Postsecondary readiness skills: Perceptions of students with and without disabilities

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POSTSECONDARY READINESS SKILLS: PERCEPTIONS OF STUDENTS WITH AND WITHOUT DISABILITIES

by

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ABSTRACT

Postsecondary Readiness Skills: Perceptions of Students With and Without Disabilities

by

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The purpose of this study was to investigate the differences in the perceptions of postsecondary readiness skills between students with emotional disorders, students with learning disabilities, and students with no disabilities. Participants consisted of 91 students, 12 students with emotional disorders, 47 students with learning disabilities, and 32 students without disabilities in grades 11 and 12 who were planning on transitioning to postsecondary education. Data were collected to determine if there were significant differences in perceptions of postsecondary readiness skills among the three groups of students, specifically on eight domains: general preparation, academic preparation, self-determination and advocacy, academic accommodations and needs, self-sufficiency, financial considerations, social skills, and family support. The results indicated that there are differences among the three groups in their perception of readiness skills for postsecondary education. Significant differences were found between at least two of the three groups on four of the eight domains. Specifically, students with emotional disorders
and students with learning disabilities perceived that they lack family support for postsecondary education in comparison to their peers with no disabilities. In the domain of general preparation, students with ED perceived themselves less prepared than their peers with no disabilities, but there were no significant differences found in this domain between students with LD and students with ED. Significant differences were also found in the domains of academic accommodations and needs, and self-sufficiency as students with LD perceived themselves less prepared in these domains than their peers no disabilities, however there were no significant differences found between the three groups on the domains of academic preparation, advocacy/self determination, financial considerations, and social skills. The results of this research indicated that students with disabilities perceived themselves less prepared than their peers with no disabilities in many areas. These results further indicated the importance for additional research to compare these students' perceptions to the perceptions of their parents, teachers, and postsecondary personnel.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The population of students with disabilities in postsecondary education is steadily increasing. Researchers from a study done for the U.S. Department of Education (2002) reported that there were 1.53 million students with disabilities enrolled in postsecondary education. This is an increase from information provided in 1999, as a similar study reported by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) indicated that 1.4 million students enrolled in the nation's higher educational institutions reported having at least one disability. Henderson (2001) in a study for the American Council on Education also reported an increase in enrollment of first year students with disabilities attending four-year institutions in the fall semester of 2000.

A large percentage of these students have difficulty achieving postsecondary education success. Two particular sub-populations of students with disabilities, those with emotional disorders (ED) and learning disabilities (LD), face unique challenges in achieving success in higher education.

Statement of the Problem

As a result of societal needs, attitudes, and legislative policies, the complexion of the student population has changed considerably in higher education institutions over the last three decades. These changes in student body have come about from the
following: the enactment of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act 1990 (IDEA), the IDEA Amendments of 1997, the enactment of Public Law 101-336, and the American with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990. These laws provide more equitable opportunities for individuals with disabilities to continue their education beyond high school. As a result of these opportunities, there has been a marked increase in the enrollment of students with ED, LD, and other disabilities in postsecondary settings (National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) 1999). However, many of these students have difficulty achieving postsecondary success.

Challenges for First Year College Students

Entering college introduces many challenges for first year students. These challenges include altered sleep patterns, a change in eating and nutritional habits, concerns surrounding the development and use of social support systems, and issues pertaining to time and stress management (Trockel, Barnes & Egget, 2000). It has also been reported that variables related to physical, emotional, social, and spiritual health potentially affect these students’ academic performance. Some of these variables include mood states, number of hours worked per week, perceived stress, and exercise habits (Trockel et al., 2000). The effect of these variables on academic performance may cause many first year college students to experience academic failure and drop out after their first few semesters of postsecondary education.

Hence, retention of first year students is an important issue. Of those students who do depart early in their college efforts, 75% are first and second year students, with the
greatest proportion in the first year of enrollment (Tinto, 1978, 1993). Their departures were found to be a result of issues involving poor academic performance, poor social integration, limited parental support, poor coping skills, financial need, and work related concerns (Higher Education Research Institute, 2000; Holohan, Valentiner, & Moos, 1994; Sax, Astin, Korn, and Mahoney, 1999; Segrin & Flora, 2000; Trockel, Barnes & Eggett, 2000).

Challenges for Students with Disabilities

Transitioning from high school to postsecondary education settings can be difficult for any student. For students with disabilities, this transition can be even more overwhelming. Many of these students have problems adjusting to life away from home and have difficulty adapting to the challenges that postsecondary education offers. Nearly one-half of college students with disabilities seek personal counseling services related to transition and adjustment to postsecondary education settings (Stanley, 2000; West, Kregel, Getzel, Zhu, Ipsen & Martin, 1993).

Some identified domains of concern for students with disabilities transitioning from high school to postsecondary education settings are general preparedness, academic preparedness, self-determination and advocacy, academic accommodations and needs, self sufficiency, financial considerations, social skills, and family support (Anderson, 1993; Babbitt & White, 2002; Baggett, 1994; Benshoff & Fried, 1990; Beilke & Yssel, 1998, 1999; Flowers, 1993; HEATH Resource Center, 2003; Henderson, 2001; Janiga & Costenbader, 2002; McBroom, 1997; NCES, 1999; Nielsen, 2001; Stanley, 1999;
Many students appear to lack basic skills when entering postsecondary education settings. To be generally prepared for college, students need to have basic living skills and understand the challenges and changes that postsecondary education settings offer. Some of the changes in the academic environment from high school to college include: less structure; more writing assignments; more long-range, comprehensive assignments requiring independent completion; proficient reading comprehension and note taking skills; less personal attention; faster pace of classes; increased work load and less contact with classroom instructors. Some of the changes in student expectations include learning how to live on their own, managing their time and resources, and advocating for their needs (Virginia Department of Education, 2002).

Poor academic preparation is an area of concern for students with disabilities transitioning into postsecondary education. Researchers report that many students with learning disabilities lack the content preparation needed to succeed in college (Nielson, 2001; Vogel & Adelman, 1992). Additional research supports these findings. The NCES (1999) reported that students with disabilities fell behind their counterparts without disabilities in their high school academic preparation for college. As a result, they were less likely to be minimally qualified for entrance into a four-year institution and more frequently enrolled in a two-year institution. This report also indicated that students with disabilities had a higher enrollment in remedial mathematics and English in high school, poor representation in advanced placement courses, lower high school GPA's and performed poorly on their college entrance exams. These findings were supported by a
study done for the American Council on Education. Henderson (2001) reported that students with disabilities received lower grades than their peers without disabilities, and that students with disabilities were more likely to have used extra tutoring assistance to achieve academic success while in high school. Similarly, Nielsen (2001) in a study on how learning disabilities affected the success rate of university students reported that the majority of students interviewed indicated at least one type of academic deficit.

Receiving appropriate accommodations is also an area of concern for students with disabilities in college. Stodden, Whelley, Chang, and Harding (2001) reported that many times, students don’t receive the accommodations they need to be successful in college as the needed accommodations are often not available.

Self-determination, self-advocacy skills, and knowledge of legal rights and responsibilities are other areas of concern. Students with disabilities in higher education lack self-advocacy skills and knowledge of their rights and responsibilities to request academic accommodations and identify instructional needs (Janiga & Costenbader, 2002; Palmer & Roessler, 2000). Researchers have reported that one reason many students with disabilities lack these skills is that teachers are not adequately prepared to teach them (Thoma et al., 2002). In order for students with disabilities to succeed in postsecondary education, they need to know how and when to advocate for accommodations and request support services. They need to be aware of their legal rights and know how to communicate their needs. Without these skills, many students with disabilities will have difficulty requesting and receiving the services they need to ensure postsecondary success. According to Skinner (1998) students become self-advocates when they (a) demonstrate understanding of their disability, (b) are aware of their legal rights, and, (c)
demonstrate competence in communicating their rights and needs to those in positions of authority.

Self-sufficiency is also a problem for some students with disabilities in postsecondary settings. Individuals with disabilities experience greater difficulty with daily life tasks than their non-disabled peers (Graham, Weingarden, & Murphy, 1991). Some of these tasks include grooming, mobility, communication, and other basic tasks most individuals take for granted. For many students with disabilities, a lack of these basic skills hinders their success in postsecondary education settings. Stanley (1999) suggested that these students have unique concerns as they attempt to live on their own and deal with their disability in an educational environment. Many of these students are coming from sheltered environments and are facing independence for the first time. Upon college entrance they face money management issues and the additional responsibilities that independence brings, and are often unprepared to meet these new challenges with success.

Financial considerations prevent many students from continuing their education. Researchers have found that many families are ill prepared to pay for postsecondary education for their children (Higher Education Research Institute, 2000; Stanley, 1999). Without financial support for postsecondary education, students with disabilities find it difficult to pursue higher education. Frequently they cannot find jobs to help pay for college, or if they do find employment, they must work an inordinate number of hours that may ultimately affect their academic performance.

Deficits in social skills and social integration were also identified as factors contributing to the failure of first year students, which include those with disabilities in
Researchers have reported that many college students with disabilities have difficulty with complex social interactions and need assistance in dealing with the social demands of college (Anderson, 1993; Segrin & Flora, 2000; Stanley, 1999). Benshoff and Fried (1990) found that many students with disabilities were significantly different from their non-disabled peers in developmental skills related to interpersonal relationships.

Family support is also an important consideration for students with disabilities entering college. Holohan, Valentiner, and Moos (1994) reported that students who dropped out of college indicated the lack of social support from family, friends and teachers as one contributing factor. Considering the challenges that transitioning to postsecondary education poses, family support is a necessity in ensuring both emotional and educational success for students with disabilities. To successfully assist in the transition from high school to college, families can help in motivating students with disabilities to think and act on their college decisions. It is important for these students to know that their families are there for them to offer advice, be objective, and to assist them in becoming independent and responsible for their own academic goals.

Persistence in higher education is an additional problem for students with disabilities. Students who reported having a disability were less likely than their counterparts without disabilities to stay enrolled in school or attain a postsecondary degree or credential within 5 years (NCES, 1999). Sitlington and Frank (1990) found that 1 year after graduation from high school, only 6.5% of the 50% of students who had enrolled in some type of postsecondary setting were still in school.
Challenges for Students with Emotional Disorders

Individuals with ED are less likely to be enrolled in postsecondary degree programs than individuals without ED (McAfee, 1989; Wagner, Newman, D’Amico, Jay, Butler-Walin, Marder et al., 1991; Wagner, D’Amico, Marder, Newman, & Blackorby, 1992). These students face many of the same challenges as students with other disabilities, as well as additional difficulties associated with the uniqueness of their disability.

Post-school outcomes have been reported to be very poor for students with ED. These students often display characteristics that do not support academic or life-long success. Researchers have shown that students with ED have difficulty sustaining or maintaining appropriate social relationships; they have academic difficulties in multiple content areas, and often experience chronic behavior problems (Bullis & Bull, 1994; McAfee, 1989). It has also been established that they have fewer opportunities to experience success during their elementary and high school experience, and as a result have less exposure to academic content (Epstein & Cullinan, 1994; McConaughy, 1993; Wagner et al., 1991; Wagner et al., 1992). These factors can have a negative impact on students with emotional disturbance transitioning to postsecondary education and may prevent them from achieving success in these settings. These problems may follow them into adulthood, especially in their pursuit of postsecondary degrees.
Challenges for Students with Learning Disabilities

Students with learning disabilities (LD) face many of the same challenges as students with emotional disorders (ED), students with other disabilities, and their peers with no disabilities. They also experience difficulties unique to their disability.

Researchers have reported that students with LD often don’t receive the necessary supports in high school to assist them with transitioning onto post school experiences and they often lack awareness of their disability and lack the skills needed for self-advocacy (Aune & Johnson, 1992).

It has also been reported that students with LD have lower graduation rates, are employed in lower level occupations, are less likely to be enrolled in postsecondary education than their peers with no disabilities, and often demonstrated deficiencies in academic preparedness (Nielsen, 2001; Rojewski, 1999; Vogel & Adelman, 1992).

Many students with LD lack academic preparedness for postsecondary education settings and often score lower on college entrance exams, specifically in the areas of reading, writing, and mathematics than their peers with no disabilities.

In postsecondary education settings, where developing social networks are the norm, a lack of social support or integration can be a contributing factor to the failure of these students. For students with LD, adequate integration into the educational community is an essential yet difficult task. Collins (1995) reported that a successful university life for students with disabilities includes building confidence and the necessary social skills to meet future challenges. For students with LD who do not develop the skills necessary to meet those challenges, their future success may be limited.
Summary of Challenges for Students with Emotional Disorders and/or Learning Disabilities

Because of these challenges, it is vital that students with ED and students with LD be provided with the support they need to make a successful transition from high school to postsecondary settings. The 1997 IDEA amendments guarantee the availability of transition services to students with LD and other disabilities. Consideration for transition services should start at age 14 and should include activities designed to promote students' movement from school to post-school opportunities, which includes preparing students with disabilities for postsecondary settings (National Council on Disability, 2000). If a student with ED or LD plans to enter postsecondary settings, it is very important for educators to address this goal in the individualized education plan process and begin to implement the appropriate transition plan supports. In order to do this successfully, it is important to assess students' perceptions related to their readiness for postsecondary education and then create effective transition plans based on data from these assessments.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine if there are differences in perceptions of postsecondary readiness between high school students with emotional disorders, students with learning disabilities, and students with no disabilities, and examine and compare those differences in eight identified domains of postsecondary readiness skills: general preparedness, academic preparedness, self-determination and advocacy, academic accommodations and needs, self sufficiency, financial considerations, social skills, and family support.
Research Questions

Research Question One

Do the perceptions of readiness skills for postsecondary education differ for high school students with emotional disorders, high school students with learning disabilities, and high school students with no disabilities?

Hypothesis

There are no differences in the perception of readiness skills among high school students with emotional disorders, high school students with learning disabilities, and high school students with no disabilities.

Research Question Two

Are there distinct differences in the perceptions of readiness skills for postsecondary education in each specific domain between high school students with emotional disorders, high school students with learning disabilities, and high school students with no disabilities?

Hypothesis

There are no distinct differences in the perceptions of readiness skills for postsecondary education in each specific domain between high school students with emotional disorders, high school students with learning disabilities, and high school students with no disabilities.

Significance of the Study

Research related to the perceptions of preparedness of high school students with emotional disorders, students with learning disabilities or students with no disabilities is
limited. Prior research has focused on the success of students with disabilities during or after their first year of college. Little research has been conducted to evaluate students’ concerns regarding their preparation for postsecondary education or what educators need to address in the transition process for students moving onto postsecondary settings. Identifying the interests, perceptions, and areas of concern for students with disabilities can have a positive effect on school completion, post-school success and personal adjustment in community settings (Thornton & Zigmond, 1988). It is imperative that educators understand the strengths and deficits that students with disabilities possess in order to create effective transition plans.

This study assists educators in identifying the perceived areas of concern of students with ED or students with LD that should be addressed prior to transitioning to postsecondary education settings, and allows them to develop effective plans for this critical process.

Analysis of the data collected from this study allowed the researcher to compare and contrast the similarities and differences in the perception of postsecondary readiness skills of students with ED to students with LD, and to their peers with no disabilities.

Limitations of the Study

One limitation of the study is that the subjects were drawn from one school district in the western part of the United States; therefore the results may not generalize to other subjects nationwide. Another limitation is that the sample sizes are small and unequal across the three groups of students examined. An additional limitation of the study is that the tool was completed in an uncontrolled environment and the students
were not supervised while completing the assessment, therefore the responses provided could reflect the influence of anyone who may have assisted them in completing the assessment.

Definition of Terms

1. Emotional disturbance is defined as follows: (i) The term means a condition exhibiting one or more of the following characteristics over a long period of time and to a marked degree that adversely affects a child's educational performance:
   (A) An inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors.
   (B) An inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers.
   (C) Inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances.
   (D) A general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression.
   (E) A tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems.
   (ii) The term includes schizophrenia. The term does not apply to children who are socially maladjusted, unless it is determined that they have an emotional disturbance (IDEA, 1997, 300.7 ¶ 12).

2. Specific learning disability is defined as follows:
   (i) General. The term means a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, that may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen,
think, speak, read, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations, including conditions such as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia.

(ii) Disorders not included. The term does not include learning problems that are primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor disabilities, of mental retardation, of emotional disturbance, or of environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage (IDEA, 1997, 300.7 § 25).

3. Student (child) with a disability is defined as follows. The term child with a disability means a child evaluated in accordance with §300.530-300.536 as having mental retardation, a hearing impairment including deafness, a speech or language impairment, a visual impairment including blindness, serious emotional disturbance (hereafter referred to as emotional disorder), an orthopedic impairment, autism, traumatic brain injury, an other health impairment, a specific learning disability, deaf-blindness, or multiple disabilities, and who, by reason thereof, needs special education and related services (IDEA, 1997, 300.7 § 1).

4. Transition Services - (a) the term transition services means a coordinated set of activities for a student with a disability that—

(1) Is designed within an outcome-oriented process, that promotes movement from school to post-school activities, including postsecondary education, vocational training, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation;

(2) Is based on the individual student’s needs, taking into account the student’s
preferences and interests; and

(3) Includes—

(i) Instruction;

(ii) Related services;

(iii) Community experiences

(iv) The development of employment and other post-school adult living objectives; and

(v) If appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation.

(b) Transition services for students with disabilities may be special education, if provided as specially designed instruction, or related services, if required to assist a student with a disability to benefit from special education (IDEA, 1997, 300.29 ¶ 1).

5. Domain(s) – Domain is defined as "a sphere of activity, interest, or function"

Summary and Overview of Remaining Chapters

Students with emotional disorders and students with learning disabilities have difficulty transitioning to postsecondary education and are often unprepared for the challenges postsecondary settings offer (Aune and Johnson, 1992; Epstein & Cullinan, 1994; Janiga & Costenbader, 2002; Henderson, 2001; Nielsen, 2001; McConaughy, 1994; Rojewski, 1999; Snyder & Shapiro, 1997; Stodden, Whelley, Chang, & Harding,
Researchers have studied the success rate of students with disabilities after they transitioned to postsecondary settings, but little research has been done to identify how prepared students with ED and LD believe they are before they make this transition.

Therefore, additional research is needed to determine the perception of readiness skills for students with ED, students with LD, and students with no disabilities before they make the transition to postsecondary settings. Chapter 2 presents a review of literature pertinent to this study. In Chapter 3, a discussion of the methodology used in this study is provided. The findings of the study and related implications for future research and practice are provided in Chapters 4 and 5.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Literature Review Procedures

Studies used in this review were located through a comprehensive search of several educational databases including the Education Resources Information Center (ERIC), EBSCO Host, and Digital Dissertations. The following descriptors were used: emotional disorders, behavioral disorders, learning disabilities, adolescents and adults with disabilities, transition, first year college students, parental support, academic preparation, social skills, preparation for college, challenges in college, students with disabilities in higher education, employment, perceptions, life skills, post secondary education, and higher education.

Selection Criteria

Studies were chosen for this review if they: (a) provided information on students with disabilities enrolled in postsecondary education, (b) provided information on the perceptions of the challenges of first year college students, (c) provided data on the characteristics of students with emotional/behavioral disorders and/or learning disabilities, (d) included a clear description of the subjects involved, research settings, research design, analysis of data, and significance of results.
Enrollment of Students with Emotional Disorders and/or Learning Disabilities in Postsecondary Education

Students with emotional disorders (ED), (often included in the other health related category) and/or learning disabilities (LD) make up two of the largest categories of students with disabilities enrolled in postsecondary education settings. Researchers have indicated that these two groups of students are steadily increasing.

Researchers from the U.S. Department of Education (1997) reporting the 1995-96 National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS) found that 6% of 21,000 undergraduates in their sample population indicated they had a disability. Among the 1995-96 undergraduates with a disability, approximately 29% reported having a learning disability, and 23% reported an orthopedic impairment, while one in five undergraduates with disabilities (21%) reported having another health-related disability or limitation, which included mental illness and/or emotional disorder. Additionally, about 16% of students with disabilities reported having a hearing impairment, 16% a vision impairment, and 3% a speech impairment.

A survey was conducted in the spring of 1998 by U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (1999) using the Postsecondary Education Quick Information System (PEQIS). PEQIS is designed to collect limited amounts of policy-relevant information on a quick turn-around basis from a previously recruited, nationally representative sample of postsecondary institutions. The survey was mailed to the PEQIS survey coordinators at 1,084 2-year and 4-year postsecondary education institutions. An analysis of the results of this study indicated that in a
representative sample of the nation’s 5,040 2-year and 4-year postsecondary education institutions, 72% enrolled students with disabilities in 1996-1997 or 1997-98. Ninety-eight percent of the public 2-year and public 4-year institutions polled enrolled students with disabilities, compared with 63% of private 4-year and 47% of private 2-year institutions. According to the U.S. Department NCES (1999), an estimated 428,280 students with disabilities were enrolled at 2-year and 4-year postsecondary education institutions in 1996-1997 or 1997-1998. Learning disabilities was the most frequently identified disability, with almost half of the students with disabilities (195,870 out of the 428,280 students) in this category. Institutions reported 59,650 students with mobility or orthopedic impairments, 49,570 students with health impairments or problems, and 33,260 students with mental illness or emotional disorder. This report also noted that 23,860 students enrolled in postsecondary education had a hearing impairment, 18,650 students were blind or visually impaired, and 4,020 students had speech or language impairments. The remaining 38,410 students were reported to be in the “other, specify” category. The strength of this study is that it provides useful data on the disability categories and enrollment of students with disabilities in postsecondary institutions and presents a profile of the academic preparation, participation and outcome of students with disabilities. However, colleges and universities noted that many students were not included in duplicate counts of disability categories. Many indicated on their application for disability related services that they had more than one disability but were only considered under their primary disability for the statistical analysis.

Henderson (2001) in a study for the American Council on Education reported that of the 66,197 freshmen with disabilities that responded to a survey, 26,739 (40.4%)
reported having a learning disability, and 21,340 (32.3%) fell into the categories of other or health-related disabilities (which included students with emotional disorders). Additional data displayed in this study showed that the remaining students fell into the categories of visually impaired (10,676 students), hearing impaired (5,662 students), or speech impaired (1,930 students). The most significant growth was seen in the category of learning disabilities as the authors reported that this category was the fastest growing category of reported disability among students. A strength of this study is that it demonstrates that there is an increase in the enrollment of students with disabilities in postsecondary settings, specifically in the categories of learning disabilities and other or health related disabilities. However, this study does not show data specifically related to students with emotional disorders.

These data show a significant increase in enrollment of students with disabilities from 1995 to 2001, specifically in the categories of learning disabilities and other or health related disabilities.

Challenges and Domains of Concern for First Year Students in Postsecondary Education

Students entering their first year of college face many new challenges. The Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) at UCLA and The Policy Center on the First Year of College at Brevard College (2000) reported the results of a study done using a new survey instrument titled “Your First College Year” (YFCY). YFCY was designed to measure students' first-year college experiences and provide data on students' cognitive and affective development during their first year of college. The YFCY was distributed
to 5,229 first-year students at 19 institutions in Spring 2000; 992 students responded. Students reported that they had a difficult time adjusting to the academic challenges and expectations of college, with many of them indicating that they were not prepared to face many of the pressures and responsibilities that postsecondary education had to offer. Two-thirds of the students reported facing some type of personal challenge (e.g., lack of motivation, discomfort with physical appearance, loneliness, homesickness, and depression). In addition, more than half of the students reported that they felt worried about meeting new people, worried about their health, and had concerns about breaking connections with their home and family. Many (40.9%) reported avoiding social interaction with other students, while some reported feeling pressure to conform to the beliefs and values of friends, and/or felt pressure from friends to do things they didn’t want to do.

General preparedness was also an area of concern found in this study. It was reported that many first year college students felt overwhelmed by all they had to do and did not feel that they were prepared to meet challenges such as scheduling issues, daily life tasks, and taking care of personal needs. Another important finding was that there was a 12% decrease in these students’ self concepts of their emotional health from the beginning of college as compared to the end of their first year of college, and some students expressed dissatisfaction with the overall sense of community among students.

Financing college was another concern for the individuals polled. It was reported that 73.4% of students were worried about financing their education and were concerned about financial issues in the first year of college. Twenty-one percent reported working 11 or more hours per week off campus in paying positions to help offset the cost of
college, and 17.9% experienced serious financial difficulties. Many reported overspending their budget (61.1% of women, 50.2% of men) during their first year of college and 12.3% frequently or occasionally accumulated excessive credit card debt. The strength of this study was that it provided data on the challenges of first year students enrolled in postsecondary institutions; however, it did not provide data specifically on students with disabilities.

Segrin and Flora (2000) reported that social skills are important to the success of first year college students. Participants for their investigation were 118 high school seniors who were planning to attend the University of Kansas and who resided at least 200 miles away from the university. At the end of their senior year in high school, students were recruited to participate in a study on the transition to college. The questionnaires used in the study provided demographic data and measured social skills, depression, loneliness, and social anxiety. The questionnaires were administered at the beginning of the fall semester and again at the end of the fall semester. An analysis of the data suggested that poor social skills resulted in the development of psychosocial problems such as loneliness, depression and anxiety. The authors suggested that poor social skills left students vulnerable to psychosocial distress that interfered with their success in postsecondary education settings. The strength of this study is that it provided evidence that first year students enrolled in postsecondary education settings have difficulty with social skills. These deficits may lead to problems developing social relationships that could assist them with success in these settings. A limitation of this study is that the Social Skills Inventory used is a self-report analysis, which does not always correspond well with observer's evaluations or behavioral assessments (Segrin &
Therefore it can be noted that the data were based on the perceptions of the participants involved and one might appropriately conclude from this study that people who negatively evaluate their own social skills are more prone to develop psychosocial problems.

Parental support was found to be a key indicator for the development of adaptive coping strategies, psychosocial adjustment, and success of first year college students. A survey of 241 students who were recruited from an undergraduate introductory psychology course at the University of Texas at Austin found that parental support relates directly to the psychological adjustment of late adolescence (Holohan et al., 1994). Adolescents with high parental support were better adjusted and less distressed than those with low parental support. The authors also reported that students who had strong parental support had better adaptive coping strategies and better psychosocial and psychological adjustment during their college experience. The strength of this study was that it demonstrated that family support could be a key element in the success of first year college students. However, there were other variables such as attendance, academic ability, and peer relationships that were not accounted for in the analysis that may have contributed to the correlation between parental support and first year success.

Sax et al. (1999) found that there is a large amount of stress among college freshman as many students reported feeling frequently overwhelmed by all they had to do. These conclusions were based on the questionnaire responses of 261,217 freshmen at 462 of the nation’s two and four-year colleges and universities. According to this study, a possible contributor to the growing stress among incoming college students was the fact that many reported concern over the likelihood of having to work full-time while
attending college. The level of stress was nearly twice as large for women as for men, with 38.8% of women feeling frequently overwhelmed, compared to 20% of men. Additionally, 69.6% of women were concerned that they may not have enough money to complete college, compared to 57.2% among men.

Academic disengagement was also reported as a concern. Many students reported being bored in class, 62.6% of students came late to class and many overslept and missed classes. It was also reported that many first year college students were under-prepared academically for college, as a number of them had taken remedial courses in mathematics, science, English, reading, and social studies upon arrival at college. The strength of this study is that it provided data to support the concept that first year college students enter postsecondary settings under-prepared academically and face stress from the challenges they encounter when entering postsecondary institutions (Sax et al., 1999).

A weakness noted in this study is that it does not identify the scale used to differentiate the difference between levels of stress experienced by the participants in the study.

Research completed by Trockel, Barnes, and Egget (2000) indicated that there are many variables that influence academic performance of first-year college students. These researchers analyzed the effect of several behaviors and other variables on the grade point averages of a random sample of 200 students living in on-campus residence halls at a large private university. It was reported that 142 students responded to the survey. The set of variables included exercise, eating and sleep habits, mood states, perceived stress, time management, social support, spiritual or religious habits, number of hours worked per week, gender, and age. The results of this study indicated that many first year students demonstrated poor sleep habits (especially wake-up times), which accounted for
the largest amount of variance in grade point averages. Later wake-up times were associated with lower average grades, as were the amount of hours worked per week. It was also found that depression, anxiety, and stress correlated to poor academic performance. They also reported that parents' social support predicted college grade point average, and the grade point averages of first year students were also negatively affected by lack of peer or social supports. The strength of this study was that it provided details that associated different life skills and self-sufficiency variables such as exercise, sleep and eating habits, mood states, stress, time management, spiritual habits, work related issues, and social supports to the success rates of students enrolled in postsecondary education institutions.

The findings of these studies demonstrate that first year college students experience many different challenges in various domains, specifically general preparedness, academic preparedness, self-sufficiency, financial considerations, social skills, and family support, which may also prove to be challenging to first year college students with disabilities.

Challenges and Domains of Concern for Students with Disabilities in Postsecondary Education

Students with disabilities face unique challenges while in college. Using qualitative research techniques, Synatschk (1994) examined the experiences of five college students with learning disabilities who had successfully completed their studies at a university. The purpose of the study was to determine what factors and processes were perceived as influential in successful adjustment to postsecondary education. Synatschk
reported that the perceptions of these students regarding their abilities and disabilities influenced how successful they were in dealing with life-event stressors. The more aware the students were of their strengths and weaknesses when dealing with life-event stressors, the better they were at coping with problems. Students also expressed a conflict between their desire to be independent and their desire to use services and accommodations available to them. A contribution of this study was that it provided information about students' perceptions of life-event stressors and how the abilities of students with learning disabilities in college in dealing with these stressors affected their success in higher education settings. A weakness of this study is that the data collected were based solely on the opinion and responses of the participants and did not involve data collected from impartial observers.

Anderson (1993) surveyed 26 students with disabilities and 66 students with no disabilities regarding social support and barriers to postsecondary education. Both students with and without disabilities described the social support network as important to successful adjustment to college. However, students with disabilities reported a need for emotional support and ongoing adjustment to their disability, which were not concerns by the students with no disabilities. This qualitative study provided information that indicates that students with disabilities have difficulty establishing social support networks in postsecondary settings, and have a need for emotional support related to their ongoing adjustment to their disability.

Flowers (1993) did a postal survey at a postsecondary institution that investigated the effects of academic achievement on academic persistence among students with disabilities. The sample for this study was 167 students who reported having a disability
and had attended a major university between fall 1990 and summer 1992. It was reported that academic achievement measured by grade point average was the best predictor for academic persistence. The strength of this study was that it supported the conclusion that students with disabilities need to achieve academic success in order to stay enrolled in postsecondary settings. However, the study failed to provide details of additional factors (other than grade point average) that may affect the success rate and persistence of college students with disabilities.

Henderson (2001) also indicated that academic preparation is an area of concern for students with disabilities enrolled in postsecondary settings. It was reported that students with disabilities were less prepared academically than their peers without disabilities. This researcher noted that a smaller share of students with disabilities than other students had earned “A” averages (30% versus 44%), and a larger proportion had earned “C” and “D” averages (12% versus 6%) while in high school. Additionally, students with disabilities ranked themselves much lower than students without disabilities on the measures of academic ability, specifically in the areas math ability, intellectual self-confidence, and writing ability. It was also reported that they predicted that they would need special tutoring and remedial services for specific subjects (specifically mathematics and English) more often than their peers without disabilities. This researcher also reported that a higher proportion of students with disabilities had used extra tutoring assistance in high school. This study is significant as it demonstrated that students with disabilities are not as academically prepared for postsecondary education as their peers without disabilities and that many of them received lower grades in high school and needed extra assistance to achieve academic success.
Support networks were also found to be a factor in the success of first year students with disabilities in college. Stanley (1999) interviewed six students with disabilities from a large urban university. The data gathered in this study related directly to people's real-life experiences. Qualitative, in-depth, one-on-one interviews were used for data gathering and analysis. The six participants perceived university life experience as a complex process. Two major themes that were noted to emerge from the analysis related to the students' willingness and ability to make choices and their need for a personal support network. All of the participants indicated that making the right choices pertaining to college life was an anxiety-provoking task. One participant indicated that moving away from home into an independent atmosphere and being away from his family resulted in additional anxiety. All of the participants maintained that belonging to a support network assisted them in their adjustment to attending college and facing the daily demands of university life. Many relied heavily on their personal support system for financial, emotional, and information support. The support of the family emerged as the primary support network for all participants. A strength of this study is that it provided information pertaining to the importance of a support network for the success of students with disabilities in postsecondary settings; however, it must be noted that the data collected were from students with physical disabilities, specifically students who were wheelchair users, and did not include data from students with other disabilities.

In a study of college students with disabilities, Benshoff and Fried (1990) reported all of the students with disabilities (45) were found to be significantly different from their peers with no disabilities in developmental skills related to interpersonal relationships. The 90 participant sample was selected from undergraduates attending
three state universities in the West and Midwest. Forty-five students who had voluntarily identified themselves as having a disability were selected. The comparison sample of 45 students with no disabilities was selected from volunteers in general education classes to have the same proportional representation in terms of gender, age group (18-26), and class level. A Student Developmental Task Inventory (SDTI-2) was used to evaluate student development levels. An analysis of the descriptive data revealed that college students with disabilities were found to have lower skills related to interpersonal relationships. As a result of this study, Benshoff and Fried suggested that the college years are important times of psychosocial development, a time of formation of lifelong friendships and from a developmental perspective, delays in or failure to accomplish successful interpersonal relationships could culminate in significant difficulties later in life. Students with disabilities in this study indicated that they often have difficulty in developing the basic skills necessary in developing and maintaining relationships with their peers in postsecondary settings. This strengthens the evidence that students with disabilities need instruction and support in social skills development prior to entering postsecondary settings. A weakness noted in this study was that it only included information on students enrolled in 4-year colleges and did not include data from students enrolled in other types of postsecondary settings. Students in settings such as community colleges or 2-year vocational schools may have different characteristics than students enrolled in 4-year colleges.

Beilke and Yssel (1998) found in their qualitative study of the relationships between faculty and students with disabilities that it is vital for students with disabilities to establish positive relationships with faculty members in order to establish one’s
identity within the classroom and university setting. Of the 10 students with various 
disabilities who agreed to be interviewed, 9 of them indicated that they had established a 
meaningful relationship with someone at the postsecondary level and believed that this 
relationship was key to their postsecondary success. This study provides pertinent 
information demonstrating a relationship between mentoring relationships for students 
with disabilities and their persistence in higher education. A weakness of the study is that 
the data reported were from a small number of students with disabilities at one university 
and may not reflect the opinion and need of the vast number of students with disabilities 
enrolled in postsecondary settings.

Receiving appropriate accommodations is also a concern for students with 
disabilities in postsecondary settings. Stodden et al. (2001) reported from their survey 
study of more than 1500 disability support coordinators nationwide that many 
accommodations needed by students with disabilities are not available. They reported 
that more than 50% of the responding institutions did not offer disability specific 
assessments or evaluations, 50% did not offer accessible transport on campus for students 
with disabilities, and 40% of the institution respondents indicated that assistive 
technology evaluations are not offered at all. Of the 60% that do offer assistive 
technology evaluations, they offered these types of services less than 25% of the time. 
Some commonly offered supports were test accommodations, note takers, personal 
counseling, advocacy assistance, and study skills programs. This study reflects the 
limitations of accommodations available at postsecondary settings nation-wide, however, 
it does not report how often students with disabilities request these limited 
accommodations.
In a survey of 422 faculty of a large Northeastern metropolitan university, Baggett (1994) revealed that 77% of the faculty had taught five or fewer students with disabilities during the last 4 years and many of them indicated that they could identify only students who disclosed their disability. Baggett also reported that the faculty lacked experience with teaching students with disabilities, and were unfamiliar with the various services available to students with disabilities. This study is significant as this author indicates that many faculty members are not aware of those students with disabilities in their classes, and are unaware of what accommodations and other services are available to these students. This lack of awareness suggests that students with disabilities should not rely on their instructors to identify accommodations they need to be successful. It is the students’ responsibility to self identify their disability, seek assistance from the disability resource center, advocate for the supports they need to achieve academic success in postsecondary settings, and properly notify their instructors of the necessary accommodations (West et al., 1993).

Requesting accommodations is a challenge for students with disabilities. Beilke and Yssel (1999) reported in a follow up report to their 1998 qualitative study that many students with disabilities face negative attitudes from faculty members. They stated that in order for students with disabilities to be successful in higher education, they needed to know how to advocate for themselves. All 10 students with disabilities involved in the study reported that many faculty members did not provide a positive classroom climate for students with disabilities. The students reported that as they became adept at requesting accommodations and assistance, many faculty members stated that they felt disempowered within the classroom and concerned about academic integrity. Students
with visible disabilities reported less resistance toward their requests for accommodations than students with hidden disabilities such as learning disabilities. Students with hidden disabilities reported many faculty members viewed their disability suspiciously and were less amiable in making simple accommodations such as extra time or special testing arrangements. The strength of this study is that it demonstrates that in order for students to be successful in postsecondary settings, they need to be aware of their rights and know how to request accommodations and modifications. One weakness is that the data collected were from a small number of participants at one university and may not reflect a true picture of faculty resistance in all higher education settings.

Requesting accommodations and being self-determined is an important skill for students with disabilities planning on transitioning to postsecondary settings. Self-determination refers to a student’s ability to make decisions and choices without undue influence from external sources (Wehmeyer, 1996). For students to be self-determined, they need to have instruction on self-knowledge and awareness, positive perceptions of control, and on how to advocate for themselves (Wehmeyer, Agran, & Hughes, 2000). Researchers have reported that while many teachers recognize that self-determination is a skill that they need to teach, many special education teachers reported that they are not adequately prepared to teach those skills. Thoma et al. (2002) reported from their study of 43 special education teachers in five southwestern states, that 25% of those surveyed were not familiar with the term self-determination, and of the 75% who were, only 33% said that they felt that they had received adequate training in successfully implementing strategies to teach this skill to their students. The strength of this study is that it demonstrates that teachers are not being adequately trained to teach the skill of self-
determination and supports additional research that indicates students with disabilities are lacking in this domain of concern.

From a mail survey completed by 74 coordinators of special services for students with disabilities at colleges and universities in New York, Janiga and Costenbader (2002) reported that many respondents were unsatisfied with the advocacy skills of students with disabilities, specifically those of students with learning disabilities. Respondents expressed dissatisfaction with how well high school staff informed students of the services available for students with disabilities at the college level. They also indicated their dissatisfaction with the documentation that they received from high schools on specific accommodations needed for students enrolled in their institutions. Many of those who responded to the survey believed that there were a large number of students with LD who failed to seek out assistance. The strength of this study is that it documents the need for self-advocacy training for students with disabilities prior to entering postsecondary settings.

West et al. (1993) surveyed 40 college and university students with disabilities to determine their levels of satisfaction with accessibility, special services, and accommodations at their school. The majority of these students indicated that they encountered barriers to their education, including a lack of understanding and cooperation from administrators, faculty, staff, and other students. They also reported a lack of adaptive aids and other accommodations and felt that much of the building and grounds of their schools were inaccessible. One weakness of the study was that it did not provide data pertaining to students' persistence in postsecondary education or whether supports and accommodations were key factors in their continued enrollment.
McBroom (1997) reported on a study of visually impaired students’ experiences with the transition to college and their perceptions of the importance of preparing for college. Data collected from telephone interviews with 102 college students who were legally blind and in their third or fourth year of postsecondary education indicated that in addition to other issues, financial concerns, preparation in high school, advocacy, and social networks were important for success of students with disabilities in higher education. The majority of students interviewed indicated that in order to meet college expenses, they had been in the workforce in some way by the time they entered college. During high school, 45% had worked an average of 17.2 hours per week at after school jobs. Sixty-four percent reported having summer jobs that averaged 35.1 hours per week, 29% had worked full time at an average of 42.5 hours per week before they entered college and 56% worked for pay while they attended college at an average of 22.89 hours per week. Many of these students (85%) stressed the importance of applying for financial aid early in the application process and 81% believed that learning how to manage money was important for a successful college experience. Additionally, the majority of the students interviewed recognized the need for academic preparation in high school and felt that coming into college with an academic deficit only accentuates adjustment problems. These students recommended that high school students with disabilities should prepare for college by taking advanced placement courses, they should make good grades, and develop college survival skills. These students also advised that high school students should develop good study habits while enrolled in high school, practice good time-management skills, and be prepared to work hard. An analysis of the responses of these students also indicated that they were forceful in stating that students...
with visual impairments must advocate for themselves, be assertive, and be aware of their legal rights. They stressed that students with disabilities coming from high school to postsecondary settings are not aware that many of the supports provided to them in high school are not provided to them in college. They also stressed the need to develop social relationships with peers and adults early in their college experience, which could solve immediate problems and help to avoid problems with adjustment in the future. They stressed the importance of making friends and cautioned that the worst thing that students with disabilities can do in higher education settings is to not mix, mingle or converse with other people. The strength of this study is that it supports the need to prepare high school students with visual impairments in many areas prior to enrollment in postsecondary settings in order to ensure success. Another strength is that data were included from a representative sample of students from various college settings across the nation. A weakness is that it only provided data from third and fourth year students with visual disabilities and did not include data from college freshmen or sophomores as the author reported that the drop out rate for these students prevented accurate collection of data. Another weakness is that it does not provide information on the perceptions of students with other disabilities.

Financing college has been identified as a concern for students with disabilities entering college. Researchers from the HEATH Resource Center at George Washington University (2003) noted in their report on the resources available for financial aid for students with disabilities that these students are often faced with additional expenses not incurred by other students. Some of these expenses include the cost of special equipment related to the disability and its maintenance, the cost of services for personal use or study,
such as readers, interpreters, note takers, or personal care attendants, transportation if traditional means are not accessible, and medical expenses not covered by insurance that relate directly to the individual’s disability. The information in this report is significant as it indicates that students with disabilities face additional costs in financing their college education in comparison to their peers without disabilities.

Researchers from additional studies have also indicated that financial consideration is an important concern for students with disabilities in college. Researchers have found that disability related scholarships are rarely offered to students with disabilities in postsecondary programs. In a study done to evaluate the current status of educational support provision to students with disabilities in postsecondary education, they have reported that 54% of the 1500 institution representatives responding to the survey indicated that they do not offer disability scholarships, and of the 21% who do offer the scholarships, they are only offered 75% of the time (Stodden et al., 2001). The strength of this study is that it demonstrates that obtaining a disability related scholarship is difficult for students with disabilities, which may make financing college even more difficult for these students.

The information found in the above literature identifies the following domains of concern for first year students with and without disabilities enrolled in postsecondary education: general preparedness, academic preparedness, financial concerns, social skills, academic accommodations and needs, self-determination and self-advocacy, and family support. Many of these domains also present challenges for students with emotional disorders and learning disabilities.
Challenges and Domains of Concerns for Students with Emotional Disorders in Postsecondary Education

Students with emotional disorders experience many of the same challenges as students with other types of disabilities during their first year of college, as well as additional difficulties that are unique to their disability. As identified in IDEA (1997) students with emotional disorders often display characteristics that do not support school or life-long success. Examples include the inability to sustain or maintain appropriate social relationships with others, and academic difficulties in multiple content areas.

A study done by Epstein and Cullinan (1994) identified characteristics of students with emotional and behavioral disorders. The interview used in the study collected information from 100 participants, their parents/guardians, case managers, and directors of the residential facilities where they lived. Characteristics of the students included the following; 50% had been identified as experiencing a variety of other disability conditions, with learning disability being cited most frequently (39%), 32% of the students were using mental health services, and 24% reported involvement with child and family service agencies. More than one quarter (27%) of the participants were on prescribed psychotropic medication, 59% had received prior residential placement, and 60% had had legal charges filed against them. It was also reported that these students had emotional and behavioral problems in the home and community. In the home, 57% reported defiance towards parents or authority figures, 45% demanded constant attention, 23% reported destruction of property, 19% failed at age-appropriate duties, and 16% experienced feeling withdrawn from their families. In the community, 47% reported that...
they sought attention from negative peers, 26% created disturbances, 19% reported stealing, 15% have assaulted others, 13% had committed vandalism and 9% reported involvement in cult and gang related activities. The risk factors identified in this study included poor family settings and poor academic achievement. Forty-seven percent of the participants’ parents were divorced and 74% reported below-grade-level achievement. Many students had experienced frequent suspension or expulsion (26%), chronic school truancy (24%) and drug or alcohol dependency (17%). The information gathered in this study demonstrates that the characteristics, habits, and actions of students with ED may prevent them from achieving postsecondary success.

McConaughy (1993) provided data from a study that used standardized rating scales for obtaining parent, teacher, and self-reports of competencies and behavioral and emotional problems of an adolescent with an emotional disorder. It was reported that the subject of this study experienced academic problems in school. His teachers described him as moody, unpredictable, and angry much of the time. They reported that he was disorganized, did not complete assignments, and often missed school because of illness. Curriculum-based measures indicated poor performance in several classes and three of the subject’s teachers reported poor productivity and near failing grades in their classes. It was reported that he had few friends and associated with peers with bad reputations. He received several detentions and suspensions for defiant behavior toward school staff and violations of school rules. This student’s parent reported that he was withdrawn, had somatic complaints, attention problems and aggressive behaviors, he was anxious and depressed, and had social problems. It was also reported that this student had average intelligence and a verbal IQ that fell within the high average range. Additionally, the
results of this study indicated that the subject had difficulty with written language and scores of this test fell well below the achievement level expected from the expected measure of the subject’s intelligence. This discrepancy between ability and achievement indicated that the subject had a learning disability in written language. The subject reported on a self-rating assessment that he had both internalizing and externalizing behaviors such as trouble sitting still, arguing, disobedience, fighting, obsessions, nightmares, strange behavior, and threatening other people. He also reported that he had suicidal thoughts and had difficulty controlling his anger. These types of behaviors may present challenges for an individual with ED wishing to transition to postsecondary settings.

A study done by Snyder and Shapiro (1997) provided data on the skills of students with ED in participating in the development of their own individualized education plans (IEPs). This study reported data from three tenth grade students enrolled at a private school for students with emotional disorders. The purpose of the study was to determine the effect of training to prepare these students to participate in their IEP meetings. The results of this study indicated while training and interventions proved beneficial to students with ED (in the area of IEP participation), these students continued to have difficulty with self-management and lacked the strategies necessary to develop goals and participate in planning for their future. Lack of these skills can have a direct impact on their ability to advocate for themselves in postsecondary settings.

Wagner et al. (1991) analyzed data from the National Longitudinal Transition Study (NLTS) done in 1986. Data were collected from approximately 8,000 youth ages 13 to 21 who were enrolled in special education programs during the 1985-86 school
year. Their report examined how job and career experiences evolved over several years and how successful the adult outcomes were for these individuals. The additional database used in this study was augmented by a 1987 parent interview and a 1989 survey of 800 parents and/or youth. These researchers found that students with disability categories other than ED had increased rates of employment, but many individuals with ED did not have jobs when the 1989 survey was conducted and had not held a job since exiting high school. Wagner et al. reported patterns of disengagement from school, and reported that students with ED had a higher dropout rate, lower grade point averages, and a higher incidence of failed classes and grade retention than other disability groups (e.g. learning disabled, visually impaired, severely impaired). They also reported that students with ED had the highest arrest rate and typically did not belong to school or community social groups.

Wagner et al. (1992) explored data trends in the post-school outcomes for youths with disabilities in a second comprehensive report. These data also included information from a 1990 survey conducted on the previously identified sample. They again reported that students with ED had the highest dropout rate and lowest postsecondary school enrollment rate compared to students with other disability classifications (e.g., learning disabilities, mental retardation, multiple disabilities, sensory impairments, and physical impairments). They also reported that these students lacked appropriate social skills in many community environments and they continued to be uninvolved in the community at large.

Bullis and Bull (1994) found in their study of 232 young adults with and without ED, individuals with emotional and/or behavioral disorders experience difficulties living
in society in large part because of social skill deficits in interacting with peers and adults. The purpose of this study was to examine the results of data collected on the social behavior of adolescents and young adults with emotional disorders. The following tests were used: Test of Community-based Social Skill Knowledge, Scale of Community-based Social Skill Performance and Behaviors That Are Undesirable for Living and Leisure in Society. The results of this study demonstrated that students with ED have difficulty choosing appropriate social behaviors as compared to their peers with no disabilities.

McAfee (1989) reported additional roadblocks for students with ED in postsecondary settings. The purpose of this survey study was to determine what accommodations were available to students with ED in community colleges. Four community colleges from each of the 50 states were selected at random for participation. Of the 137 respondents, 106 (77.4%) reported that students with emotional disorders were enrolled in their institutions while 18 (13.1%) reported that no students with emotional disorders were currently identified on their campus. Eighty-three percent of respondents provided services to students with ED, with the most commonly provided service being counseling (78.8%). Other services provided included special courses, evaluation and testing accommodations, tutoring, referral to other agencies and career guidance. Only 9 respondents reported specific plans to develop or expand services to emotionally disordered students. While 74.5% believed that they had a legitimate role in the delivery of postsecondary education services to students with ED, the remaining institutions reported that they were less willing to provide services because of a lack of funding and a belief that students with ED did not belong on college campuses. This
study demonstrates that while there are many institutions that are providing supports for students with ED, there are still those that present attitudinal barriers to these students.

These studies may have strong implications for students with ED planning to transition from high school to other settings. Data show that students with ED have difficulties in home, community, and school settings. They often have problems developing positive social relationships; have high drop rates, lower grade point averages and a higher incidence of failed classes than peers in other disability groups or their peers with no disabilities. These characteristics and behaviors may create difficulties for students with ED as they transition to postsecondary settings.

Challenges and Domains of Concerns for Students with Learning Disabilities in Postsecondary Education

Students with learning disabilities experience many of the same difficulties as students with emotional disorders and students with no disabilities as they transition from high school to postsecondary education settings, and face additional challenges as well.

Aune and Johnson (1992) conducted case study research that involved a student with a learning disability. This subject did not receive the necessary supports in high school to successfully transition to a postsecondary setting. The results of their study on the effectiveness of transition services for a student with a learning disability indicated that this individual's grade point average was low and he did not meet the English, math, and foreign language requirements for the university that he wished to attend. Additionally, the researchers reported that this student did not possess an adequate
awareness of his disability or the impact it had on his education, nor did he demonstrate self-advocacy skills.

In an analysis of the database from The National Education Longitudinal Study: 1988-1994 (NELS: 88; 1996) Rojewski (1999) found that in a sample of 25,000 adolescents attending 1052 schools across the United States who had been followed at 2-year intervals since 1988, individuals with learning disabilities reported lower graduation rates, were more likely to aspire to moderate or low-prestige occupations, and were more likely to be employed at a lower rate of pay. It was also reported that these students were less likely to be enrolled in some type of postsecondary education program than their peers with no disabilities. This researcher also indicated that 75% of students with LD exhibited lower academic achievement than their peers with no disabilities in all areas examined (reading, mathematics, and science) and reported lower self-esteem, and more external locus of control than their peers with no disabilities. This study is significant as it demonstrates that students with LD are lacking many necessary skills to be successful in postsecondary settings.

There are many students in postsecondary settings that report having a learning disability. Researchers at the National Center for the Study of Postsecondary Educational Supports (NCSPES) (2002) at the University of Hawaii at Manoa reported from their study of 1500 postsecondary institutions, 43.8% of the population of students receiving disability related services reported having a learning disability.

Many of these students are not prepared academically for the challenges of postsecondary settings. Vogel and Adelman (1992) reported on the success and attainment of 62 college students with learning disabilities as compared to a sample of 58
peers with no disabilities. They reported that upon entrance to postsecondary settings, students with LD scored lower on college entrance exams than their peers with no disabilities, specifically in the areas of reading comprehension and written composition and had taken significantly more developmental math courses in high school than their peers. This study demonstrates that students with LD enter their first year of college less prepared academically than their peers with no disabilities.

A study by Nielson (2001) indicated that students with disabilities have deficits in academic skills that could prevent them from achieving success in college. This researcher reported results of a phone interview of eight participants with learning disabilities enrolled in college. Three of the four females and all four males that participated in the interview reported having reading and/or writing difficulties. One female and two males also said they had difficulty with mathematics, two females and two males stated that they had difficulty with attention, and one female and one male described problems with memory. A strength of this study is that it provides additional data that indicates that students with disabilities have difficulty with academics.

These studies demonstrate that students with LD have difficulty with self-esteem, and self-awareness, have poor advocacy skills, and are less prepared academically than their peers with no disabilities as they transition from high school to postsecondary settings.

Summary of Literature

The amount of research on students with disabilities transitioning to postsecondary settings has increased over the past decade. However, most of the
research has focused on the success of these students during their first year of postsecondary education but provided little insight as to how prepared these students are before they make the transition from high school to college. No one study emerged as the most comprehensive, however, information from a combination of studies demonstrated the emergence of eight domains as areas of concern for students with ED and LD, as well as for students with no disabilities as they transition from high school to postsecondary settings. The eight domains identified are general preparation, academic preparation, advocacy/self determination, academic accommodations and needs, self-sufficiency, financial considerations, social skills, and family support.

A review of the literature found few studies that focused on the population of high school students with emotional disorders and learning disabilities planning to transition to postsecondary settings. Additionally, there were no data that specifically addressed the perceptions of these students regarding their preparedness to transition to postsecondary settings. Considering the fact that students with ED and LD represent a significant population of students enrolled in higher education settings, and many of them are experiencing difficulties in many domains of life, it is surprising to find that the literature on the challenges presented for these students with these disabilities is so limited. It is imperative that information pertaining to the readiness skills of these students is gathered and presented to better assist the educational community in preparing students with ED and LD for postsecondary success.

Researchers need to conduct additional studies to investigate how students with emotional disturbance, learning disabilities and those with no disabilities differ in their
perceptions of readiness skills for postsecondary education to assist in better preparation for postsecondary experiences.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Research Questions

*Research Question One*

Do the perceptions of readiness skills for postsecondary education differ for high school students with emotional disorders, high school students with learning disabilities, and high school students with no disabilities?

*Hypothesis*

There are no differences in the perception of readiness skills among high school students with emotional disorders, high school students with learning disabilities, and high school students with no disabilities.

*Research Question Two*

Are there distinct differences in the perceptions of readiness skills for postsecondary education in each specific domain between high school students with emotional disorders, high school students with learning disabilities, and high school students with no disabilities?

*Hypothesis*

There are no distinct differences in the perceptions of readiness skills for postsecondary education in each specific domain between high school students with
emotional disorders, high school students with learning disabilities, and high school students with no disabilities.

Description of the Subjects and Setting

Participant Pool

Participants consisted of a sample of students drawn from an urban school district in the southwestern part of the United States. A sample of eleventh and twelfth grade high school students who indicated that they were considering attending postsecondary education was studied. The following groups were represented: (a) students with emotional disorders, identified by school district personnel as meeting the federal definition of students with emotional disorders, (b) students with learning disabilities, as identified by the school district as meeting the federal definition of students with learning disabilities, and (c) students with no disabilities.

Subject Selection

Efforts to reduce bias involved selecting participants from a population sample that was drawn from schools in a district that represented a diverse population based on ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and gender.

Special education teacher facilitators at four high schools in the district identified students with emotional disorders and learning disabilities enrolled in the eleventh or twelfth grade at their respective high school. Every eligible student was asked by his or her classroom teacher to participate in the study. The special education teacher facilitators also identified from individual class schedules eleventh and twelfth grade students with no disabilities who were enrolled in a physical education class. Their
teachers then asked these students if they were willing to participate in the study. Consent forms were distributed, signed by both the parents and the student participants and returned prior to distribution of the questionnaire. Data from all of the sample population responses were analyzed.

**Subject Demographics**

Ninety-one students, 53 males and 28 females participated in the study. There were 20 eleventh grade males, 3 with ED, 9 with LD, and 8 students with no disabilities. Thirty-three twelfth grade males also participated. There were 5 students with ED, 19 with LD, and 9 students with no disabilities. The female participants had the following profiles: There were 12 eleventh grade females, 1 with ED, 3 with LD, 8 with no disabilities, and 26 twelfth grade females, 3 with ED, 16 with LD, and 7 with no disabilities.

The ethnic profiles of these students were as follows: Thirty-nine point six percent were Caucasian, 23.1% were Hispanic, 17.6% were African American, 7.7% were Native American, and 4.3% were Asian. An additional 7 students (7.7%) indicated "other" as their ethnicity.

Additional demographic information for the subjects is displayed in Table 3.1.
Table 3.1
Subject Demographics

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</table>
Setting

The study took place in the 6th largest school district in the United States. The Clark County School District, located in the southwest part of the United States, encompasses all of Clark County, which covers 7,910 square miles and had a 2000 population of about 1.4 million people. It includes the metropolitan Las Vegas area, and all outlying communities and rural areas. Each Nevada county has one school district responsible for K-12 public education within that county. The ethnicity breakdown of the student population is as follows; white, 47.7%, African American, 13.8%, Hispanic, 30.6%, other, 7.9%. Four high schools of the 32 high schools in the district participated in the study. The percentages of the ethnic groups represented in this study were closely aligned to what is represented in the Clark County School District with the exception of the categories of Native American, Asian, and “other.” The Clark County School District did not provide ethnicity data on Native American or Asian students; therefore, it can be assumed that they were included in the “other” category.

Development of the Assessment Tool

The High School to Postsecondary Education Transition Questionnaire was developed for use for this study. In designing the assessment tool, there were several questions and issues that were addressed as the instrument was under development. For example, what domains of postsecondary readiness skills would be assessed, and what questions would fall under those identified domains? How could the questionnaire be balanced to collect data and measure the perceptions of postsecondary readiness skills for students with emotional disorders, students with learning disabilities, and their peers with
no disabilities? Would the assessment tool provide enough information in each domain area, since there were eight domains that needed to be addressed? How should the survey be designed so it captured the type of information that could be used? Could the survey be designed so that it would be simple enough to be understood by all of the students?

The eight domains and the 80 questions found in the domains on this assessment tool were based on information from the literature on the difficulties that first year students with and without disabilities experienced as they transitioned to postsecondary education settings. The eight domains identified from the literature were general preparation, academic preparation, self-determination and advocacy, academic accommodations and needs, self-sufficiency, financial considerations, social skills, and family support. Each of the eight identified domains had 10 questions to be addressed. Students' responses identified those areas in which they believed they already had skills and other areas where they felt they were lacking skills. Each question was assigned a response option conducive to generation of ordinal data. The scale used to analyze the data allowed the students to select Y – yes (1), NS not sure (2), or N – no (3). Hence, a low score would indicate greater perceived readiness for postsecondary education.

The assessment tool went through several revisions to assist in addressing the issue of content validity and reliability. The first draft of the questionnaire was presented to a small group of special education teachers in the Clark County School District. Input from this group of teachers was then incorporated into a second revision.

The second revision of the instrument was distributed to a national panel of professionals, including four professors of special education, one professor of statistics, five special education high school teachers, two transition specialists, three
representatives from community agencies, and a director of special education. All items or domains that one or more of these reviewers judged to be unclear on a standardized form were reworded for clarity. Any item the reviewers judged to be inappropriate or unnecessary was discarded.

The revised tool was field tested to determine if the students clearly and easily understood the language of the questionnaire, and if the questionnaire was an appropriate length in terms of administration time. To address these concerns, the assessment tool was administered to seven different high school special education classrooms. Twenty-six high school students meeting the previously identified criteria for ED, LD, and students with no disabilities participated in this pilot study. Students were asked to identify any questions that they did not clearly understand, or those with which they were having difficulty. No students indicated that the assessment was difficult to follow or difficult to complete. Teachers who assisted in administering the pilot test were given the assessment tool, a cover letter, and instructions on how to administer the questionnaire, and were asked to review the revised questionnaire and provide feedback. All of the teachers involved indicated that the assessment instructions and items were easily understood and appropriate for the intended postsecondary student population.

Additional feedback was incorporated into the final product (Appendix A). As a result of intensive scrutiny, reviews and revisions, those involved in the review process have determined that the content of the instrument has met validity standards.

Procedures

A packet that included the questionnaire, directions for completing and returning
the questionnaire, and the parent and student participant permission and assent forms were provided to eligible students. The consent form signed by the parent or guardian of the participants of the study and an assent form signed by the participants described the purpose of the study and authorized the results of this assessment tool to be released to the principal investigator (Appendix B). The aforementioned forms were pre-approved by the appropriate offices of the university where the principal investigator was enrolled. The assessment was distributed to all eligible students who were identified as meeting the criteria for this study. Teachers with eligible students (identified by the special education teacher facilitator) were asked to distribute the materials and collect only those assessments that were accompanied by both parent and student permission and assent forms. Students were asked to take the packet home, acquire the necessary signatures and return the completed assessments to their special education teacher. Once collected, the special education and general education teachers were asked to give them to the special education facilitators, who then forwarded them to the researcher.

The Role of the Special Education Teacher Facilitators

The special education teacher facilitators utilized in this study were asked to assist the researcher by completing the following tasks. (1) Identify eligible eleventh and twelfth grade students meeting the eligibility criteria for students with emotional disorder, learning disability, or students with no disabilities (enrolled in a physical education class). (2) Distribute the packets of materials to teachers of eligible students. (3) Collect and mail all returned, completed questionnaires and appropriate permission slips directly to the researcher. (4) Forward any calls related to the project directly to the researcher.
Data Analysis

The data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics utilizing Statistical Products and Service Solutions software (SPSS) (2001) for all of the domains of the assessment tool. Effect statistics were computed across all groups. To determine how the different disability groups affected the combined scores of the domains, a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was performed. The MANOVA allowed for a simultaneous examination of group differences on a set of variables, while accounting for intercorrelations among variables. Significant MANOVA results were followed by univariate analyses of variance (ANOVA) that allowed for an assessment of the variance explained among the three identified groups, and between the three groups using post-hoc tests, specifically Bonferroni and Tamhane multiple comparisons.
CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to examine and compare the perceptions of high school students with emotional disorders, students with learning disabilities, and students with no disabilities in their overall perception of college preparation, and in eight specific domains of postsecondary readiness skills. The eight domains examined in this study were general preparedness, academic preparedness, self-determination and advocacy, academic accommodations and needs, self-sufficiency, financial considerations, social skills, and family support.

Research Questions

Research Question One

Do the perceptions of readiness skills for postsecondary education differ for high school students with emotional disorders, high school students with learning disabilities, and high school students with no disabilities?

Hypothesis

There are no differences in the perception of readiness skills among high school students with emotional disorders, high school students with learning disabilities, and high school students with no disabilities.
Hypothesis

There are no distinct differences in the perceptions of readiness skills for postsecondary education in each specific domain between high school students with emotional disorders, high school students with learning disabilities, and high school students with no disabilities.

To examine this question and test the hypothesis, a multivariate analysis of variance was conducted on the combined domain scores as a dependent variable and group (three disability groups) as an independent variable.

Research Question Two

Are there distinct differences in the perceptions of readiness skills for postsecondary education in each specific domain among high school students with emotional disorders, high school students with learning disabilities, and high school students with no disabilities?

Hypothesis

There are no distinct differences in the perceptions of readiness skills for postsecondary education in each specific domain between high school students with emotional disorders, high school students with learning disabilities, and high school students with no disabilities.

To examine this question and test the hypothesis, univariate analyses of variance were conducted on each of the eight domain scores as dependent variables and group (three disability groups) as an independent variable.
Results

To test whether there would be significant group differences on the combined domains of postsecondary readiness skills, a one-way multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted. The MANOVA procedure generates several test statistics to evaluate group differences on the combined dependent variables (Mertler & Vannatta, 2001). Box’s M test of equality of covariance matrices indicated that the assumption of homogeneity of covariance matrices was not met for the MANOVA procedure, $F(72, 3454.488) = 1.590, p = .001$, thus indicating that the observed covariance matrices of the dependent variables were not equal across groups. Following Mertler and Vannatta’s (2001) recommendations, Pillai’s Trace criterion was used to evaluate multivariate significance. MANOVA results indicated that differences among the three groups significantly affected the combined scores in the eight domains of postsecondary readiness skills, Pillai’s Trace $\Lambda = .40, F(16,164) = 2.6, p = .002$, multivariate $\eta^2 = .20$.

To determine if there were significant differences among the groups in each of the eight domains, additional univariate analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were conducted. A Levene’s test of homogeneity of variance was conducted on each of the domain scores to check the assumption of equal variance across the groups (ED, LD, none). The results of the Levene’s test indicated that the assumption of equal variance across groups was met in the domains of general preparation, $F(2,88) = .066, p = .936$, academic preparation, $F(2,88) = .975, p = .381$, and academic accommodations and needs, $F(2,88) = 1.562, p = .215$. However, the assumption of equal variance was not met at the $p = .05$ level in the domains of self-sufficiency, $F(2,88) = 4.137, p = .019$, financial consideration, $F(2,88) = .
3.451, $p = .036$, family support, $F(2,88) = 4.473, p = .014$, advocacy/self-determination, $F(2,88) = 6.691, p = .002$, or social skills, $F(2,88) = 8.039, p = .001$

To address the issue of unequal variance, outliers were examined and additional regression analyses were run. To run regressions to look for outliers, dummy variables were created to represent two of the groups based on disability status, then entered in as independent variables, with the dependent variables being the scores for those domains where the Levene’s test showed strong evidence of unequal variances (self-sufficiency, financial considerations, family support, advocacy/self determination, and social skills). Z-scores were computed within each group for those domain scores, those with the absolute value greater than 3 were identified. A z-score in the domain of advocacy/self determination exceeded 3; therefore, the score was manually adjusted to be just greater than the largest value next to this outlier. After the one outlier was adjusted, the analysis was run as before. The results of the analysis indicated that reigning in the one extreme value did not have an undue effect on the results of the analysis, which indicates that the low p-values ($p < .005$) shown for the domains of advocacy and self determination, and social skills on the Levene’s test are questionable. However, the analysis is fairly robust to the departures from the assumption of normality if the data is symmetric (SPSS, 2001). This was the case when the extreme value was reigned in.

Examinations of the variance and sample size for the domain scores with unequal variances indicate that the smallest group (students with emotional disorders) tended to have the largest variance or median variance of the three groups. Due to this tendency, the $F$ test could be too liberal. Thus, the test results will need to be carefully examined, especially when the null hypothesis is rejected. ANOVA results were tested using a
conservative significance level, \( a = .006 \). This also takes care of a Type I error inflation problem due to conducting multiple ANOVA tests.

To test the differences between each pair of means, Bonferroni’s and Tamhane’s post hoc tests were conducted. These analyses helped to determine which disability groups were significantly different in their perception of postsecondary readiness skills in the different domains. When equal variances were found, as was the case in the domains of general preparation, academic preparation, and academic accommodations and needs, the Bonferroni test was utilized. Bonferroni corrections for probability (\( a = .002 \)) were applied. This correction is made to take into account problems that arise from multiple testing and consists of adjusting the significance level by correcting for the number of tests.

When equal variance was not found, as reported above in the Levene’s test of equality of error variances, the Tamhane’s contrasts were calculated, with the mean difference being significant at the .002 level. The domains of advocacy/self-determination, self-sufficiency, financial considerations, social skills, and family support were compared using the Tamhane test, which makes adjustments for unequal variance. Both Bonferroni and Tamhane are conservative tests that assist in preventing a Type 1 error and make adjustments for unequal sample sizes. Means and standard deviations for each group in each domain are presented in Table 4.1

The results of the ANOVA tests of between-subject effects shown in Table 4.2 indicate that there are significant differences in six of the eight domains. The variance explained (\( \eta^2 \)) indicate practical significance and shows how much association there is
between the independent variable and the dependent variables, or the proportion of variance in the domain scores that is attributable to the different disability groups.

ANOVA results indicated that there were no statistical significant differences found at the .006 level in the domains of academic preparation and financial considerations, however, a statistically significant difference was found in the domain of family support $F(2,88) = 16.0, p < .0005, \eta^2 = .27$ indicating a moderate association between disability grouping and this domain score. A statistically significant difference was also found in the domain of general preparation $F(2,88) = 8.8, p < .0005, \eta^2 = .17$, indicating a small to moderate association between disability grouping and this domain score.

Statistically significant differences were also found in the domains of academic accommodations and needs $F(2,88) = 6.5, p = .002, \eta^2 = .13$, and self-sufficiency $F(2,88) = 6.7, p = .002, \eta^2 = .13$, indicating a small association between disability grouping and these domain scores. The domains of advocacy/self determination $F(2,88) = 5.5, p = .006, \eta^2 = .11$ and social skills $F(2,88) = 6.0, p = .004, \eta^2 = .12$ also showed statistically significant differences. The $\eta^2$ of these domains indicated a small association between disability grouping and domain scores.

Means, standard deviations, and significance levels are presented for each pair. Table 4.3 presents the results from post hoc Bonferroni tests and Table 4.4 presents the results from post hoc Tamhane tests.

Significant differences were found between at least two of the three groups on four of the individual domains. In the domain of general preparation, students with
emotional disorders perceived themselves to be less prepared overall than students with no disabilities. In the domain of academic accommodations and needs, the scores of students with LD indicated that they were less aware of their academic accommodations and needs than students with no disabilities. In the domain of self-sufficiency, the LD group perceived themselves less self-sufficient to meet the rigors of postsecondary education than their non-disabled peers. Students with ED and students with LD indicated that they had concerns with family support pertaining to postsecondary education as both groups demonstrated significant differences in their mean scores as compared to students with no disabilities.

In summary, the results of these analyses show that there were significant differences in high school students’ perceptions of postsecondary readiness skills among students with ED, students with LD, and students with no disabilities, as well as significant differences between the three groups on four of the eight different domains.

Specifically, there were significant differences found among all three groups in their overall scores of readiness skills for postsecondary education. In the different domains, students with emotional disorders and students with learning disabilities perceived that they lack family support for postsecondary education in comparison to their peers with no disabilities. In the domain of general preparation, students with ED perceived themselves less prepared than their peers with no disabilities, but there were no significant differences found in this domain between students with ED and students with LD. Significant differences were also found in the domains of academic accommodations and needs and self-sufficiency as students with LD perceived themselves less prepared in these domains than their peers with ED and their peers with no disabilities, however there
were no significant differences found between the three groups on the domains of academic preparation, advocacy/self determination, financial considerations, and social skills.

Table 4.1

Means and Standard Deviations for Groups in Different Domains

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Table 4.2

Analysis of Variance for Different Domains

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<td>.002*</td>
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<td>.002*</td>
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<td>Social Skills</td>
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<tr>
<td>Family Support</td>
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<td>.000*</td>
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</table>

Note: *p <= .006, degrees of freedom = 2, 88.
Table 4.3
Means, Standard Deviations, and Significance Levels (Bonferroni)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent Variable</th>
<th>DC (1) Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>DC (2) Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td>.462</td>
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</table>

Note: DC - Disability Category, *p ≤ .002.

Table 4.4
Means, Standard Deviations, and Significance Levels (Tamhane)

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<tr>
<th>Dependent Variable</th>
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<th>SD</th>
<th>DC (2) Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>p</th>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>LD</td>
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<td>.512</td>
<td>ED</td>
<td>1.97</td>
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</table>

Note: DC - Disability Category, *p ≤ .002.
CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

This chapter begins with a brief review of the study’s design and related procedures. This is followed by a discussion of the study’s implications related to the two research questions. Finally, limitations to the study, recommendations for future research, and research conclusions are stated.

Research Purpose and Model

This study examined the differences in the perceptions of eight domains of postsecondary readiness skills of students with emotional disorders, students with learning disabilities and students with no disabilities. These postsecondary skills included general preparation, academic preparation, advocacy/self determination, academic accommodations and needs, self-sufficiency, financial considerations, social skills, and family support. Researchers have shown that all students, including those with emotional disorders and learning disabilities have difficulty in postsecondary education settings in many different areas of concern. The results of this study provided additional information pertaining to differences and similarities in the perceptions of postsecondary readiness skills for the three groups of students. The study was completed in the Clark County School District in southern Nevada and included 91 participants: 12 students with
emotional disorders, 47 students with learning disabilities, and 32 students with no disabilities. Data were collected through the use of a researcher constructed assessment tool. The assessment tool was developed with the assistance of school district employees and other professionals in the field of education interested in assessing the perceptions of postsecondary readiness skills of students with and without disabilities. The assessment tool went through several revisions based on the review of literature pertaining to the study and the input of the many individuals participating in its review. Eight domains of postsecondary readiness skills were identified and questions in each domain were designed to provide information on students' perceptions of their readiness skills in particular areas of concern relating to postsecondary education. Teachers from the school district assisted in distributing, collecting, and returning the assessment tool to the researcher.

Implications of Findings

The results gathered from the study addressed two research questions and hypotheses. Following each question and its hypothesis is a summary of the results, implications of the findings, and related discussion.

Research Question One

Do the perceptions of readiness skills for postsecondary education differ for high school students with emotional disorders, high school students with learning disabilities, and high school students with no disabilities?

Hypothesis

There are no differences in the perception of readiness skills among high school
students with emotional disorders, high school students with learning disabilities, and high school students with no disabilities.

This study indicated that there were significant differences in the perceptions of postsecondary readiness skills on the overall readiness skills among the three groups of students. The effect of the disability was a significant factor in perceptions of the students when looking at the combined scores of the eight domains. These results assisted the researcher in demonstrating that knowing which group students are in can assist others in the field in determining how ready the students perceives themselves in their overall perception of postsecondary readiness skills. Additionally, these findings imply that knowing which of the three groups students are in can assist in determining how those students may perceive their readiness skills in the different domains of postsecondary education readiness skills. This information is important to the educational arena as educators can implement plans to help students with emotional disorders, students with learning disabilities, as well as students with no disabilities understand what is expected of them in postsecondary settings, and develop plans to address the students’ perceived deficit areas. Information from this study can also assist schools in planning for additional transition supports to aid students in developing the necessary skills to successfully transition to postsecondary institutions.

Research Question Two

Are there distinct differences in the perceptions of readiness skills for postsecondary education in each specific domain among high school students with emotional disorders, high school students with learning disabilities, and high school students with no disabilities?
Hypothesis

There are no distinct differences in the perceptions of readiness skills for postsecondary education in each specific domain between high school students with emotional disorders, high school students with learning disabilities, and high school students with no disabilities.

This study identified significant differences in many of the individual domain categories between students with emotional disorders, students with learning disabilities, and students with no disabilities. These findings are consistent with previous research, specifically those that state students with emotional disorders and learning disabilities have more difficulty in postsecondary settings than their peers with no disabilities. These findings can assist educators in focusing on the specific domains of concerns of postsecondary readiness skills for students with ED, students with LD, and students with no disabilities. School districts could use this information along with parent and teacher perceptions to develop programs that address disability related needs pertaining to postsecondary education for students wishing to continue their education after high school.

Specific differences were found between at least two groups in four of the eight domains. In the area of general preparation, students with emotional disorders perceived themselves to be less prepared overall than students without disabilities, but did not perceive themselves any more or less prepared than their peers with LD. Students indicated if they were aware of the differences between high school and college, or if they believed that they had taken the necessary steps in preparing for college. Many students with ED indicated that they did not know what they wanted to study in college,
they had not taken college entrance exams, and that they weren't confident that they would be successful in postsecondary settings. Researchers from earlier studies reported similar differences between students with and without disabilities. However, it must also be noted that many students, both with and without disabilities, have difficulty their first year of college. Researchers have reported that many first year college students feel overwhelmed by all they have to do, specifically in attending to the pressures and responsibilities that postsecondary education offers (Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA and The Policy Center on the First Year of College at Brevard College, 2000). As indicated by students with ED in this study, these pressures include choosing a college and course of study, filling out the appropriate paperwork, and making living arrangements. Having an awareness of this information should prompt schools in evaluating how well they are generally preparing students with ED, as well as others, for the experiences and challenges of postsecondary education.

In the domain of academic preparation, there were no significant differences found between the ED and LD students, nor were there significant differences found between students with ED, students with LD, and students with no disabilities. These results were surprising in that there is a vast amount of research available that contradicts this finding. Investigators in the field have reported that students with disabilities don't do as well as students without disabilities in college, and many researchers have reported that poor academic preparation was a concern of first year college students (Henderson, 2001; Nielsen, 2001; Sax et al., 1999). The difference between the findings in this study and what has been reported in previous literature may result from the fact that students with disabilities may not recognize what level of classes
they need to take in high school to adequately prepare themselves for postsecondary education. Many students with disabilities reported taking four years of high school math and English. However, many students with ED and LD may have received most of their instruction in self-contained or resource settings for the majority of their classes, and may have perceived that the curricula and materials provided to them in the 4 years of math, 4 years of English, and 4 years of science they received in these settings were equivalent to the curriculum that other students have received in general education classes, where in fact the quality, quantity and academic level of these materials may be significantly different from that provided in general education classrooms. Though the assessment tool did not define or capture what content students received in 4 years of instruction in math, English or science, professionals in education need to be aware that these students believe that they are taking the appropriate classes to prepare them for postsecondary settings, and take measures to ensure that these students’ perceptions become a reality.

An additional concern pertaining to the domain of academic preparation reported in the literature is that student behavior often impacts academic success. Researchers who have done studies on behaviors that were thought to impact the academic progress of first year college students found that some of the behaviors that impact the academic success of students in college include eating and sleeping habits, stress, anxiety, time management, spiritual habits, and peer influences (Trockel et al., 2000). In light of this information, educators need to assist students in recognizing how outside influences may impact these types of behaviors, and how these behaviors may negatively influence their academic success in postsecondary settings. Additional instruction in dealing with
stress, developing healthy eating and sleeping habits, and time management is also warranted.

In the domain of academic accommodations and needs, students with LD felt that they were less prepared than their peers with no disabilities, but did not indicate that they were different from their peers with ED. Students indicated if they could identify their learning styles, if they knew what accommodations would be helpful to them, or if they were aware of their academic strengths and weaknesses. Some students with LD indicated that they were not able to identify what supports were listed in their individualized education plans, many could not identify what specific technological tools would be helpful to them in college, or were unable to determine what supports would be available to them in postsecondary settings.

Beilke and Yssel (1999) reported that many students with disabilities had difficulty recognizing what academic accommodations they needed to be successful in college. Other researchers have discovered that students with learning disabilities who had awareness of their academic needs often had difficulty getting those accommodations incorporated in their plan of study (Janiga & Costenbader, 2002) and that many faculty members are not aware of what accommodations and services are available to students with disabilities (Baggett, 1994). These findings should prompt educators to develop programs that will assist students in identifying what academic accommodations are available to them in college, how they differ from what they are receiving in high school, and what additional supports they can expect to find as they make the transition to postsecondary settings. Students should also be advised about the different demands that postsecondary education has to offer, and on what supports are
available to them to address these demands. Students in college face an increased reading load and should be made aware that there are particular accommodations available to them that may not have been needed in high school. An accommodation such as books on tape would assist them in meeting the reading expectations they face in postsecondary settings.

In the domain of advocacy and self-determination, no one group of students perceived themselves less prepared than another to advocate for themselves in postsecondary settings. All three groups of students perceived that they would have no difficulty identifying the skills that they needed to work on in college, and many indicated that they were aware of the laws supporting students with disabilities in college. Additionally, many indicated that they had the skills to seek assistance from their instructors or others on campus if needed, and felt that they were prepared to advocate for themselves effectively. Again, it must be noted that the perceptions of these students differ from what is reported in the literature and may not reflect how successful these students will be in advocating for themselves after they transition to postsecondary settings (Beilke & Yssel, 1999; Janiga & Costenbader, 2002). This realization is significant, as previous researchers have reported that it is important for educators to prepare these students to be self-determined, and to teach them the skills they need to advocate for necessary supports in college (Thoma et al., 2002). These findings are important for both the domains of academic accommodations and needs, and advocacy/self determination, and should prompt school districts in evaluating their current practices on how well they are doing in assisting students with disabilities in identifying their academic needs. Educators must also assist students in discovering
what accommodations and supports are available to them in postsecondary settings. Educators should then develop plans on how to teach students with disabilities to effectively advocate for those identified accommodations and supports.

In the domain of self-sufficiency, students with learning disabilities perceived themselves as less self-sufficient than their peers with no disabilities, but did not rate themselves more or less self-sufficient than their peers with emotional disorders. Many of these students indicated they did not feel that they were sufficiently prepared to take care of all of their personal needs on their own, they were lacking skills in money management, and use of public transportation, and they were unsure if they would be able to access student health services on campus if needed. These findings are similar to what has been found in the literature, as McBroom (1997) reported that many students with disabilities found themselves to be less self-sufficient and less prepared to take care of their basic needs while in college. This information has important implications for students with disabilities planning on transitioning to postsecondary settings, as they need basic skills to take care of themselves. Education professionals need to continue to develop programs to support the acquisition of these skills to ensure that these students have a better chance of achieving their dream of higher education.

In the domain of financial considerations, information was collected to determine how prepared students felt they were to meet the financial demands of postsecondary education, and to ascertain if they had developed a plan to address these costs. Many students indicated that they were willing to work to help pay for college, and that they were aware of all of the expenses involved in postsecondary settings. The results of these responses indicated that there were no significant differences found between any of
the three groups of students in this study, however this domain may still be a concern for these students. While other researchers have not compared perceptions of different disability groups, it has been reported that many students feel under-prepared to meet the financial challenges of higher education (Higher Education Research Institute, 2000; Stanley, 1999). Financing college was noted as a concern for the majority of students entering postsecondary education, and many students have indicated other financial concerns related to employment in their first year of college (Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA and The Policy Center on the First Year of College at Brevard College, 2000). Students with disabilities who are willing to work to pay for college expenses may not be aware of the difficulties they may face in acquiring a job, or that they may receive a lower rate of pay than their peers with no disabilities (Rojewski, 1999). An additional recommendation to school districts in the area of financial awareness would be to determine what type of financial support is available to students with disabilities who plan to transition to college, and ensure that this information is being disseminated to all of these students. Programs could also be developed to increase supported employment opportunities for this population of students, as gainful employment could assist these students in addressing their financial concerns pertaining to postsecondary education. Additionally, educators need to make sure that students are aware of all the costs of postsecondary education. Students with ED and students with LD should be informed of the additional costs that students with disabilities might incur. Some of these costs could include technological supports and tutoring expenses. Educators should continue to develop and implement programs to support all students in making adequate plans to pay for their continued education.
In the domain of social skills, all three groups of students perceived that they possessed the skills necessary to make new friends, maintain old relationships while in college, and had the skills to complete work independently or in study groups. These findings do not support what has been reported in the literature. It has been reported that students with disabilities have difficulty developing new friendships and often are not successful developing new peer groups. This study indicates that these students perceive that they have appropriate social skills, therefore educators need to be aware that these students’ perceptions may prevent them from acquiring the skills necessary to develop successful relationships in postsecondary settings as they may not recognize these deficits until after they transition to college. Researchers who have done studies on college students with disabilities have found that many students with disabilities lack the skills to make new friends and often have difficulties developing new relationships in postsecondary settings (Anderson, 1993, Benshoff & Fried, 1990). These findings provide important information to educators as the development and acquisition of social skills is vital for students to be successful in postsecondary settings (Segrin & Flora, 2000). Professionals in the field need to be aware that students, who perceive themselves socially adept, may find themselves unprepared to meet the social demands of colleges. Programs and supports should be developed to bring awareness to the social demands of postsecondary settings to ensure that students with disabilities acquire the skills to make new friends and develop strong social networks.

In the domain of family support, data were collected to determine if students perceived that their families would support them in their pursuit of higher education, and if their families were helping them to prepare for college. The results of the students’
responses in this domain indicated that students with ED and students with LD both perceived that they had less family support than their peers with no disabilities, however, there were no significant differences found in this domain between students with emotional disorders and those with learning disabilities. In light of this information, school districts should begin investigating and implementing best practices to ensure that these students with ED and LD are acquiring the skills they need to foster appropriate relationships within their families and build student perceptions of strong family supports. Educational personnel should also evaluate how well they are assisting students and their families in developing supports that these students will need to be successful in higher education. Researchers have reported that family supports are important to the success rate of students with disabilities in postsecondary settings, and parental support was found to be a key indicator for the development of coping strategies, psychosocial adjustment, and student success of first year college students (Holohan, Valentiner, & Moos, 1994). Armed with this information, educators nationwide should determine how well they are doing in developing and implementing plans to increase parental and family support for high school students wishing to transition to postsecondary settings.

The results of this study have many implications. It is important to note that there are many similarities and differences between students with emotional disorders, students with learning disabilities, and students with no disabilities. This researcher found that students with emotional disorders and students with learning disabilities perceived themselves to be significantly less prepared than their peers with no disabilities in the domain of family supports. This finding is consistent with the
literature and the expectations of the researcher; however, the researcher did expect to find that students with emotional disorders would perceive themselves significantly less prepared than their peers with no disabilities in all eight domains. The results of this study also indicated that students with learning disabilities perceived themselves less prepared than their peers with no disabilities in the domains of academic accommodations and needs, self-sufficiency, and family support but did not perceive themselves less prepared in these domains than their peers with emotional disorders. It was anticipated that students with LD would find themselves less prepared than their peers with no disabilities on all eight domains of postsecondary readiness skills; however, this was not the case with this study.

There was an additional finding that was not anticipated by the researcher. It was expected that students with emotional disorders would perceive themselves as equally unprepared or less prepared as students with learning disabilities in all domains; however, students with ED did not feel that they were less prepared than their peers with learning disabilities in any domains of postsecondary readiness.

In light of these new findings, additional research should be done to determine if these students’ perceptions are comparable to the perceptions of educators and parents on how ready these students are to enter postsecondary settings. The perceptions of teachers are critical as teachers can identify if students are prepared academically for college and what academic accommodations and supports are necessary for these students to achieve success in postsecondary settings. Parent perceptions would provide vital information on how self-sufficient a student is or if the student has the skills to live on their own and manage their own health and financial concerns. Investigating the
perceptions of teachers, parents, and students will allow researchers to determine if the three parties are aligned in their perceptions of postsecondary readiness skills. If the perceptions of students, teachers, and parents are not aligned, educators can implement plans to address students' awareness of their perceived strengths or deficits. This awareness will assist professionals in developing effective transition plans for students with disabilities who plan on continuing their education in postsecondary settings.

Follow-up studies should also be done to determine if these students' perceptions change after they make the transition to postsecondary settings. The field of education would benefit from additional research in this field as this study has demonstrated a difference in high school students' perceptions of their readiness skills in comparison to what is being found by researchers investigating the success rate of students with disabilities after they transition to higher education. Many high school students with ED and LD perceive that they possess the skills necessary to be successful in college in many of the domains where it has been reported they lack the skills. These discrepancies should be further investigated to ensure that these students are not setting themselves up for disappointing results after they transition to postsecondary education.

Limitations of the Study

There are some limitations to this study. These limitations include issues such as subject selection and participation, sample size, and concerns related to the completion of the assessment tool. Each of these limitations will be addressed individually in the following sections.
Subject Selection and Participation

The selection of the subjects to participate in the study was not done by random selection as every questionnaire that was returned was used in the analysis. A sample from each group was obtained as the researcher made an effort to obtain as many subjects as possible from each group of students. All students in the eleventh or twelfth grade in the selected schools who met the criteria of students with ED, LD, or students with no disabilities who indicated that they planned on transitioning to postsecondary settings were asked to participate in the study.

Another threat that could not be controlled for is volunteer bias that may naturally exist in this research scenario. As stated previously, the researcher sought students with emotional disorders, students with learning disabilities, and students with no disabilities who planned on attending postsecondary education as volunteers to participate. Selection therefore was limited to those who met the disability related criteria and to those who received parental or guardian consent and volunteered to participate in the study. As previous researchers have discovered, those individuals that chose to participate in the study may have been very different students than those who chose not to participate, or those who had not received consent to do so. Thus, the volunteers may have had an impact on the study just by the nature of the self-selection process (Light, Singer, & Willett, 1990).

An additional limitation related to subject selection is that the researcher only collected data from a pool of participants in one school district. The sample that was drawn from this district may not accurately represent other districts nationwide with regards to demographic data such as number of students enrolled, ethnicity, and socio-
economic status. Additionally, the curriculum, programs, and services offered to high school students wishing to transition to postsecondary education in this school district may not reflect the multiplicity of services being provided in other districts in this state or nationwide. The students' perceptions of their readiness skills for postsecondary education may be a direct result of the services that they have received, or are receiving, and therefore may not reflect the perceptions of their peers in other high schools.

Sample Size

All efforts were made by the researcher to obtain a viable sample size in each of the previously identified groups of students, however only 91 students participated in the study. The small sample size may not represent the perceptions of the majority of students that fall into each of the disability groups nationwide, therefore what is presented in this study is limited to the perceptions of the participants involved.

Completion of the Assessment Tool

An additional limitation to this study is that there was no control over the completion of the assessment tool. It was the intention of the researcher to have the students complete the assessment in the schools with teacher supervision and assistance, however, as per the direction of the school district involved, students were asked to complete the assessment independently on their own time, outside of the school setting, which may have allowed the students to seek assistance and influence from outside sources, such as peers, family members, or other individuals with whom they are associated. These influences (if solicited) may or may not have had an impact on the students' perceptions of their readiness skills on each domain; therefore the data collected
may not solely represent the individual students' true awareness and perceptions of their skills.

Recommendations for Future Research

Research on the perceptions of postsecondary readiness skills for students with emotional disorders, students with learning disabilities, and students with no disabilities is extremely limited, therefore, there are many new findings discussed in this study. This researcher has discovered that there are significant differences in the perceptions of postsecondary readiness skills between students with emotional disorders, students with learning disabilities, and students with no disabilities. However, specific differences were found between the groups on only four of the individual domains of college preparation. Another discovery was that students with ED and students with LD perceived themselves more similar than different on many of the domains.

Students with emotional disorders and students with learning disabilities perceived that they have less family support in their dream to pursue high education than their peers with no disabilities. Students with ED perceived that they are generally less prepared than their peers with no disabilities, and that they had not taken the necessary steps to prepare themselves for postsecondary education. Students with learning disabilities felt that they were less aware than their peers with no disabilities of the academic accommodations and needs required for success in college. This group of students also perceived themselves less self-sufficient than students with no disabilities as they indicated deficits in basic skills such as money management and use of public
transportation. Additional research needs to be done to determine if these students’ perceptions are a true reflection of their actual postsecondary skills.

These findings may have a significant impact in area of transition services of high school students and should prompt future research involving students’ perceptions of their postsecondary readiness skills in all categories of disabilities. Many of these findings are consistent with prior research in this area and should encourage future researchers in examining the perceptions and needs of other disability groups related to transitioning to postsecondary education. Additional research should also be done to determine the perceptions of high school teachers and parents of students with disabilities planning to attend postsecondary education, as this information could provide a comparative and holistic view of the possible deficits of these students that should be addressed before they transition into higher education settings.

Further research also should be done in evaluating the transition curricula and programs that are available in school districts nationwide. Educators need to become more aware of the deficits students possess as they leave high school and transition to postsecondary settings. This awareness should lead to the development and implementation of effective educational tools and programs that teachers can use to assist all students who wish to pursue higher education, regardless of their disability status.

Conclusions

Many interesting and important findings resulted from this study that have numerous and practical implications for high school teachers, administrators, students, parents, and other educational stakeholders. High school teachers and administrators
should take note of this study’s findings to further aid in the development and implementation of programs to better prepare high school students with ED and students with LD in transitioning to postsecondary settings. Understanding the students’ perceptions related to the different domains of postsecondary readiness skills will allow educational professionals to work collaboratively in ensuring that any student who wishes to attend higher education receives the services and supports they need to be successful in these settings in high school, before they matriculate to postsecondary settings.

It is also important for this information to be disseminated to families to assist them in understanding the perceptions of needs of their adolescent children as they prepare to enter into a new phase of their life. This awareness can help families in assisting their student in developing specific skills based on the identified needs of that individual. Establishing this type of family support has been proven vital to the success of all first year college students and should be fostered and encouraged by the education profession.

Student perception of postsecondary readiness skills is an issue that warrants further thought and interest of those individuals who seek to assist students with emotional disorders, learning disabilities, and those with other disabilities in achieving success in their pursuit of postsecondary education. Further inquiry into the topic of postsecondary readiness skills of students with disabilities will undoubtedly assist educational professionals, families, students, and other community stakeholders in many ways. Additional research will assist the public in fostering thoughtful understanding of the special challenges that are often encountered by these students on their way to receiving a college education. This inquiry will also assist in facilitating growth and
interest in increasing the postsecondary preparedness of students with disabilities who wish to obtain a degree in higher education.
APPENDIX A

STUDENT ASSESSMENT TOOL
Student High School
to College Transition Questionnaire

Date: ________________

School: ____________________________

Teacher: ____________________________

Grade
❑ 11
❑ 12

Gender
❑ Male
❑ Female

Race
❑ African American
❑ Hispanic
❑ Caucasian
❑ Asian
❑ Native American
❑ Other ______________________

Disability category
❑ None
❑ Learning disability
❑ Emotional disorder
❑ Other ____________
Please circle the correct response:  

Y - Yes  NS - Not sure  N - No

**GENERAL PREPARATION**

1. I plan on going to college. 
   Y   NS   N

2. I know which college I'd like to attend. 
   Y   NS   N

3. I know what I want to study in college. 
   Y   NS   N

4. I have met with or spoken to a representative from the college that I would like to attend. 
   Y   NS   N

5. I have filled out a college application. 
   Y   NS   N

6. I have a plan in place if I find that college is not for me. 
   Y   NS   N

7. I know where I will be living during college. 
   Y   NS   N

8. I already have made living arrangements for college. 
   Y   NS   N

9. I know all the differences between high school and college. 
   Y   NS   N

10. I have taken college entrance exams. 
    Y   NS   N

11. I feel confident that I will be successful in college. 
    Y   NS   N

**ACADEMIC PREPARATION**

11. My current academic program is written to help me prepare for college. 
    Y   NS   N

12. I have taken the classes needed in high school to prepare me for college. 
    Y   NS   N

13. I have taken 4 years of English. 
    Y   NS   N
14. I have taken 4 years of math.  
   Y  NS  N

15. I have taken a composition class.  
   Y  NS  N

16. I have taken a math class equal to or higher than Algebra II.  
   Y  NS  N

17. I have taken 4 years of science.  
   Y  NS  N

18. I have taken college entrance exams.  
   Y  NS  N

19. I have achieved an adequate score on my college entrance exams.  
   Y  NS  N

20. I have a 2.0 or better grade point average.  
   Y  NS  N

ADVOCACY/SELF DETERMINATION

21. I am able to identify which skills I need to improve on in order to be successful in college.  
   Y  NS  N

22. I am able to advocate for myself.  
   Y  NS  N

23. I know the laws that protect my rights.  
   Y  NS  N

24. I am able to ask for my legal rights.  
   Y  NS  N

25. I am aware that I, not my parents, need to initiate a request for disability services at college.  
   Y  NS  N

26. I will seek assistance at the Disability Resource Center at the institution I attend, if needed.  
   Y  NS  N

27. I will seek assistance from my instructors if needed.  
   Y  NS  N

28. I am able to identify my academic strengths.  
   Y  NS  N

29. I am able to identify my academic needs.  
   Y  NS  N

30. I will request the accommodations that I need to be successful in college.  
   Y  NS  N
ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATIONS AND NEEDS

31. My current IEP includes academic accommodations  Y NS N
32. I am able to identify those accommodations.          Y NS N
33. I can identify the supports I need to be successful in college. Y NS N
34. I can identify the specific tools I need for reading.  Y NS N
35. I can identify the specific tools I need for writing.  Y NS N
36. I can identify specific technological supports needed to help me be successful in college. Y NS N
37. I can identify my academic strengths.                 Y NS N
38. I can identify specific teaching styles that will help me be successful in college. Y NS N
39. I know how to adjust to different teaching styles.    Y NS N
40. I can identify my learning style preference(s).      Y NS N

SELF-SUFFICIENCY

41. I am able to budget my money.                        Y NS N
42. I am able to use a course catalog.                   Y NS N
43. I am able to use a computer or word processor.       Y NS N
44. I am able to take care of all my personal needs.     Y NS N
45. I am able to schedule an appointment                 Y NS N
46. I am able to use public transportation.             Y NS N
47. I am able to access student health services at college. Y NS N
48. I am able to use the different types of postal services. Y NS N

49. I am able to manage a bank account. Y NS N

50. I am able to fill out all necessary paperwork for college independently. Y NS N

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

51. I am aware of all of the expenses involved in going to college. Y NS N

52. I will be paying cash for college. Y NS N

53. I know how much college is going to cost me. Y NS N

54. I know how to apply for financial aid to continue my education. Y NS N

55. I have completed the necessary financial aid paperwork. Y NS N

56. I have applied for grants to help pay for college. Y NS N

57. I have applied for scholarships to help me pay for college. Y NS N

58. I am willing to work to help pay for college. Y NS N

59. I am willing to be in a work-study program. Y NS N

60. I understand how working will impact my education. Y NS N

SOCIAL SKILLS

61. I have the skills to make new friends. Y NS N

62. I make new friends easily. Y NS N

63. I plan on making new friends when I go to college. Y NS N

64. I believe it is important to develop new friendships while
in college. & Y & NS & N \\
65. I plan on maintaining old friendships while in college. & Y & NS & N \\
66. I am comfortable meeting new people. & Y & NS & N \\
67. I have the social skills to participate in study groups & Y & NS & N \\
68. I prefer to work independently. & Y & NS & N \\
69. I prefer to work with groups. & Y & NS & N \\
70. Peer groups are important to me. & Y & NS & N \\

**FAMILY SUPPORT**

71. My family is aware that I want to go to college. & Y & NS & N \\
72. My family and I have discussed which college I'd like to attend. & Y & NS & N \\
73. My family is going to help me pay for college. & Y & NS & N \\
74. I can live at home if I want to during college. & Y & NS & N \\
75. My family has been very supportive about me going to college. & Y & NS & N \\
76. I can go to my family for help if I have problems while attending college. & Y & NS & N \\
77. My family has helped me to prepare for college. & Y & NS & N \\
78. My family will support me if I decide that college is not for me. & Y & NS & N \\
79. My family understands all that is involved with me going to college. & Y & NS & N \\
80. Other members of my immediate family have attended college. & Y & NS & N
Dear Parent/Guardian;

Thank you for taking the time to consider my request. I am Carol White, a doctoral candidate from the UNLV Department of Special Education. I am currently working on my doctoral dissertation doing research on this project. I am asking you to grant permission for your child to participate in a research study that will allow me to assess the readiness skills of high school juniors and seniors who are considering continuing their education in a postsecondary setting.

Students recruited for this study are those in grades eleven or twelve that meet the federal definition of students with an emotional disturbance and/or a learning disability as identified on their individual education plans, and those students who have no disabilities that are enrolled in a physical education class. Your student's disability category will be identified on the front page of the assessment tool.

If you allow your child to participate in this study, they will be asked to complete a questionnaire tool that will help me in determining how prepared your child feels he/she is to attend a postsecondary institution. He/she will complete this assessment on his/her own time.

By allowing your child to participate, you will be assisting me in determining if the students in the Clark County School District feel that they are prepared to meet the academic and social challenges of postsecondary education.

The risks to your child in completing this assessment are minimal, however they will be asked to take the assessment on their own time. Your child should have no difficulty answering the questions, but if there are any concerns, they may ask you or another adult for clarification or assistance.
If you have any questions about this study or if your child experiences any harmful effects as a result of completing this assessment and participating in this study, you may contact me, Carol White at 702-435-2025, or my advisor, Dr. Beatrice Babbitt at 702-895-1106.

For questions regarding the rights of research subjects, you may contact the UNLV Office for the Protection of Research Subjects at 702-895-2794.

Your child’s participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to allow your child to participate in this study. You may withdraw your child at any time without prejudice to your relations with the university. You are encouraged to ask questions about this study at the beginning or any time during the research study.

All information gathered in this study will be kept completely confidential. No reference will be made in written or oral materials that could link your child to this study. All records will be stored in a locked facility at UNLV or at my home for at least 3 years after completion of the study.

Parental Consent:

I have read the above information and agree to let my child participate in this study. I am the legal guardian or custodial parent of this child. A copy of this form has been given to me.

__________________________________________  __________________________
Signature of Parent                             Date

__________________________________________
Name of Parent (please print)

__________________________________________
Name of Participant/Child (please print)
Dear Student;

Thank you for thinking about participating in this study. My name is Carol White, a doctoral candidate from the UNLV Department of Special Education. I am currently working on my doctoral dissertation doing research on this project. I am asking you to participate in a research study that will allow me to determine how ready you feel you are to go to onto college or a university.

The students that I will survey for this study are those in grades eleven or twelve that meet the federal definition of students with an emotional disturbance and/or a learning disability as identified on their individual education plans, and those students who have no disabilities that are enrolled in a physical education class. Your disability category will be identified on the front page of the assessment tool.

You will be asked to complete this tool to help me in determining how prepared you feel you are to attend a college or university. You will complete this assessment on your own time. By participating, you will be assisting me in determining if juniors and seniors in the Clark County School District feel that they are prepared to meet the academic and social challenges of college or university life.

There are minimal risks involved in taking this assessment. However, I am asking that you complete the questionnaire independently and on your own time. You should have no problem answering the questions, but if you have any questions, you may an adult for clarification or assistance.

If you have any questions about the study or if you get uncomfortable as result of completing this assessment and participating in this study, you may contact me, Carol White at 702-435-2025, or my advisor, Dr. Beatrice Babbitt at 702-895-1106.

For questions regarding your rights as a research subject, you may contact the UNLV Office for the Protection of Research Subjects at 702-895-2794.
Your participation in this study is voluntary. You do not have to participate in this study. You can change your mind at any time and it won't affect you in any way. If you have any questions about this study at any time, be sure to call me directly.

All information gathered in this study will be private and confidential. No reference will be made in written or oral materials that could link you to this study. All records will be stored in a locked facility at UNLV or at my home for at least 3 years after completion of the study.

Youth Assent for Participation:

I have read the above information and agree to participate in this study. A copy of this form has been given to me.

______________________________    ________________________
Signature of Participant                Date

_____________________________________
Name of Participant (please print)
REFERENCES


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