better job of teaching professors what some of these disabilities actually look like in students.

Staff participants also reported students themselves lacked knowledge about how to get disability services. Staff Member 2 reported students need help with "paperwork and knowing about what all you need in order to get services." Some students lacked knowledge about what conditions were considered disabilities, so they did not seek out services because they did not

realize their condition would qualify them for disability services. Additionally, there were students who had not yet been diagnosed with a disability and students who were unaware their struggles were due to a disability condition. When asked about barriers students encounter, Staff Member 2 reported students “may not know they have a disability until they are adults.” There are also “some students who don’t even have a condition until they are in college, like with some mental health conditions.” Staff Member 3 similarly stated, “There’s been a couple of times where the student didn’t know their mental health condition was a disability.”

Knowing about the different services the school can provide was also reported to be necessary. Staff member 1 believed it was important to make sure students knew where to go for help by “disseminating information better, getting the message out about where to get services, and making sure students don’t forget” where to go for help.

Limited Resources. Staff participants reported limited campus resources negatively affected students. Some of the departments on campus were small and had only one to three full-time staff members. When asked about staff numbers, Staff Member 1 reported, “I don’t really have a team here. It’s really just me.” Staff Member 3 similarly stated, “It’s really just three of us, and then we have about two or three interns helping.” Due to these low numbers of staff, staff members were unable to help students as much as they would have liked because they had to divide their time between students. Staff Member 3 reflected this when she stated:

Unfortunately, we are such a small staff that the level of communication we’d like to have isn’t as high, just because I can’t facilitate conversations with the five professors that every student has. We couldn’t maintain that on top of just running the day-to-day stuff...we can’t do it as well as we’d like to.

Convenience. Convenience was reported to be an influencing factor on whether students signed up for disability services. Staff participants reported students would use accommodations or universal supports based on the type of struggles they had with school. Staff Member 3 stated:

Some students just use tutoring, so I think students just pick whatever's easier for them and whatever makes sense for their situation. If they're really struggling with managing the soft skills of a class like taking notes or staying organized, they might use accommodations; or if they're struggling more with the content of the course, they might just go to tutoring, so it just depends on what their struggle is.

Stigma. For the most part, staff participants reported stigma was a barrier students faced in setting up disability services. Staff Member 3 stated: "I think that a big barrier is the stigma of having accommodations and receiving services and what that means."

This was especially true for students with mental health conditions. Staff participants reported students had a tendency to feel more comfortable requesting accommodations than using campus mental health services. Staff participants believed more awareness about disabilities was needed to help eliminate stigma. Additionally, staff participants believed eliminating stigma would increase the use of disability services. Staff Member 3 reflected this when she said:

It's about doing our best as a campus to destigmatize disability services and what it is and how it sort of helps students...I'd love to see us work on disability awareness...We really want to encourage students to use these services and not be ashamed of it and not feel it makes them less of a college student or not smart enough or not good enough.

Staff Member 4 reported a different experience with stigma and stated:

I think it's getting easier because there seems to be, over the last 20 years, it's easier for students to ask for help and want help...It's not something bad anymore because we have so many more students and parents wanting accommodations for their kids.

Summary

The aim of the study was to find out how students and staff members perceived that the use of disability services by students with nonvisible disabilities could be increased. Student participants reported they believed accommodations were helpful. It was found students who had received K-12 services prepared for their transition into college and knew how to register for services, but students who were identified as adults already in college did not know they might have been eligible to receive disability services. Students suggested they would be more likely to seek out disability services if they knew more about how the university could help them and about what conditions would qualify them for services.

Student participants with mental health conditions reported their disability condition often made it more difficult to ask for help due to anxiety. Students suggested better and easier communication with faculty and staff members may help increase their use of disability services. Self-advocacy was reported to be an important skill needed for setting up accommodations. Additionally, financial barriers were reported, like not being able to afford classes and job loss as well as concerns that came up due to the COVID-19 pandemic, like switching to remote learning.

Staff participants reported better collaboration was needed between staff from different departments and between faculty and staff. Improving collaboration between departments and communication between faculty and staff were named as possible ways to increase the use of disability services. Communication between staff and students was also reported to be important

for students, especially during their transition into college. Staff members suggested that increasing their presence at orientation could help students learn more about available services. Improving the way faculty let students know about available services was also named as a possible way to increase the use of disability services.

It was also found staff members needed better job training, and faculty members needed more knowledge about how disability conditions like ADHD and mental health present in students. Staff members felt improving faculty and staff knowledge of disabilities would help students get better information about disabilities and lead to more students utilizing disability services. Furthermore, it was reported that more disability awareness was needed to reduce the stigma surrounding disabilities. Staff felt that if stigma was reduced then students would feel more comfortable self-identifying and seeking out disability services.

Staff and student interviews had some overlap in themes. Both participant groups reported students, faculty, and staff lacked knowledge about disability conditions. Additionally, students lacked knowledge of how to set up disability services. It was suggested that disability service use could be increased by providing faculty, staff, and students with better information of what disabilities are and with information about accommodations and how to register for services. Both participant groups also reported a lack of staff caused problems for students by limiting the potential resources that were available. It was suggested that students would be more likely to use disability services if the campus increased the available staff members.

Conclusion

This chapter presented the findings and results of the study with an overview of themes that emerged from student and staff member interviews. Themes that were derived from the student interviews included the following: individual experiences, preparation, and planning are

important, accommodations are beneficial, self-identification is personal, faculty attitude and communication style, staff to student ratio, self-advocacy, and financial barriers. Themes that were derived from staff member interviews included the following: Communication and third-party help are important during the transition process, communication between stakeholders is important for student success, staff members need better job training, departmental collaboration is necessary for student success, positive faculty relationships are important, room for improvement, self-identification, convenience, and stigma. Both student and staff member interviews had the three themes of secondary barriers, lack of knowledge, and limited resources in common.

The next chapter concludes the study. The study's results will be discussed in connection to the literature and the theoretical framework of the study. The final chapter will also have a review of the limitations, future recommendations, and overall conclusions of the study.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine the perceptions of students with nonvisible disabilities and disability and student services staff members regarding the use of campus disability services. Data were collected from nine participants: five students and four staff members. Participants completed individual semistructured interviews. After the interviews were transcribed, a thematic analysis approach was used to derive themes. The themes that resulted from the findings included individual experiences, preparation and planning are important, accommodations are beneficial, self-identification is personal, faculty attitude and communication style, staff to student ratio, self-advocacy, financial barriers, communication and third-party help are important during the transition process, communication between stakeholders is important for student success, staff members need better job training, departmental collaboration is necessary for student success, positive faculty relationships are important, room for improvement, convenience, stigma, secondary barriers, lack of knowledge, and limited resources.

This chapter concludes the study and includes a discussion of the findings and results as they relate to the literature and the theoretical framework that guided the study. The limitations of the study will also be discussed. Lastly, recommendations for future studies will be examined.

Findings in Relation to the Literature

Several themes were derived from the student and staff member interviews. The themes are discussed in-depth as they relate to the two research questions: RQ1) How can university disability services be more utilized as perceived by students with nonvisible disabilities? RQ2) How can university disability services be more utilized as perceived by disability and student services staff members? A discussion of the implications of the findings is also provided.

Themes Related to Transition

Individual Experiences, Preparation and Planning, and Third-Party Help During the Transition Process. Findings from student interviews indicated student participants felt preparing and planning for their transition into college was important. According to Francis, Stride, and Reed (2018), collaboration between all stakeholders like parents, students, and staff members is important during the transition process. Family members have also been found to be a support for students with disabilities during their transition and help students ask for help and services (Couzens et al., 2015; Daly-Cano et al., 2015; da Silva Cardoso et al., 2016). This study had similar findings where student participants reported getting knowledge about their transition into college and information about setting up disability services from doctors and family members. Findings from student interviews also revealed students with disabilities were given preparation and support to set up disability services from parents, teachers, and high school personnel.

Based on the literature, positive experiences in high school led to students with disabilities seeking disability services and experiencing greater motivation to succeed in college (O'Shea & Meyer, 2016). The results of this study support these findings because responses for student interviews indicated students who had received K-12 disability services and who knew what to do to set up disability services were more likely to register with the office of disability services. On the other hand, students who had not received K-12 disability services were less likely to plan for their transition and know about disability services and how to set them up.

Students who did not receive K-12 disability services were also more likely to drop out of college and spend more time in school than students who did receive K-12 disability services. Findings from staff member interviews further indicated students who were not identified before

college and did not get help while in high school were less likely to set up disability services than students who were identified during their K-12 years. Additionally, student participants with mental health conditions were more likely to be diagnosed with their condition as adults.

Similarly, McEwan and Downie (2013) found students with mental health conditions were more likely to be diagnosed after high school than students with learning disabilities.

Furthermore, findings from staff interviews indicated staff members felt it was important to work with students with disabilities while they were still in high school to help them with their transition into college. Staff members reported students with disabilities would be more likely to seek out campus disability services if staff members had conversations with students about setting up services and reached out to students to help them learn about college life before they started college. Francis, Duke, et al. (2018) highlighted similar findings where students with disabilities felt it would be beneficial for them to learn about college life and how to talk to professors about services before starting college.

Accommodations and Convenience. According to the literature, the most commonly used accommodations are extended time and alternative testing environments (Francis, Duke, et al., 2018). The results of this study support these findings because student participants reported additional time and a quiet room for testing as their primary accommodations. Findings based on student interviews indicated students felt accommodations helped them focus on their classes and that having a quiet room for testing allowed them to not get distracted by other students.

Findings for staff member interviews revealed staff members reported that when it comes to using universal supports or individual accommodations, students will use what is most convenient for their needs. According to Abreu et al. (2016), students believed the role of disability services was to help students establish accommodations, provide academic and

social/emotional support, and help with time management and organization. The findings of this study support these results because staff members reported students who needed help with organization and time management were more likely to seek out disability accommodations, and students who only needed help with course content were more likely to just use universal supports like tutoring.

Additionally, students reported emotional and mental health support were important needs (Francis, Duke, et al., 2018). Similar findings were revealed in this study as student participants reported they found the use of campus mental health counseling beneficial. Student participants were also more likely to use mental health counseling services than other universal supports provided by the campus, like tutoring and the writing center.

Self-Identification. Findings from student interviews indicated students preferred to self-identify as a student with disabilities only when necessary. Cox et al. (2017) and O'Shea and Meyer (2016) similarly found students who chose to self-identify did so only when necessary. For student participants in this study, it became necessary to disclose their disability status to faculty and staff when they needed accommodations. Student participants also found it necessary to disclose their disability status with friends, classmates, and coworkers when they needed additional emotional support or time off from work.

Cox et al. (2017) further found that students who self-identify do not always disclose details about their condition. Likewise, student participants in this study reported not wanting to discuss the details of their condition with professors. Students have also been found to avoid using accommodations to avoid self-identifying (Magnus & Tøssebro, 2014). Students further chose not to disclose their disability status as a way of avoiding negative perceptions and getting

a clean start in college (Hong, 2015; Kranke et al., 2013). Findings based on student interviews indicated student participants also tried to avoid negative perceptions by not self-identifying.

Additionally, one student participant reported not seeking out disability services because they wanted to see if they could do things on their own first. They set up disability services only after they started having trouble with their classes. Kranke et al. (2013) had similar findings where students delayed getting disability services until their disability negatively affected them with their coursework.

When it came to faculty and staff knowledge of a student's disability status, Black et al. (2015) found school personnel usually did not know about a student's disability unless the student self-identified. Results based on staff member interviews revealed similar findings that staff members felt they often did not know when a student had a nonvisible disability. Staff members reported they often would not know a student is struggling unless the student says something because students with nonvisible conditions like mental health conditions just stop going to school when they start to struggle instead of asking for help.

Self-Advocacy. Student participants reported self-advocating was an important skill that helped them improve their communication with professors. Student participants also reported learning to self-advocate helped improve their knowledge of their educational needs and disabilities. Daly-Cano et al. (2015) had similar findings where learning to self-advocate was found to be an essential skill for students with disabilities. Self-advocacy contributed to students' acceptance of themselves and their disability. Student participants with self-advocacy skills also felt more confident in their ability to take care of their needs. Additionally, students with self-advocacy skills were found to be more likely to seek out disability services (Fleming et al.,

2018). This study had similar results where the students who reported being comfortable self-advocating were the ones who were registered with the office of disability services.

Some of the student participants reported they became nervous when attempting to self-advocate and talk to professors. Additionally, student participants with anxiety disorders reported it was more difficult for them to self-advocate because talking to professors made their anxiety worse. Student participants preferred not to ask for help than have their anxiety become worse. Squires and Counterline (2018) reported similar results that students experienced feelings of fear and insecurity when it came to self-advocating.

Barriers

Lack of Knowledge. Findings from student participant interviews indicated student participants with mental health conditions did not seek out disability services because they did not know they might be eligible for services. McEwan and Downie (2013) had similar findings where students with psychiatric disabilities were reported to not seek out disability services because they were unaware of their right to receive disability services. Additionally, Lightner et al. (2012) found students struggled with setting up disability services because they lacked knowledge about their disability.

Both student and staff member participants reported faculty members lacked knowledge of disabilities and accommodations. Francis et al. (2019) had comparable findings where professors were found to lack preparation for dealing with students with disabilities. Black et al. (2015) and Dallas and Sprong (2015) also found professors lacked knowledge of disabilities and disability laws. However, professors with disability-related training were more supportive of students with disabilities. Findings for staff member interviews indicated staff member participants felt professors needed better knowledge of how to accommodate and work with

students with disabilities. Staff members also felt professors needed to learn more about different disabilities and how they present in students.

Secondary Barriers. Student participants with depression and ADHD reported their disability caused them secondary issues like struggling to concentrate and struggling to find the motivation to complete school. Depression was also reported as a factor that led to one student dropping out of school several times. Thompson-Ebanks (2014) had similar findings where students who had disabilities that caused problems with attention, memory, and mood were more likely to withdraw from school because of the symptoms of their disability.

Stigma. Hong (2015) found students did not seek out disability services due to possible stigma. Kendall (2016) and Thomson-Ebanks (2014) had related findings where students with disabilities were reluctant to disclose their disability status to avoid stigma. Staff member participants reported stigma was something students with disabilities dealt with and that a way to increase the use of disability services was to reduce stigma and bring more campus awareness to nonvisible disabilities. Responses to staff member interviews also indicated staff member participants felt faculty members could help reduce stigma by increasing their role in getting the word out about disability services. Abreu et al. (2016) similarly noted faculty members play an important role in helping reduce stigma for students with disabilities.

Faculty and Staff

Faculty Attitudes and Communication Style. Findings about faculty members were mixed because some student participants reported professors were good about providing accommodations, while other student participants reported professors were unprofessional and hard to communicate with. According to Yssel et al. (2016), the faculty-student relationship is important for students with disabilities. Warmth and genuine care have been found to be qualities

students prefer in professors (Francis et al., 2019). This study had similar findings where student participants reported faculty attitudes were important in their decision to seek out disability services. Student participants wanted professors who were professional and provided accommodations without questioning students. Additionally, student participants with anxiety disorders wanted professors to have a good attitude when it came to communicating with students.

Room for Improvement. Findings for staff member interviews revealed staff participants felt professors could do a better job of teaching and providing services to students. One staff member participant believed professors should change the way they teach to accommodate all students regardless of disability status. Fleming, Oertle, Plotner, and Hakun (2017) had similar findings where it was suggested using inclusive teaching practices and creating a disability-friendly environment would help improve services for students with disabilities. Students with disabilities have also reported learning best with more universal teaching practices (Black et al., 2015).

Staff to Student Ratio and Limited Resources. According to Littlepage and Clemson (2018), the increase in students with disabilities entering postsecondary institutions has caused issues for universities where there is not an adequate number of staff members to meet student needs. Student participants in this study reported a lack of available staff members made it difficult for students to get the services they needed from the campus. Being unable to get in touch with staff members was a major concern student participants expressed. Staff member participants also reported a lack of staff made it difficult to provide services to students. Most departments are small, and there are not enough staff members to provide enough time for all students. As a result, both student and staff member participants suggested having more staff

members would be beneficial for the university to provide adequate services for students with disabilities.

Additionally, student participants reported being unable to utilize universal services like counseling due to a lack of available staff. Thompson-Ebanks (2014) found students with mental health conditions preferred to use outside counseling services. This study supported these findings because student participants reported campus counselors were sometimes their professors, so they preferred to see an outside counselor that would not cause a conflict of interest. Students did not feel comfortable seeing a counselor they had as a professor and felt there were not enough nonprofessor counselors to meet the needs of students on campus.

Staff Member Job Training. Francis et al. (2019) found students felt staff members would benefit from having additional training regarding students with disabilities. Students were also found to be more likely to seek out disability services when staff members were well-trained (O'Shea & Meyer, 2016). However, disability staff members have been found to come from a variety of different educational backgrounds and lack professional training and experience in disability services (Fleming et al., 2018). This study had similar findings where staff member participants reported working in different fields prior to their current position and not having specific backgrounds in special education or disabilities. Staff members learned most of what they knew about students with disabilities after they started in their current job position. These findings suggest students would be more likely to seek out disability services if staff members had better knowledge and training about disabilities, the needs of students with disabilities, and how to work with students with disabilities.

Positive Faculty Relationships, Communication With Stakeholders is Important, and Departmental Collaboration is Necessary. Staff member participants reported it was

important for staff members to have good communication with students and faculty because students received better services when all stakeholders worked together to meet the needs of students. Staff members also felt students would benefit from better collaboration between different departments on campus, so that faculty and staff knew who to send students to for help on campus. Both student and staff participants reported the university personnel needed to do a better job of working with staff from other departments and with knowing what each department does for students.

Additionally, staff member participants reported the relationship between professors and staff members was important because professors often asked for advice about disability concerns and referred students for disability services or testing, so it was important for faculty members to feel comfortable communicating with staff members. These findings point to a bigger issue of the importance of having a good campus culture. According to Fleming, Oertle, Plotner, and Hakun (2017), campus cultural and social climate has been found to be an important component in helping students with disabilities be more likely to persist and feel satisfied with their education. The findings of this study suggest the university needs to improve its campus culture because student and staff participants feel faculty and staff members from different departments are disconnected, causing students to struggle to get general educational and disability-related services from the campus.

Limitations

The study is limited by the location and setting of the study. The study dealt with a single public university in the Southwestern region of the United States; therefore, the results are not generalizable to other 4-year universities. The study was conducted at a mid-sized university, so

it also not generalizable to private universities or to larger public universities that have more numerous resources at their disposal.

The study is also limited by its location because the area where the study took place is predominately Hispanic/Latino. Most of the students who attend the university are local students, so the student population is also primarily Hispanic/Latino, followed closely by White/Caucasian. The lack of diversity in the area leads to a limited diversity participant pool. For this study, three out of the five students and two out of the four staff members who participated identified as Hispanic/Latino.

Another limitation of the study was that three of the five student participants majored in psychology. Therefore, the results of the study may not reflect the perceptions of students majoring in other disciplines. This may also indicate students majoring in psychology were more interested in participating in a study dealing with disabilities than students in other fields.

Furthermore, confidentiality and the COVID-19 pandemic caused limitations by making it more difficult to obtain participants. Potential student participants could not be contacted directly by the examiner due to confidentiality and were instead contacted through email by the ADA compliance officer. The COVID-19 pandemic also reduced the potential participant pool because the campus was closed more often, had reduced staff on campus, and had many staff members working remotely. As a result, staff members took longer to answer emails and phone calls because they were not on campus to receive calls or emails. Due to the COVID-19 social distancing guidelines, the interviews were conducted via an online video conferencing platform, so students and staff members who were uncomfortable or unfamiliar with online video conferencing may have not participated in the study due to their lack of comfort with this communication method.

Recommendations for Future Research

There are several possible avenues that could be explored in future research that relate to and can expand upon the findings of this study. The same study can be conducted in using different universities in either the same or a different geographical location. This would expand upon the current research by getting participants from locations with a different demographic makeup than the current location as well as explore how participants at different types of universities (i.e., large, small, and private) perceive the use of disability services.

Future studies would also benefit from focusing on faculty perceptions of the use of disability services. Several of the themes focused on professors, so the research on the topic of increasing the use of disability services would be expanded upon by getting faculty perceptions of their role in providing disability services. Additionally, focusing on staff members in departments other than the offices of disabilities and student services could help expand the research by helping find ways for staff members in different departments to collaborate more successfully.

There are many conditions that fit under the umbrella of nonvisible disabilities. This study did not differentiate between the different types of nonvisible disabilities, but future research could focus on individual types of disabilities like learning disabilities or mental health conditions. Most of the students in this study reported having a mental health condition, and their needs and experiences were different from the experiences of students with ADHD or learning disabilities, so focusing on specific conditions could help expand the knowledge of the experiences of student with different types of disabilities.

Student participant experiences of getting identified with a disability and of preparing for their transition into college were varied. Due to this, a more in-depth look at the transition

process would be beneficial. By further examining the transition process in future research, we can learn more about ways to improve the transition process and better assist students with disabilities with seeking out disability services.

Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine the perceptions of students with nonvisible disabilities and disability and student services staff members regarding ways to increase the use of disability services at 4-year universities. Data were collected from five student and four staff member participants through semistructured interviews. Interviews were transcribed, and themes were derived from each interview using a thematic analysis approach. The following themes were derived from the student interviews: Individual experiences, preparation and planning are important, accommodations are beneficial, self-identification is personal, faculty attitude and communication style, staff to student ratio, self-advocacy, and financial barriers; and the following themes were derived from staff member interviews: Communication and third party help are important during the transition process, communication between stakeholders is important for student success, staff members need better job training, departmental collaboration is necessary for student success, positive faculty relationships are important, room for improvement, self-identification, convenience, and stigma. Both student and staff member interviews had the three themes of secondary barriers, lack of knowledge, and limited resources in common.

This chapter concluded the study and discussed the findings of the study in relation to the previous literature. Participant interviews revealed that students and staff members felt the use of disability services could be increased by improving communication and relationships between students, faculty, and staff as well as by improving departmental collaboration at the university.

Students, faculty, and staff members were also found to lack knowledge about disabilities and disability services, so increasing knowledge and training about disabilities was discussed as a way to increase the use of disability services. Results also revealed that staff members felt reducing stigma and increasing awareness of disabilities on campus would make it easier for students to self-identify resulting in an increased use of disability services.

This chapter also discussed the limitations that were experienced throughout the research process. The main limitations discussed were the effects the location of the study had on the research and the effects that conducting research during the COVID-19 pandemic had on the study. The chapter was concluded by discussing potential future studies as a way of highlighting the importance of further exploring the utilization of campus disability services. Examining this topic further in different locations, with different types of universities, and with different populations like faculty or students with specific types of nonvisible disabilities would allow for additional exploration and discovery of ways to increase the use of disability services at 4-year universities.

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13. Describe your self-advocacy skills.
14. Describe the role, if any, self-advocacy plays in your experience as a student and with setting up classroom accommodations for yourself?
15. Talk about both internal and external barriers you encounter at the university.
16. How can university faculty and staff members help eliminate or reduce the barriers you encounter?

For students who do not receive disability services:

17. Tell me about your transition into college and what, if anything, you did to prepare for college.
18. What are your reasons for not seeking campus disability services?
19. Do you use universally available accommodations (i.e., services available to all students)? Why or why not?
20. Talk about both internal and external barriers you encounter at the university.
21. Describe your self-advocacy skills.
22. Describe the role, if any, self-advocacy plays in your experience as a student?
23. How can university faculty and staff members help eliminate or reduce the barriers you encounter?
24. What, if anything, would lead you to utilize campus disability services?

Appendix B: Staff Interview Form

1. Age: _____ Gender: _____ Race:
2. Job Title and Department:
3. How many years have you worked in your position?
4. Tell me about your knowledge of the transition into college for students with disabilities and what, if anything, you do to assist students in this transition.
5. What is your experience with working with students with disabilities? What is your experience with working specifically with students with nonvisible disabilities?
6. How comfortable are you with working with students with nonvisible disabilities?
7. What barriers do you feel students with nonvisible disabilities encounter with establishing disability services on campus?
8. Tell me what you have noticed about students with nonvisible disabilities' use of individualized accommodations versus universally available accommodations (i.e., services available to all students).
9. How can your department make it more likely for students with nonvisible disabilities to receive and request campus disability services?
10. How can the university make it more likely for students with nonvisible disabilities to receive and request campus disability services?

Appendix C: IRB Approval Letter

ABILENE CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY

Educating Students for Christian Service and Leadership Throughout the World

Office of Research and Sponsored Programs
320 Hardin Administration Building, ACU Box 29103, Abilene, Texas 79699-9103
325-674-2885



July 22, 2020

Cristina Figueroa
Department of Organizational Leadership
Abilene Christian University

Dear Cristina,

On behalf of the Institutional Review Board, I am pleased to inform you that your project titled "Utilization of Disability Services by Students with Nonvisible Disabilities",

was approved by expedited review (Category 6 & 7) on 7/22/2020 (IRB # 20-096). Upon completion of this study, please submit the Inactivation Request Form within 30 days of study completion.

If you wish to make any changes to this study, including but not limited to changes in study personnel, number of participants recruited, changes to the consent form or process, and/or changes in overall methodology, please complete the Study Amendment Request Form.

If any problems develop with the study, including any unanticipated events that may change the risk profile of your study or if there were any unapproved changes in your protocol, please inform the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs and the IRB promptly using the Unanticipated Events/Noncompliance Form.

I wish you well with your work.

Sincerely,

Megan Roth

Megan Roth, Ph.D.
Director of Research and Sponsored Programs