2022

“Even a little bit of independence can go a long way”: The experiences of students with disabilities transitioning from high school to college

Joshua M. Cooper
cooper299@marshall.edu

Recommended Citation

Cooper, Joshua M., "“Even a little bit of independence can go a long way”: The experiences of students with disabilities transitioning from high school to college" (2022). *Theses, Dissertations and Capstones*. 1751.
https://mds.marshall.edu/etd/1751

“EVEN A LITTLE BIT OF INDEPENDENCE CAN GO A LONG WAY”: THE EXPERIENCES OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES TRANSITIONING FROM HIGH SCHOOL TO COLLEGE

A dissertation submitted to
Marshall University
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education
in
Curriculum and Instruction
by
Joshua M. Cooper
Approved by
Elizabeth Campbell, Ph. D., Committee Chairperson
L. Eric Lassiter, Ph. D.
Lori Howard, Ph. D.
Douglas Sturgeon, Ph. D.

Marshall University
May 2023

APPROVAL OF DISSERTATION

We, the faculty supervising the work of Joshua Cooper, affirm that the dissertation *"Even a Little Bit of Independence Can Go a Long Way": The Experiences of Students with Disabilities Transitioning from High School to College* meets the high academic standards for original scholarship and creative work established by the Curriculum and Instruction program and the College of Education and Professional Development. This work also conforms to the editorial standards of our discipline and the Graduate College of Marshall University. With our signatures, we approve the manuscript for publication.

Elizabeth Campbell
Date: Dec 5, 2022
Dr. Elizabeth Campbell, Curriculum & Instruction
Committee Chairperson

Eric Lassiter
Eric Lassiter (Dec 5, 2022 14:20 EST)
Date: Dec 5, 2022
Dr. Luke "Eric" Lassiter, Curriculum & Instruction
Committee Member

Lori Howard
Lori Howard (Dec 5, 2022 16:21 EST)
Date: Dec 5, 2022
Dr. Lori Howard, Special Education
Committee Member

Douglas Sturgeon
Douglas Sturgeon (Dec 6, 2022 09:23 EST)
Date: Dec 6, 2022
Dr. Douglas Sturgeon, Shawnee State University
External Committee Member

Acknowledgements

To the brave students with disabilities who participated in this project — Drake, Rooster, Michael, Peg, Morgan, Skylar, Celia, Tyler and Alice —thank you for sharing your stories and your time with me. Your bravery is an inspiration to future generations of students with disabilities. The experiences you shared will help prepare them for a successful future.

To my chair, Dr. Elizabeth Campbell, and my committee, Dr. L. Eric Lassiter, Dr. Lisa Howard, and Dr. Douglas Sturgeon, thank you so much for your patience, guidance, wisdom, and encouragement throughout this process. You have been there when I needed you and provided encouragement when necessary.

To my fellow doc students, the Wolf Pack —Harley Walden, Angie Abbott, and Valerie Jones —thank you so much for being my tribe. Thank you for the laughs, the encouragement and constantly checking in on me. Val, thank you for everything. 25 years ago, you took me in and treated me like family. Thank you for all the advice, encouragement and karaoke on our long commutes to Charleston. Without you all I wouldn’t have made it past that first night, when Val and I couldn’t figure out what a chair was and how to get one.

To my dear friend, Erin Dixon, thank you for all of the hours spent editing and workshopping my writing.

To my parents, Mark and Krystal Cooper, my siblings, Annie, Ashli, Mickey, Alexis and Ameris and their spouses, thank you for all your love and encouragement. Thank you for teaching me the meaning of hard work, the value of education and offering to help in any way possible.

And finally, to my sweet and patient wife, Serena, and our beautiful girls, Penelope and Sloanne, I love you so much more than I could ever say. Thank you for your encouragement, motivation and support during this journey. Thank you for your patience during difficult times, knowing when I need to laugh and knowing when I need a hug. I love you more than yesterday, but not as much as tomorrow.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

Abstract

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2020), the national percentage of first-time, full-time college students who returned to the same campus the following year was 81%. For students with disabilities, retention and graduation statistics were disproportionate to their non-disabled peers. Students with disabilities graduated high school at a rate of 73% in 2018 (NCES, 2020) but completed college programs at a rate of just 38% while their non-disabled peers graduated at a rate of 51% (Sanford et al., 2011). Additionally, students were less likely to be full time students and were less likely to graduate on time (Lee, Rojewski, Gregg, & Jeong, 2014). In order to understand why so many college-bound students with disabilities are failing to complete post-secondary programs or participate in the typical college experience I conducted interviews to explore the experiences of students with disabilities who have transitioned from high school to college. The intent of this qualitative study was to utilize these interviews to explore the experiences of students with disabilities who have made the transition from high school to college and gain insight into how students with disabilities, parents, and Intervention Specialists could better prepare for a successful transition from high school to college, and how colleges might better serve students with disabilities while they are enrolled.

Findings:

Interviews with participants revealed two major themes: Challenges and Supports. Interestingly, there was not a consensus among participants about these challenges and supports. Some participants had great difficulty in areas that came easily for others. This aligns with the individualized nature of special education that participants experienced in high school. Data was further organized into five sub-themes; Identifying Disabilities, Needs and Supports, Interacting with Faculty and Staff, Navigating Campus, and Wraparound Services.

Chapter 1: Introduction

In the fall, new students arrived on college campuses around the country, brimming with excitement and anticipation. For college freshmen, the transition from high school to collegiate life was a paradigm shift. The burden of success was no longer on their parents or teachers; instead, it rested squarely on the shoulders of each individual student. For many, this was a liberating experience. They were able to follow their own unique interests into a course of study that best suited their ambitions. This liberation also presented a new set of challenges. Students were responsible for their class schedule, time management, independent personal care and financial stability. These challenges were too much for some and they failed to return the following year. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2020), the national percentage of first-time, full-time students who returned to the same campus the following year is 81%.

For students with disabilities, retention and graduation statistics were disproportionate to their non-disabled peers. Students with disabilities graduated high school at a rate of 73% in 2018 (NCES, 2020). These same students completed college programs at a rate of just 38% (Sanford et al., 2011), 13% less than the rate of their non-disabled peers who were graduating at a rate of 51%. Additionally, these students were less likely to be full time students and were less likely to graduate on time (Lee, Rojewski, Gregg, & Jeong, 2014). In order to understand why so many college-bound students with disabilities are failing to complete post-secondary programs or participate in the typical college experience I conducted interviews to explore the experiences of students with disabilities who have transitioned from high school to college.

Rationale

The intent of this qualitative study was to utilize interviews to explore the experiences of students with disabilities who have made the transition from high school to college. I chose to do this study because I hoped to gain insight into how parents and Intervention Specialists could better prepare students with disabilities for a successful transition from high school to college, and how colleges might better serve students with disabilities while they are enrolled.

Lee, Rojewski, Gregg, & Jeong (2014) found that even though more students with disabilities pursued postsecondary education than ever, they were less likely to be full-time students and were more likely to drop out. This was concerning, as postsecondary education increases positive employment outcomes for students with disabilities. Lindstrom, Doren, & Miesch (2011) discussed the importance of postsecondary education for students with disabilities and noted that, although the majority of individuals with disabilities held part-time or semi-skilled jobs, those with postsecondary education showed comparable employment outcomes to their non-disabled peers.

The evidence of improved employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities with postsecondary education coupled with a completion rate of college programs of just 38% (Sanford et al., 2011) for the same population prompted researchers to investigate why individuals with disabilities were failing to complete postsecondary education programs. Researchers identified risk and resilience factors for individuals with special needs. Fabian and Liesner (2005) identified important career related risk factors such as inadequate vocational training, poor self-efficacy, low occupational aspirations, social stigma, and discrimination. Post-secondary persistence risk factors included disability status, occupational and educational aspirations, family composition, family socioeconomic status, and peer influence (Lee, Rojewski, Gregg, & Jeong, 2014).

Researchers also identified an extensive list of resilience factors, generally split into two categories: internal and external influences. Lee, Rojewski, Gregg, & Jeong (2014) identified recognition of disability, accommodations strategies, positive attitude, self-advocacy, parent-child discussions, parental educational expectations, knowledge of American with Disabilities Act (ADA) guidelines, and positive individual career and educational aspirations as internal resilience factors. External resilience factors include supportive adults, connections to support staff, and positive emotional support and communication from parents (Lee, Rojewski, Gregg, & Jeong, 2014). Although existing research identifies factors that impact the outcomes of students with disabilities who are transitioning from high school to college, it would be helpful to understand how the identified resilience and risk factors impact individual students with disabilities and address underlying issues that may contribute to those outcomes. The current body of research lacks a narrative from the students' perspective. This study aims to provide that narrative through a collection of first-hand accounts from students with disabilities who experienced the transition from high school to college.

Summary of Methods

The purpose of this study has been to explore how students with disabilities experience the transition from high school to higher education, especially with regard to acquiring and utilizing accommodations, through the lens of those who have experienced this transition. The most effective way to achieve this exploration is through the first-person narratives, or stories, of research participants. Haffey and Rowland (2014) posited that first person accounts are a shortcut to the direct experiences of students and help to describe them in the context of those affected. In order to gather these stories, I conducted one on one interviews. Although face to face interviews would have been preferred, the era of social distancing required alternative methods. Participants determined if they wanted to participate in a teleconference or a Zoom video conference. Some participants may not have been able to video conference due to geographical, technological, environmental and/or socio-economic factors. Providing this choice allowed this study to be inclusive of all willing participants.

Participants for this study were identified through convenience sampling. In this case, convenience sampling was a method of non-probability sampling in which participants were notified through an email distributed by the Office of Disability Services and volunteered to participate. Participants were required to be students at Marshall University and be registered with the Office of Disability Services (ODS). This study was conducted using exploratory case study methods. Case study methods were the most appropriate for this study as it focused on one particular event, transitioning from high school to college, and required the flexibility provided by traditional case study methodology (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 59). This study fell in the sub-category of an exploratory case study as it aimed to provide initial data on the experiences of the transition for high school to college through the lens of those students with disabilities who experienced it. Qualitative interviews were utilized to gather data. Qualitative interviews allow researchers to use the stories of participants to construct an understanding of how they experience specific phenomena (Kvale, 1996). Semi-structured interviews allowed me to evoke stories from participants about their experiences in college, specifically those about acquiring accommodations. Kvale and Brinkmann (2008) define a semi-structured interview as “an interview with the purpose of obtaining descriptions of the life world of the interviewee in order to interpret the meaning of described phenomena” (p. 3). Brinkmann (2013) elaborated that semi-structured interviews “can make better use of the knowledge-producing potentials of dialogues by allowing much more leeway for following up on whatever angles are deemed important by the interviewee” (p. 21). The semi-structured interview allowed me to guide participants toward stories that were directly related to the research questions. It also provided me with the freedom to explore experiences that participants found important and unexpected themes that emerged. Interviews, the primary source of data collection for this study, commenced and continued until sufficient data for all research questions was collected.

Problem Statement

Traditionally, students with special needs struggle in higher education. Sanford et al. (2011) stated that 62% of students with special needs failed to complete higher education programs in America. The majority of the research available on this topic provides a quantitative understanding of the size of the problem. There was far less information on the nature of why students with disabilities are not succeeding. This was problematic for educators and administrators who were looking for ways to ensure the success of students with disabilities that entered their classrooms. This study aimed to identify common needs of participating students with disabilities who were trying to obtain accommodations and successfully complete college programs. In order to accomplish this, I utilized case study research methods to provide experiential information in real-life context.

In order to obtain valid, reliable, and appropriate data, one on one interviews were conducted with research participants. These semi-structured interviews allowed for research participants to explore their experiences in college and identify factors that they felt contributed to their successes and failures. The stories shared by research participants provided contextual data that identified common themes to be addressed in future research.

Research Questions

This study sought to answer the question: How do students with special needs experience the transition from high school to higher education in respect to obtaining and utilizing services and accommodations? Interviews were directed by the following research questions:

- How do participating students with disabilities experience the transition from high school to college?
- How do participating students with disabilities experience the process of acquiring accommodations in college?
- How do participating students with disabilities experience utilizing accommodations in college?

Definitions

Throughout this study, I utilized several specialized terms. For those readers who are unfamiliar with special education, this section aims to provide an understanding of those terms. The term *students with disabilities* refers to those students who required additional or specialized services due to having a physical, emotional, behavioral, or learning impairment. The term *Intervention Specialist* refers to educators who specialize in the education of Pre-K-12 gifted students and students with disabilities. For these students to receive accommodations in college, they must *self-disclose*, or personally inform and register, the nature of their disability to the *Office of Disability Services* (ODS). At Marshall University, The Office of Disability Services (ODS) is a vital resource for students with disabilities. The ODS provides the educational and physical accessibility supports that are necessary for students with disabilities to achieve their academic goals and to become as independent as possible. The ODS staff work directly with students to provide personalized services that make programs, services, and activities fully accessible to students with disabilities.

Significance of the Study

This study was dedicated to sharing the experiences of students with disabilities who transitioned from high school to college. I hoped to learn about these experiences and identify common areas of need for students with disabilities who are making the transition to college. The experiences shared by participating students with disabilities were unique to each individual, so no generalizable information was obtained through this study. It is my hope that a pattern of difficulties becomes apparent, and the knowledge gained through this study can be communicated with students with disabilities and their families in order to better prepare them for a successful transition to college and improve the likelihood of graduation.

While reviewing literature on the experiences of students with disabilities in college, two studies were found that provided qualitative data on the subject. In *Student Experiences Utilizing Disability Support Services in a University Setting*, Abreu, Hillier, Frye, & Goldstein (2016) performed a survey study that saw 21% of surveys returned. This study was used to identify areas in which an Office of Disability Services could improve. In *Qualitative Analysis of the Barriers College Students with Disabilities Experience in Higher Education,* Hong (2015) completed a study in which participant’s journals were collected and analyzed. This study provided an understanding of possible barriers for student success such as faculty perceptions and social stigmatization. Neither of these studies provided an opportunity for the reader to connect with participants and understand their experiences. This study attempted to fill a gap in the existing literature by providing first person narratives on the way participating students with special needs transitioned from high school to higher education. This was important, as it emphasized the human aspect of special education and made students with disabilities the focus of this study.

Limits

This study was limited to students with disabilities at Marshall University. Only those who registered with the Office of Disability Services were eligible to participate. As mentioned previously, this study did not aim to produce generalizable knowledge of the experiences of students with disabilities as they transitioned to college. The stories shared by participating students with disabilities were unique to each individual. Any similarities between participants' socio-economic backgrounds, communities, or ethnic groups were random. Their only known similarities were that they are students with disabilities and that they had experienced the transition from high school to college. Their stories were collected in a one-on-one setting and did not include classroom observations or assessment data. It was possible that participants experienced difficulties related to current social distancing practices. With this in mind, participants were able to meet via Skype or Zoom.

Organization of the Study

Following this introductory chapter, Chapter 2 provides a review of the current literature related to the history of special education in higher education, how students acquire services, how those students view the process and how faculty interact with students with special needs. Chapter 3 describes the full methodology of the study. Chapter 4 consists of participants' stories of transitioning from high school to college. Finally, Chapter 5 consists of a discussion of the findings, how they can be utilized to better prepare future transitioning students and recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

Nineteen percent of all undergraduate students reported having a disability in 2015-16 (NCES, 2020). Students with disabilities are completing college programs at a rate of just 38% while their non-disabled peers are completing college programs at 51% (Sanford et al., 2011). This discrepancy raises questions about how to better serve these students. Students with disabilities graduated high school at a rate of 67.7% in 2017 (NCES, 2018). It is vital to explore what factors could contribute to a difference of nearly 30%. A disparity of this magnitude warrants investigation into the experiences of students with disabilities in college. Although some research has focused on faculty perspectives and improving accommodations, little has been done from the student perspective. In order to better serve students with disabilities in college we must understand their experiences from their perspectives.

A Review of Disability Services in Higher Education

The origin of disability services in higher education can be traced back to President Abraham Lincoln (Madaus, 2011). In 1864, Lincoln signed a bill that established the Columbia Institution for the Deaf and Dumb which, in 1894, became Gallaudet College. Participation of individuals with disabilities in higher education was not exclusive to Gallaudet College but remained limited until the end of World War 1 (Madaus, 2011).

The Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1918 provided educational assistance for disabled veterans. Disabled veterans generally enrolled in degree programs that focused on agriculture and trade (Madaus, 2011). In 1944, Congress passed the Servicemen’s Readjustment Act (GI Bill) in an attempt to reduce the possibility of a post-war depression and ease the transition into civilian life for hundreds of thousands of servicemen. Developed in collaboration with the American Legion, the GI Bill established federal aid to help veterans with hospitalization, employment, and education. More specifically the GI Bill provided financial aid for qualified veterans attending approved institutions of higher education for tuition, books and supplies, counseling and living expenses (NARA, n.d.). This program was so successful that by 1946, 52% of all college students were veterans (Strom, 1950). The increase in the number of veteran students was accompanied by an increase in students with disabilities. Veterans with physical and emotional disabilities made up a significant portion of the disabled population in post-secondary institutions. Institutions often were unable to accommodate the influx of individuals with disabilities which lead to several issues. In addition to facility, housing and transportation difficulties, tension among faculty became apparent. Many faculty members felt unprepared to meet the needs of disabled students while others felt, “to include severely handicapped students in regular college programs would be a waste of time and effort” (Nugent, 1978). The American Council on Education took note of this and issued a statement that, “physical disability is not, and should not be an insurmountable handicap to the successful achievement of the benefits of a college career” (Strom, 1950, p. 47).

Federal Policy

In 1963, Dr. Samuel Kirk coined the term *learning disability* (LD) and by 1968 the federal government began acknowledging the category. This Federal attention prompted an increase in the number of students identified as learning disabled (LD) and provided vocational rehabilitations services (Madaus, 2011). In 1965, Congress passed the Higher Education Act (HEA) which provided financial support to colleges and universities who were serving students with disabilities (Shelly, 2018). The purpose of HEA was to “provide technical assistance or professional development for postsecondary faculty, staff, and administrators in institutions of higher education to enable such faculty, staff, and administrators to provide students with disabilities with a quality postsecondary education" (Higher Education Act, 1965). HEA established precursors that would lead to future educational developments like Meyer and Rose's *Universal Design for Learning* (UDL), postsecondary transition, creating research in the field, distance learning and disability career pathways.

The 1970's saw a drastic increase in Federal attention to individuals with disabilities. The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 expanded the role of the Federal government in the care of individuals with disabilities. This legislation outlined the coordination of the Secretaries of Health and Education and created the Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation (Shelly, 2018). This act specifically required federally funded institutions to make existing facilities accessible or provide alternative locations and new construction to be readily accessible to disabled individuals (U.S. Dept. of Education, 2017). Most importantly, Section 504 of this law states that:

> No otherwise qualified individual with a disability in the United States, as defined in section 705 (20) of this title, shall, solely by reason of his or her disability, be excluded from the participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance or under any program or activity conducted by any Executive agency or by the United States Postal Service. (The Rehabilitation Act of 1973)

Section E of Section 504 specifically targeted higher education. This section required institutions to consider the applications of individuals with disabilities and provide reasonable accommodations and aids to those individuals. As universities began to focus on improving access to all campus programs, student advisors began to allow students with disabilities to choose their majors without discrimination. This planted the seeds for the self-determination movement in higher education during the 1990s (Madaus, 2011). Self-determination theory is based on the idea that students with disabilities are more likely to successfully transition to higher education when they participate in “goal directed, self-regulated, autonomous behavior” (Field et al., 1998, p. 115). This shift in treatment of students with disabilities corresponded with the passage of the Education for all Handicapped Children Act in 1975 and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) in 1990. ADA led to increased access for students with disabilities in higher education, the development of programs for students with disabilities in higher education and an increase in public awareness (Madaus, 2011).

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

In 1997 Congress reauthorized the Education for all Handicapped Children Act and renamed it the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). IDEA ‘97 provided many changes, some of which included bringing regular education teachers into the IEP process, increasing student immersion into the general curriculum and state assessments, and providing services for students with ADHD (Gregg, 2000). IDEA was again reauthorized in 2004 as part of No Child Left Behind. This reauthorization ushered in penalties for states who were not meeting indicators, increased the focus on early intervention for struggling students and required transition plans, a plan of activities to prepare students for life after graduation (University of Kansas, n.d.).

The twentieth anniversary of ADA prompted policy makers to revisit the rights of students with disabilities to equal access. The Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act (ADAAA) addresses several issues encountered by students with disabilities in higher education. In addition to expanding the legal definition of *disability*, ADAAA outlines the need for a service model for students with psychological disabilities and the importance of accessible technology

(Heyward, 2011). Effective January 1, 2009, the ADAAA changed the legal definition of disability to read:

> (1) DISABILITY. — The term 'disability' means, with respect to an individual— (A) a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities of such individual; (B) a record of such an impairment; or (C) being regarded as having such an impairment (as described in paragraph (3)) (ADA Amendments Act of 2008).

This definition made it easier for students with disabilities seeking services under ADA to prove the existence of a disability by broadening the scope of interpretation. Students became able to receive services if they had a disability that impacted their learning or major life activities. In regard to higher education, uniform rules of building construction were established to ensure consistent standards when determining if a disability "substantially limits" an individual's ability to access the curriculum (Heyward, 2011). This was a major help to students with obvious physical disabilities but students with less obvious disabilities, like ADHD or anxiety disorders, still were not guaranteed to receive the services they required. ADAAA required that each case be addressed with an individualized assessment (U.S. Equal Opportunity Commission). The increase in students with psychological disabilities in higher education called for higher education institutions to evaluate how they serve those students. ADAAA acknowledged the need for an updated service model for students with psychological disabilities, recognizing that the service model should include providing mental health services and effective accommodations (Heyward, 2011).

On August 14th, 2008, Congress enacted the Higher Education Opportunity Act (P.L. 110-315) (HEOA). Along with reauthorizing the Higher Education Act of 1965, HEOA also included new provisions to improve the access to higher education for students with intellectual disabilities (Lee, 2009). For the first time, students with intellectual disabilities became eligible for financial aid in the form of Pell Grants, Work Study programs, and Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants. To be eligible for this assistance, students with intellectual disabilities had to be enrolled in a comprehensive transition and postsecondary program and maintain satisfactory progress (Lee, 2009). Although these Transition and Postsecondary Programs for Students with Intellectual Disability (TPSID) mark an important shift, they are not available at all institutions for higher education (IHE). As of 2019, there were only forty-eight institutions nationwide that received grant funding for their program (Institute for Community Inclusion, 2019). IHEs that do offer these programs must design the programs around students with intellectual disabilities who want to continue their education and improve their ability to gain postsecondary employment. These programs must have an outlined curriculum, advisors for students with intellectual disabilities, and a requirement that students attend academic classes on at least a half-time basis (Lee, 2009). The focus of these programs provides students with learning experiences focusing on socialization, independent living, self-advocacy, and career building based upon each student’s needs.

Disability services in higher education have drastically improved in the last half century and programs like TPSID provide higher education experiences for some students with disabilities but access to higher education must continue to improve. On July 12, 2017, H.R.3199 was introduced in the United States House of Representatives by Rep. Mark DeSaulnier. Titled the *Improving Access to Higher Education Act of 2017*, this bill aimed to “improve accessibility to, and completion of, postsecondary education for students, including students with disabilities” (H.R.3199). If passed, this bill would have increased funding for training of faculty in accessible instruction for the classroom, access to instructional materials and technology, and improvements in data collection and research, expanding options for students with disabilities in higher education and promoting UDL (Sesay, 2017). Although it did not pass, there were several bills that were introduced to the 115th Congress. The Aim High Act, for example, hopes to "authorize the creation of a commission to develop voluntary accessibility guidelines for electronic instructional materials and related technologies used in postsecondary education, and for other purposes" (H.R. 1772). The RISE (Respond, Innovate, Succeed and Empower) Act would "amend the Higher Education Act of 1965 to provide students with disabilities and their families with access to critical information needed to select the right college and succeed once enrolled" (H.R. 2782). We must continue to insist that Congress both follows up on their efforts to improve K-12 education for students with disabilities (IDEA) and widens their focus to include higher education more thoroughly as well.

How do students receive services?

When enrolled in K-12 institutions, students with special needs receive accommodations via a 504 plan or an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). These plans are served by an Intervention Specialist, a teacher who specializes in the instruction of students with disabilities. The responsibilities of Intervention Specialists include providing classroom accommodations, individualized instruction, creating IEPs, assessing the needs of students with disabilities, coordinating services with general education teachers and more. After high school, students with disabilities no longer fall under the protection of IDEA. Post-secondary institutions are not required by law to provide the same supports for students with disabilities as high schools. Students with disabilities are no longer entitled to specialized instruction, tutoring or a case manager in the form of an Intervention Specialist (Understood.org, 2014). After graduating from high school, students with disabilities lose the protection of IDEA and fall under section 504 of the ADA. This means that students are no longer provided the services of an Intervention Specialist and are only provided access to programs through appropriate accommodations that do not alter the requirements of the curriculum (Gil, 2007). According to the National Longitudinal Study-2 (2011), 55% of students with disabilities attend post-secondary institutions after high school. This number includes, but is not limited to, students with ADHD or ADD, health impairments, physical disabilities, psycho-social disabilities, cognitive disabilities, and specific learning disabilities (Abreu, Hillier, Frye, & Goldstein, 2016). Connor (2012) focuses specifically on students with learning disabilities. Students with learning disabilities are enrolling in colleges around the country at a rate of 34%. Of these students, only 28% are graduating (Connor, 2012). Students with disabilities are usually unprepared for the demands of college life because they are so reliant on the services of Intervention Specialists while in high school (Connor, 2012). The college curriculum involves heavy writing, analysis, and lecture. Without the supports that they are accustomed to, these students are more likely to fail than their non-disabled peers. It is important for students with disabilities to understand that when they enter post-secondary education, they are responsible for their education. It is paramount that Intervention Specialists and parents make students with disabilities aware of what is expected of them when they enter the college of their choice by focusing on activities that encourage self-determination when transition planning.

Transitioning to college life

Many students struggle with the transition to college life The transition can be especially troublesome for students with disabilities who may not be accustomed to dealing with adversity on their own. In high school, the focus on early intervention reduces the likelihood of failure, providing students with assistance before they fail. This is not the case in post-secondary institutions, students must be able to recognize and admit when they are having trouble and to seek out their own assistance.

Once students enter post-secondary education, they transition to the services provided by Section 504 and the ADA, which ensure equal access to post-secondary programs for qualified students with disabilities and prohibit discrimination. Students with disabilities must meet the same admission requirements as their non-disabled peers; in fact, Section 504 prohibits a college from inquiring as to whether an applicant for admission had a disability (U.S. Department of Education, 2020). If a student with disabilities is accepted by a post-secondary institution, the student then becomes responsible for acquiring services through self-advocacy. Wehman (2009) presents a summary of the differences students can expect in the following table:

Table 1

Differences between high school and college in skills needed and disability services provided.

High School	College
Guidance counselor organizes the student's class schedule.	The student organizes his or her own class schedule.
Good study skills may not be taught and may not be necessary for success.	Good study skills are necessary for success.
Teachers give frequent and regular feedback.	Feedback may be infrequent.
The semester is typically 18 weeks long.	The semester is typically 15 weeks long.
The student has a full year (36 weeks) to master course information.	The student must master the material in 15 weeks.
Use of a computer may not be necessary for written assignments.	Computer skills are a must for all assignments.
A few hours of study each week are required.	From 10 to 15 hours of study per week per class is required.
The school provides proof of the disability.	The student must provide proof of disability.
Special education services are a entitlement.	Special education services are provided at the discretion of the institution.
Services are IEP driven.	Services are disability driven.
A resource teacher is available for daily help.	Limited help is available through the campus disability office.

Special educators automatically give help.	Help must be requested by the student.
Regular progress reports are given to parents.	The student has to inform his or her parents of progress.
IDEA and Section 504 provide protection for services.	ADA provides protection services.

Note: IEP = Individualized education program; IDEA = Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004; ADA = American with Disabilities Act of 1990.

Needs and Supports

The process of requesting services is not necessarily uniform across colleges and universities and can be difficult for students who are unaware of the requirements to receive accommodations in post-secondary institutions. Heyward (1998) breaks the process of the requesting services into three general steps: self-disclosure, accommodation request, and documentation.

By law, students must initiate contact with the Office of Disability Services (ODS). A student must request accommodations by disclosing their need for accommodations. In this self-disclosure, students must notify the Office of Disability Services of their disability, provide appropriate documentation of their disability, and request accommodations based upon their disability. The Office of Disability Services requires documentation of a disability in the form of a Summary of Performance, a 504 plan, a diagnosis, and other means, as necessary. This information, which is provided by K-12 special education departments, doctors, or psychologists, should provide a clear description of the impact the disability has on the student’s ability to perform college related activities (Cory, 2011). If a student does not self-disclose, the post-secondary institution is not required to provide services. A common mistake made by many students with disabilities is to attempt courses without accommodations and then attempt to request accommodations when they begin to struggle.

After making the decision to request services, many students are not prepared to take the lead in the accommodation process. It is important that students be aware that accommodations are not implemented retroactively and that grades earned cannot be changed. This can be devastating to students who are struggling to maintain a minimum GPA. When these students realize that they need services it can sometimes be too late (Madaus, 2005).

When a student makes an inquiry about accommodations, a disability services professional will engage in an in-depth conversation about the student's needs in the college environment. This conversation focuses on the college classroom, environment, and housing. This conversation allows a disability services professional to establish a relationship with the student at the time of their disclosure by discussing the student's academic and career goals, past experiences and any disability history that may impact a student's experience. The disability services professional will verify all claims through third party resources (IEP, 504 plan, etc.). Once verified, the service professional will recommend accommodations in the form of a letter that will be distributed by the student to their instructors (Cory, 2011). At Marshall University this meeting is referred to as a pre-enrollment assessment. This meeting between the student and staff allows the Office of Disability Services staff to assess a student's skills and needs and discuss possible accommodations.

The Office of Disability Services is a key resource for students with disabilities in college. This office provides free services to students with any documented disability as outlined by Section 504 of the ADA. When a student with disabilities wishes to enroll at Marshall University they are expected to contact the Office of Disability Services and participate in a pre-enrollment assessment. During this assessment students and ODS staff discuss needs and accommodations. The ODS provides the following services for qualifying students with disabilities:

- Note Taking
- Test proctoring and accommodations
- Alternative format textbooks
- Tutoring
- Lab and library assistants
- Liaison with faculty
- Advising
- Early registration
- Equipment (Marshall University, n.d.)

Enrolling in a post-secondary institution signifies a transition into adulthood. As a result of the transition, post-secondary institutions only provide students with generic special education services. Generic services include reasonable accommodations that improve student access to material like extended time on exams and limited-distraction testing sites. These services are outcome neutral, unlike those in high school that are designed to ensure student success. Some universities provide more intensive services, but these programs can come at an additional cost (Madaus, 2005). In the case of Marshall University, reasonable accommodations can include:

- Extended test time
- Preferential seating
- Table and chair seating rather than desk
- Note-takers

- Interpreters
- Readers for test questions
- Scribes for tests
- Course substitution
- Separate, quiet room
- Tape recorded classes
- Early registration following the first semester (Marshall University, n.d.)

Marshall University's accepted accommodations are similar to those provided by other colleges. The services provided in post-secondary institutions are not as extensive as those provided before high school graduation, but they still can improve the likelihood of student success. Utilizing these services can reduce the amount of stress students experience. This is especially important during the first year of college when students are faced with adjusting to campus life. Unlike in high school, failure is still possible, but students should be encouraged to take every step to reduce the likelihood.

In focus groups conducted by the National Center for College Students with Disabilities (NCCSD), participants were interviewed in order to answer three primary research questions:

- What barriers do students with disabilities encounter in accessing and participating in higher education?
- What are the supports and strategies promoting equitable participation?
- What are recommendations for training and resource materials related to access and equity for college students with disabilities? (NCCSD,2019).

This study provided important access to how students view the process of acquiring services in college.

The process of acquiring services in college can be a tricky task. Students are not always prepared for the requirements of doing so on their own. Participants in the NCCSD Access and Participation focus groups identified working with the Office of Disability Services (ODS) as a common barrier. According to the NCCSD (2019), 86% of participants shared that they or their friends were unaware of disability services and accommodations in college. Participants also shared challenges they faced when they had connected with the ODS. Many students were unaware that they are required to self-disclose, request accommodations, and provide documentation of their needs. Abreu, Hillier, Frye, & Goldstein (2016) distributed a survey to 525 students who registered with an ODS. This survey provided a glimpse into the student experience. Although only 21% of the 525 surveys were completed, respondents identified a need for administrators to re-evaluate disability services at the post-secondary level. Abreau, Hillier, Frye, & Goldstein (2016) discovered that students with disabilities averaged 4.7 visits to the ODS per semester. These visits were mostly used to establish accommodations for each course. Other reasons included seeking help with time management and organization, seeking advice from staff, asking general questions and seeking assistance with staff. Two percent of respondents visited the ODS to specifically request assistance in dealing with faculty (Abreu, Hillier, Frye, & Goldstein, 2016); this low number indicates an improved willingness of faculty members to work with students with disabilities since the early days of the G.I. Bill. This is echoed in the National Center for College Students with Disabilities focus groups as students identified uninformed faculty, instructor pushback, and non-responsive instructors as common barriers to their access and participation (Scott, 2019).

Abreau, Hillier, Frye & Goldstein (2016) also allowed participants to provide feedback on the usefulness of the ODS and make suggestions for improvement with their survey. Over half of participants found the ODS useful in establishing accommodations, 20% felt that the ODS was helpful in providing academic support and 15% felt that the ODS provided social and emotional support. Unfortunately, 15% felt that the ODS was not helpful (Abreu, Hillier, Frye, & Goldstein, 2016). In terms of improvement, 24% of participants felt that ODS could improve the delivery of services; 14% felt that ODS needed to improve communication between students and staff; 10% felt that expanding the ODS would be beneficial (Abreu, Hillier, Frye, & Goldstein, 2016). The quantitative data collected in this study calls attention to the need for improving support for students with disabilities in post-secondary education. The NCCSD focus groups provide specific qualitative information on the experiences of these students. Participants in the study used words like “added burden,” “frustrating,” and “hard to get done” to describe Office of Disability Services procedures. Participants also identified inadequate accommodations and lack of support for self-advocacy skills as major barriers (Scott, 2019).

Hong (2015) provides qualitative data collected from sixteen students who were served by the ODS in a study that required students to keep journals over a 10-week period in which they kept track of their experiences with students, faculty, and ODS staff. After analyzing the journals, four themes emerged, none of which were positive. Students identified fit of advisors, stressors, quality of support services, and faculty perceptions as barriers to their success.

A common complaint of participants in the Hong (2015) study was that their advisors did not have a basic understanding of how to schedule courses or how to help them acquire services. In some cases, students had to stay an extra semester due to the mistakes made by their advisors. Others complained that their advisors did not respond promptly or even at all. The lack of response forced students to fend for themselves which resulted in scheduling mistakes and delayed services. When advisors did respond several students felt that their advisors were uncaring, apathetic, or aversive, but it was unclear if these advisors were faculty (Hong, 2015).

Participants identified three major stressors that served as barriers to their success: physical demands, mental and emotional struggles, and social stigmatization (Hong, 2015). Students who identified as being stressed by the physical demands of post-secondary institutions cited environmental distractions, medical requirements, and fatigue as major stressors. Often instructors do not realize the impact a noisy classroom, a new medication, or a long walk between classes can have on the ability of a student with disabilities to focus or participate (Hong, 2015). Participants who identified as experiencing mental and emotional struggles discussed the need to prove themselves in every aspect of college life. Participants noted that asking for accommodations made them feel like a burden on their fellow students and instructors (Hong, 2015). Participants in the NCCSD focus groups felt similarly. One participant noted, “it’s a little lonely sometimes. Like I don’t like to tell people” (Scott, 2019). Other concerns centered on lack of time management and organizational skills (Hong, 2015). The most cited stressor was social stigmatization. Participants worried about their peers resenting them for any accommodations they may receive. Many felt the need to deceive their peers in order to escape any negative attention. This deception often led to an increased sense of self-consciousness (Hong, 2015). Participants in the NCCSD focus groups also felt the stigma sometimes associated with disability. 100% of focus groups discussed experiencing resentment, judgment, and questioning. 86% of focus groups described negative interactions with peers as significant barriers (Scott, 2019). Ultimately, many participants chose to forgo accommodations rather than face isolation from their peers (Hong, 2015).

The quality of support services received by participants emerged as a major theme. Participants noted that the name "Health and Wellness Center" felt more positive because it did not directly state disability. Hong (2015) found that despite the positivity associated with the name, many participants did not have positive experiences with the Office of Disability Services personnel. At a time when students are most vulnerable, many reported that Office of Disability Services personnel made them feel uncomfortable, unprepared, and incompetent. The term "cold and clinical" (p. 220) was used to describe one Office of Disability Services staffer. Another participant was expected to know what accommodations they would require and when they could not answer, no list was provided (Hong, 2015).

Traditional transition planning is split into three foci: post-secondary education, post-secondary employment, and independent living, but the three foci are not given equal attention. Students are then unprepared for the questions posed by Office of Disability Services staff. It is important that students with disabilities feel comfortable assessing their own needs upon graduation if they are expected to succeed at the college level. There is a need for Intervention Specialists and Office of Disability Services staff to work more closely to identify what is needed for students to succeed in post-secondary education and develop strategies to improve student outcomes. NCCSD focus groups identified lack of support for self-advocacy and disclosure skills as a barrier to their success. 100% of focus groups expressed a lack of knowledge and experience in the area of self-advocacy. Participants stated that the Office of Disability Services informed them of their role in the accommodation process, but they were still unsure of how to participate in self-advocacy (Scott, 2019).

The final major theme presented by Hong (2015) was faculty perceptions. Participants identified two stressors that fell under the umbrella of faculty perceptions: lowered expectations and past experiences. After disclosing their disability to faculty members, participants felt that the expectations of their instructors changed for them. Many stated that faculty viewed them as less capable than their peers or as if something were wrong with them. Negative experiences left participants feeling embarrassed and humiliated. One participant shared her experience;

> My accommodation for that class was excused absence. I knew that missing class would make me fall behind, but I prepared for that, lining up a tutor and setting up "speaking dates" with my sister. But even after assuring the professor that I would only use the accommodation in the worst-case scenario, she stared me straight in the eyes and coldly said that I would not succeed in her class if I needed to use the accommodation. I'm positive she didn't mean to hurt me, and she was just being realistic, but it made me feel so awful. She started to not call on me as much and seemed shocked if I answered a question correctly. I vividly remember being treated like an INVALID. I know most normal people would have probably stayed in the class just to spite her and prove her wrong. I wished I was like that. But I'm not. Now, instead of focusing on class, I would ruminate over giving her that dreaded slip of paper. I am unsure if I would have aced the class had I stayed in and never given her the note. I do wonder though; had I been treated like a normal student. (Hong, 2015, p. 214)

These feelings impacted participants' decision making and many participants cited past experiences as a stressor. Participants acknowledged feeling skeptical about new instructors each semester and dreading the repetition of the accommodation process. Each time a participant would disclose their disability, which could open them up to humiliation and faculty resistance. Participants who experienced positive interactions with faculty members were more likely to attempt the accommodation process than those who did not (Hong, 2015).

NCCSD focus groups discussed the difficulty of working with non-responsive faculty (Scott, 2019). Participants described experiences with faculty who did not communicate efficiently in regard to accommodation requests. Participants cited not responding to emails, failing to complete paperwork, and forgetting accommodations as typical difficulties. Participants also discussed their perceived reasons for these difficulties. Many cited extensive faculty workload and schedule as a possible reason for non-responsive faculty, while others discussed experiencing faculty ambivalence and disinterest (Scott, 2019).

The research in the area of student perception is limited, especially when looking for qualitative studies. There are some inconsistencies presented that need to be addressed. Abreu, Hillier, Frye, & Goldstein (2016) state that 2% of respondents specifically complained about faculty while Hong (2015) identifies faculty perceptions as a major stressor and NCCSD focus groups cited non-responsive faculty as a barrier (Scott, 2019). This could be attributed to the lack of self-advocacy skills possessed by students with disabilities. It is impossible to fully understand the issue of faculty perceptions without further research. The data collected is also limited to the experiences of students in participating colleges. Another inconsistency lies in the role of the advisor. Some universities require faculty to advise students while others have staff dedicated to student advising. Hong (2015) discusses the shortcomings of advisors and how they impact students, but her study is limited to ten students who attend the same university.

It is important to note that the data collected do provide a snapshot of the college experience for students with disabilities but more needs to be done in order to provide a more expansive and comprehensive understanding. The material presented by Hong (2015) focuses heavily on the negative experiences of students with disabilities and it would be interesting to see more of what works well for students with disabilities. The NCCSD focus groups discussed barriers to access and participation, but they also focused on inclusive aspects on campus and positive experiences (Scott, 2019). It seems important that faculty and researchers continue to conduct qualitative research to investigate the experiences of students with disabilities in college in order to improve the overall awareness of faculty, staff, and students and the effectiveness of accommodations at this level.

Emotional barriers to student success

Leaving home and going to college can be terrifying for anyone. Many students, especially those who experienced stigmatization in high school, look forward to a fresh start. Students often leave high school with negative feelings towards being labeled as disabled. The desire to be more socially accepted in college can lead students to make poor decisions about acquiring disability services (Connor, 2012). Consequently, students with disabilities are at a greater risk of failure than their non-disabled peers. A study conducted by the Office of Special Education Programs of the U.S. Department of Education has revealed some disappointing statistics. Two-thirds of students with disabilities are not receiving services due to a lack of self-disclosure. Half of those students did not view themselves as having a disability (Wagner, Newman, Cameto, Garza & Levine, 2005). This lack of self-determination can be devastating. Students who are unaware of their challenges and assets will not be able to effectively communicate with disability services professionals. It is important for students to understand their disability and needs when venturing into the college atmosphere.

One of the most prominent barriers to success for students with disabilities is a lack of information. Students with disabilities, as well as parents and teachers, are often unaware of what is required of them to effectively transition into the college environment. Another barrier to student success is the communication gap that exists between the Office of Disability Services

(ODS), the students, and the faculty. The ODS can be vital to the success of students with disabilities, but if students and faculty do not take advantage of this resource chances for success diminish greatly (Cory, 2011).

Although great strides have been made, accessibility can become a major barrier to student success. Cory (2011) discussed the phenomena of unintentional discrimination. Unintentional discrimination refers to instances when students are asked to perform tasks that may not be possible for students with disabilities. An example of this would be an art class where students are required to stand and paint. Completing these activities would not be possible for students with certain disabilities. The instructor must make accommodations to ensure the content of the course accessible to all students (Cory, 2011). Another accessibility issue is digital compatibility. Assistive technology (AT) does not always cooperate. Aguirre & Duncan (2013) outline many of these technological hiccups. In a powerful excerpt beginning on pg. 540, Chad shares his experience when his AT crashed during a test. Devastated, Chad asked for a paper copy of the test despite being completely blind.

> I was so desperate to make it work that I asked for the paper version. I haven't been able to see words on a page in years. I felt like I had to have the answer. I didn't want accommodations to take it later. I wanted to be treated like all the other students, but my own emotions couldn't accept the fact that I am blind. (Aguirre & Duncan, 2013, p. 542)

Experiences like this can leave students emotionally exhausted and raw. When coupled with challenging faculty attitudes, traditional academic culture, and resentment towards the changing demographic these types of experiences can become major obstacles for student success (Yssel et al, 2016). Faculty members are used to traditional accommodations like extended time and alternate test sites, but the transition from face-to-face classroom to hybrid and online environments presents new frustrations for faculty and students (Aguirre & Duncan, 2013). Faculty members are not required to make an effort like Regina Aguirre did with Chad Duncan. Despite their perceptions, faculty members must be made aware of the struggles faced by students with disabilities. Chad Duncan captures those struggles:

> Students with disabilities have more than the disability to overcome. Students with disabilities have to fill out more paperwork and be organized. Able bodied students have to worry about recalling the information for the test. Students with disabilities have to coordinate with the professor and the disability accommodation office to get the test accessible, schedule it to be taken at the testing center, and/or use assistive technology to take the test. We have to reapply each semester for the services. Nice? It is a paper form that those of us who are blind cannot fill out ourselves. (Aguirre & Duncan, 2013, p. 549)

Listing all of the barriers faced by students with disabilities would be an exercise in futility. What should be the focus is the ability to diagnose a problem and fix it. A major problem is the lack of success students with disabilities have in post-secondary institutions. Some students are choosing to take a chance at failing rather than disclose that they have a disability. Faculty perceptions are a major barrier to student success and, in my experience, Intervention Specialists are not preparing students for the accommodation process in college because they are not sure what it entails. There are many factors that contribute to lack of success experienced by students with disabilities. The experiences and perspectives of students with disabilities in college could provide a more nuanced understanding of how to better serve them.

How do faculty view the process?

The amount of data collected on faculty perceptions of the accommodation process in post-secondary institutions is much larger than that collected on the students’ perceptions. After meeting with the Office of Disability Services and qualifying for services, students must discuss accommodations with their instructors on an individual basis. A one-on-one meeting can be difficult and awkward for both parties if there is not a shared understanding of the accommodations processes at the post-secondary level. The level of experience and understanding among post-secondary instructors, when it comes to providing accommodations, varies. A study of liberal arts schools discovered that 68% of faculty members felt they had limited experience dealing with students with disabilities; 27% felt they had extensive experience; and 5% felt they had no experience (Baker, Boland, & Nowik, 2012). Bruder & Morgo-Wilson (2010) found that 18% of faculty members were uncertain of how to treat students with disabilities. According to Baker, Boland, & Nowik (2012), 71% of faculty were aware of the Office of Disability Services and the services they provide to students with disabilities.

Yssel et al. (2016) discuss the impact faculty can have on the success of students with disabilities in higher education. They note that faculty members' unwillingness to provide accommodations creates additional stress for students with disabilities. It is important that faculty create content delivery systems that provide access for students with disabilities. Post-secondary institutions select faculty based upon their expertise in specialized content areas. Although this makes them highly qualified to pass their knowledge onto future professionals, this does not ensure the effectiveness or efficiency of their instructional methods. Unlike high school, many instructors in post-secondary institutions do not have formal pedagogical training. This lack of pedagogical expertise means that many instructors are not familiar with many of the disabilities their students may possess or the best practices for ensuring the success of those students. It is easy to take for granted that all faculty members are aware of the ADA and its requirements. However, without professional development on instructional methods, like Universal Design for Instruction (UDI), it is unfair to expect faculty to comfortably interact with students with disabilities or design methods of instruction that are effective for all students (Lombardi & Murray, 2011).

Post-secondary faculty are generally willing to make accommodations to courses, provided they do not feel that it compromises academic rigor (Bruder & Morgo-Wilson, 2010). Although aware of the presence of students with disabilities, faculty members are not always aware of the federal regulations that entitle students with disabilities to equal access. Faculty members are required to inform students of an institution's policy on requesting accommodations. Many faculty choose to inform students by including an ADA statement in a course syllabus. In a 2010 study, Bruder & Margo-Wilson found that only 18% of faculty specifically announced the availability of accommodations during the first class meeting and 46% of faculty waited for students to request accommodations before they provided any general information (Bruder & Morgo-Wilson, 2010). In their 2004 study, Wolman et al. found that faculty were more willing to accommodate certain disabilities than others. The faculty in this study were more sympathetic to the needs of students with LD and hearing and visual impairments than they were to the needs of students with emotional or physical disabilities. These findings echoed the findings of previous studies by Leyser (1989) and Szymansky et al. (1999) but the preferred type of disability is not consistent. The inconsistency could be due to current trends in education, professional development opportunities, personal experiences, or other factors. Whatever the reason, the inconsistency itself draws attention to the fact that more must be done to provide equal opportunities for all students with disabilities.

Bruder & Morgo-Wilson (2010) also collected data on faculty feelings toward students with disabilities. They found that 83% admired students with disabilities, but 61% experienced pity, embarrassment, or awkwardness when meeting with students with disabilities. In her 2017 article *Why I Dread the Accommodations Talk*, Dr. Gail Hornstein discusses how interactions with students with disabilities should be individualized. Faculty must resist the urge to let past experiences dictate the way they interact with new students. Although the article does not provide empirical data, it does shine a light on the importance of accommodating the individual instead of the diagnosis and the emotions experienced by both students and faculty during the accommodations processes. This focus is particularly important in an environment that relies so heavily on rubrics and best practices. Hornstein (2017) argues that faculty should respond in ways that support students' educational goals, help them when needed, and encourage resilience when possible. Offering a struggling student some extra encouragement or taking a little time after class to talk with students can go a long way in improving a student's chance of success.

Not all instructors share Hornstein's vision of how to treat students with disabilities or her willingness to work with them. Historically, faculty and administrators did not see the point in working with students with disabilities. They felt that resources were wasted on students who, they believed, had no hope of graduating, and many institutions chose not to accept students due to their lack of accessibility (Madaus, 2011). The great strides made in the treatment of students with disabilities is made evident by the number of students enrolled in post-secondary institutions. Still, many faculty express concerns that providing accommodations may provide an unfair advantage to students, compromise academic rigor, or require too much time (Shelly, 2018). These feelings are understandable when one considers the lack of pedagogical training for instructors across numerous disciplines.

Hornstein is not alone in focusing on the individual needs of students with disabilities. In their autoethnography "Being an Elbow: A Phenomenological Autoethnography of Faculty-Student Collaboration for Accommodations," Regina Aguirre and Chad Duncan (2013) described the interaction and collaboration between an instructor (Regina) and a student who is blind (Chad). From the start Chad echoed what research had found, that self-advocacy is a major barrier for students with disabilities. Chad shared how vulnerable he felt each time he had to ask for an accommodation from a professor, or inform them when an accommodation did not work, and the fear that the extra effort from the instructor would result in a lower grade. Chad mentioned that humor can open lines of communication between students and faculty (Aguirre & Duncan, 2013).

Regina then discussed her past experiences with students with disabilities. She shared how some students want to identify as disabled only to overcome their disability without accommodations and prove themselves to faculty members. She also mentioned that many choose to keep it to themselves and work harder in order to pass. Students who did disclose, typically needed extended time or test site accommodations (Aguirre & Duncan, 2013). She was comfortable with these accommodations but found herself intimidated by Chad's particular disability and the knowledge that he would require more and different kinds of accommodations than the ones with which she was familiar.

As the piece continued both Chad and Regina shared their successes and failures in creating accommodations for Chad. What is unique about their situation is that Chad and Regina began to develop a symbiotic relationship. Regina's interest forced Chad to improve his self-advocacy skills, while addressing Chad's needs forced Regina to analyze her own methods and gravitate towards a more universal approach to instruction (Aguirre & Duncan, 2013). This article is an important part of the overall literature on this subject. It provides an intimate picture of the struggles and triumphs of a dedicated educator and a student with disabilities. The effort of Regina and the vulnerability of Chad allow the reader to connect with the information on a personal level and should inspire any instructor who reads it to evaluate the way they provide accommodations in their own classroom. What Regina has done is take something as detached as classroom accommodations and connect it to a person. Regina has provided a narrative for faculty-student collaboration at the college level. In post-secondary institutions this is not the norm - but it could be. By providing a narrative of the student experience from the student perspective, this study could encourage more faculty to pursue the type of relationship shared between Regina and Chad and provide ideas on how to better assist students with disabilities in college.

What can be done?

It is best to begin by acknowledging that there is no magic fix. Special education is, in the literature and in my own teaching experience, an iterative cycle of trial and error. What may work with one student, instructor, or class may not translate to another. For this reason, it is imperative that students with disabilities develop the skills to help them direct their own learning. This set of skills, known as self-determination, has been linked to post-secondary success for students with disabilities (Newman & Madaus, 2015).

An increase in self-determination among students with disabilities would help to increase the rate of self-disclosure at the post-secondary level. According to Newman & Madaus (2015), 11% of all post-secondary students report having a disability but only 35% of students who report having a disability are self-disclosing their need for accommodations. The lack of understanding of one’s strengths, needs, and disabilities is a contributing factor to the rate at which students decide to forego accommodations. When students are aware of their needs, they often lack an understanding of their legal rights, as well as the accommodations process and the available services provided by their institution (Newman & Madaus, 2015). A possible solution is to increase the communication between Intervention Specialists, parents, guardians, and students. Intervention Specialists should utilize parent teacher meetings to inform parents, guardians, and students of their legal rights in the post-secondary setting. When informed, parents and students can make better decisions on postsecondary options and search for schools that better fit a student's needs (Gil, 2007).

Transition planning is a way for Intervention Specialists to increase students' understanding of the accommodation process in the post-secondary setting. Students who experienced transition planning geared towards post-secondary education were more likely to seek out supports and receive accommodations (Newman & Madaus, 2015).

These research-based practices are a great way for high school Intervention Specialists to improve the future outcomes of students with disabilities in post-secondary education, but what can instructors do to improve the success of students who are currently enrolled or do not receive these services? A key component of a successful experience is the development of a mentoring relationship within the classroom (Beilke &Yssel, 1998). This strategy may be the most effective for students with disabilities, but it also requires a major commitment from faculty members and a connection between the student and the faculty member. Effective mentoring can drastically improve a student's chances of success but finding a mentor for each of the estimated 707,000 students with disabilities in post-secondary institutions is a daunting task (Dallas, Sprong & Upton, 2014). Interactions with supportive staff was the most commonly experienced support discussed in NCCSD focus groups (Scott, 2019). Participants described positive experiences in smaller classes, varied teaching strategies, and flexible testing options, but the most commonly discussed positive interactions were those with informed and supportive faculty. Participants frequently shared stories of faculty encouraging struggling students to connect with the Office of Disability Services and even serving as a mediator between the two. Participants also shared their appreciation for faculty who engaged in conversations with students about how to support their learning (Scott, 2019).

Another effective way to increase student access and success is to incorporate Universal Design for Instruction (UDI). Also referred to as Universal Design for Learning (UDL), UDI focuses on making instruction universally accessible to all students. UDI encourages instruction to focus on nine principles: Equitable Use, Flexibility in Use, Simple and Intuitive, Perceptible Information, Tolerance Error, Low Physical Effort, Size and Space for Approach and Use, a Community of Learners, and Instructional Climate (Dallas, Sprong & Upton, 2014). These principles guide faculty’s instructional practices to meet the needs of a diverse population.

UDI is not necessarily a cure-all. Many faculty members do not have formal training in instructional methods. For many faculty members, research is a primary focus and there is little incentive to improve teaching methods. In addition, a lack of training and professional development opportunities makes institution-wide implementation unlikely (Dallas, Sprong & Upton, 2014).

Conclusion

The treatment of students with disabilities in colleges has improved drastically in the past 30 years. Thanks to legislation like ADAAA, colleges are required to include students with disabilities in programs that were once out of reach. This increase in accessibility has led to an increase in enrollment. Newman & Madaus (2015) claim that 11% of all students enrolled in post-secondary institutions report having at least one disability. Of the 16.9 million students in 2016, 1.86 million of those had a disability. Sadly, only 38% of those students completed their programs (Sanford et al., 2011). That left around 1.2 million students with disabilities who did not finish. This has to change.

These statistics illuminate a much larger issue in our post-secondary institutions. High schools are not preparing students with disabilities for education after high school and our instructors are not fully prepared to support them. Only 35% of students with disabilities are self-disclosing once they reach post-secondary institutions (Newman & Madaus, 2015). Some of these students are unaware that they must self-disclose, some look at post-secondary institutions as a way to shed the label of disabled and others are embarrassed of their disability and would rather fail than seek help. Whatever the reasons, students with disabilities in college who do not self-disclose are at a greater risk of failure than those that do. Even when students with disabilities in college choose to self-disclose, not all instructors are prepared or willing to support students with disabilities, a fact that further diminishes students' odds of success.

Some information on the way students view disability services is available but it is limited. Hong (2015) and Abreu, Hillier, Frye & Goldstein (2016) each looked into students' experiences with the Office of Disability Services and found that a majority of students felt that the overall experience could improve. Hong (2015) identified faculty perceptions as a major theme in her findings. Students felt that disclosing to faculty lowered their expectations. Students also felt that self-disclosing to faculty provided an opportunity for them to be judged based upon faculty's past experiences with similar cases rather than on an individual basis.

The literature available on the perceptions of faculty is far more extensive. Baker, Boland & Nowik (2012) found that 71% of faculty were aware of Office of Disability Services and their responsibilities, and only 5% of faculty felt that they had no experience with students with disabilities. Despite this, Yssel et al. (2016) note that many faculty members lack the expertise to support students with disabilities. Often, the lack of pedagogical expertise can lead to a disconnect between students and instructors.

This disconnect along with a lack of information; the communication gap between students, faculty, and Office of Disability Services; poor faculty attitudes; and accessibility issues are just some of the barriers students face. Students and faculty are often unaware of accessibility issues until they present themselves. It is important for both parties to be understanding and work together to find a solution.

The risk of failure for students with disabilities is significant. Although the available literature provides a strong description of the number of students with disabilities, their needs, faculty perceptions of students, and suggestions for how to increase success rates, it lacks information focusing on the overall experience of students with disabilities acquiring and using accommodations in college. Narratives from the student perspective would allow faculty members to relate to students and encourage them to improve their understanding of students' needs. Such narratives would also address the lack of qualitative data on the subject. Encouraging students with disabilities to reflect on their experiences would empower those students and improve self-determination. A qualitative study of the experiences of students with disabilities in college would mutually benefit students and faculty.

Chapter 3: Research Methods

“Stories have the power to create social change and inspire community”

Terry Tempest Williams

The fourth quarter of the school year was always difficult. Students and staff tend to suffer from chronic cases of spring fever. This was especially evident after the conclusion of state testing requirements. Things slow down in a high school after that and a collective sigh of relief can be heard throughout the building. For some seniors, this relief was short-lived. As they began to imagine what their first fall semester in college will bring, students with special needs felt excitement for the future, accompanied with a specific and particular anxiety: *How am I going to make it on my own?* This was a common question parents and Intervention Specialists were asked in the weeks leading up to graduation. Despite the years of transition assessments, planning and activities they have completed, the fear of the unknown was intimidating for many students with disabilities. My students and I often discussed how to obtain accommodations in college, researched schools that were the best fit for them, and gathered information about the Office of Disability Services on their future campuses, but this information did not always ease the mind of an apprehensive teenager. Each year, as my students crossed the stage and collected their diploma and handshake, I worried about how successful they would be at the next level. Would they have the courage to self-disclose their disabilities to the Office of Disability Services and communicate their needs to their instructors? Or would they fall through the cracks?

In May 2018, one of my former students graduated from college. We worked closely together during his final two years of high school to prepare for his transition from high school to college and he graduated with a bachelor’s degree in education. His success was unusual and led me to question why his outcome was so different from so many others. What could I learn from his story? What about his experience transitioning from high school to college made it possible for him to succeed in spite of such overwhelming odds?

Qualitative Framework and Research Design

Transitioning from high school to college is a landmark event for many students. For students with disabilities this milestone can signify overcoming great difficulty, amplify the frustrations experienced within education, or fall somewhere in between. While reviewing literature on the subject, I discovered that there was not enough data to provide an in-depth glimpse into the experiences of students with disabilities during this transition. Most of the available data was quantitative in nature. Quantitative data, while prevalent and valuable in educational research, does not always paint the most complete picture of the college landscape for students with disabilities. There is much that can be learned from the experiences and stories of these students. A qualitative study of how students with disabilities experience the transition from high school to college could provide the opportunity to design more complex and accessible learning opportunities. With this in mind, this project aimed to collect deep and rich stories of students' transition experiences through qualitative research. A focus on the individual needs of students with disabilities is ubiquitous in special education, therefore justifying the practicality of focusing on the experiences of individuals with disabilities transitioning to college. In special education it is important to be able to change instruction according to student individual needs; that made emergent design a natural fit for this research. Patton (2002) described emergent design as:

> Openness to adapting inquiry as understanding deepens and/or situations change; the researcher avoids getting locked into rigid designs that eliminate responsiveness and pursues new paths of discovery as they emerge. (p. 40)

It was essential to design this study in a way that allowed me to utilize the skills that I developed while working with students with disabilities for the last thirteen years and utilize emergent design.

Case Study

The case study method provided the appropriate individualized focus necessary to collect the nuanced empirical data that is the goal of this study and provided me with the flexibility to accommodate participants when needed. Stake (1995) substantiated this:

> A case study is expected to catch the complexity of a single case. The single leaf, even a single toothpick, has unique complexities – but rarely will we care enough to submit it to case study. We study a case when it itself is of very special interest. We look for the details of interaction with its context. Case study is the study of particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances. (p. xi)

Students with disabilities are unique in the way they experience the transition from high school to college. By embracing their unique perspectives, this study provided a complex look into how the participants experience the previously mentioned transition. Yin (2009) defined case study as “an empirical inquiry about a contemporary phenomenon, set within its real-world context.” This definition aligned with the goal of this research, which was to derive a detailed understanding of the experiences of those students with disabilities transitioning from high school to college in a way that provides the researcher and readers with real-world context. This study focused on providing a detailed narrative of the way students with disabilities experience the transition from high school to college. The goal of this narrative was to provide information that will elevate awareness of the difficulties experienced and inspire future research.

In order to address my research questions and goals, my study was an exploratory case study informed by phenomenology. An exploratory case study is a study designed to gather initial data that can identify questions for future research (Center for Innovation in Research and Teaching, n.d.). This study explored the phenomena of students' experiences and perceptions when transitioning to college. The varied success of students with disabilities transitioning from high school to college is concerning. This study was not designed to collect data that will allow researchers to create generalizations about what works or what does not, it was designed to increase the awareness of factors that can support student success.

Research Questions

This study sought to answer the question: How do students with disabilities experience the transition from high school to college in respect to obtaining and utilizing services and accommodations? Interviews were directed by the following research questions:

- How do participating students with disabilities experience the transition from high school to college?
- How do participating students with disabilities experience the process of acquiring accommodations in college?
- How do participating students with disabilities experience utilizing accommodations in college?

Research Design

The goal of this study was to utilize stories to identify factors that may contribute to students with disabilities success when acquiring accommodations as they transition to college. This study, vetted by Marshall University's Institutional Review Board, employed an exploratory case study model to identify factors for future research that could increase success rates for students with disabilities. Qualitative interviews were conducted with participants to encourage rich and authentic responses (See appendix 2, IRB Application Interview Questions).

Population and Sample

Participants of this study included current and former college students with disabilities. This study utilized convenience sampling methods. This method allowed me to identify and to target "information rich participants" (Wingrove, Barbour, & Palermo, 2017, p. 496). Participants were recruited through emails distributed to university students by the Office of Disability Services (See appendix 2, IRB Application Recruitment Materials). Participants then volunteered to be interviewed via Zoom. The sample consisted of students with disabilities who have college experience. As with most emergent design studies, the number of participants can vary due to participants' ability to opt out of the study or become unavailable for interviews. Exclusion criteria for participants were limited to individuals who were not able to allocate one hour for face-to-face or telephone interviews during the four-week data collection period.

Participants were originally required to give written consent before interviews were conducted but due to COVID-19 protocols the decision was made to record verbal consent (See appendix 2, IRB Application Informed Consent Form). Informed consent was distributed to participants via email two weeks before initial interviews. Before interviews were conducted the participants and I read the consent form together. I then described the study, answered questions and received verbal consent. Participation was voluntary. No identifying information was published without participants' consent. There were no perceived risks to participating in this study.

Data Collection and Interpretation

Qualitative Interviews

For millennia, stories have been an essential tool for gaining knowledge about others. Stories provide a glimpse into how others experience phenomena. Stories tell us how individuals feel, act, think, and understand as they experience the world around them. In the mid-19th century, journalistic interviews were introduced as a way to curate individuals' stories (Brinkman, 2013, p. 1). Maccoby & Maccoby (1954,) described interviews as "a face-to-face verbal exchange, in which one person, the interviewer, attempts to elicit information or expressions of opinion or belief from another person or persons" (p. 449). This broad definition of interviews provides a basic description of the purpose of interviews. Interviews are a "conversational process of knowing" (Brinkmann, 2013, p. 3). The purpose of this study was to utilize the stories of students with disabilities to identify factors that may contribute to successful acquisition of accommodations in college.

Qualitative interviews allow researchers to utilize the stories of others as a way to gain an understanding of how they experience life. Qualitative interviews were the primary source of data collection for this study. Kvale (1996) described a qualitative interview as an attempt to utilize the subject's experience and point of view to develop an understanding of the world. This study used semi-structured interviews to evoke stories from participants about their experiences in college, specifically those about acquiring accommodations. Brinkmann (2013) argued that semi-structured interviews "can make better use of the knowledge-producing potentials of dialogues by allowing much more leeway for following up on whatever angles are deemed important by the interviewee" (p. 21). An advantage of a semi-structured interview is that it allowed me, the interviewer, to guide the focus of the conversation towards issues that were important to the research. Kvale and Brinkmann (2008) defined a semi-structured interview as "an interview with the purpose of obtaining descriptions of the life [and] world of the interviewee in order to interpret the meaning of described phenomena" (p. 3).

This study employed individual interviews with one interviewer and one interviewee. Individual interviews offered several advantages: they were more easily guided towards relevant topics than group interviews, they made it easier to create a safe environment for participants who were discussing sensitive topics, and they provided participants the opportunity to share their stories without interruptions (Brinkmann, 2013). The individual interviews in this study were meant to be face-to-face, but, as COVID-19 protocols changed, it was necessary to do interviews via Zoom. Utilizing Zoom allowed me to collect information from both body language and verbal communication. During an interview it was important to make note of body language as it can be lost once a transcript has been made. Although face-to-face interviews were preferred, in order to accommodate participants and still have access to this rich information, video-chat was available for participants. I acted as the interviewer and used a receptive interviewing style. Receptive interviewing is characterized by focusing on the lived experience of the interviewee. In this style of interview, the interviewee is empowered by their ability to control the conversation and address the relatively open interview questions (Brinkmann, 2013).

The individual, face-to-face interviews conducted for this study sought to produce knowledge of the experiences of students with disabilities and their experiences obtaining accommodations in higher education. These interviews revolved around the stories participants shared. These stories were interpreted through thematic analysis to develop perspectival understanding of how students with disabilities experienced obtaining accommodations in higher education.

Data Review and Analysis

Data review and analysis occurred simultaneously with data collection. Interviews were transcribed upon completion. After the transcription process, data was manually coded and sorted into two initial themes; expected responses and unexpected responses. I then listened to recorded interviews while coding in an attempt to improve recall. After coding each interview, data was further organized as new themes emerged with the goal to be between five and seven themes for analysis.

This study utilized thematic analysis in order to ensure the trustworthiness of the research process. Thematic analysis provided "a method for identifying, analyzing, organizing, describing, and reporting themes found with a data set" (Norwell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017, p. 1). Thematic analysis is beneficial for fledgling researchers as it provides the flexibility needed to adapt to the needs of a study without requiring detailed theoretical knowledge. It was especially useful when examining the perspectives of different participants. Thematic analysis allowed me to collect complex data and provide rich and detailed accounts (Norwell et al, 2017). Thematic analysis is not devoid of flaws. The flexibility that made it attractive also contributes to a lack of consistency and agreement. This was addressed by establishing trustworthiness.

To establish trustworthiness, this study used the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability introduced by Lincoln and Guba (1985). To address credibility, this study utilized peer debriefing to check the research process, interpretations, and initial findings. Transferability was ensured by creating thick descriptions that could be utilized by peers in future research. Dependability was achieved by utilizing a transparent and clearly described research process. Finally, confirmability was established when credibility, transferability, and dependability were all achieved.

Summary

Through this qualitative case study, I collected data via individual, face-to-face interviews to gain a perspectival understanding of how students with disabilities experience the process of obtaining accommodations in college. A semi-structured and receptive interview process was used to collect data relevant to the research questions. Data was organized into themes and thematic analysis was employed to develop a rich and trustworthy account.

Conclusion

“Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can, as long as ever you can.” (Unknown, 2022). With these words, often though mistakenly credited to John Wesley in mind, I hoped to create a study that would ignite a conversation towards improving how students with disabilities transition from high school to college. Decisions about the treatment of students with disabilities are often made without their input. Hopefully, this study provided a platform for those students, increased awareness among decision makers, and allowed me to do the most good for the most students with disabilities.

Chapter 4: Findings

This study sought to provide a better understanding of the experiences and needs of students with disabilities to college faculty and staff. In order to identify some of the experiences and needs of students with disabilities in college, this study was conducted with college students who were registered with Marshall University's Office of Disability Services. This study consisted of one-on-one interviews with nine voluntary research participants. In these interviews, participants, using pseudonyms they selected themselves, shared their experiences in college and identified factors that they felt contributed to their successes and failures. The stories shared by research participants provided contextual data on the experiences of students with disabilities who have transitioned from high school to college. When analyzing the data collected during interviews two major themes emerged: Challenges and Supports. Interestingly, there was not a consensus among participants about these challenges and supports. Some participants had great difficulty in areas that came easily for others. This aligns with the individualized nature of special education participants experienced in high school. With this in mind, the data has been arranged in five sub-themes; Identifying Disabilities, Needs and Supports, Interacting with Faculty and Staff, Navigating Campus, and Wraparound Services. During this study, participants openly discussed challenges and supports in regard to each of the sub-themes.

Challenges

Identifying Disabilities

The first common challenge that emerged during interviews was that of constantly evolving diagnoses. For many participants, changes in diagnoses often led to inconsistent accommodations. As new complications arose for participants, new diagnoses were given along with new guidance from doctors. This had a ripple effect in the accommodations that students received. When a new diagnosis was given to a student with disabilities, they readdressed their needs with the Office of Disability Services and requested further accommodations. Participants shared their experiences with changing diagnoses. In many cases, participants were also dealing with multiple diagnoses. Drake, for example, was diagnosed with ADHD, OCD, ODD, and ADD. He was then informed that he might be a person with Autism. After two years and three psychological evaluations, he was finally diagnosed with Level 1 Autism Spectrum Disorder. At that point, Drake felt that he had finally received the right diagnosis; more recently, however, his counselor informed him that he is displaying bi-polar tendencies. Drake was not alone. Celia shared her experience with evolving diagnoses:

> So, my diagnosis has changed a lot in the time period between high school and college. In high school, following a suicide attempt, I was diagnosed with a major depressive disorder, general anxiety disorder, and social anxiety disorder. I had those diagnoses for about two years. I was diagnosed when I was sixteen. Then, when I came here, I was re-diagnosed with major depressive disorder, but I was also diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder. I didn't qualify for the diagnosis of a general anxiety disorder or a social anxiety disorder anymore.

In some cases, participants had a stable diagnosis that presented with progressive symptoms. Michael, for example, was originally diagnosed with Retinitis Pigmentosa when he was eleven years old. Since then, he has had difficulty with colorblindness, visual acuity, and differentiating between objects. But as he has aged, his vision has deteriorated. He has recently begun experiencing night-blindness and having difficulty seeing distances. Another participant with developing symptoms was Alice. Alice describes her rare diagnosis below:

> I have Hyper-IGD (Hyper-Immunoglobulin D). It is a rare primary immunodeficiency. It’s considered an invisible disability. In high school I was able to get a note from my nurse practitioner who studies the disease along with a list of symptoms and of course that it would require some accommodations like extra time off and stuff like that. That was submitted at the principal’s level, and I really didn’t have to do much after that. I often have a lot of fun, new diagnoses pop up from time to time. Like I just developed tachycardia. So, I have to walk slower to get across campus. Going from being able to run up 4 flights of stairs to waiting on elevators now is really annoying.

Other participants, like Skylar and Tyler, recently received formal diagnoses. Skylar was not diagnosed until the summer of 2021. She struggled through high school with attention and mental health issues, but she never knew that she had a disability that would qualify her for help. She was finally diagnosed with ADHD, bipolar disorder, and chronic migraines. For Skylar, struggling with these conditions without having any guidance on treatment or interventions was disheartening. Now with a treatment plan in hand, Skylar knows how to seek help if and when she needs it. Much like Skylar, Tyler realized during her junior year that she needed help. She went to see her primary care physician. Her physician administered assessments that found she was experiencing anxiety along with her ADHD. This combination diminished her ability to focus and to accomplish tasks within a reasonable timeframe.

For many students with disabilities, the challenge of getting the “right” diagnosis is often a difficult one. The progressive and evolving nature of disabilities, student’s abilities to cope with these disabilities, and resources available to these students can make it difficult for medical professionals to pinpoint the perfect diagnoses. Moreover, students’ diagnoses continue to shift and change as they mature, as they experience more, as their illnesses evolve, and as they transition to communities with varying levels of support. This means that college students with disabilities must remain active in their healthcare in order to ensure that they are receiving the most appropriate accommodations.

Needs and Supports

Participants discussed the accommodation process at length during interviews. Many participants entered college with little knowledge of how accommodations worked in higher education. When asked what they knew about the process of getting accommodations as new college students, many participants had similar responses. Drake, for example, said that he knew nothing other than what his community college counselor told him. Peg also felt uninformed. She did not know many people with disabilities or accommodations, so she entered college without knowing what to expect. The process was not what she was used to in high school. Peg was not used to being involved in the accommodation process. When she met with the Office of Disability Services (ODS), they requested all of her paperwork from the previous three years. Thankfully, her most recent special education evaluation was completed during her senior year in high school and her documentation was up to date. This allowed the ODS to finalize her accommodations quickly. Unlike Peg and Drake, Celia knew that accommodations existed, but not much else. In high school she had not been involved in the accommodations process–that had been handled by her mother and her IEP team. Once at college and on her own, Celia knew she needed help, but did not know where or how to begin the process of getting accommodations.

Some participants were a little more informed. Alice and Tyler learned about the ODS and the Campus Psychology Center during their college orientation sessions. When they decided that they needed accommodations, then, they were able to contact the ODS and start the process. Some participants, like Michael, took the initiative to educate themselves. He, his parents, and his Intervention Specialist looked into college campuses before they selected the college he would attend. Although they did not contact the ODS, they did inspect each college's webpage and what services they provided. Michael's parents and Intervention Specialist also taught him how to look for services he might need that other college students may overlook.

Possessing a limited knowledge of the accommodations that are offered in college and a lack of familiarity with the process of acquiring them can be a significant challenge for students with disabilities who are transitioning from high school to college. These students do not typically exercise agency in the accommodation process during high school. The lack of experience in self-advocacy can lead to negative experiences with the ODS in college. When asked about her experience in acquiring accommodations, Alice gave a detailed description of the multiple challenges she encountered during that process:

> It sucked! We had the big, huge packet of the medical information we thought they needed. I go to the disabilities office, and they take me back to a room with an employee. They asked what I needed accommodations for, I was requesting the same accommodations I got in high school. They asked for a note from my doctor stating that I had a disability. My doctor that specializes in my condition was a nurse practitioner at the time. We got it faxed over and they said it wasn't valid because she was a nurse practitioner. Yeah. They said unless you can get a note from a different doctor, we cannot accommodate you. That was not great. My condition is really rare. We were lucky to even find a nurse practitioner that specializes in it. So, we had to contact my research team at the NIH [National Institutes of Health] and get a note written from the team lead and have it sent to school. That was a whole process in and of itself. It was way more stressful than I had hoped for. In orientation they made a big deal about how

> accommodating they were and then to have everything that I needed and be told it wasn't good enough was really difficult. I took almost the whole semester. I had to go back and forth. They requested a letter, I requested a letter. The doctor asked what they needed, I asked what they needed. Of course, this doctor is super busy. It was several months. I started at the beginning of the fall semester and didn't get them until the end.

Although Tyler was aware of the availability of accommodations, she still had difficulty obtaining them. She knew where the Campus Psychology Center was located but had difficulty finding the ODS, and was not able to contact them. When she did arrive at the ODS, she felt like she was treated poorly, and the staff had little patience for her. She then spent several months organizing and transferring documents. Ultimately, her experience with the ODS was not productive and she had to rely on self-accommodations. During her junior year she heard about the HELP program, which focuses on students with ADHD. She attempted to enter that program but was unable to commit the funds required for the service. Celia shared a similar experience. She was informed that the ODS was unable to use her IEP and required a current psychological evaluation. She was unable to get her psychologist to do a new evaluation and turned to the University's Campus Psychology Clinic. They informed her that they would be able to evaluate her in 9 months. Celia was finally evaluated by the Campus Psychology Clinic in the Spring of 2021. Once she had their report in hand, the process proceeded quite smoothly. She was able to send her paperwork in, the ODS offered her a list of accommodations, and she accepted them. Reflecting back on what it was like to spend her first year without those accommodations, she had this to say:

> If you're drowning, you don't want to wait for 9 months for someone to come get you. I realize there might not be anything to do about that, but I think there should be something

> for students that are pending accommodations so that they don't have to flounder around like I did.

Michael also experienced a delay in getting accommodations, but for different reasons. Michael did not feel like he needed accommodations, therefore he declined to register with the ODS during his first semester. By the time he realized that he needed help and decided to reach out, it was late in the year. Reflecting back on that process, Michael realized that he went in unprepared. He needed additional paperwork, and it was his responsibility to communicate with his doctors and the ODS. Once he was able to iron out consent and documentation the process felt pretty easy. Michael and his doctor thoughtfully put together a list of accommodations that would benefit him and the ODS accepted.

The challenge of getting accommodations for students with disabilities transitioning from high school to college can be intimidating. The burden of success no longer lies with their parents or teachers; it rests squarely on the shoulders of each student. This responsibility presents a new set of challenges. Students were responsible for their class schedule, time management, independent personal care, and financial stability. This can result in a need for teachers, parents, and university staff to educate students with disabilities on the accommodation process in college before they step on campus.

Interacting with Faculty and Staff

After acquiring accommodations, students with disabilities can face another unique set of challenges when it comes to interacting with faculty and staff. Although Abreu, Hillier, Frye, & Goldstein (2016) indicated an improved willingness of faculty members to work with students with disabilities, respondents in their study still reported visiting the Office of Disability Services

(ODS) to specifically request assistance in dealing with specific faculty. This is echoed in Scott's research brief of the National Center for College Students with Disabilities focus groups. In this study, students identified uninformed faculty, instructor pushback, and non-responsive instructors as common barriers to their access and participation (Scott, 2019). When asked about her interactions with faculty and staff, Peg discussed her interactions with a professor in nursing school. The professor had a difficult time understanding why she needed accommodations. After a conversation with the professor, the two were able to work together on a system that worked for both parties.

Rooster shared a few instances where interacting with professors became difficult. Being visually impaired, the ODS provided him with the accommodation of enlarged work. Typically, this is not an issue. Many assignments are digital and for those that are not, professors willingly provide accommodations. However, one professor resisted doing this, citing copyright concerns as his reasoning. Thankfully, the ODS was able to iron out this situation and Rooster was able to complete the class. On another occasion, Rooster had a difficult time with an Art professor at another college. This professor also refused to enlarge classwork for Rooster. After a few weeks, Rooster dropped the class. When he re-enrolled in the course a meeting was held. The meeting had no impact on the professor’s behavior and Rooster was forced to find ways to enlarge the classwork on his own. When he requested extra time to complete assignments, the professor refused, saying, “It’s too difficult for me.” Through a lot of hard work, and extra credit, Rooster was able to overcome these difficult circumstances and pass the course with an A-.

Alice experienced difficulties in other areas. Initially, the ODS informed her that they would communicate with her professors about her accommodations. This did not happen, though, and Alice had to inform her professors of her accommodations on more than one occasion. Initially, her professors resisted excusing her absences but after the ODS confirmed her accommodations, things went smoothly. Graduate school was more difficult for her. Even with accommodations, Alice felt like the university was working against her. There were some professors who resisted her attendance accommodations and still tried to enforce their own attendance policies. When she met with these professors, their responses were unkind. Celia also experienced push-back from professors in regard to other accommodations. In one instance, she approached a professor to inform him of her extended time accommodations. He responded by telling her that he had given everyone a specific amount of time and that should be enough for her. She continued to advocate for herself and eventually he allowed her extra time. Celia also shared a negative interaction with a professor that she trusted;

> After class we went up to her office and I told her what happened. Instead of giving me advice, I guess she decided to criticize my entire personality. She was like 'You're too weak minded, you're too introverted.' Honestly, I blocked half of it out and I don't remember everything she said to me. What I do remember is that she brought up the fact that I had depression, negatively, like 'you are too depressed, and you need to be more proactive in seeking out treatment.' Even though I had gone to seek out treatment and it didn't work out. I felt like she was basically shaming me for having depression. And she was like 'you can't let it define you' even though I think at the time I didn't qualify for a depressive disorder. I was in a lower mood than everybody else, but you know doing fine. I guess in her mind I was too depressed, too socially awkward. I really felt like, I don't know what her intention was, I assume she had good intentions but was just stupid. I really felt like she was attacking me and trying to embarrass me. I'm telling you all of this now like it's not a big deal, but it was a really big deal.

The lack of information; the communication gap between students, faculty, and the Office of Disability Services; poor faculty attitudes; and the challenge of accessing curriculum and materials are just some of the barriers students with disabilities transitioning from high school to college can face. Students and faculty are often unaware of accessibility issues until they present themselves and these issues can be traumatizing for students with disabilities.

Navigating Campus

Participants in this study experienced unique challenges during their transition to college with regard to navigating campus. These challenges encompassed transportation; navigating campus, housing, medical needs; and interacting with peers. Several participants discussed the difficulties they experienced while trying to get around. Drake discussed the difficulties of commuting to class. He did not live anywhere near campus and struggled to cover his expenses. He could not afford dorms, so he drove an hour to campus, sat through two or three classes, and then drove an hour back home. Drake thus could not participate in many extracurricular activities. When he did stay on campus, it was to complete projects. He did not have a computer at home and often stayed late, worked on a project until it was finished, skipped dinner, and drove home, sometimes not getting home until midnight.

The responsibility of commuting can be especially trying for students with hidden disabilities. Drake had trouble dealing with the stress of driving up hills, long commutes, and an old unreliable car. “I can’t tell you how many times my car has broken down, how many times I thought I was going to die, honestly.” One evening Drake was involved in an accident:

> Yeah. Especially the time I accidentally hit a deer. Actually, I didn’t hit it, it ran into me. I stopped but I was worried about the people behind me because it was an older car. And

> if you know anything about older cars you know if they stop completely, they start to roll backwards. It was like BOOOOM and ran into me. I was like, oh crap, I need to get off this hill. Then it started smoking and I was like, oh crap.

The stress of commuting affected Drake in other areas. In addition to not participating in extracurricular activities, he struggled to complete assignments because of his long commutes. Drake’s experiences commuting are an example of how transportation can be a difficult barrier for students with disabilities transitioning to college, especially when those students are attempting to do so on their own. Other participants were able to share their commutes with friends. Peg discussed carpooling to and from campus. Peg was fortunate to have support in her own community. She and another student from her high school alternated weeks driving. They rode together every day and became particularly good friends. Her friend also received accommodations in college, and they were able to support each other. When they got in the car, they usually talked about how hard a test was or if their accommodations were helpful. This was an invaluable resource for both of them. Regardless of whether participants were residents or commuters, transportation was a constant topic of discussion. Morgan shared several experiences. She discussed her initial trip to campus, a 300-mile drive. She and her mom packed everything she would need for her first semester into a minivan and hit the road. When Morgan finally arrived on campus, she discovered a different set of transportation challenges. Parking was extremely difficult:

> Marshall has a bad habit of over filling their parking lots. Eventually, I moved off of campus, but I still have a parking pass because I drive here every day. I would get to campus and the parking lots were already full. Then I would be forced to park in handicapped. I have a legal placard and people would see me walking out of my car and

> give me dirty looks. There was this guy in a wheelchair in the same parking lot and I introduced myself to him. He was understanding but people saw us talking and I got dirty looks because I didn't look handicapped, and he was in a wheelchair.

Another time, somebody rear ended Morgan's car in a handicapped spot. When they spoke, the other party accused her of not needing to park in that spot. Morgan was terribly upset by this and proceeded to inform the other party that she was, in fact, disabled: "Why the hell would she think I parked there. She was like 'Oh, you just don't look disabled.'" For Morgan, this was not an isolated incident. She shared several experiences dealing with individuals who would either mistreat her because she does not look disabled or park in handicapped spots illegally. She spoke of several people using handicapped spots to park and wait on others. These people did not have placards or handicapped plates and she was forced to either park in the back of the lot or be late to class.

Drake also had difficulty parking. His first day on campus was his first day in the city. He had no idea where to park so he used the Pizza Hut parking lot. He was told by staff that he was not permitted to park there but the Pizza Hut employees informed him of a free parking lot for students on the other side of campus: "I was like hell yeah, I'm parking in that even if I have to walk 30 minutes. I didn't have quarters. I didn't have any money."

The parking and accessibility issues for participants was a major topic of conversation. Something as routine as getting to and from class was a major stress for many of the students in this study. Students with disabilities who drive are not the only ones who experience stress trying to get around: for those students with visual impairments, transportation presents a new set of challenges. Rooster shared his experiences and difficulties in getting to campus. He utilized a service provided by Cabell Wayne Association for the Blind. They provided transportation for visually impaired individuals between the hours of 8:00 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. Outside of those hours he used Dial-A-Ride or the Tri-State Transit Authority (TTA). If none of these services were available, Rooster would have to rely on family members to drive him to campus.

Rooster's experience was unique. He was unable to drive himself due to his visual impairment. Therefore, he relied on the services provided by Cabell Wayne Association of the Blind, TTA, Dial-a-Ride, or his parents for transportation. That was extremely taxing. When Rooster finally arrived on campus, he experienced a different set of difficulties. The ODS did not provide sighted guides for orientation, so Rooster was required to orient himself with Marshall's campus. He used a transportation service to get to campus a few days early, asked for directions, and walked around campus trying to find the buildings that his classes were in. Rooster experienced significant difficulty crossing streets in downtown Huntington. He had enough vision to see cars that stopped and waved him across the street – but not everyone was willing to stop. Once, as he was trying to cross the street by Corbley Hall, a car nearly hit him as he was in the crosswalk. He saw it just in time and had to run to get out of the way.

Wraparound Services

While all students face complications, the students with disabilities who participated in this study all faced unusual – and sometimes exacerbating – sets of complications. These complications resulted in unique medical, home life, and/or socioeconomic needs. Morgan spoke at length about her struggles with fibromyalgia, rheumatoid arthritis, and navigating her medical needs. She has had rheumatoid arthritis since she was four. At 15 she was diagnosed with fibromyalgia, TMJ, and asthma. Due to her fibromyalgia, she experienced fainting spells and required a wheelchair or a cane. Because her fibromyalgia is triggered by heat, she carried and used ice packs to help keep herself cool throughout the day. When Morgan arrived on campus, she was giving herself injections once a week. This meant that she needed a sharps container in her dorm room to safely dispose of her used syringes. The complex and intertwined nature of her disabilities also meant that she needed to identify the location of the nearest hospital, and Morgan had difficulty obtaining medical care at college. Her family was a military family, and it was difficult for her to find local physicians within her healthcare network requiring her to schedule appointments for when she was home on breaks. This was not ideal as she had to spend the majority of her free time going to appointments. On campus, Morgan struggled with getting to her classes. Sometimes she would have to wait 25 minutes to get on an elevator. Climbing six flights of stairs was not an option for her so she would have to wait. This required Morgan to develop strong time management skills. Sometimes, she would get to class up to 30 minutes early.

Morgan felt like working around everyone else's schedule was a major stressor. She also did not like giving herself injections. She was worried that her peers would see her and think she was using drugs. She was ashamed of having to do it herself and hide it from everyone, so she switched to IV infusion treatments. Morgan's fibromyalgia flared up in different ways. Sometimes she would need to wear a knee brace, other times she would wear compression gloves. When her peers asked her why, she lied. It was easier to lie about falling and hurting herself than to admit to them that she had a disability. In trying to keep her disability a secret, Morgan developed some unique strategies to help her get through her day;

> It's so hot in this building, especially in the winter. When they turn on the heat this building burns up. I'm struggling and sweating. That triggers my fibromyalgia. So now my shoulders are hurting. Then I get this thing called "fibro-fog." It's basically my body powering down. It's worse in the summer or in the winter when I'm walking in the cold,

> and I walk into a burning building. The drastic change turns off my brain. I started taking showers so that my hair could freeze on my walk to class so I could have cold water on my neck to keep me aware. So many people were like ‘you didn’t time that right.’ I would get inside of Harris Hall and drop my outer layer of clothing ASAP. That would take an extra 15 minutes. I was either moving too fast or too slow. It takes a huge mental toll to be so time efficient and in tune with your body. Then people look at you weird.

While Morgan’s medical complications were extensive, she was not alone. Alice is diagnosed with hyper immunoglobulinemia D (Hyper IGD) syndrome. “I have hyper IDG. It is a rare primary immunodeficiency. It’s considered an invisible disability.” Hyper IDG can significantly impact a student’s ability to attend class and complete work. Alice shared her experiences navigating school with such a rare condition. She missed a lot of high school due to complications and appointments. Determining a college was a very intense decision for her and her family. They researched the area around Marshall to make sure that the medical centers nearby were adequate and in close enough proximity to the University. Living near an emergency medical center was essential. After settling on Marshall, they started transferring all of her medical information to the doctors she would be working with. Alice’s rare condition also caused issues with the ODS. When she requested accommodations, they informed her that she needed a letter from her primary care doctor. When she complied, she was informed that the ODS did not accept letters from nurse practitioners. This put Alice in a difficult spot. Her condition was extremely rare, and her primary care physician was a nurse practitioner who specialized in Hyper IGD. But the ODS required a letter from a more traditionally credentialed physician. Alice had to contact her research team at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and request a letter from the lead researcher. After several months of emails back and forth, Alice was finally able to satisfy the ODS and received her accommodations.

Medical complications are not limited to those students with chronic illnesses. One participant, Peg, suffered a serious injury. In December of 2020 she fell down a flight of stairs and required several surgeries. Medical complications like this can be part of every student's life, but it is important to recognize the augmented impact that medical complications can have on the experiences of students with disabilities transitioning to college.

For some participating students, the challenges specifically related to their disabilities were exacerbated by the impact of socioeconomic and home life complications. Several participants discussed the difficulties they faced due to socioeconomic challenges. Drake discussed the strain of not being able to afford the dorms:

> As of right now I am worried about lots of things. I'm worried about getting into the Autism program to get more help. I can't keep driving up there every day and I have two more years to go apparently. I'm also worried about getting into the dorm because my mom can't help. She works part time; she works her butt off just to pay the bills and to pay for all four of us. Two of her kids are in college and one is getting ready to go to college. She can't pay for that stuff.

Drake was not alone. Skylar discussed the pressure that she was under due to her own financial situation. She felt pressured to finish her degree in four years, despite changing majors, and having to juggle three jobs. If she were unable to finish her degree, she would lose her biggest scholarship. In order to make ends meet, Skylar worked at a rock wall, as an intramural referee, and as a photographer. She attended class throughout the day and worked all evening.

Along with socioeconomic complications, many participants discussed stressful experiences involving their families that made it more difficult to transition from high school to college. Drake spoke of traumatic events and familial responsibilities while in college. On one occasion he had to take his sister along with him to a job interview. She had to wait in the car for two hours while he interviewed and then he took her to the eye doctor. Celia also experienced familial difficulties. She moved out of her parents' house when she was eighteen and lived on her own. Her parents had to pay certain bills due to West Virginia's law prohibiting the financial abandonment of a minor. Living independently meant that she had to travel to campus and complete her application and audition for the Marshall University School of Music without any support. For students with disabilities, the difficulty of getting other needs met is amplified. Celia, Skylar, and Drake discussed the increased stress they experienced due to socioeconomic and familial complications. The impact of socioeconomic and family status on students with disabilities who are transitioning from high school to college can be immense. The socioeconomic and familial complications experienced by students transitioning from high school to college can create needs that can have a major impact on their transition outcomes.

Supports

Students with disabilities rely heavily on the resources available to them. The need for these resources increases when students with disabilities transition from high school to college. Once in college, many students are on their own for the first time and they typically need significant supports in order to increase their chances for success. There are several campus resources and supports that are available to students with disabilities that can have a major impact on the transition of participants. During interviews, participants shared several positive experiences relating to the supports provided by Marshall University and the surrounding community. For the participants in this study, resources like Marshall Health, the Campus Psychology Center, Cabell-Wayne Association for the Blind, West Virginia Division of Rehabilitation Services, and the Office of Disability Services have provided the additional support they needed for a successful transition from high school to college. As Michael shared, “Independence is a lot more of a sensitive subject for people with a disability. We are more dependent on other people, so it’s like even a little bit of independence can go a long way.” Campus and community resources give students with disabilities an opportunity to develop the independence that ultimately made many of the participants feel like they have successfully transitioned to college life.

Getting - and Staying - Diagnosed

Not all participants arrived on campus with an official diagnosis or the proper paperwork. For those students, campus resources can be integral to getting their needs met. Celia discussed how campus resources assisted her in getting diagnosed:

> Actually, my spring semester of my freshman year I went and got an exception to not live with somebody. They moved me to a place of my own because it was getting so bad. I did that through the Marshall Psych Center [Campus Psychology Clinic] and they provided me with the documentation so that I was able to get that.

Celia returned to the Campus Psychology Clinic when she decided she needed further accommodations. Celia started the process by discussing accommodations with her psychologist and he directed her to contact the Office of Disability Services. The ODS informed her that she would need a full evaluation. When her psychologist was not able to evaluate her, she went to the Campus Psychology Clinic. They were able to evaluate her, and she received her report in

July of 2021. With a report in hand, Celia was able to get accommodations from the ODS within a week. The Campus Psychology Clinic provided Celia with a service that was otherwise unavailable to her.

Needs and Supports

The experiences of Michael, Celia, Tyler, and Alice provide evidence that getting accommodations can be a daunting task, especially for students attempting to do it on their own. The Office of Disability Services (ODS) is a vital resource for students with disabilities. The ODS provides the educational and physical accessibility supports that are necessary for students with disabilities to achieve their academic goals and to become as independent as possible. The ODS staff work directly with students to provide personalized services that make programs, services, and activities fully accessible to students with disabilities. Participants shared experiences they had with the ODS and the support they provided. When Skylar walked into the ODS she did not know what she would need to do to get accommodations. A staff member welcomed her and informed her of the requirements for acquiring accommodations. When she ran into an issue with her psychologist, the ODS was able to call and rectify the situation. Skylar spoke very highly of the ODS staff and the support they provided. On another occasion, Skylar was taking an exam in the ODS but was locked out of the testing portal. The ODS was able to coordinate with Skylar and her professor and found a solution that fit both of their needs.

Celia also had a positive experience with the ODS. After waiting several months for an evaluation and report from the Campus Psychology clinic, Celia took the results to the ODS. The staff there was able to get her accommodations in order within a week. They notified her professors of her accommodations and Celia was immediately able to use her accommodations across campus. The process was equally positive for Drake and Rooster. Drake transferred from a local community college; he described the process of acquiring accommodations as seamless. He was able to show the ODS staff his documentation and accommodations from his previous school and got his accommodations almost immediately. When Rooster transferred to Marshall from a community college, he was able to contact the ODS by phone and set up his accommodations for the upcoming semester. Rooster was able to do everything by email and phone that first semester and remarked how easy the process was for him. Rooster also took exams at the ODS. This allowed him to utilize all of the accommodations he is provided without distraction.

Finally, Morgan had this to say when asked about her experience with the ODS: “Oh yeah. I think her name is Stephanie Ballou. She really wants to help people and her husband is the instructor of the self-defense class at Marshall. He was really accommodating to me when I took the class, too. They are really good people. They just want you to have a good time and they are trying to help with everything.” Positive interactions with the ODS are vital to students with disabilities. Morgan, Rooster, Drake, Celia, and Skylar were confident that they had a resource on campus that was exclusively dedicated to their success. This provided them with a safety net when they were having difficulty on campus or with faculty and staff.

Participants also shared positive experiences with community resources. Specifically, they discussed their interactions with the West Virginia Department of Rehabilitation Services (WVDRS). Michael was registered with WVDRS. They provided him with a laptop that is loaded with software for the visually impaired and an iPad that can invert color. Skylar was also registered with WVDRS. WVDRS provided her with funding and vocational services like finding jobs and training if needed. Community resources like WVDRS add an additional safety net for students with disabilities trying to transition to college. It is important that students with disabilities are informed of the services they can provide and how to acquire them.

Interacting with Faculty and Staff

Utilizing accommodations across campus can be difficult. Faculty and staff may not always understand the needs of their students in the same fashion as the ODS. Fortunately, many participants shared positive experiences with faculty and staff. Alice and Drake spoke generally about faculty and staff. They both felt that faculty and staff were dedicated to making sure that they succeeded. Alice explicitly mentioned how accommodating she found the faculty and staff of the Marshall Psychology Department to be. Skylar shared that she had only positive experiences with faculty and spoke kindly of her biology professor. The professor was supportive while Skylar was working with the ODS on acquiring accommodations and provided her with additional support until her accommodations were finalized. In the end, Skylar viewed her biology professor as an ally to students with disabilities. Tyler also spoke of a professor that acted as a mentor to her. When she informed her professor of her need for accommodations, the professor made a point to check in on her every time they met. She felt that he was genuinely interested in her success, and he provided her with advice, assistance, and opportunities within the department. Tyler's relationship with her professor is reminiscent of the relationship between Regina Aguirre and Chad Duncan in *Being an Elbow: A Phenomenological Autoethnography of Faculty-Student Collaboration for Accommodations* (Aguirre & Duncan, 2013). Like Tyler and her professor, Regina and Chad developed a symbiotic relationship that benefitted both by allowing them to learn about accommodations and their roles in the process (Aguirre & Duncan, 2013). Tyler's professor's interest encouraged her to improve her self-advocacy skills, while also encouraging her professor to analyze his own instructional methods in regard to working with students with disabilities.

Navigating Campus

Rooster relied on the transportation resources provided by the Cabell-Wayne Association for the Blind (CWAB). Without these services it would have been difficult for Rooster to attend college of any sort. CWAB provided Rooster with transportation to and from campus until 4:30 p.m. If Rooster needed transportation to and from an evening class, he relied on his family or other community resources such as the Tri-State Transit Authority (TTA) or Dial-A-Ride. CWAB also provided Rooster with training vitally important to his success and independence. They provided him with Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist (COMS). The COMS and the director of CWAB trained Rooster in how to properly use his white cane. They taught him how to properly fold and unfold his cane, how to safely move his cane, and how to utilize the appropriate arc pattern. These lessons, which are critical for the safety of an individual with visual impairment, allowed Rooster to navigate campus safely and independently.

Wraparound Services

Several participants spoke about the support they received from various campus resources. Morgan needed some specific medical accommodations. When she needed a sharps container for her dorm room, Marshall Housing and Residence Life helped her acquire one through Marshall Health. She was also able to get other medical needs met through Marshall Health like prescriptions and referrals.

Another invaluable resource on campus is the Campus Psychology Center. Skylar spoke about how the support she received:

> I get free counseling and free psychiatry appointments. I would have to pay for my medications through the psychiatry department, but all of my medications are free. The only thing that I wish was better in the counseling center is that I only get one appointment a month.

For some students with disabilities, families can be a major support. Tyler discussed her relationship with her mom:

> I can tell you about who has given me extra emotional support, that's my mother. While the teachers and professors and people at Marshall have been helping with my academic stress, there is still also the self-care stuff that I struggle with. I have my family that reaches out to me every day. They help me to stay afloat and not drown every day. My mom has been a really big help through that. Helping me figure out what is wrong with me since elementary school, actually since I was born now that I think of it. She's really just that rock that I really depend on.

Other participants did not explicitly discuss the support that their families provided although it was evident in the way they described their transition from high school to college. Morgan's family, for example, was a positive influence. They provided her with logistical and emotional support and made her experience more successful than some of her peers. When she first attempted to come to campus, her car died. "I was supposed to have an orientation but, on the way, there my car died. Me and my dad were driving in my 98 Slug Bug and it died two hours away from home. My mom and brothers had to pack up and come and get us." When it was finally time to move in, she and her mother packed everything into a minivan and drove 300 miles. Having her mother with her made it easier. She was able to move her things in early and spent the next day with her mom getting essentials for dorm life.

Having the support of family, friends, faculty and staff, community resources like WVDRS and CWAB, and on-campus resources like Marshall Health, the Campus Psychology Center, and the ODS can be crucial for students with disabilities transitioning to college. These programs provided participants with accommodations and support to encourage success and independence. Participants discussed challenges but it was encouraging to see all of the positive supports in place for students with disabilities making the transition from high school to college.

Chapter 5: Implications, Recommendations and Conclusion

This dissertation began with the intention of utilizing interviews to explore the experiences of students with disabilities who have made the transition from high school to college, gaining insight into how parents and Intervention Specialists could better prepare students with disabilities for a successful transition from high school to college and how colleges could better serve them while they are enrolled. According to Gregg (2009), 72% of students with special needs are failing to complete higher education programs in America. The majority of the research available on this topic provided a quantitative understanding of the size of the problem but there was far less information on the nature of why students with disabilities were not succeeding, and there was very little from the student perspective. Hence, during interviews, I attempted to explore why students with special needs are struggling in higher education. With that in mind the interviews aimed to address three questions:

- How do participating students with disabilities experience the transition from high school to college?
- How do participating students with disabilities experience the process of acquiring accommodations in college?
- How do participating students with disabilities experience utilizing accommodations in college?

These interviews provided focused and nuanced results that illuminate the successes and shortcomings of the existing support systems for students with disabilities transitioning from high school to college. In this chapter I plan to discuss the implications of these results, practical and scholarly recommendations that rise out of the research, and how this research has impacted the way I view the needs of students with disabilities who are transitioning from high school to college.

Implications

During interviews, most information fell into two categories; challenges and supports. These were then split into five subcategories: Identifying Disabilities, Needs and Supports, Interacting with Faculty and Staff, Navigating Campus, and Wraparound Services. Although these categories do not include all of the challenges and supports that participants discussed, they provide a snapshot of the most frequently discussed issues students with disabilities transitioning from high school to college are facing.

Getting and Staying Appropriately Diagnosed

Several participants shared stories about their experiences in receiving and maintaining an accurate diagnosis. For many students with disabilities, accommodations, and services in college hinge on the acquisition of medical documentation of a need. This meant that if a participant was struggling and wanted accommodations, they needed to seek out a physician or mental health professional and request an assessment. In the cases of Celia and Drake, acquiring these diagnoses took a significant amount of time. Celia provided a powerful description of the experience: “If you’re drowning, you don’t want to wait for 9 months for someone to come get you.”

For participants, acquiring a diagnosis was only the beginning. As participants matured, developed new skills, or encountered new challenges they experienced changes in diagnoses. These new diagnoses usually came along with new guidance from doctors, which affected the accommodations that students received. When a new diagnosis was given to a participant, they had to readdress their needs with the Office of Disability Services (ODS) and request further or altered accommodations. In many cases, participants were also dealing with multiple diagnoses which required further – and often more complex – accommodations and considerations from students, medical professionals and campus faculty and staff.

While universities can do little to improve the diagnostic timelines and complications for students with disabilities transitioning from high school to college, universities can work to increase the awareness and availability of medical resources around campus. Students with disabilities rely heavily on the resources provided by educational institutions. Incoming students with disabilities are on their own, many for the first time, and they typically need significant support. There are several campus resources and supports that are available to students with disabilities that can have a major impact on the transition of participants. The support provided by Marshall University and the surrounding community include resources like Marshall Health, the Campus Psychology Center, Cabell-Wayne Association for the Blind, West Virginia Division of Rehabilitation Services, and the Office of Disability Services. Marshall's campus and community resources can provide students with disabilities an opportunity to develop independence. Those opportunities made many participants feel like they had successfully transitioned to college life.

Participants like Alice and Rooster discussed the positive interaction they had with many of the previously mentioned community resources. In her interview Alice shared that having all of her medical documents organized and available was paramount to her successful transition. At the time of her enrollment, the ODS did not possess a comprehensive list of community and medical resources readily available for incoming students. She and her parents then took it upon themselves to research Marshall's campus and the surrounding area in order to ensure that all of her medical needs could be met. This was echoed during Tyler and Michael’s interviews, as they encouraged incoming students with disabilities to take the time to research the available resources on campus and in the surrounding community. By providing students with a place to access information concerning their healthcare and support options on and around campus, the ODS could provide a vital service to students with disabilities, improving their likelihood of a successful transition to college and address a need identified by several participants within this study.

Needs and Supports

Participants’ experiences revealed that getting effective accommodations in college is as much about a positive mindset and preparation as it is about getting appropriate documentation and accurate diagnoses. To increase the likelihood of a successful transition from high school to college, preparation must begin before enrollment. While in high school, it is important for students with disabilities, parents and Intervention Specialists to research and practice the collegiate accommodation process. As a high school Intervention Specialist, there were several transition activities that I utilized in order to familiarize my students with the steps for acquiring accommodations once they enrolled in college. These included researching the ODS at various universities, discussing the process of self-disclosure, providing students with letters of accommodations, and facilitating conversations between faculty and students to improve understanding, build relationships, and encourage autonomy. While these activities did not guarantee successful transitions from high school to college, they did provide graduating seniors with confidence and a positive mindset towards acquiring accommodations once they were on campus. For example, Peg spoke of her high school Intervention Specialist and the assistance she provided, while Rooster praised his Teacher of the Visually Impaired and all of the preparation they did together before college.

Once enrolled, the responsibility of acquiring accommodations falls upon students with disabilities. Each year freshmen attend orientation events which serve as opportunity for students to learn how to navigate through Marshall's student resources and support services, learn about the first year at Marshall, including academic expectations and student life, learn about graduation requirements at Marshall, and meet with an academic advisor to register for their first semester of classes (Marshall University, 2022). However, the students who participated in this study shared a range of different experiences. Many participants expressed that they felt the information presented about the ODS was insufficient and disengaging. One participant even went as far to say that the only information they received was "If you need us, find us." (Taking into consideration the time that has passed since that participant's orientation, I hope that is no longer the case.) A focus on creating engaging and informative presentations tailored to students with disabilities by ODS and other available resources could result in an increase in participation and, thus, an increase in positive outcomes for students with disabilities transitioning from high school to college and serve as a model for other universities.

Finally, the participants in this study experienced varying levels of satisfaction with the interactions they had with ODS. For some, the lack of a dedicated case manager worked in their favor as they were able to quickly resolve problems with available staff members. But for others, the lack of a specified point of contact led to complications. Participants described feeling disconnected from staff, receiving conflicting information from case workers, and feeling dismissed, confused, and hopeless. These issues may seem small but to a student with disabilities, who is attempting to acquire accommodations on their own for the first time, they can be crippling. The experiences of the participants in this study are not meant to challenge the effectiveness of the ODS but, rather, to highlight areas that can be improved upon. It is important to note that any participant who had an interaction with the Director of ODS praised her efforts to help them and make them feel valued. It is encouraging that an individual of her caliber has been trusted with such a great responsibility and her leadership should serve to correct the small issues within ODS and provide students with disabilities with a positive mindset and an empowering experience.

Interacting with Faculty and Staff

Once students have procured their accommodations, the accommodations are then communicated with the faculty and staff who will be responsible for providing them. This is typically done by the ODS, but, in many cases, participants took it upon themselves to inform their professors of their accommodations. The majority of interactions were positive, with participants sharing how helpful faculty and staff were. Skylar and Tyler shared several stories about faculty who took extra care to make sure that they had all the support they needed. Of the participants who shared positive experiences with faculty, the majority took the time to meet with faculty early in the semester and spent time building relationships, opening lines of communication, and displaying initiative and autonomy. These participants felt that their relationships with faculty were a direct result of their efforts and had a major impact on success in and out of the classroom.

Some participants did share difficult experiences they had with faculty and staff. These experiences ranged from explaining their need for accommodations to enduring personal attacks and misguided attempts at “tough-love.” While it would be easy enough to just condemn these acts and move on, I want to emphasize that it is imperative for colleges to prevent these types of behaviors through education and intervention. By providing mandated and regular professional development, the ODS can begin to act as a bridge between faculty and students with disabilities. They can serve to foster positive relationships by facilitating conversations between students with disabilities and faculty. Too often, ODS becomes involved after there has been a negative experience leaving relationships damaged. By encouraging students to develop relationships with faculty, ODS would provide students with the opportunity to show that they are invested in their education and capable of independence while promoting a positive mindset towards accommodations.

Navigating Campus

Another major theme that emerged during interviews was navigating campus. Many participants discussed travel difficulties, either during their move to Marshall University in Huntington, during their commutes, or on campus. Morgan shared a story about breaking down while moving to campus. Thankfully, her family was able to help her make the move and she arrived on campus in time to move in. For students with disabilities who are moving to campus, the drive to Huntington signals the beginning of their transportation needs. Once arriving on campus, several participants experienced difficulties parking. Drake was unable to find a parking spot during orientation and parked illegally in a Pizza Hut parking lot; once the semester started, he could only find parking in a free overflow lot which resulted in considerably long walks to classes.

Morgan also experienced parking difficulties. As a student who required handicapped parking, the limited access to handicapped parking spots was an issue for her. On many occasions the number of students with disabilities that required a handicapped parking spot was greater than the number of spots available. In order to make it to class on time, Morgan arrived

30 minutes before class. If handicapped parking was not available, arriving early allowed her enough time to park in the back of the lot and walk to class.

Morgan’s difficulties navigating campus did not end there. Her disabilities made walking to class a challenge. As discussed in Chapter 4, on hot days she would develop “fibro fog” and have to navigate a busy campus, climb stairs, or wait on crowded elevators in order to get to class on time. On cold days she would wash her hair and let it freeze on her way to class. Her hair would then thaw as she climbed the stairs allowing her to keep cool and focus in class. Rooster and Michael also experienced many difficulties while navigating campus. Both are visually impaired and needed extra time before classes started to orient themselves to campus. Michael’s night blindness impacted his social interactions and limited the classes he could take, and Rooster struggled with evening classes as well. He spoke of being scared to walk on campus at night due to his visual impairment. During his interview we discussed the options available that could ensure his safety. Both participants discussed using public transportation and transportation services provided by other agencies. The resilience, creativity, and ingenuity displayed by Rooster, Michael, and Morgan is something to celebrate. Many students with disabilities are faced with unforeseen challenges and must find a creative way to overcome. The participants in this study took pride in their ability to solve problems that may arise and to continue to participate in the college experience.

Navigatin campus can be a major challenge for students with disabilities who are transitioning from high school to college. Be it moving to campus, commuting, or simply walking to class, the transportation needs of students with disabilities on campus are great. Many of the participants in this study spoke of specific difficulties they encountered while trying to navigate the Huntington campus. Participants like Rooster and Michael utilized transportation resources available to them while Morgan displayed resourcefulness in a different manner. Students with disabilities must be resourceful in order to successfully transition from high school to college, but improvements should be made. By increasing the number of handicapped parking spaces across campus or providing some form of campus trolley and transport system a majority of the issues participants experienced could be alleviated. Other forms of support could come in the form of gas and maintenance vouchers for commuting students with disabilities. There are countless ways to improve the experiences of students with disabilities who are trying to get around campus. Rooster, Morgan, and Michael serve as examples of what can be accomplished when students with disabilities refuse to fail. Their desire to succeed in spite of their disabilities was the catalyst for their resilience, creativity, and ingenuity. By following their example, universities could create an environment that is inclusive and welcoming to all students with disabilities.

Wraparound Services

The final major theme that emerged during interviews was getting other needs met. This included the vast list of wraparound services provided by Marshall University and the surrounding community to students with disabilities transitioning from high school to college. Whether it be Morgan acquiring a sharps container through Marshall Housing and Residence Life; Skylar utilizing the counseling services at the Campus Psychology Center; the multiple participants who utilized Marshall Health; or Tyler who spoke of the benefits of the Explore, Design, Graduate, Empower (EDGE) mentoring program, the wrap-around services provided on campus had an impact on the successful transition of participants. Other participants took advantage of community resources. Rooster and Michael utilized public transportation provided by the Tri-state Transit Authority to get around campus. Rooster also utilized the various services provided by the Cabell-Wayne Association for the Blind. They were able to provide him with Orientation and Mobility training and transportation services. By having so many services available on campus and throughout the community, Marshall University is creating an environment that is conducive to success. The wrap-around services available at Marshall University provide a comprehensive, holistic, and student-driven way of accommodating the needs of students with disabilities who are transitioning from high school to college.

When talking about wraparound services, it is important to discuss the social needs of students with disabilities who are transitioning from high school to college. Many of the participants in this study spoke of how they felt isolated or ashamed of their disabilities in high school and felt like college was a chance for them to reset. In *Qualitative Analysis of the Barriers College Students with Disabilities Experience in Higher Education*, Hong (2015) discovered that the most cited stressor in her research was social stigmatization. Participants felt the need to deceive their peers in order to avoid negative attention or resentment, and many stated that this deception led to embarrassment. The results of the NCCSD focus groups also found social stigmatization associated with their disability. 100% of focus groups discussed experiencing resentment, judgment, and questioning, and 86% of focus groups described negative interactions with peers as significant barriers (Scott, 2019). Due to this, many of the participants in Hong's research chose to forgo accommodations (Hong, 2015).

During interviews, participants discussed feeling stigmatized and isolated. Michael shared his feelings about the stigma of disabilities. He spoke about being self-conscious about his needs and trying his best to blend in, even to the point where he would not go out at night to avoid discussing his night blindness. Morgan also spoke about the feeling isolated;

> I wish that I was more connected with more people that were disabled… Obviously this isn't a disability, but LGBT resources on campus are minimal but they are pushed on the students. Being part of both communities, I knew more about the gay kids than the disabled ones. I'm using gay as an umbrella term. Queer, I should say. I knew more about where the LGBT office was and what their organized groups were. There is a freshman LGBT orientation class for LGBT students and their allies. I knew about that before I knew the disability office was in Pritchard. I didn't know what the ODS could do for me and not having those resources really stunted me and how much I wanted to be there.

This was the case with the majority of participants: they did not know of any other students with disabilities but craved the interaction and support that so many other marginalized groups are afforded on campus. In Peg's case, she was fortunate enough to have a friend with disabilities. She shared her feelings on the importance of such a friendship:

> Oh yes! Having someone that you know that is in the same boat is really helpful. It's not common to meet somebody that has accommodations. It lets you talk about the accommodations they have, what works for them. Maybe your accommodations aren't working for you, and they have something that you think will work a little bit better. You could talk to Stefanie and try it out. It's a trial-and-error thing.

In order for students with disabilities to successfully transition from high school to college they need to feel valued and included. Morgan and Michael were not alone in their desire to connect with other students with disabilities. Throughout the interview process this theme continued to emerge and permeated nearly every conversation. Many participants expressed the desire for a way to communicate with a formally organized group of students with disabilities - to connect with each other. Everyone needs a tribe, and the participants in this study are no exception. They want to know that they are not alone and that they are valued, and they want to be included in conversations about accommodations. They want to feel supported and support each other. In a time when society is more connected than ever, students with disabilities deserve that same feeling of connection.

Recommendations

When reviewing interview data, it is clear that there are areas in which this particular college can improve. All of the participants were students at Marshall University, so the recommendations provided must be looked at through that lens. However, much of the information obtained through interviews aligns with existing research on the experiences of students with disabilities transitioning to college, and thus could have relevance for other college campuses to ensure that students with disabilities feel safe, valued, included, and connected.

Obtaining an accurate diagnosis and proper documentation was a common difficulty for participants in this study. In order to alleviate some of these difficulties it would be beneficial for the Office of Disability Services to provide more information about the process on their website. Currently, the site reads, “All full-time and part-time students with proper documentation can receive our services. All new students are expected to meet with our staff prior to enrollment at Marshall” (Marshall University, 2021). Many participants shared their frustration with the ambiguity of the term, “proper documentation.” In Alice’s case, she arrived on campus with a file of medical documents fully anticipating to seamlessly obtain accommodations through the Office of Disability Services, only to be told that she needed documentation from a doctor, not a nurse practitioner. This led to a lengthy process that postponed her accommodations by several months. By clearly defining “proper documentation” and publishing the criteria for receiving, utilizing, and altering accommodations, the Office of Disability Services could alleviate a majority of the difficulties experienced by participants in this area. Creating an *Accommodations Playbook*, as detailed above, could provide more fine-grained information to students with disabilities, their families, and Intervention Specialists that will help them effectively prepare for the transition from high school to college.

Participants shared suggestions on how to improve their experiences with the Office of Disability Services (ODS). When discussing their orientation experiences, there was little recollection of the presentation by the ODS. More engaging and informative presentations tailored to students with disabilities could result in an increase in positive outcomes for students with disabilities transitioning from high school to college. Participants also shared their desire for a dedicated case manager that they could build a relationship with and feel supported by. This could improve the communication between students with disabilities and the ODS and limit conflicting and confusing information communicated to students and faculty.

After a student with disabilities received accommodations through the Office of Disability Services, those accommodations were communicated to faculty by ODS staff. This process resulted in varying levels of satisfaction. Participants who met with faculty early in the semester and spent time building relationships, opening lines of communication, and displaying initiative and autonomy felt that their relationships with faculty had a major impact on the success in and out of the classroom. Participants who did not meet with faculty often ran into uncomfortable situations with faculty who were either uninformed or unwilling to work with them. Students with disabilities should be encouraged to initiate communication with faculty about their accommodations and their needs in order to develop autonomy, build positive relationships with faculty, and avert some of the uncomfortable situations experienced by participants.

As previously mentioned, by providing mandated and regular professional development, the ODS can begin to act as a bridge between faculty and students with disabilities. Creating resources like a *Faculty Tool Kit* that includes all relevant information for faculty in regard to accommodations and provides answers to frequently asked questions would be beneficial to all parties involved.

Finally, students with disabilities are in dire need of social connection. Every participant discussed feeling isolated or lost at some point. Many participants expressed interest in a group for students with disabilities and their allies. This could be in the structure of a formal club on campus or a Facebook group. Participants wanted to meet other students with disabilities and have a way to communicate with each other. Even though students with disabilities transitioning from high school to college are on their own, many of them for the first time, they want to know that they are not alone, that they are valued, and they want to be included in conversations about accommodations. They want to share their difficulties, experiences, ideas and celebrate their successes together. Rooster reflected on the positive impact of the Cabell Wayne Association for the Blind and how he is now able to mentor other members who are entering college. By creating a social network for students with disabilities in college, Marshall can provide students with disabilities a place where they can feel safe, valued, included, and connected.

This study has provided nuanced data that is unique and valuable information from the perspective of students with disabilities who are transitioning from high school to college. However, it is limited to Marshall University. Further research is needed across college campuses. As I pointed out in Chapter 2, much of what is known about the experiences of students with disabilities transitioning to college is through a quantitative lens. Interviewing students with disabilities across college campuses, could provide Office of Disability Service staff suggestions that could improve outcomes of students with disabilities and gather important data on the efficacy of accommodations and the experiences of students with disabilities in college. As I stated earlier, I think that an *Accommodations Playbook* is needed. This could provide a step-by-step guide on how to acquire accommodations during the pre-enrollment process. I have mentioned that getting effective accommodations in college is as much about a positive mindset and preparation as it is about getting appropriate documentation and accurate diagnoses. With a tool like an *Accommodations Playbook,* students with disabilities could arrive on campus with their accommodations in hand, feeling confident in their independence; as Michael shared, "a little bit of independence can go a long way."

Justifications

This study was not meant to be representative of the population of university students with disabilities; rather, it aimed to identify areas of improvement that could improve the outcomes of students with disabilities who are transitioning from high school to college at a particular university. With this in mind, the recommendations presented in this chapter are based upon the unique experiences of participants, my own experiences in special education, and the existing literature that explores the high school to college transition experience for students with disabilities. Many of the participants in the study discussed that they did not feel prepared for the process of acquiring accommodations in college. This aligns with data from the National Center for College Students with Disabilities (NCCSD), who reported that 86% of participants in NCCSD Access and Participation focus groups shared that they or their friends were unaware of disability services and accommodations in college (Scott, 2019). Participants in this study also shared challenges they faced when they had connected with the Office of Disability Services (ODS). Many students were unaware that they are required to self-disclose, request accommodations, and provide documentation of their needs. explicitly seek to engage with students with disabilities during orientation, a finding in line with Scott (2019). Coupling this data with participants experiences and my own experiences in special education led me to believe that it could be beneficial for the ODS to provide more information about the accommodation process on their website and create engaging and informative presentations tailored to students with disabilities.

In my experience in special education, students with disabilities often fail to self-advocate. As mentioned by Peg and Celia, students with disabilities do not always have a hand in the development of their IEPs or service plans. As a result, they tend to lean heavily on their Intervention Specialists for support. This is where a dedicated case manager provided through ODS could provide students with disabilities with an ally. Abreau, Hillier, Frye, & Goldstein (2016) found students with disabilities averaged 4.7 visits to the ODS per semester. Fifteen percent of participants in their study felt that the ODS was not helpful; 24% of participants felt that ODS could improve the delivery of services; 14% felt that ODS needed to improve communication between students and staff; and 10% felt that expanding the ODS would be beneficial (Abreu, Hillier, Frye, & Goldstein, 2016). Participants in the NCCSD focus groups identified inadequate accommodations and lack of support for self-advocacy skills as major barriers to their success (Scott, 2019). Furthermore, a common complaint of participants in the Hong study was that their academic advisors did not have a basic understanding of how to help them acquire services (Hong, 2015). Students with disabilities should be encouraged to initiate communication with faculty about their accommodations and needs. A trained case manager through ODS could provide students with disabilities with the individualized guidance they desperately need and develop rapport that could alleviate the feelings isolation that so many participants experienced.

Hong (2015) also found that the most cited stressor by participants was social stigmatization. Participants in the Hong study noted that asking for accommodations made them feel like a burden on their fellow students and instructors (Hong, 2015). This resonates with many participants in this study who felt like they would rather fail than be any more of a burden. Participants in the NCCSD noted, “It’s a little lonely sometimes. Like I don’t like to tell people” (Scott, 2019). Many students with disabilities felt the need to deceive their peers in order to avoid any negative attention, which often led to sense of self-consciousness (Hong, 2015). Participants in the NCCSD focus groups also felt the stigma sometimes associated with disability. Every one of the focus groups discussed experiencing resentment, judgment, and questioning. Eighty six percent of the focus groups described negative interactions with peers as significant barriers (Scott, 2019). In all of the interviews done for this dissertation study, this theme continued to emerge and permeated nearly every conversation. Many participants expressed the desire for a way to communicate with a formally organized group of students with disabilities - to connect with each other. They want to know that they are not alone, that they are valued, and they want to be included in conversations about accommodations. They want to feel supported and support each other. By creating a social network for students with disabilities in college, Marshall’s ODS can provide students with disabilities a place where they can feel safe, valued, included, and connected.

Future Research

This study aimed to provide a narrative from the students' perspective through a collection of first-hand accounts from students with disabilities who experienced the transition from high school to college identify areas that could be improved in order to improve outcomes for students with disabilities. The results of this study and conversations with participants provided that narrative but it does not provide generalizable information that can help to guide best practices. New questions arise that should be explored: Why are students with disabilities failing to connect with one another? How can students with disabilities better prepare for the transition from high school to college? Are the experiences of participants in this study unique? Is there an underlying theme that has not yet emerged or been identified? In future research, I would like to revisit this study by interviewing participants a second time. This would provide data on the long-term implications of participants' transitions, changes in challenges and supports, and useful retention data. Repeating this study and comparing the experiences of a different group of students could provide data that could be utilized in a mixed methods study that could result in more generalizable and actionable results. Finally, I would like to develop a guide for acquiring services in college and provide it to students with disabilities who are transitioning from high school to college and compare the experiences of students who use it to the participants in this study.

Conclusion

When I began this research, I wanted to do something that mattered. I wanted to help students with disabilities get the accommodations they needed in college. What was the best way to do that? My chair and I spent months sharing and shooting down ideas until finally we decided to just ask the students themselves. During interviews I found myself admiring the strength, resilience, creativity, and ingenuity of the participants. Each one had their unique stories to tell, and they were so excited that someone was willing to listen. The most profound discovery of this research was not about accommodations, or navigating campus, or even faculty interactions; it was that students with disabilities felt isolated and lost. They wanted to feel safe, valued, included, and connected. I have spent my career in the service of students with disabilities creating a classroom that provides that type of environment, but I was unaware of how alone they felt when they left. I hope that this research is able to provide college campuses with an awareness of the struggles that students with disabilities experience while transitioning from high school to college and encourages them to create a place for students with disabilities to feel safe, valued, included, and connected.

References

Abreu, M., Hillier, A., Frye, A., & Goldstein, J. (2016, September 1). Student experiences utilizing disability support services in a university setting. *College Student Journal, 50*(3), 323-328.

ADA Amendments Act of 2008, P.L 110 - 325 (2008).

Aguirre, R. T., & Duncan, C. (2013). Being an elbow: A phenomenological autoethnography of faculty-student collaboration for accommodations. *Journal of Teaching in Social Work, 33*(4-5), 531-551. https://doi.org/10.1080/08841233.2013.827611

American with Disabilities Act of 1990, PL 101-336 (1990).

Baker, K. Q., Boland, K., & Nowik, C. M. (2012). Survey of faculty and student perceptions of persons with disabilities. *Journal of Postsecondary Education and Disability*, *25*(4), 309-329.

Bogdan, R., & Biklen, S. K. (2007). *Qualitative research for education: an introduction to theories and method* (5th ed.). Pearson.

Brinkmann, S. (2013). *Qualitative interviewing*. Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:osobl/9780199861392.001.0001

Center for Innovation in Research and Teaching (n.d.). Case Study Method. Grand Canyon University. https://cirt.gcu.edu/research/developmentresources/research_ready/descriptive/case_study

Connor, D. J. (2012). Helping students with disabilities transition to college. *TEACHING Exceptional Children, 44*(5), 16-25. https://doi.org/10.1177/004005991204400502

Cory, R. C. (2011). Disability services offices for students with disabilities: a campus resource. *New Directions for Higher Education, 2011*(154), 27-36. https://doi.org/10.1002/he.431

Dallas, B. K., Sprong, M. E., & Upton, T. D. (2014). Post-secondary faculty attitudes toward inclusive teaching strategies. *Journal of Rehabilitation,80*(2), 12-20.

Field, S., Martin, J., Miller, R., Ward, M., & Wehmeyer, M. (1998). Self-determination for persons with disabilities: A position statement of me division on career development and transition. *Career Development for Exceptional Individuals, 21*(2), 113-128.

Gil, L. A. (2007). Bridging the transition gap from high school to college; preparing Students with disabilities for a successful postsecondary experience. *TEACHING Exceptional Children, 40* (2), 12-15. https://doi.org/10.1177/004005990704000202

Gregg, S. (2000). At a glance: ADHD and IDEA 1997. A guide for state and local policymakers. Policy Briefs.

Haffey, S. J., & Rowland, L. M. (2015). *The importance of first-person accounts in education: Teacher and student perspectives*. Schizophrenia Bulletin. https://doi.org/10.1093/schbul/sbu137.

Heyward, S. (1998). *Disability and Higher Education: Guidance for Section 504 and ADA Compliance.* Horsham, PA: LRP

Heyward, S. (2011). Legal challenges and opportunities. *New Directions for Higher Education, 2011*(154), 55-64. https://doi.org/10.1002/he.434

Higher Education Act of 1965, 20 U.S.C. § 1140a (1965).

Hong, B. S. (2015). Qualitative analysis of the barriers college students with disabilities experience in higher education. *Journal of College Student Development,56*(3), 209-226. https://doi.org/10.1353/csd.2015.0032

Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004, PL 101-476 (2004).

Institute for Community Inclusion. (2019). *What is a TPSID?* University of Massachusetts Boston. https://thinkcollege.net/tpsid

Lee, I. H., Rojewski, J. W., Gregg, N., & Jeong, S. (2014). Postsecondary education persistence of adolescents with specific learning disabilities or emotional/behavioral disorders. *The Journal of Special Education, 49*(2), 77-88. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022466914524826

Lee, Stephanie (2009). Overview of the federal Higher Education Opportunity Act. Think College. Boston, MA: University of Massachusetts Boston, Institute for Community Inclusion.

Lombardi, A. R., & Murray, C. (2011). Measuring university faculty attitudes toward disability: willingness to accommodate and adopt Universal Design principles. *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation,* (34), 43-56.

Madaus, J. W. (2005). Navigating the college transition maze: a guide for students with learning disabilities. *TEACHING Exceptional Children,37*(3), 32-37. https://doi.org/10.1177/004005990503700305

Madaus, J. W. (2011). The history of disability services in higher education. *New Directions for Higher Education,2011*(154), 5-1. 5. https://doi.org/10.1002/he.429

Marshall University. (n.d.). Disability Services | Marshall University. https://www.marshall.edu/disability/

National Center for Education Statistics. (2018). Common core of data (CCD). https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/tables/ACGR_RE_and_characteristics_2016-17.asp

National Center for Education Statistics. (2020). Students with disabilities. https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_cgg.asp

National Center for Education Statistics. (2021). *Digest of education statistics, 2019* (2021-009), Chapter 3. U.S. Department of Education.

Nugent, T. J. (1978). More than ramps and braille. *American Education, 14*(7), 11-18.

Office for Civil Rights. (2020). *The civil rights of students with hidden disabilities and section 504 and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973*. U.S. Department of Education. https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/hq5269.html

Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods* (3rd ed.). SAGE.

Rehabilitation Act of 1973, 29 U.S.C. § 701. (1973).

Sanford, C., Newman, L., Wagner, M., Cameto, R., Knokey, A.-M., and Shaver, D. (2011). *The post high school outcomes of young adults with disabilities up to 6 years after high school: Key findings from the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2* (NLTS2) (NCSER 2011-3004). SRI International. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED523539

Schwandt, T. A. (2015). *The SAGE dictionary of qualitative inquiry* (4th ed.). SAGE.

Scott, S. (2019). *NCCSD research brief; access and participation in higher education: perspectives of college students with disabilities*. National Center for College Students with Disabilities. https://www.nccsdonline.org/research-briefs.html

Sesay, Y. (2017). Students with disabilities: we want our fair chance at college. *Diverse Issues in Higher Education.* http://diverseeducation.com/article/99029/

Shelly, J. M. (2018). *Perceptions and understandings of community college instructors in the provision of accommodations for students with disabilities* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. Gwynedd Mercy University.

Stake, R. E. (1995). *The art of case study research*. Sage.

Strom, R. J. (1950). *The disabled college veteran of World War II*. American Council on Education.

Understood Team. (2014). 7 Things to Know About College Disability Services. https://www.understood.org/en/school-learning/choosing-starting-school/leaving-high-school/7-things-to-know-about-college-disability-services

University of Kansas. (n.d.). Timeline of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). https://educationonline.ku.edu/community/idea-timeline

U.S. Equal Opportunity Commission. (2011). *Fact sheet on the EEOC's final regulations implementing the ADAAA* [Fact Sheet]. https://www.eeoc.gov/laws/regulations/adaaa_fact_sheet.cfm

U.S. Department of Education. (2017). The Rehabilitation Act. https://www2.ed.gov/policy/speced/reg/narrative.html

U.S. National Archives & Records Administration (NARA). (n.d.). *Servicemen's readjustment act*. https://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?doc=76

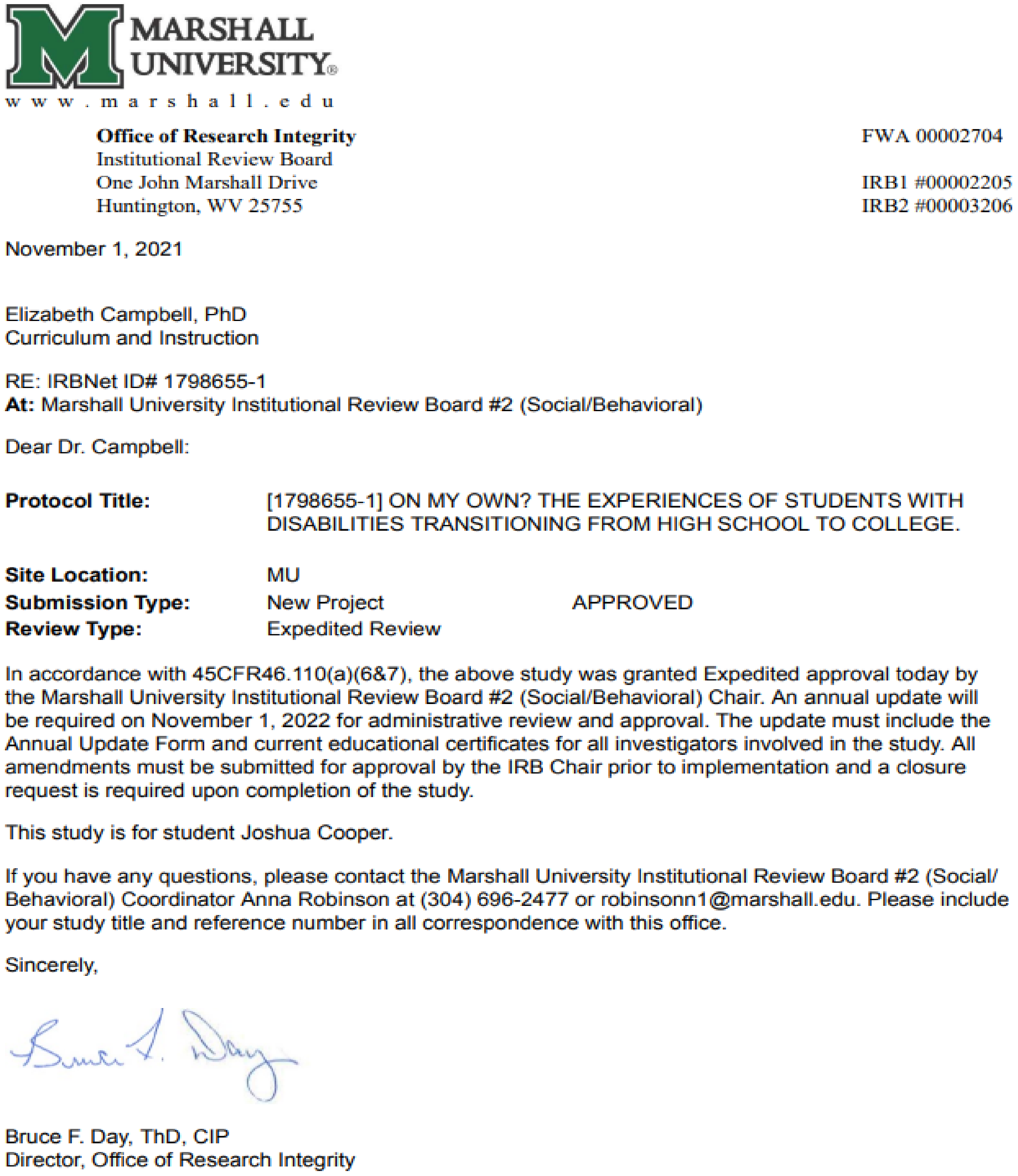
Wagner, M., Newman, L., Gameto, R. Garza, N., & Levine, P. (2005). After high school: A first look at the post school experiences of students with disabilities. A report from the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2). www.nlts2.org/pdfs/ afterhighschool_execsum.pdf

Walden, H. D. (2016). *The story of Holden Central School: A historical case study of a progressive Appalachian community, curriculum, coal company* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. Marshall University.

Wolman, C., McCrink, C. S., Rodríguez, S. F., & Harris-Looby, J. (2004). The accommodation of university students with disabilities inventory (AUSDI): assessing American and Mexican faculty attitudes toward students with disabilities. *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education,3*(3), 284-295. https://doi.org/10.1177/1538192704265985

Yssel, N., Pak, N., & Beilke, J. (2016). A door must be opened: perceptions of students with disabilities in higher education. *International Journal of Disability, Development and Education,63*(3), 384-394. https://doi.org/10.1080/1034912x.2015.1123232

Appendix A: IRB Approval Letter



MARSHALL UNIVERSITY
www.marshall.edu

Office of Research Integrity
Institutional Review Board
One John Marshall Drive
Huntington, WV 25755

FWA 00002704

IRB1 #00002205
IRB2 #00003206

November 1, 2021

Elizabeth Campbell, PhD
Curriculum and Instruction

RE: IRBNet ID# 1798655-1
At: Marshall University Institutional Review Board #2 (Social/Behavioral)

Dear Dr. Campbell:

Protocol Title:	[1798655-1] ON MY OWN? THE EXPERIENCES OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES TRANSITIONING FROM HIGH SCHOOL TO COLLEGE.	
Site Location:	MU	
Submission Type:	New Project	APPROVED
Review Type:	Expedited Review	

In accordance with 45CFR46.110(a)(6&7), the above study was granted Expedited approval today by the Marshall University Institutional Review Board #2 (Social/Behavioral) Chair. An annual update will be required on November 1, 2022 for administrative review and approval. The update must include the Annual Update Form and current educational certificates for all investigators involved in the study. All amendments must be submitted for approval by the IRB Chair prior to implementation and a closure request is required upon completion of the study.

This study is for student Joshua Cooper.

If you have any questions, please contact the Marshall University Institutional Review Board #2 (Social/Behavioral) Coordinator Anna Robinson at (304) 696-2477 or robinsonn1@marshall.edu. Please include your study title and reference number in all correspondence with this office.

Sincerely,

Bruce F. Day, ThD, CIP
Director, Office of Research Integrity

Appendix B: Interview Questions

1. As I’m sure you know, the way that students receive accommodations is college is very different from high school. Can you start by telling me about your disability and how you received accommodations in high school? (RQ1)
2. Could you tell me about when you decided to go to college?
3. Describe how you felt about college before you arrived on campus?
4. Tell me about arriving on campus.
5. Acquiring accommodations in college can be a long process, can you tell me about your experience?
6. Utilizing campus wide accommodations can also be a tricky task. Tell me about your experiences with using accommodations in class.
7. Existing research has identified physical demands, mental and emotional struggles, and social stigmatization as three major stressors for students with disabilities transitioning to college.
8. Tell me about you biggest challenges in college.
9. Now can you share your biggest successes so far?
10. Much of the existing research is performed from the outside looking in. As a student with disabilities in college, you can provide a unique and valuable perspective. Imagine you were in charge of preparing students with disabilities for college. What would you do to help students with disabilities transition successfully to college?