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# STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES IN THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE: THEIR GOALS, ISSUES, CHALLENGES AND SUCCESSES

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By

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STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES IN THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE: THEIR GOALS, ISSUES, CHALLENGES AND SUCCESSES

A DISSERTATION APPROVED FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND POLICY STUDIES

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achieve their highest dreams.

The community college was the institution where I received my first degree, an Associate Degree in Applied Science with a nursing major at Fayetteville Technical Community College in Fayetteville, N.C. I then completed a Bachelor's degree in nursing at North Carolina Central University, a Historically Black College/University (HBCU) in Durham, N.C. These early educational experiences in North Carolina contributed greatly to my preparation for success in my graduate education, and I consider myself to be an example of the goals that can be attained through the wonderful educational opportunities that exist in the United States of America.

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# ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to obtain information regarding the experiences of students with learning disabilities (LDs) in the community college. A particular focus within this study was to examine the perceived effectiveness of Disability Support Services Departments (DSSDs) services and the impact on the progression and retention of students with LDs towards their educational goals. This concurrent mixed methods study utilized the Learning Disability Student Questionnaire (LDSQ) and the Disability Services Questionnaire (DSQ) to survey a sample of students attending the community college in the south central United States who had self-identified as having a learning disability, and disability support services counselors. Focus group interviews were also conducted with LD students. A data sheet was utilized to obtain demographic data on the study participants.

The LD students related both positive and negative experiences during their education at the community college, and obtaining an Associate's degree was the goal cited most frequently. Overall, the LD students were satisfied with DSSD services, and felt they were effective in assisting them to achieve their educational goals. Problems were cited with registration, separate testing locations, willingness of professors to accommodate, and faculty knowledge and sensitivity regarding students with LD. Themes of desire to succeed, perseverance, desire for understanding, and personal accountability emerged from the data. Several conclusions and recommendations are offered to community colleges to further enhance the abilities of community colleges to assist LD and other disabled students to achieve their educational goals.

# CHAPTER ONE

## Introduction

### *Background*

The community college offers educational opportunities to a diverse population of students. Many of the students attending the community college are considered non-traditional, and have numerous factors not faced by traditional-age students that can impede their ability to have adequate study time and preparation time needed for their coursework, which can affect retention in this population. Given the reality that the non-traditional student population that is often found in the community college setting has various coexistent factors that can negatively impact educational goal attainment, what of those students who also have learning disabilities (LD)?

### *Scenario of an Adult Student with a Learning Disability*

> After some earlier attempts, Martha returned to college in her mid-thirties and earned a bachelor's degree at a state university. Although not unusual for an adult student, her success came after she had overcome a number of barriers. When she was nine, she was diagnosed as having a significant reading disability and she was told by a teacher that she was just "lazy." She describes a number of bad experiences with teachers and educators throughout grade school, high school, and her earlier college attempts.
>
> Martha has a very low comprehension when she reads. Primarily an auditory learner, she learns well and has high comprehension when she listens to tape- recorded books and materials, a reader, and class

> presentations. She demonstrates her learning well in papers that she writes using a computer. Her desire to earn a college degree and her persistence were supported by further testing and services provided by a community college. Understanding faculty in both the community college and the state university encouraged this intelligent and determined woman to continue to work toward her educational and career goals (Gadbow & DuBois, 1998, p. 3).

*"*Martha" is a somewhat typical case example of students affected by learning disability while in pursuit of additional education in the postsecondary arena. Learning disabled students attend the community college at a higher rate than other higher education institutions (Barnett, 1992; Bigaj & Shaw, 1995; & Henderson, 1992). Barnett (1992) reported that community colleges serve the largest segment of disabled students, enrolling up to 71 percent of all postsecondary students with disabilities. A majority of students with disabilities have turned to two-year colleges for their educational needs; of the students with disabilities in higher education institutions in 1997-1998, fifty-five percent were enrolled in community colleges.

Data reported in 1991 from the National Longitudinal Study of Special Education Students found that persons with LDs attended two-year vocational, community, or junior colleges more frequently than four-year colleges or universities (Bigaj & Shaw, 1995). Henderson (1992) also noted that 59 percent of freshmen students with LD attended two-year colleges and 40 percent attended four-year colleges. The American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) reported that LDs now constitute the largest single

category of disability served by disability service offices in the community colleges (Barnett, 1992).

A common belief that is held today is that higher education should provide ladders of upward mobility for Americans (Brint & Karabel, 1989, p. 5), and a community college education is the avenue utilized by many students to begin their higher education pursuits. In 1997, 44 percent of all students beginning postsecondary education enrolled first in a two-year college (Cohen & Brawer, 2003).

An understood prerequisite for obtaining the many outcomes of higher education is the retention of students for the duration of a particular course or program of study. This reality has resulted in an intense focus on student retention in the community college setting. In recent years, there have been increasing pressures on community colleges nation wide to enhance student retention (Wyman, 1997; Wild & Ebbers, 2002; Sydow & Sandel, 1998). These pressures have come primarily from external agents such as the United States Department of Education (USDE), national accreditation bodies such as the North Central Association's Higher Learning Commission (NCA, 2004), and locally the Oklahoma State Regent's for Higher Education (OSRHE, 1998).

Disability Support Services departments (DSSDs) were set up to provide accommodations to students with disabilities. Most community colleges serve students who have a variety of disabilities through accommodations set up by the DSSDs, and it is the Disability Services offered by the college that can be the deciding factor for the student regarding the choice of institution (Cocchi, 1997).

### *Statement of the Problem*

There are other challenges encountered by LD students in addition to the

challenges faced by non-traditional students in the community college. Most community colleges now have DSSDs to assist LD students, and while much data has been collected on number and types of Disability Support Services available in postsecondary institutions (PSIs), there is little documentation of the experiences and educational outcomes of students with LD who utilize DSSD services. Furthermore, there has been little research conducted to evaluate the impact of DSSDs on the progression and retention of LD students attending the community college.

### *Purpose of the Study*

The purpose of this study is to obtain information regarding the experiences of students with learning disabilities (LDs) in the community college. A particular focus within this study will be to examine the perceived effectiveness of Disability Support Services Department (DSSD) services and their impact on the progression and retention, and educational goal attainment of students with LDs in the community college.

### *Research Questions*

The following research questions were formulated for this research study:

1. What are the experiences of LD students who attend the community college?
2. What are the goals identified by LD students who attend the community college?
3. What are factors identified by LD students that may negatively impact their continued enrollment in their community college?
4. To what extent do LD students perceive Disability Support Services Departments to be effective in assisting them to obtain their educational goals in the community college?

5. How satisfied are LD students with the Disability Support Services available at their community college?
6. How satisfied are LD students with the disability counselor(s) at their community college?
7. How do Disability Support Services Departments currently evaluate student satisfaction with their services in the community college?
8. What specific data are currently collected by Disability Support Services Departments regarding the progression and retention of LD students in the community college?

*Definitions*

1. Disability – A physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more of the major life activities, record of such an impairment, or being regarded as having such an impairment. Major life activities include caring for one's self, performing manual tasks, walking, seeing, hearing, speaking, breathing, learning, and working. (Americans with Disabilities Act, 1990).
2. Learning Disability- A neurological disorder that affects the brain's ability to receive, process, store and respond to information (National Center for Learning Disabilities, 2005). This disorder manifests itself with a deficit in one or more of the following areas: attention, reasoning, processing, memory, communication, reading, writing, spelling, calculation, coordination, social competence, and emotional maturity (USDE, Office of Special Education & Rehabilitative Services, 2002).
3. Community College – An institution regionally accredited to award the associate

in arts or the associate in science as its highest degree (Cohen & Brawer, 2003).

4. Disability Support Services Departments – Departments or offices set up to provide accommodations to students with disabilities (Cocchi, 1997).

5. Student Progression – Student completes one semester in good academic standing, with GPA $\geq$ 2.0.

6. Student Retention - Maintenance of continued enrollment in classes for two or more semesters...generally Fall and Spring semesters (Crawford, 1999).

**7.** Retention Rate – The percentage of credit students, either full or part-time, enrolled during Fall 2006, compared to the number of credit students having remained continuously enrolled through the official Spring 2007 college enrollment census date.

8. Satisfaction – A state felt by a person who has experienced a performance or outcome that has fulfilled his or her expectations (Kotler & Clarke, 1987).

9. Satisfaction Level - A measurement of the level of student satisfaction as measured by the LDSQ survey instrument.

10. Non-traditional college student – A student older than age 22, who attends part-time, works full-time, has dependents, and commutes to campus (USDE, 1993 & 2003).

11. Traditional college student – A student age 18-22, who attends full-time, does not work or works only part-time, and resides on campus (USDE, 1993 & 2003).

### *Significance of the Study*

The number of students with disabilities in higher education has continued to increase, and those students with hidden disabilities, such as LD, now make up more than half of all freshmen with disabilities. Assisting students with disabilities involves more

than assuring physical access and safety. Support may involve a range of services ranging from involvement in clubs and organizations, to internships and leadership opportunities (Komives & Woodard, 2003).

There is little documentation of the experiences and educational outcomes of students with LD who utilize DSSD services. Furthermore, there has been little research done to evaluate the impact of DSSDs on the progression and retention of LD students attending the community college. It is not adequate to simply supply a variety of services for students with LD and other disabilities in the community college setting. The quantity and availability of services alone do not ensure that these students will achieve their educational goals.

The information obtained through this research study will be informative for Disability Support Services Departments and other student services areas in the development of assessment measures to document the effectiveness of disability services provided, and for the planning and development of additional services for LD and other disabled students who attend the community college. Students with LD who utilize the services of the DSSDs will benefit from the restructuring of current services and/ or the development of additional services designed to facilitate the attainment of their educational goals.

### *Assumptions*

The assumptions maintained for this research study are that all study participants will be honest in answering questions, and that the participants are able to speak and read English. Chapter I has provided background information on learning disabilities and delineated the areas of interest that will be addressed in this study. Research questions

were also presented, along with operational definitions of terms pertinent to this study. Chapter II will provide further information on learning disabilities, community colleges, disability support services departments, student retention, and satisfaction.

# CHAPTER TWO

## Review of the Literature

### *Learning Disabilities*

#### Scenario of an Adult Student with a Learning Disability

After some earlier attempts, Martha returned to college in her mid-thirties and earned a bachelor's degree at a state university. Although not unusual for an adult student, her success came after she had overcome a number of barriers. When she was nine, she was diagnosed as having a significant reading disability and she was told by a teacher that she was just "lazy." She describes a number of bad experiences with teachers and educators throughout grade school, high school, and her earlier college attempts.

Martha has a very low comprehension when she reads. Primarily and auditory learner, she learns well and has high comprehension when she listens to tape- recorded books and materials, a reader, and class presentations. She demonstrates her learning well in papers that she writes using a computer. Her desire to earn a college degree and her persistence were supported by further testing and services provided by a community college. Understanding faculty in both the community college and the state university encouraged this intelligent and determined woman to continue to work toward her educational and career goals (Gadbow & DuBois, 1998, p. 3).

*A Famous American with Learning Difficulty*

Despite his phenomenal gifts, Albert Einstein had great difficulties with academic learning. He said of himself, "writing is difficult, and I communicate this way [by speaking] very badly….I very rarely think in words at all." Einstein was unable to learn in traditional ways. His genius was rare, but his difficulties with school work were similar to those of many students with learning disabilities (Taymans, West, & Sullivan, 2000, p. 1).

*A Successful Dentist with Learning Disability*

"I found out I was learning disabled when my two sons were diagnosed. I think of my brain as being like an outdated computer when it comes to listening to a conversation. It can do anything a modern computer can do; it just takes longer. I have to get there earlier and stay longer but I will succeed. I have written a few books. I have developed a writing friend. I fix his teeth and he fixes my grammar.

The relationship works well for both of us." (Taymans, et al, 2000, p. 14)

*A Successful Businessman with Learning Difficulty*

Paul Orfalea failed second grade because he didn't know the alphabet. In third grade the only word he could read was "the." He would keep up with his reading group by following from one "the" to the next. He graduated from high school with a 1.2 grade point average. Paul's family and family friends owned their own businesses. Paul went on to

college with the desire to have his own business. During college he thought there was a market for reasonably priced school supplies, so he rented a garage and sold supplies like pens and notebooks. He hired student workers and relied on their reading and mechanical skills. This was the beginning of Kinko's office supply, named after Paul's kinky hair. Paul reports his business controls more than 800 stores across the world. Paul still finds reading difficult but loves listening to his wife read to him (Taymans, et al, 2000, p. 6).

The above scenarios give a brief snapshot into the lives of individuals who experience difficulty with learning. "Researchers report that 5 to 10 percent of Americans have learning disabilities (LD), and while no two people with LD are exactly the same, many do share certain characteristics" (Taymans, et al, 2000, p. 2). Vogel (1998) points out that there are a variety of LD rates reported based on which segment of the adult population is scrutinized, with age range and the setting where the adults are located affecting LD rates. For example, the United States Employment and Training Administration in 1991 estimated that between 15-23% of Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) Title IIA recipients may have a learning disability.

Based on the Department of Labor observations, the percent of adults with LD increases to between 50-80% among those reading below the $7^{th}$ grade level. The National Adult Literacy Survey of 1988 reported that 3% of the 26,000 adults sampled had LD. Surveys of adults receiving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and those who participated in the Job Opportunities Basic Skills programs (JOBS) showed an increase in LD rates from 15-30%, which reflected the poverty, under-

employment and unemployment along with low literacy functioning and educational attainment (Vogel, 1988).

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reported that nine percent of undergraduates reported having disabilities that created difficulties for them as students in its 1999-2000 survey, and eleven percent reported a learning disability or Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) (U. S. Department of Education, 2003). Kaplin and Lee (1995) reported that in 1992 nearly one in eleven freshmen reported that they had a disability, compared with one in thirty-eight in 1978. Additionally, Brazelon (1995, p. 12) reported that "one in five Americans has some form of mental and/ or physical disability, such that individuals with disabilities are now the largest minority group in the nation".

While the term "learning disability" is used quite often in our communications in the education field, there has been difficulty in formulating one definition that all professionals and professional organizations agree upon. LD is not a single disorder, but a term that refers to a group of disorders. According to Gadbow & Dubois (1998), "despite a significant amount of scientific research and increased knowledge about various types of LD, there is no commonly accepted definition of the chronic learning difficulty that exists in 10-15% of the human population." (p. 25)

"Most experts believe that LD represents a group of related disorders with different characteristics, requiring different types of treatment and/ or accommodations." (Eliason, 1992, p. 375). According to Gadbow & Dubois (1998), "there is disagreement among scholars as to what conditions should be considered under the LD label. For example, some researchers would argue that Attention Deficit Disorders (ADD/ADHD) should not

be considered learning disabilities, although they clearly interfere with some aspects of the learning process." (p. 25).

The National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD, 2005) defines LD as "a neurological disorder that affects the brain's ability to receive, process, store and respond to information" (p. 1), and note that, LDs can affect a person's ability in the areas of listening, speaking, reading, writing, or mathematics. The term LD is used to describe the seeming unexplained difficulty a person of at least average intelligence has in acquiring basic academic skills. These skills are essential for success at school and work, and for coping with life in general. Other features of a LD involve a distinct gap between the level of achievement that is expected and what is actually being achieved (Gadbow & Dubois, 1998). The USDE Office of Vocational & Adult Education (2002) defines LD as:

> A disorder in one or more of the central nervous system processes involved in perceiving, understanding, and/or using concepts through verbal (spoken or written) language or non-verbal means. This disorder manifests itself with a deficit in one or more of the following areas: attention, reasoning, processing, memory, communication, reading, writing, spelling, calculation, coordination, social competence, and emotional maturity (p. 1).

LDs result in different learning and working profiles, depending on age, settings, strengths, and needs of each individual. Schools systems use the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) definition that focuses on the profile of children with LD. Rehabilitation services use a slightly different definition that focuses on needs of

adult learners and workers. And postsecondary educational settings combine the definitions of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) with the language in Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act (Taymans, et al, 2000).

According to the definitions of the ADA of 1990 and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, a disability is: 1) a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more of the major life activities; 2) a record of such an impairment; or 3) being regarded as having such an impairment. "Major life activities" include caring for one's self, performing manual tasks, walking, seeing, hearing, speaking, breathing, learning, and working. Since "learning" is a major life activity, students with LD and AD/HD are covered under the Act (Taymans, et al, 2000, p. 55).

"Specific Learning Disability" (SLD) is the term used in the federal law for any LD, and some of the SLDs include: dyslexia, dyscalculia, dysgraphia, dyspraxia, auditory processing disorder, visual processing disorder, and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (AD/HD) (NCLD, 2005). The Learning Disabilities Association (LDA, 2005) defines specific learning disabilities as:

> A chronic condition of presumed neurological origin which selectively interferes with the development, integration, and/or demonstration of verbal and nonverbal abilities. Specific learning disabilities exist as a distinct handicapping condition in the presence of average to superior intelligence, adequate sensory and motor systems, and adequate learning opportunities. The condition varies in its manifestations and in degree of severity (p. 1).

The federal definition of LD (PL 94-142) identified three components of LD: 1) average or above average intellectual abilities; 2) academic achievement significantly below that expected by the individual's intelligence; and 3) a deficit in one or more of the cognitive processes underlying learning. In most states, the diagnosis of LD depends only on the first two components and LD is defined as a discrepancy between ability and achievement. However, the law does not state how large the discrepancy must be for it to be considered significant. Each state or region sets its own criteria (Eliason, 1992, p. 375).

A student is qualified under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1990 when the student is found to have one of the thirteen qualifying disabilities listed in the IDEA. Students with LD most often qualify under the label of "specific learning disabilities", and students with AD/HD can receive services under the category of "other health impaired" if their AD/HD significantly affects their ability to perform academically at school (Taymans, et al, 2000, p. 48). Under the IDEA, an evaluation is provided free of charge by the school district and results are compared with the criteria used by the particular school district to determine whether LD or AD/HD is present. In Oklahoma, the Edmond School District utilizes a battery of standardized tests along with teacher and parent observations to determine a child's eligibility. LD eligibility criteria is recognized when the child is functioning one and a half standard deviations below his/ her expected level of achievement (S. Crane, personal communication, April, 2005).

Adult students over age18 (age limit varies by state) are no longer covered under IDEA, but under the ADA of 1990 and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973

(Taymans, et al, 2000, p. 55). Adult students are required to submit documentation to the Disability Services Department regarding their particular disability from a medical doctor or other qualified professional depending on the type of disability. Adult students may have testing done at local universities for a limited cost, or by a private psychologist who may charge considerably more. Higher education institutions may pick up the cost of testing if they chose to refute an evaluation report submitted by the student, but no law requires this (L. Jansen, personal communication, October 2001).

Although there is currently no single definition of LD that all professionals and professional organizations agree upon, it is important to have a fairly consistent definition of LD for educators and the general public. The ADA law and the national LD organizations help to establish a measure of consistency regarding the definition of LD.

### *Community Colleges*

The first public junior college was opened in Joliet, Illinois in 1901, and the community college was cited as the great innovation of twentieth-century American higher education by Clark Kerr, a key architect of the current system of higher education (Brint & Karabel, 1989). Among the social forces that contributed to its rise, most prominent were the need for workers trained to operate the nation's expanding industries; the lengthened period of adolescence, which mandated custodial care of the young for a longer time; and the drive for social equality, which supposedly would be enhanced if more people had access to higher education (Cohen & Brawer, 2003). Individual mobility was held in the highest esteem, and the notion was widespread that those people who applied themselves most diligently would advance most rapidly. "The public perceived schooling as an avenue of upward mobility and a contributor to the

community's wealth, and publicly supported universities, given impetus by the Morrill Acts of 1862 and 1890, had been established in every state." (Cohen & Brawer, 2003, p. 2).

Two generic names have been applied to two-year colleges. From their beginnings until the 1940s, they were known most commonly as junior colleges. During the 1950s and 1960s, the term *junior college* was applied more often to two-year colleges supported by churches or organized independently, while *community college* came gradually to be used for the comprehensive, publicly supported institutions. By the 1970s, the term c*ommunity college* was usually applied to both types. The community college can be defined as "any institution regionally accredited to award the associate in arts or the associate in science as its highest degree." (Cohen & Brawer, 2003, p. 5).

At the end of World War II, large numbers of veterans were returning to civilian life and were seeking college education. The G.I. Bill of 1944 made available the first large-scale financial aid packages and made it possible for people to be reimbursed not only for their tuition but also for their living expenses while attending college, which resulted in a rapid increase in the number of people going to college (Cohen & Brawer, 2003; Brint & Karabel, 1998).

President Harry S. Truman established the President's Commission on Higher Education which published a landmark report entitled *Higher Education for American Democracy* in December 1947. The Truman Commission called for full equality of educational opportunity:

> The Commission does not subscribe to the belief that higher education should be confined to an intellectual elite, much less a small elite drawn

> largely from families in the higher income brackets. Nor does it believe that a broadening of opportunity means a dilution of standards either of admission or scholarly attainment in college works.... If the ladder of educational opportunity rises high at the doors of some youth and scarcely rises at all at the doors of others, while at the same time formal education is made a prerequisite to occupational and social advance, then education may become the means, not of eliminating race and class distinctions, but of deepening and solidifying them. It is obvious, then, that free and universal access to education, in terms of the interest, ability, and need of the student, must be a major goal in American education (emphasis theirs). (Brint & Karabel, 1998, p. 69).

Colleges which previously operated apparently for the sons and daughters of the wealthy and educated were now open to ethnic minorities, lower-income groups, and those whose prior academic performance had been marginal. Of all the higher education institutions, the community colleges contributed most to opening the system (Cohen & Brawer, 2003).

Today, a community college education is the avenue utilized by many students to begin their higher education pursuits. A majority of students with disabilities have turned to two-year colleges for their educational needs; of the students with disabilities in higher education institutions in 1997-1998, fifty-five percent were enrolled in community colleges. This increase is attributed to, among other factors, enhanced technology, expanded support service programs, and higher expectations of what students with disabilities can accomplish (Prentice, 2002).

Because some students with LD fail to meet standards for admission to four-year institutions, they often opt for a two-year postsecondary education. The open admissions policy at many two-year postsecondary institutions enables students with LD to access that environment easily (Mellard, 1994). In 1997, 44 percent of all students beginning postsecondary education enrolled first in a two-year college (Cohen & Brawer, 2003).

Learning disabilities (LD) are the most common form of disability found in the college-age population, but often are unrecognized (Eliason, 1992, p. 375). According to Henderson (Finn, 1992), the category of LD has had the highest growth rate among all categories of disabilities in postsecondary institutions, and approximately 25 percent of all first-time full-time freshmen who reported having a disability in 1991 had a LD.

Barnett (1992) reported that community colleges serve the largest segment of disabled students, enrolling up to 71 percent of all postsecondary students with disabilities. Data reported in 1991 from the National Longitudinal Study of Special Education Students found that persons with LDs attended two-year vocational, community, or junior colleges more frequently than four-year colleges or universities (Bigaj & Shaw, 1995). Henderson (1992) also noted that 59 percent of freshmen students with LD attended two-year colleges and 40 percent attended four-year colleges. Bigaj & Shaw (1995) found more students with LDs participating in programs for LD students at two-year schools compared to their counterparts attending four-year institutions.

As community colleges continue their mission of open access to all community members, it is possible that these institutions will service increasing numbers of students with disabilities (Barnett, 1992).

*Disability Support Services Departments*

Disability Service departments were set up to provide accommodations to students with disabilities. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the receipt of federal funding enabled Disability Service departments to be set up to provide accommodations to students with disabilities. It is the Disability Services offered by the college that can be a deciding factor for the student regarding the choice of institution (Cocchi, 1997).

The American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) reported that LDs now constitute the largest single category of disability served by disability service offices in the community colleges (Barnett, 1992). Nearly 80 percent of all campuses responding to the AACC's Directory of Disability Support Services in Community Colleges survey (1996) reported having a Disability support services office. Of the 570 institutions that reported disability by category, LD constituted the largest single category of disability (38%) served by a Disability Support Services office.

The National Learning Disabilities Postsecondary Data Bank: An Overview (Vogel et al, 1998), found that almost half (43%) of postsecondary institutions used the centralized model of service with Disabled Student Services as the sole provider of support services, while 37 % used the decentralized model of service wherein services are provided by Disability Support Services in conjunction with other campus support centers. Only 4% of the institutions surveyed offered a comprehensive, separately staffed LD program.

According to Komives & Woodard (2003):

> Assisting students with disabilities involves more than assuring physical access and safety. A range of services may be needed for student support, such as helping students with disabilities become involved with clubs, organizations, internships, and leadership opportunities that allow them to develop a range of skills and to participate as valued members of the campus community. Many campuses are working with an increasing number of students with hidden disabilities such as health impairments or LDs that, while not noticeable, still require accommodation or assistance (p. 52).

Some campuses have developed strong programs to assist a growing number of students with a range of LDs. Staff in disability support services provides academic services such as note takers and interpreters; they also work to improve physical access on campus for students with mobility challenges, advise students about their rights and responsibilities, and provide outreach and consultation to other campus offices and academic units. Disability support services staff often are advocates for students with disabilities to ensure that students are given appropriate support and accommodation, and to ensure that legal obligations are met by the institution (Komives & Woodard, 2003).

Students with LD have difficulty encoding information in short-term memory which makes it more difficult to retrieve information from long-term memory. "Students with LD are often slow readers and may be penalized by their slow reading and writing when taking timed exams or taking college level exams that are multiple choice" (Eliason, 1992, p. 376). Reasonable accommodations that can be implemented for the LD students may include: providing textbooks on tape, providing a reading list in advance of

the start of the course, highlighting important reading sections, increasing time allowed for testing, providing a quiet room for testing, or having someone read the exam to the student (Eliason, 1992, p. 376). Additional accommodations for LD students may include note takers, taped lectures, large print text, alternate format for testing, extended time to complete degree requirements, course requirement substitutions or waivers, or priority registration (American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN), 2001), and the use of sign-language interpreters (American Council on Education (ACE), 2005).

Many of the national surveys that have been conducted by agencies such as the AACC, ACE, American College Testing Service (ACT), and USDE-NCES have focused on disability categories, numbers and types of services available, or student services in general, with limited focus on disability support services departments. Commonly utilized assessment surveys found via an on-line search of the literature are the: 1) Alumni Survey 2-year college form (ACT); 2) Community College Student Report (ACE); 3) Disability Support Services: Community College Survey (AACC); 4) Faces of the Future Survey (ACT); 5) National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (USDE-NCES); 6) Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction Inventory (SSI), and 7) Student Opinion Survey 2-year college form (ACT) (Barnet, 1996; Noel-Levitz, 2005; The Community College Student Report, 2005; & USDE, 1993).

A survey conducted by the researcher in June 2005 (McCleary-Jones, 2007) and March 2006 of disability support services counselors at two community colleges in Oklahoma revealed that LDs represented the largest category of disabilities reported at both institutions, as was reflected in the literature review. The types of services available to accommodate students with disabilities were relatively the same for each campus, and

there were no LD student retention statistics available for either institution. It was interesting to discover that no retention statistics were currently being collected for students with disabilities at either institution. This would be a good method for tracking the progress of LD students and students with other disabilities, and serve as an assessment measure of the effectiveness of disability services that are provided to these students. Both disability support services counselors stated that they did wish to collect this data in the future, and cited a need for the development of a systematic method of data collection via the utilization of computerization.

Although some colleges have begun tracking students and measuring outcomes, there still is much to be accomplished in the area of Disability Support Services program evaluation (Barnett, 1992).

*Student Retention Definitions*

Student retention or academic persistence has been conceptualized in many different ways, and this tends to make examination of the research in this area somewhat difficult. Wild and Ebbers (2002) point out that how retention is defined can be problematic when researching retention in the community college setting, and that many studies use the definition of retention developed for the university setting. These authors also cite that experts believe that retention models and research at the university levels need to be adapted to community colleges.

The National Postsecondary Student Aid Survey of 1992-1993 defined persistence as those students enrolled in Fall 1992 and indicating that they would also enroll in Fall 1993 (USDE, 1993). The Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education define persistence as the percentage of students from the original cohort group who are

enrolled during the following year (OSRHE, 1998). Sydow and Sandel (1998) conducted a study of Mountain Empire Community College to investigate the reasons for the high rate of student attrition, and defined persistence as enrollment in a subsequent semester. Wyman (1997) sought to develop a predictive model of retention rate in community colleges, and examined 16 community colleges in South Carolina utilizing the first-time full time Fall cohorts for 1990 and 1991, and defined retention as the percentage of entering students graduating or persisting in their studies at an institution.

Crawford (1999) conducted a study of performance outcome for the Extended Opportunity Programs and Services for Community College Retention in California community colleges, and defined persistence as maintenance of continued enrollment in classes for two or more semesters, specifically from Fall term to Spring term. In a study of student success in the Puente Student English Program at Gavilan Community College, Willett (2002) defined persistence as the proportion of students who did not withdraw from either course in the two semester program. Derby and Smith (2004) defined retention as students remaining at the institution for the duration of their studies, that is until they graduate, in their study of orientation courses and student retention in the community college.

Walleri (1981) defined retention as program completion, and for students in special programs and community education, retention can be defined meaningfully only in terms of student objectives. Degree completion rates have also been utilized as an indicator of persistence (Tinto, 1998; and Stoecker, Pascarella, and Wolfle, 1988; Wild & Ebbers, 2002).

*Student Retention Challenges – Non Traditional Students*

It is well documented in the literature that several factors can and do impact retention in the non-traditional student population attending the community college. The Profile of Undergraduates in U.S. Postsecondary Education Institutions: 1999-2000 revealed that thirty-eight percent of all 16.5 million undergraduates were pursuing associates degrees, and that three-quarters of all undergraduates reported at least one of the seven risk factors found to be negatively associated with persistence and degree attainment. These seven factors are: 1) delaying enrollment by a year or more after high school graduation; 2) attending part-time; 3) being financially independent; 4) having children; 5) being a single parent; 6) working full-time while enrolled; and 7) being a high school dropout or a GED recipient (USDE, 2002).

The USDE's Postsecondary Student Aid Study 1992-1993 documented the increase of the numbers of non-traditional students pursuing higher education, citing that this population returns to college for various reasons such as career mobility, job security, increasing income to support their family's needs, or to expand their knowledge base (USDE, 1993). Many non-traditional students have to balance their academic pursuits with other variables in their personal lives such as family and job responsibilities, and the desire to pursue leisure activities. These non-traditional students have numerous factors not faced by traditional higher education students that can impede their ability to have adequate study time and preparation time needed for their coursework. Whenever situations exist which distract the non-traditional student from being able to prepare for academic coursework, there is a great potential for the student to stop out or discontinue their pursuit of higher education (USDE, 1993).

*Student Retention Challenges – Minority Students*

O'Donnell & Green-Merritt (1997) found that several factors affected the recruitment and retention of minority students such as:

> few minority role models in leadership positions, insufficient number and variety of ethnic studies programs, relevant and appropriate library and media resources being unavailable, few concerted efforts to empower minorities, inadequate preparation of faculty, staff, and students to live in a multicultural society, and few opportunities to experience the enrichment resulting from a culturally pluralistic community (p. 5).

Chesler and Crowfoot (1989) suggested that five elements of all organizations' operations influence universities' policies and practices, including those that affect members of different racial groups. These elements are mission, culture, power, structure, and resources. The mission reflects the official and unofficial vision and purposes of the organization, and when it lacks explicit attention to justice and racial equality, it can promote racism in the institution.

Chesler and Crowfoot (1989) assert that culture permeates institutional functioning and consists of core values and assumptions regarding how people are expected to behave. They believe that racism can exist when monocultural norms are promulgated with no explicit rewards for anti-racist behavior of faulty and staff. Power is manifested in the decision-making structures and processes, and the typical hierarchical and centralized institution concentrates formal power at the top, in the hands of a small number of persons – usually white men. Organizational structure refers to procedures,

technologies and activities that define the ways in which the organization acts to meet its goals, and when no opportunities exist to (re)train white faculty to deal with students of color, the social networks of the faculty generally exclude people of color (Chesler & Crowfoot, 1989).

When the curriculum does not explicitly address issues of racism, when there is no coherent policy of response to racial harassment, or an Office of Minority Affairs exists but is not a central part of the university structure, institutional racism can exist. Resources are materials required to accomplish organizational goals. Institutional racism is fostered "when funding is not available to support new anti-racist practices, when the community and physical settings usually include pervasive racism, when active recruitment of students and faculty of color doesn't exist, or post-recruitment support for students and faculty of color is minimal." (Chesler & Crowfoot, 1989, p 436). The five elements identified by Chesler and Crowfoot, are also relevant for students with disability who are also considered to be part of the diverse and minority populations of colleges and universities.

Chin, et al (2002) state that it's not enough to recruit diverse students if nothing is done to retain them. Hurtado (1992) notes, "there is a difference between enhancing diversity of the population of an institution and the day-to-day experiences of minorities at predominantly white institutions" (p. 539). Brown (2004) observed that:

> the challenge of overcoming a history of exclusion, based principally on race, in some cases gender, and disability, is formidable for universities who wish to actualize a vision of excellence that includes diversity. This type of commitment rests with college and university presidents without

whose support the issue of diversity remains more of an intellectual debate.

Brown (2004) further states, "it is inevitable that institutions will become more diversified, and this should provide the impetus for the administration to aggressively pursue programs that would facilitate the process for a shift in thinking and attitudes of both faculty and administrators." Turner, et al (1996) caution that although strong institutional statements in support of diversity by faculty and administrative leaders are helpful, strong actions that change the "way things are usually done around here" will do more than strong statements to nurture an open and inclusive climate (p. 17).

Access and completion rates for African American, Hispanic, and Native American students have always lagged behind white and Asian students, as have those for low-income students and students with disabilities. A number of factors have been cited as impacting student retention in the literature, yet the complexity of the human condition makes it difficult to definitely prove the validity of one psychological or sociological theory over another (Swail, 2003).

Research also shows that congruence between student goals and institutional mission, which are mediated by academic and social components, causes greater institutional commitment and student persistence. Peer relations and the development of role models and mentors are also cited in the literature as important factors for student integration (Swail, 2003). Financial aid in the form of grants and loans affect the college attendance of all students, and low-income and minority students who receive financial aid are more likely to persist in their educational endeavors (Swail, 2003; Hauptman, 2001; & Johnstone, 2001).

Campus climate or "institutional fit" and campus integration have been cited as important factors in retaining college students to degree completion, and minority students who are inadequately prepared for non-academic challenges can experience culture shock. Additionally, lack of diversity in the student population, faculty, staff, and curriculum can affect the nature and quality of minority student interactions in and out of the classroom and threaten their academic performance and social experiences (Swail, 2003).

African Americans and Hispanics are primarily enrolled in community colleges and two-year institutions, and minority students may experience difficulty dealing with a college racial climate that may not be conducive to their full integration, particularly social adjustment to a college environment that is predominantly white. Minority students may be faced with interpersonal tensions in dealing with white students and faculty, and may even be faced with actual occurrences of racism and discrimination (Just, 1999).

The racial climate on campus, and the perception of a hostile climate on campus can directly affect minority students' sense of belonging and can have an impact on their performance. Students who feel alienated are most likely to drop out, and Okinaka reported in a 1990 study that even Asian students, who have relatively high college retention rates, still report strong feelings of social alienation (Just, 1999).

*Student Retention Challenges – Students with Disabilities*

Similar concern has also been extended to those individuals who have mental or physical disabilities, and this issue has definitely been given priority as a result of legislation such as the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (Pub L 101-336, 42 USC

§ 12101-12184). Physical disabilities are easily recognizable, however many campuses are working with an increasing number of students with hidden disabilities such as health impairments or learning disabilities that, while not noticeable, still require accommodation or assistance (Komives & Woodard, 2003, p.52). Students with LD now constitute a larger portion of the student population in many colleges and universities, and their needs, issues, and concerns must be addressed, just as are those of other segments of the diverse populations in higher education.

Chelberg, Harbour & Juarez (1998) address campus climate for disabled students in their guidebook "*Accessing student life: Steps to improve the campus climate for disabled students."* Four access environments must be addressed for people with disabilities: *physical* which relates to accessibility laws; *informational* which relates to oral and written communications in alternate formats, and information technologies; *programmatic/policy* which involves adjustments to eliminate participation barriers; and *attitudinal* which relate to prevailing negative assumptions perpetuated by society about people with disabilities.

According to Chelberg, et al. (1998), the attitudinal environment is the most intangible of the four environments, and changes in the attitudinal environment typically take place through one-to-one interaction with people with disabilities. In the case of students with disability, hiring disability counselors who are sensitive to the special concerns of learning and other disabled students is a must. Also, retaining disability counselors who may also have a disability, may help the comfort level of disabled students who seek assistance from Disability Support Services Departments.

*Student Retention Challenges – National and Local Focus*

In recent years, there have been increasing pressures on community colleges nation wide to enhance student retention (Wyman, 1997; Wild & Ebbers, 2002; Sydow & Sandel, 1998). These pressures have come primarily from external agents such as the United States Department of Education (USDE), national accreditation bodies such as the North Central Association's Higher Learning Commission (NCA, 2004), and locally the State Regent's for Higher Education (OSRHE, 1998). At the state and national levels, public accountability is a very important issue in higher education, and stakeholders such as taxpayers, legislators, administrators, faculty, and students, etc., demand proof of institutional effectiveness.

Student retention rates have typically been used as indicators of the effectiveness of an institution of higher education, and the 1990 Student Right to Know Act, Public Law 101-542, requires colleges and universities to publish their graduation rates (Wyman, 1997). In response to the national trend of increased focus on accountability measures in higher education, many community colleges have attempted to institute measures to enhance their retention and graduation rates.

The Office of Vocational and Adult Education (OVAE) within the USDE works with Congress, the states and institutions to expand the current student retention and completion reporting system for institutions of higher education. OVAE has developed a number of community college initiatives, and strategic goal number five for community colleges addresses enhancing the quality of and access to postsecondary education. Objective 5.1 is to "reduce the gaps in completion among student populations differing by race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and disability while increasing the educational

attainment of all." A performance measure for this objective is 3-year graduation rates. Objective 5.2 is to "strengthen accountability of postsecondary institutions." A performance measure for this objective is the percentage of states with comprehensive reporting systems that include student retention data and graduation rates (USDE, 2002).

The American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) indicated its position on student retention in its publication entitled, *"Building Communities: A Vision for a New Century – Leadership for a New Century: Assessing the Outcomes."* In this document, the AACC recommended that each community college develop a campus-wide assessment of institutional effectiveness. Such a program should include a periodic reexamination of mission and goals, specific programs, individual student outcomes, retention rates, and the performance of graduates (AACC, 1998).

The NCA's Higher Learning Commission (2004) is responsible for the accountability of schools with postsecondary designation in accordance with federal regulations. Member schools maintain a verifiable assessment-driven system of information collection that will provide evidence of the effectiveness of the school in meeting its mission and its goals over time. According to the NCA:

> The assessment of achievement includes student grades and GPA, retention rates, job placement rates, program and course completion rates, scores on admissions tests or other standardized tests, percentage of graduates pursuing degrees, acceptance of graduates to professional schools, state licensing and other examination pass rates, follow-up studies of graduates, and student loan default rates (p. 3).

In Oklahoma, the State Regent's for Higher Education have instituted an initiative

that ties budgetary allocation to the retention and graduation rates of each community college (OSRHE, 1998; L. Tyree, personal communication, October 25, 2004), which is reflective of similar movements that are taking place nationally (Wyman, 1997). "Brain Gain 2010" is a 12-year initiative of the OSRHE developed to increase Oklahoma's graduation and retention rates, thereby increasing the proportion of Oklahoma's population who hold college degrees and are "prepared to successfully compete in the global, knowledge-based economy of the 21st century." (OSRHE, 1998, p. 7).

*Strategies to Enhance Student Retention*

According to Tinto, showing "concern for the education of students and their integration in the social and intellectual life of the institution appear to be the two most important principles of successful retention programs" (Molnar, 1993, p. 6). Molnar (1993) states:

> The fundamental goals of the institution are often indicated in the mission statement of the institution, and student perception of mission effectiveness has both a direct and indirect influence on retention. The mission of the institution encompasses many areas of institutional performance that lead to academic and social integration, as well as institutional commitment. In the course of establishing a retention policy, institutions must discern the goals and commitments of entering students, as well as those of the institution (p. 5).

New student orientation programs build an "esprit de corps" among new students, provide confidence and a social support network necessary for their academic and personal success. Students enrolled in an extended orientation program in a community

college were more likely to persist and performed academically better than their non-enrolled counterparts. Strategies to effectively integrate technology into new student orientation programs include providing email accounts to students on arrival to campus, emphasizing the importance of technology, virtual campus tours, and an on-line treasure hunt on the college website (Miller & Pope, 2003). In addition to orientation classes, intensive academic advising of At-risk students has also been incorporated as a component in comprehensive retention programs (Walleri, et al, 1997).

Learning communities and cohort groups offer structure and support as students integrate and engage in the educational process. Group interaction and group support provides an environment that encourages retention. A Coordinated Studies Program (CSP) was offered at Seattle Central Community College in Washington using interdisciplinary faculty involvement. Students and faculty meet in four- to six-hour blocks of time over two to four days, and the course activities include a variety of participatory assignments- lectures, discussions, guest speakers, films, and small- and large-group activities. Students who participated in the program spoke of their increased desire to continue their education as a result of the experience (Wild & Ebbers, 2002).

Crawford reported on an Extended Opportunities Programs and Services (EOP&S) program available in all 106 California community colleges that provides services that enhance persistence and academic achievements for low income, educationally disadvantaged students enrolled in the program. A sample of the services available are outreach/recruitment, orientation, registration, progress monitoring, basic skills instruction, child care, peer advising, financial aid grants, and single parenting support groups (Wild & Ebbers, 2002).

Culture-specific values and experiences many significantly contribute to individual learning preferences that students bring to the educational environment. Shaping the instructional climate of classrooms in a way that best benefits the individually and culturally influenced differences in learning styles, value systems and educational preferences of their student population holds special significance for community colleges (Szelenyi, 2001). Mentoring and freshmen orientation seminars are strategies that have been developed to create a supportive campus climate and are associated with increasing the persistence rates of minority students. Having a campus climate in which diversity is valued is an important factor contributing to the comfort and educational success of minority students on community college campuses (Szelenyi, 2001; Pope, 2002).

Zamani (2000) relates that student motivation and achievement are often influenced by the campus climate, therefore, "students of color are more likely to excel in institutional environments that are culturally diverse, programmatically inclusive, and supportive of multiple approaches to the acquisition of knowledge" (p. 99). The Puente Project in California sought to remedy the high dropout rate and low transfer rate of Hispanic community college students who were often first-generation college students, by bringing these students together with Hispanic counselors and mentors who could relate to their unique experiences. In this project, students' educational aspirations and cultural identity were celebrated, validated, and woven into the fabric of the programs to further their academic, personal, and professional development, which resulted in significant increases in retention rates and transfer rates (Zamani, 2000).

A useful strategy utilized by the community and technical colleges in Washington

State involved the development of a list of indicators to track students over time, which allows assessment of the types of programs that need to be developed and implemented to increase student retention rates. These indicators included: percent of degree-seeking students who attended four or more quarters in a two year period, percent of degree-seeking students who attend only one quarter and do not return in a two year period, percent of students who enroll in a developmental English or math course who progress to college-level English or math, credits taken by students compared to credits required to complete a course of study, percent of students graduating or completing within three years of initial enrollment, and hours completed by basic skills students (Wild & Ebbers, 2002).

According to Wild & Ebbers (2002), additional institutional strategies that can be utilized to maximize student retention include:

> 1) identification of a leader of the retention program who has a broad-based understanding of curriculum, student support, retention research, and a clear understanding of the retention goals of the college; 2) identification of a task force to develop and define retention goals and the retention plan, with membership from administration, faculty, academic advisors/counselors, learning support staff, and students; 3) determination of what data need to be collected to measure goal attainment; 4) conducting focus groups with students and support staff to determine what type of assistance will help retain students; 5) reviewing grant initiatives and determine if grants can be secured to support and enhance student-retention initiatives; 6) attending regional and national

> conferences to tap into networks that are working on retention in community colleges; 7) reviewing recruiting and admission processes and forms to determine if the information gathered provides a solid foundation for retention strategies; 8) reviewing admission and advising strategies affecting minority populations from the perspectives of retention and recruitment; 9) establishing an early-warning system that lets faculty notify counselors, advisors, or tutors to assist students who are having difficulty in class; 10) providing tutors in classes that typically have high percentages of students who have difficulties (p. 514).

Program initiatives have taken place statewide and at the institutional level to address minority recruitment and retention in Oklahoma. The State Regents for Higher Education and the institutional governing boards control several programs. "Pass through" programs provide grant monies directly to students or faculty members (Olson & Hagy, 1990).

Examples of these programs are the Minority Doctoral Study Grant Program, the Professional Degree Assistance Program, and the Postdoctoral Fellowship Program. The second type of programs channel monies to the institutions with specific directives for their use. Examples of these programs are Minority Institutional Incentive Awards provided by the state to institutions for increasing the enrollment of underrepresented minority students. Institutions that outreach and provide extension activities in areas with a significant number of underserved Black students, and institutions with selected minority recruiting and retention activities, counseling workshops, and financial aid information fairs are also examples in this category. The State Regents also set policy

eligibility guidelines for the in-state tuition waiver program, which has been modified several times to encourage more minority participation, and also includes a policy to reduce the out-of-state tuition liability for minority students attending Oklahoma educational institutions (Olson & Hagy, 1990).

A starting point for establishing a multicultural climate for an institution would be to develop a mission statement that expresses the institution's commitment to creating an institution where cultural diversity is recognized and valued through support of institution-wide diversity initiatives. North Seattle Community College developed the following mission statement in 1990, which could be used as a guide for other institutions (Kerlin, 1992):

> NSCC will create a climate that affirms and endorses our diversity:
>
> * by employing a staff that reflects the diversity of the students we serve;
> * by supporting a diversified English as a Second Language program;
> * by implementing multicultural and gender-balanced education throughout the curriculum;
> * by welcoming learning disabled and physically disabled students;
> * by supporting faculty/ staff development activities that will help us be effective with all students and ourselves;
> * by making the community aware that we welcome all students and consider our diversity a community resource (p. 3).

In order to develop multicultural competencies, administrators could participate in training provided by organizations such as the National Multicultural Institute (NMCI).

This organization was founded in 1983 and recognized the nation's need for new services, knowledge, and skills in the growing field of multiculturalism and diversity. NMCI's mission is to work with individuals, organizations, and communities in creating a society that is strengthened by its diversity. NMCI leads efforts to increase communication, understanding and respect among people of diverse backgrounds and addresses some of the important systemic issues of multiculturalism facing our society.

This training will assist the administrator to "build a culture that is empowered by differences, develop effective multicultural teams, recruit and retain a diverse workforce, resolve conflict between employers and employees, reduce employee turnover, promote employee productivity, and demonstrate compliance with emerging federal guidelines." (NMCI, 2005, p. 1).

Kee & Mahoney (1995) identified methods for fostering a multicultural climate in their book *"Multicultural Strategies for Community Colleges."* These strategies included increasing minority representation among administrators and faculty, developing leadership diversity in the college, investigating and improving racial attitudes on campus, and monitoring outcomes of various initiatives. Similar efforts could be directed towards increasing representation and leadership for administrators and faculty with a disability, and improving attitudes towards persons with disability in the institution.

Student retention has a very significant impact in the community college and the entire higher education arena, which involves accountability to the many stakeholders in higher education. The preceding literature review documents the impetus for the

numerous efforts that are being undertaken nationally and locally to enhance student retention in the community college setting.

### *Satisfaction*

There are many definitions of satisfaction that appear in the academic and business literature. Oliver (1997) stated that satisfaction is the consumer's fulfillment response. It is a judgment that a product or service feature, or the product or service itself, provided (or is providing) a pleasurable level of consumption-related fulfillment, including levels of under- or over-fulfillment. Solomon (1996) states that:

> Satisfaction or dissatisfaction is more than a reaction to the actual performance quality of a product or service. It is influenced by prior expectations regarding the level of quality. According to the expectancy disconfirmation model, consumers often form belief about product performance based upon prior experience with the product and/or upon communications about the product that imply a certain level of quality. When something performs the way we thought it would, we many not think much about it.
>
> If, on the other hand, something fails to live up to expectations, a negative affect may result. And, if performance happens to exceed our expectations, we are satisfied and pleased.

The Webster's New English Language Dictionary (2004) defines satisfaction as "being pleased because of what you do or what someone else does". Kotler and Clarke (1987) define satisfaction as:

> a state felt by a person who has experienced a performance or outcome

> that has fulfilled his or her expectations. Satisfaction is thus a function of relative levels of expectation and perceived performance...Expectations are formed on the basis of past experiences with the same or similar situations, statements made by friends and other associates, and statements made by the supplying organization.

Low (2000), vice-president of Noel-Levitz, Inc., states that students are seen as individuals with definite expectations about their campus experience, and that satisfaction with college occurs when the expectation is met or exceeded by an institution. The satisfaction rating obtained from the Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction Inventory (SSI) shows the degree to which the institution has met the expectation (the higher the score, the greater the satisfaction).

Student satisfaction is and should be an integral part of assessment and evaluation conducted in all higher education settings. The academic researcher or planner will need to modify a definition before proceeding any further in the analysis of student satisfaction (Hom, 2002).

### *Summary*

Students with LD represent yet another element of the complexity of student retention in the community college setting. This fact brings focus to the reality that student retention and educational goal attainment for LD students is an interconnected issue shared by DSSDs and the students with disabilities whom they serve. Exploring the experiences of LD students in the community college setting will allow for further understanding regarding how satisfied LD students are with DSSD services, and how

effective DSSD services are in facilitating retention and educational goal attainment for students with LD.

# CHAPTER THREE

## Methodology

The following research questions were formulated for this research study:

1. What are the experiences of LD students who attend the community college?
2. What are the goals identified by LD students who attend the community college?
3. What are factors identified by LD students that may negatively impact their continued enrollment in their community college?
4. To what extent do LD students perceive Disability Support Services Departments to be effective in assisting them to obtain their educational goals in the community college?
5. How satisfied are LD students with the Disability Support Services available at their community college?
6. How satisfied are LD students with the disability counselor(s) at their community college?
7. How do Disability Support Services Departments currently evaluate student satisfaction with their services in the community college?
8. What specific data are currently collected by Disability Support Services Departments regarding the progression and retention of LD students in the community college?

### *Research Approach and Design*

This concurrent mixed methods study utilized the Learning Disability Student Questionnaire (LDSQ) and the Disability Services Questionnaire (DSQ) to survey a sample of students attending the community college in the south central United States

who self-identified as having a learning disability, and disability support services counselors. Focus group interviews were also conducted with the LD students. A data sheet was utilized to obtain demographic data on the study participants. The following sections of this paper provide further information on the mixed methods research design, and outline the rationale for the selection of the research approach and design selected for this research study.

A concurrent mixed methods design was utilized in this study to better understand the experiences of students with LD in the community college via an exploration of their goals, issues, challenges and successes. A particular focus within this study was to examine the perceived effectiveness of Disability Support Services Department (DSSD) services and their impact on the progression and retention of students with LDs towards their educational goals.

The researcher utilized the four decision choices matrix of implementation, priority, integration, and theoretical perspective proposed by Creswell, et al (2003) to determine the mixed method strategy for the study. This matrix allows the researcher to determine the implementation sequence of quantitative and qualitative data collection, determine which data collection procedure will be given priority, determine the stage in the research project where the data and findings will be integrated, and determine if an overall theoretical perspective will be used in the study (Creswell, 2003).

The mixed methods design is useful to capture the best of both quantitative and qualitative approaches, and the collection of diverse types of data best provides an understanding of a research problem. The concept of mixing different methods probably originated in 1959, when Campbell and Fiske used multiple methods to study validity of

psychological traits. Others were encouraged to use their "multimethod matrix" to examine multiple approaches to data collection in a study. Soon approaches associated with field methods such as observations and interviews (qualitative data) were combined with traditional surveys (quantitative data). Researchers recognized that all methods have limitations, and felt that biases inherent in any single method could neutralize or cancel the biases of other methods. Triangulating data sources, which are a means for seeking convergence across qualitative and quantitative methods, were born (Creswell, 2003). Additional reasons for mixing different types of data emerged from the original concept of triangulation. The results obtained from one method can help develop or inform the other method, provide insight into different levels or units of analysis, or provide advocacy for marginalized groups (Creswell, 2003).

Concurrent triangulation procedures involve the researcher seeking to confirm, cross-validate, or corroborate findings within a single study. This model generally uses separate quantitative and qualitative methods as a means to offset the weaknesses inherent within one method with the strengths of the other method. Quantitative and qualitative data collection is concurrent, happening in one phase of the research study. Priority would ideally be equal between the two methods, but priority is typically given to either the quantitative or the qualitative approach. Integration of results for both methods is usually completed in the interpretation phase. The interpretation may either note convergence of the findings to strengthen the knowledge claims of the study or explain any lack of convergence that occurs (Creswell, 2003). The concurrent triangulation mixed methods model is familiar to most researchers and can result in well-validated and substantiated findings, and results in a shorter data collection time period

compared to the sequential approaches. A challenge related to the concurrent triangulation strategy is the effort and expertise needed to adequately study a phenomenon with two separate methods, which can also make the comparison of the results difficult when using data of different forms (Creswell, 2003).

The researcher wished to examine learning disabled students and disability counselors from two community colleges in the south central United States. The LDSQ and DSQ questionnaires enabled the researcher to obtain a sample from the target populations with minimal cost, and the interval level data is suitable for analysis via the SPSS computer software. The researcher conducted a focus group interview with the LD students from each community college to verify results obtained on the LDSQ questionnaire. The students would perhaps be more likely to share their responses openly with the researcher during a focus group interview session due to the relaxed group setting, rather than in a one to one personal interview session. Use of the focus group interview would allow for the collection of rich, in-depth data from the students (Vaughn, Schumm, & Sinagub, 1996).

A mixed methods design would allow for better understanding of the experiences of learning disabled students in the community college setting, and the perceived effectiveness of DSSD services in the progression, retention, and educational outcomes for these students via triangulation of the quantitative data from the surveys and the detailed qualitative data from the focus group interviews (Creswell, 2003).

*Surveys & Interviews*

The survey is a research technique in which data is gathered by asking questions of a group of individuals called respondents, and is a research method that is widely used

in sociology, business, political science, government, and education (Ary, Jacobs, & Razavieh, 2002). Survey research is the branch of research that examines the characteristics, behaviors, attitudes, and intentions of a group of people by asking individuals belonging to that group to answer a series of questions. Survey research is an extremely flexible research approach and, therefore, is "quite diversified with respect to populations studied, scope, content, and purpose" (Polit & Hungler, 1991, p. 217).

Utilization of questionnaires is one method in which data are gathered in survey research, and the following approaches may be utilized to collect data: personal interview, telephone interview, mailed questionnaire, and directly administered questionnaire (Ary, et al, 2002; Gall, et al, 2003). The most powerful method of securing survey information is through personal interviews, the method in which interviewers meet with individuals' face-to-face and secure information from them. In most cases the interviewer will use a carefully developed set of questions, referred to as an interview schedule (Polit & Hungler, 1991).

The personal interview is advantageous because it encourages cooperation, which results in higher response rates and a better quality of data (Polit & Hungler, 1991; Gall, et al, 2003). The disadvantages of personal interviews include cost, and interviewer bias which occurs when the interviewer's own feelings and attitudes or the interviewer's gender, race, age, and other characteristics influence the way questions are asked or interpreted. Social desirability bias may also be a problem in which respondents want to please the interviewer by giving socially acceptable responses, one's that they would not necessarily give on an anonymous questionnaire (Ary, et al, 2002).

Telephone interviews have become more popular, and recent studies indicate that

it compares favorably with face-to-face interviews. The telephone permits the survey to reach people who perhaps would not open their doors to an interviewer, but who might be willing to talk on the telephone (Ary, et al, 2002). Telephone interviews are less costly, but often are a less effective method of gathering survey information, particularly when detailed or sensitive information is needed from respondents (Polit & Hungler, 1991; Gall, et al, 2003). Another disadvantage of this method is that households without telephones and those with unlisted numbers are automatically excluded from the survey, which may bias results (Ary, et al, 2002).

Mailed questionnaires have the advantage of guaranteeing confidentiality or anonymity, and perhaps eliciting more truthful responses than would be obtained with a personal interview. It is possible to include a larger number of subjects in more diverse locations than would be practical with the interview, and are more efficient in regards to costs and time. A disadvantage of the mailed questionnaire is the possibility of respondents misinterpreting the questions. The reading levels and writing ability can differ among respondents, which may affect the questionnaire return rate. A response rate of 75-90 percent is a reasonable expectation in a questionnaire study (Ary, et al, 2002).

Electronic mail (e-mail) surveys are becoming more popular. The advantages of e-mail surveys include prompter returns, lower item nonresponse, and more complete answers to open-ended questions. The main disadvantage is that not everyone has an e-mail address. E-mail surveys have been used most successfully on college campuses with faculty and students, with companies and their employees, or with other populations having universal e-mail access. According to Ary (2002), Dillman suggests combining e-

mail and regular mail surveys for a maximum return rate. Research shows that some of the factors found to be important for regular mail surveys are also important in e-mail surveys. For example, people who received a prior e-mail notification about the upcoming survey were more likely to respond. "E-mail surveys addressed individually to a person (rather than being part of a mailing list) had higher response rates." (Ary, et al, 2002, p. 385).

A large sample of respondents can be obtained via directly administered surveys. The main advantage of directly administering questionnaires is the high response rate, which typically reaches 100 percent. Another advantage is low cost and the fact that the researcher is present to give assistance or to answer any questions. The disadvantage is that the researcher is usually restricted in terms of where and when the questionnaire can be administered (Ary, et al, 2002).

*Focus Groups*

Focus groups have been defined by Beck, Trombetta, and Share as "an informal discussion among selected individuals about specific topics relevant to the situation at hand" (Vaughn, et al, 1996). Usage of focus groups is increasing across disciplines, including education, psychology, marketing, business, health, and communication. The major assumption of focus groups is that a permissive atmosphere that fosters a range of opinions, will result in a more complete and revealing understanding of the issues. The goal of focus group interviews is to create a candid, normal conversation that addresses, in depth, the selected topic (Vaughn, et al, 1996).

Focus groups have become popular as a data-gathering tool in qualitative research. A focus group, which is like a group interview, typically centers on a particular

issue; and the trained interviewer elicits the views of the group members while noting interactions within the group. Focus groups are helpful because they bring several different perspectives together. The researcher gains insight into how the participants are thinking and why they are thinking as they do. Focus groups also make more economical use of time and money than do individual interviews (Ary, et al, 2002). Focus groups usually consist of a group of 6-15 people assembled for a group discussion, led by an interviewer who is guided by a written series of questions or topics to be covered. The group should be small enough that everyone can take part in the discussion, but large enough to provide diversity in perspective. Focus-group discussions usually need to last at least one or two hours (Ary, et al, 2002; Gall, et al, 2003; Polit & Hungler, 1991; & Vaughn, et al, 1996).

*The Settings*

The locations for this study were two community colleges in the south central United States. Both campuses had the busy hustle and bustle that exists as students converse and socialize during changes between classes, and the relative calm that is present when classes are in session. There was a respectful quietness in the hallways, with much more sociable and audible interactions observed in the common areas in buildings and on the grounds of each campus.

*College A.*

College A is visible from the highway and has a very stately presence in the horizon of this part of the small rural city in which it is located, and there is a hospital located a short distance away from the college on the opposite side of the highway. The college's buildings have a very modern appearance with red brick used for the exterior

buildings. The parking lots surround the twelve campus buildings, which are generally situated in the center of the campus. Two buildings are slightly separated from the main cluster of buildings by two ponds on the campus' grounds, one of these buildings is a residence hall with forty-six units. There is a third building that is located across the street from the main cluster of campus buildings, which is also a residence hall with forty-four units.

The close proximity of the parking lots shortened the walking distance to each building on the campus. There are several small businesses on the streets across from the campus, as well as some older homes. The highway is a well-traveled road with a moderately heavy traffic flow.

The campus has well maintained lawns and exteriors, and the décor in each building is also very modern. Each building has displays of lively wall art, art pieces, awards, informational bulletin boards, and pictures of former students and administrators on the walls. There are computers available for student use in the Student Services area of the Administration building. Several facilities are available for use by enrolled students for recreational pursuits. Located in the gymnasium are an indoor swimming pool, weight room, sauna, steam room and racquetball court for student use when classes which utilize these facilities are not in session. On the south side of the campus are four lighted tennis courts, which are available to students for day and evening play. For indoor fun and enjoyment, the Student Union provides a television, video games, pool tables and a ping-pong table. The facilities appear to be large enough to meet student needs, from food to recreation and library services.

The counselor had allowed the use her office for the focus group meeting. Chairs

were arranged in a half circle in front of the desk that the researcher used. This seemed to help make the environment a little cozier. The office door was also closed when the focus group questions began to block out noise from the common area/ waiting area of the adjoining office spaces.

*College B.*

College B is located on a busy interstate highway near the metropolitan area of a large city. This college offers more degree programs and non-credit courses than are offered at College A, and has a larger enrollment due to its location, and perhaps due to enrollment of members of the U. S. military from a nearby military base. The campus consists of twenty-one white bricked buildings on approximately one hundred and sixteen acres of land . Due to the layout of the campus, one must either drive his or her automobile across campus to other buildings, or some of the more fitness-minded people simply walk across campus. The health sciences building is one of the buildings that sits closest to a major interstate highway, and there is approximately a quarter mile walk from this building to the administration building that is in the center of the campus.

The grounds were well maintained and a fountain is located in the center of the campus near the Student Center, which housed a bookstore, food court, cafe, cyber cafe for laptop computer usage, and a lounge/recreational area with pool tables. Many of the common areas of the buildings had plants, either artificial or real. The décor ranged from well appointed furnishings with leather seating and upscale décor in upper administrative offices, to blue-gray colored modular furnishings for most of the other campus offices. There is a large performing arts and communication center located in the center of the campus that is used for student events and community events, and many community

organizations utilize conference rooms in the student center for scheduled meetings and other functions.

A room was reserved in the Learning Resources Center for the focus group meeting. There was an oval conference table in the center of the room, and the chairs were comfortable. The door was closed during the time of the focus group interview to block out any potential distraction from other people who were utilizing the learning resources center.

### *Population and Sample*

A non-random sample of students (N=10) who self-identified as having an LD, and disability support services counselors (N=2) was obtained from two community colleges selected from a population of fourteen community colleges located in one state in the south central United States. College A is a rural institution that reported an unduplicated headcount enrollment of 3,052 students for Fall 2006. College B is an urban institution that reported an unduplicated headcount enrollment of 8,316 students for Fall 2006. College A currently has a federal Student Support Services Grant, while College B does not.

#### *General Sample Characteristics*

There were three female students and one male student participating from College A, and there were four female students and two male students participating from College B, for a total of females (n=7) and males (n=3). The mean age of the students from College A was 26.8 years, with a range of 19 to 40 years. The mean age of the students from College B was 24.3 years, with a range of 19 to 36 years. The racial characteristics of the student participants were African-American (20%) and Caucasian (80%). All

student participants are referred to by pseudonyms, and summaries of the student participants are provided in Appendix J.

All of the students from College A were enrolled full-time and the mean grade point average (GPA) of these students was 3.13, with a range of 3.0 to 3.4. Only one student from College B was enrolled full-time and the mean GPA of these students was 2.98, with a range of 1.95 to 4.0. One student from College A and three students from College B were completing their first semester of college, and two students at College A had completed four semesters of college. No calculated college GPA was available for one student from College A and for three students from College B who were completing their first semester of college. One student from College B indicated that she had a "C average", but gave no numerical value that could be included in GPA averaging.

The majors indicated by the students from College A were child development, law, ministry and psychology, and nursing. The majors indicated by the students from College B were education, business, social work, criminal justice, and psychology with one student indicating he was undecided. The students from both colleges reported using a variety of the services available via the DSSDs (Table 1).

Table 1:

Disability Support Services Utilized by Students by College

---

_A, B_ Disability support services office

_A, B_ Tutoring

_A, B_ Alternative exam format/ extra time

_A__ Textbooks on tape

_A___ Registration assistance

_B___ Counseling (personal)

_A, B_ Learning center lab

_A, B_ Note takers/scribes/readers

_A, B_ Disability benefits counseling (e.g., Vocational Rehab. services, SSI, SSDI, Medicare)

_A, B_ Other (Specify): Tape recorder

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*Note: A = College A; B = College B

Learning disabilities represented the largest category of reported disabilities for both colleges, as was reported in the literature. College A had twenty LD students registered for DSSD services in Fall 2006, out of a total of 38 students with any disability who registered with the DSSD (52.6%). This was a slightly lower percentage of LD students than were registered in the Spring 2006 semester (62.9%). College B reported twenty-seven LD students registered for DSSD services for Fall 2006, out of a total of 65 students with any disability who registered with the DSSD (41.5%). This was a slightly lower percentage of LD students than were registered in the Spring 2006 semester (54.8%) (Table 2).

Table 2:

Percentage of LD Category Students out of Total Disability Categories Registered with DSSD

| | Spring 2006 | Fall 2006 |
|---|---|---|
| College A | 62.9% | 52.6% |
| College B | 54.8% | 41.5% |

Both colleges offered similar support services or accommodations to LD students and other disabled students (Table 3). Students reported visiting the DSSD at least once a semester to initiate accommodations, and return as needed throughout the semester when any particular issue may need to be addressed with the counselor. The counselor from College A responded, "highly effective" and the counselor from College B responded, "slightly effective" to two items on the DSQ survey which asked, *"*Do you feel your disability support services department has effective services and adequate resources for LD students? and for disabled students?"

Table 3

Support Services and Accommodations Able to Meet the Needs of Students with Disabilities by College

| | |
|---|---|
| _A, B_ Disability support services office | _B_ Textbooks on tape |
| _A, B_ Tutoring | _A, B_ Note takers/scribes/readers |
| _A_ Disability resource handbook | _A, B_ Alternative exam format/extra time |
| _A_ Special orientation | _A_ Course substitution or waiver |
| _A, B_ Registration assistance | _B_ Career counseling |
| _B_ Emergency evacuation | _B_ Study skills training |
| _B_ Job-seeking skills training | _B_ Self-advocacy training |
| _B_ Job placement | _A, B_ Transfer assistance |
| _A, B_ Counseling (personal) | _B_ Adapted sports/ physical education |
| _A, B_ Interpreters (sign language) | A, B Adaptive equipment and technology (e.g., assistive listening devices, talking computers) |
| _B (referrals)_ Disability benefits counseling (e.g., Vocational Rehab. services, SSI, SSDI, Medicare, Medicaid) | |

*Note: A = College A; B = College B

The disability support services counselors participating in the study were both female, and had been functioning in their roles an average of 3.3 years. The counselor

from College A is Native American, and holds a Bachelor's and Master's degree in counseling.

The counselor from College B is Caucasian, holds a Master's degree in education, and is a licensed professional counselor. The counselor from College A was primarily an academic counselor and also functioned as the ADA coordinator for overload pay. The counselor from College B functioned as the disability coordinator, as well as in the role of academic counselor. Both counselors had many years of experience as academic advisors prior to assuming their current responsibilities, and both participate extensively in continuing education offerings and professional organizations.

Each counselor reported utilization of several methods to assist faculty and staff in working with students with disabilities such as: 1) faculty/staff handbook; 2) workshops and presentations to faculty groups; 3) one-on-one discussions with faculty/ staff who request information or assistance; and 4) information resources (e.g., books, videotapes) available for faculty/staff use. College A does not utilize annual mailings to faculty/staff, and College B does not utilize a faculty/staff handbook, but does utilize a bi-monthly article in the Learning Resources Center's Connections Newsletter.

*Instrument*

This study utilized the Learning Disability Student Questionnaire (LDSQ) and the Disability Services Questionnaire (DSQ) to gather data from the students who self-identified as having a learning disability (LD), and disability support services counselors (Appendices E and H). The LDSQ and DSQ consist of 13 and 14 questions respectively, and are designed to obtain information regarding LD student experiences and the perceptions of these students and disability services counselors. Three items on the

LDSQ and two items on the DSQ utilize a Likert scale of 1 – 5 to determine perceived levels of effectiveness and satisfaction, with 1 = not effective/ not satisfied, 2 = slightly ineffective/ slightly unsatisfied, 3 = neutral, 4 = slightly effective/ slightly satisfied, and 5 = highly effective/ highly satisfied. The remaining questionnaire items require completion of a checklist of items, or fill in the blank responses.

The survey instruments were developed by the researcher after review of the literature including surveys produced by the AACC, ACE, ACT, and USDE-NCES. Both tools were examined by the faculty of the Adult and Higher Education Department in the Graduate College of Education at the University of Oklahoma to determine clarity and face/ content validity.

Additionally, a series of questions were asked of the LD students who participated in the focus group sessions (Appendix I). The sessions were audio recorded and the participants were allowed to elaborate as much as they wished on all of the questions.

### *Procedure for Data Collection*

Approval to conduct this study was obtained from the Institutional Review Board of the University of Oklahoma prior to data collection (Appendix A). Permission was also obtained from the appropriate authority from each community college included in the study.

A letter of introduction (Appendix F) and a consent form (Appendix B) was sent via United States postal mail service to the disability support services counselors at each community college, along with the demographic data sheet (Appendix G) and DSQ instrument. The letter of introduction asked each counselor to complete the consent form, demographic data sheet, DSQ survey, and to mail the information packets provided

to students attending their institution who had self-identified as having a LD in the current academic term (Fall 2006). The counselors were instructed to return their completed forms via the self-addressed stamped envelope provided for them within two weeks of receipt. A reminder e-mail was sent to the counselor if the survey information was not returned within the two week time frame.

Information packets for the LD students contained a letter of introduction (Appendix C) and two consent forms (Appendix B). These forms were sent by the counselor to the LD students via United States postal mail service. A number was assigned and placed on each consent form as a method of tracking returned forms.

Students responding via United States postal mail were instructed to keep one of the two consent forms provided for their records, and to return the second consent form via the self-addressed stamped envelope provided for them within two weeks of receipt. Students were also asked to indicate on their consent form if they would agree to participate in a focus group interview session with approximately four to eight students at their institution.

If adequate response was not obtained with the first mailing, reminder post-cards were sent to those students who did not return the consent form within a two week time frame. The postcards were assigned a number that correlated with the same number assigned to the consent form. The reminder postcards were pre-stamped for U.S. Postal mailing and included in the packets mailed to the counselors. The counselors were contacted via telephone and instructed to mail postcards to the students, identified by number only, who had not returned their consent form within the two week period specified. The demographic data sheet (Appendix D) and LDSQ questionnaire were

completed by the students at the beginning of the focus group session, and students were also informed that they would be paid $20.00 in cash upon completion of the focus group session.

*Data Analysis*

Once the questionnaires were completed and focus group data was transcribed, the data was prepared for analysis using the SPSS and NUDIST computer software analysis systems. The following techniques were utilized in the analysis of the research questions:

Question 1: What are the experiences of LD students who attend the community college? Analysis was conducted via utilization of the NUDIST computer software analysis system for the focus group data.

Question 2: What are the goals identified by LD students who attend the community college? Analysis was conducted via compilation of goals identified on the LDSQ survey form, and in the focus groups.

Question 3: What are factors identified by LD students that may negatively impact their continued enrollment in the community college? Analysis was conducted via examination of responses provided in the focus groups.

Question 4: To what extent do LD students perceive Disability Support Services Departments to be effective in assisting them to obtain their educational goals? Analysis was conducted via computation of Likert scale average from the LDSQ survey form, and examination of responses provided in the focus groups.

Question 5: How satisfied are LD students with the Disability Support Services available at their institution? Analysis was conducted via computation of Likert scale average from the LDSQ survey form.

Question 6: How satisfied are LD students with the disability counselor(s) at their institution? Analysis was conducted via computation of Likert scale average from the LDSQ survey form, and examination of responses provided in the focus groups.

Question 7: How do Disability Support Services Departments currently evaluate student satisfaction with their services in the community college? Analysis was conducted via compilation of evaluation methods currently in use at each institution.

Question 8: What specific data are currently collected by Disability Support Services Departments regarding the progression and retention of LD students in the community college? Analysis was conducted via compilation of progression and retention data currently collected at each institution.

Descriptive statistics were utilized to analyze data obtained from the demographic data sheet and the remaining questionnaire items. Focus group interview data was summarized and focused on the major themes presented by the students who participated in the focus groups. Triangulation and rich, thick description were techniques implemented to check the accuracy of findings, and safeguard the validity of the data.

### *Limitations and Delimitations*

A small, non-random sample was utilized for this study. The small sample size and lack of randomization in sample selection limit the generalizability of the results to other populations. The reliability of the results depends upon the truthfulness of the

participants. Use of one coder may potentially affect the validity of the qualitative analysis.

The research study participants were obtained from two community colleges in the state of Oklahoma. Student participants under age 18 or over age 65 were excluded from the study, and only those students who had self-identified as having a learning disability were included in the study. While it would have been informative to include participants from more community college campuses and from other states, this expansion was not feasible given the time and cost constraints of the researcher.

### *Welfare*

This study was completed after the Institutional Review Board of the University of Oklahoma granted its approval. Students participating in focus group interviews were identified by pseudonyms assigned by the researcher. All audio tapes, focus group interview transcripts, and survey questionnaires were kept in a securely locked place, and only the researcher had access to them. Electronic data was password protected, and only the researcher had the access code. Only the researcher had control and access to the data. All data remained confidential and will be destroyed after data analysis. All data will be kept intact for the three year period specified by the IRB, and will be destroyed after data analysis is completed.

Study participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time without risk and that participation was voluntary. The consent form addressed confidentiality, direct benefits, and rights of study participants. Study participants were given a telephone number to contact the investigator if they had any questions regarding

the research study, and the phone number of the Office of Research at the University of Oklahoma in Norman, Oklahoma.

# CHAPTER FOUR

## Results

This research study sought to find out more about the experiences of students with learning disabilities who attend the community college. A particular focus of the study was to examine the perceptions of LD students regarding the effectiveness of the DSSD services in assisting them to achieve their educational goals, as well as to determine their satisfaction with the services provided by the DSSDs. Utilization of quantitative methods was very helpful for the quantification of student responses on the LDSQ questionnaire. The addition of qualitative methodology enriched the study findings by allowing for further understanding of the LD student experiences through the use of focus groups.

The remainder of this chapter will focus on answering each of the research questions that were formulated for the study. The researcher will allow the student participant's voices to speak regarding their particular experiences and thoughts, and will also provide interpretive comments on the information. The chapter will conclude with a discussion of the themes that emerged from the study data.

### *Research Questions*

*Research Question 1: What are the experiences of LD students who attend the community college?*

The intent of this question was to allow the LD students to have a broad opening wherein they could express any positive or negative experiences that they had encountered while attending the community college. The specific focus group question was, "Describe the experiences, positive or negative, that you've encountered as an LD

student at this college." There could be no better resource than hearing a first person account from the student.

Karen is a student attending College A, and she was the oldest student participating in the focus group session. During the session, she was noted to be very thoughtful before answering each question. She was also very focused on her goal of becoming a child development specialist. Karen had a very positive outlook regarding her experiences. Her conversation focused on her strengths and the help that was available to her. She shared the following thoughts:

> I've discovered that a lot of the teachers will take their time to work with you and they'll see your strengths and help you see what your strengths are. And how to go about when you take different teachers, and find out that you can use a tape player and different things to help you through your education.

Paula is another student attending College A. She was the youngest focus group participant, and had a very spirited personality. Paula's mother is an attorney and she also desires to pursue a law degree. Paula concurred with Karen's observations regarding the help that the teachers provide at the college, and offered the following comments:

> I really like the teachers here they work with you, but not only that but most colleges how can I say it – most colleges don't let their disability kids stand out as much I think. At this college I'm vice president of student government, so they let me stand out here a lot more. They also help other learning disability kids with that, we're trying to start a program right now. It seems like my high school and another college I help out at

in a nearby town, aren't as good because sometimes disability kids hold back and they don't know how to become friends with people, but this college actually has organizations that you can get involved in even if you have a disability.

They're not afraid to let their disability kids come out and become something.

Carol concurred with Paula's statement and felt that the college let them be more involved in what was happening on the campus. Carol was a few years older than Paula, was married and had two young children. This was her first semester of college and she initially seemed to be just a little more hesitant to speak compared to the other members of the group. As the session continued, she appeared more comfortable and spoke more freely.

David was the fourth member of the focus group held at College A. He was happy that he received extended time to take his tests. He also commented that a negative for him was that he was sometimes unable to copy down his notes quickly. When asked if he used a note taker, as he had indicated on his LDSQ form, he replied, "Yes, and that helps."

All of the students from College A related positive experiences in the focus group. As a whole, they all seemed to be generally content with their academic environment as was evident from their comments. The students attending College B also had some positive experiences to share, along with some negative experiences.

Rachel, Michael, Stacey and Andrea were complimentary of the tutoring provided at College B, and of the tutoring staff. Rachel and Michael were attending their first

semester of college. It was fortunate to have these new, beginning students in the group to perhaps provide a contrast to those students who had been attending the college for a longer span of time.

Michael was the youngest of the participants, and related that he had trouble speaking and writing. He expressed concern that he was in a "low math class, algebra", and that he was having a "hard time in it" and did not know if he would be able to pass. When questioned regarding the use of a tutor, Michael related that he had a tutor at first and was doing fine. He was told by the tutor that he did not need to return. Michael said the work was getting harder now. This seemed to be a little odd that the tutor would basically dismiss the student. The researcher inquired about the opportunity to return to get assistance from the tutor, to which Michael replied, "Well, most of the work is done on-line now and I get my younger brother to help me. He is one year younger than me." Michael lets his brother play with his computer games and as a trade-off, he helps him with his math.

Although the math course was mostly "on-line", this fact would not preclude the student from seeking out a tutor in person if he or she still felt that they needed additional help. Perhaps Michael did not feel comfortable seeking out the tutor again, or it may have been simply more convenient for him to work with his brother at home. The on-line learning environment may have been more difficult for Michael due to his particular learning disability. Perhaps each of these elements was at play.

James had completed two semesters at College B. He indicated that he was a business major, and he actually dressed the part with a business casual wardrobe. James was well-spoken and used hand gestures along with animated facial expressions at times

as he spoke. James related instances when there were difficulties with a testing location, a computer software program, and a professor who suspected students of cheating:

> I had one class, accounting procedures, where it was all software-based programs and there was no way for accommodation, so while technically I could use them the problem was the other room they put me in was not isolated and the other students that were in there if they happened to be a talkative bunch then it really didn't benefit me that much after that time. So I just took tests with the rest of the class because there wasn't any other viable space. So with certain software there's no way to help.
>
> I do get extra time but the software wasn't designed to have extended time, so [the teacher said] 'we'll just move you to another room' which was okay. Then the next semester I didn't really try it again asking for extended time even though I could have, and I've just really started using it a lot this semester and I've been enjoying it a lot. The other professors are willing to work with you.

In this instance, James went through the proper procedures to obtain accommodations, yet there was a problem with the facilities that were available, as well as limitations presented by the computer software program, and the attitude of the professor. A quiet place and additional time for testing were the accommodations that James required, but it appears that these two things were not consistently present for him.

The computer software is yet another issue. Where would one begin to attempt to address this concern? If the manufacturer set the [business] software to perform in a

certain manner, then perhaps as James stated “with certain software there’s no way to help." James was understandably frustrated by the situation, yet he pressed ahead and did the best he could with the accommodations that were present. This negative situation may have been avoided if the professor had made an alternate testing format available for James, or at least have been open to exploring other options.

James also spoke of a professor who discovered that a student was having another student take his tests in the alternate testing center [in the Learning Resources Center]. According to James, this professor has “always been very leery of doing it [using the testing center] anyway.” James understood that the professor scheduled his tests so that they coincided with his class period to “thwart cheating”, but was upset that if he had another class starting within 20 minutes after taking his extended testing time, then he would really have to hurry to avoid being late for his other classes. James lamented, “Some teachers will let you take the test before everyone or after everyone else but there is no standard. But it’s the procedures, there is no standard technically.”

In this situation, there needed to be a balance between meeting the LD student’s accommodation needs and preventing dishonest students from taking advantage of the alternate testing structure. Perhaps procedural changes could have been instituted at the testing center, if the professor had followed up on the cheating incident. A solution such as this would allow adequate testing time for the LD student as well as maintain test security. The DSSD counselor may have been able to assist with resolution of this issue, had it been brought to her attention.

Stacey also attended College B, and she spoke of her feelings of dismay that one particular professor did not seem to understand why she was attending college if her

reading level was not at a higher level. The frustration she felt was apparent as she talked about her experiences:

> Some professors don't understand students with disabilities because they expect more of the student. I had to take reading with this one professor and it was so hard for me to understand her because she wasn't the kind of teacher ... [pauses] I needed one on one, even though I did everything in the class she was more hard on me than what she was on the other students and I had to sit down and tell her that I have a learning disability and I read at a 4th grade level and she said "well what are you doing in college?" and I said I'm here to learn and I'm here to get a degree. Even though I am a student with a disability you shouldn't be hard on me because I don't read at a certain level and she said "college students should read at a 13 level." Well I don't read at a 13 level, I've been tested and it's still going to tell you that I read at a 4th grade level.
>
> If I can accept it why can't you accept it?

Stacey was shaking her head side to side as she recounted this intense exchange between herself and a reading teacher. The researcher was in disbelief that a professor, especially one who taught the developmental reading courses, would have such a poor attitude and low regard for a student. This is clearly an example of what Prentice (2002) referred to, teachers in the community college with little exposure to disability which can result in disabled persons feeling misunderstood in an academic setting.

Stacey stated that this particular reading teacher was going to flunk her, so she dropped out of the class. Stacey enrolled in a different community college and took a

reading class there. After she spoke with the teacher regarding her reading level, Stacey happily stated “she understood me and helped me. I did all my work and I passed her class with a C, so I don’t have to take reading anymore.” Stacey was smiling and her tone of voice reflected a sense of accomplishment and pride.

Stacey also mentioned that she had just found out that her twenty year-old son read at a 3rd grade level. She said she was not upset that he reads at that level because “something in our brain doesn’t function right or we have a chemical imbalance in our heads telling us you can’t learn this it takes time for you to learn." The Learning Disability Association (2005) does report that LD is “a chronic condition of presumed neurological origin." The National Center for Learning Disabilities (2005) states that LDs often run in families, and that it is not uncommon to find that people with LD have parents or other relatives with similar difficulties.

Andrea, who also attends College B, had by far the most negative experiences and perceptions compared to the other students who participated in the focus groups. She also takes classes at a local 4-year college, and had many experiences to relate:

> The accommodations for special needs students are not here at college like they are in K-12. This is at both campuses, 2-year and 4-year. I'm a good student I work hard, I don't mind going to school and doing my assignments and my attendance is excellent so I did quite well in grade school and high school. It's not fair, I don't think I would have been in college this long [ten years] if the accommodations had been here where they would have a teacher that specialized in special needs for each subject area.

> They have a person who is responsible for special needs in the school setting but the accommodations aren't there. It's a whole different ball game in college, they look at you as just an average student. I've had some teachers where the teachers may not have time to put in with you if you aren't understanding something. They may sit and talk with you but you can tell that they're getting kind of frustrated too if you're not catching on.

These comments prompted the researcher to inquire whether or not Andrea utilized a tutor, and Andrea responded:

> Yes, I have a tutor. The first day of the semester I get the paperwork from the counselor. I do this at my 4-year college too. It's just that when it comes to the teacher it's more of if you want to ask questions of the teacher, I understand that they can't stay in the chapter as long as I need them to. When it comes to the teacher trying to help you in a subject it's like they don't know how to help you. The tutors are fine but when you want to talk to the teacher one on one, I've had some teachers here when I was taking one of the courses here who said that he 'didn't give more time'. I had the paperwork that showed that I needed more time and he said that he 'doesn't do that'.

Andrea did not return to speak with the disability counselor when this incident occurred. It is unclear why Andrea did not follow-up with the disability counselor, perhaps she believed that the teacher could elect not to accommodate her if he so desired. She continued on to describe several of her other experiences also:

> One psychology course I was in [a positive experience], he was a nice guy though. I have lots of classmates who are special needs and if they feel like they don't have that support they drop out and they get frustrated. You feel like you're working hard and you may take an hour to study and I may take an hour and a half depending on the subject.... and they [professors] label you even though they say they don't they do, I've been in college for ten years and I've seen it I've already experienced it so I know that's what they do.

Andrea said she did have some good teachers that understood the situation and asked, 'How can I help you?' and said 'I don't understand what special needs is could you explain to me what it is?' She stated that some teachers are real honest, and although their kids weren't special needs, they weren't special needs, nor their husbands or wives, she wondered "how can they accommodate you?" Andrea said she had some good professors that understood the situation and some that "just don't care." She related that some of the professor's attitudes were "it's your problem, if you don't get it 'oh well'".

This was discouraging for Andrea. She felt that if you do work hard and don't catch on to a lot of things, then the professors would just look at you as if you have to take the course four or five times. Andrea stated, "I don't have time for that I've been in school a long time, but I'm willing to do whatever it takes to finish." She further commented:

> I hear what they are saying to me but when I go to certain classrooms and they look at me as if they don't know what it is [the accommodations letter from the disability counselor] or they blow it off to

the side, and you're constantly in their face a lot showing them that you're doing whatever it takes and they come off as 'if you get it you get it and if you don't you don't'.

Andrea shared so many experiences, and the majority were negative ones. She seemed to be glad to get these feelings off of her chest, and out in the open. She was unhappy with her lack of progress over the years. When asked if she felt that the professors cannot relate to her as an LD student? Andrea responded:

> Yes. I don't think they can relate, I think that's what it is. I don't think they do things like that to try to be cold to you they just don't know how to accommodate. I just feel that's what it is and I think if they could get teachers at each college to accommodate special needs students only, I think a lot of special needs students would stay in college and finish college and not drop out and make excuses for themselves. I have some co- workers that do that – they ask 'you're going to stay in there that long?' And I say yes I'm going to do whatever it takes, I've been in here this long I may as well stay.

Andrea's experience is a stark contrast from her classmate Jane who was completing her first semester of college. Jane stated that she had had all positive experiences while attending college B. She remarked, "I haven't had a negative experience yet." Michael is also completing his first semester of college, and spoke of the staff in the tutoring office of College B as "nice, friendly, and cooperative."

The majority of the students had positive experiences as LD students attending the community college; however, there were instances wherein the students were frustrated

or upset by situations that occurred as they pursued their studies. Those students who were attending their first semester of college had more positive experiences when compared to students who had been attending college for a longer period of time.

With more time in the community college educational setting, students have more opportunity to interact with a variety of individuals. Many of the professors and staff were reportedly helpful at both of these colleges; whereas some were very insensitive to the needs and concerns of the LD students. Chelberg, et al (1998) and Prentice (2002) speak of the attitudinal environment as being an important aspect with regard to the educational environment for students with disabilities.

According to Growe, et al (2001), administrators must create a learning environment in which students from diverse racial, ethnic, and social groups believe that they are heard, are valued, and experience respect, belonging and encouragement. And Molnar (1993) quoting Tinto, states, "showing concern for the education of students and their integration in the social and intellectual life of the institution appear to be the two most important principles of successful retention programs." It is imperative that faculty, staff, and administrators facilitate an environment that is supportive of LD students. Without this environment, LD students will be more likely not to continue their education in the community college setting.

*Research Question 2: What are the goals identified by LD students who attend the community college?*

This question sought to determine the goals indicated by the LD students who chose to attend the community college to pursue their education. This information was elicited by asking the focus group participants, "What were some of your reasons or

goals for entering a 2-year college to pursue your education?" A majority of students with disabilities have turned to two-year colleges for their educational needs (Prentice, 2002). As cited by Cohen and Brawer (2003) and the Truman Commission (Brint & Karabel, 1998), the community college flourished as society wanted more social equality, which would be enhanced if more people had access to higher education. Education was perceived to be an avenue of upward mobility, and community colleges opened the doors of higher education to include more people than just the children of the wealthy.

The U.S. Department of Education reported that non-traditional students return to college for various reasons such as career mobility, job security, increasing income to support their family's needs, or to expand their knowledge base (USDE, 1993). The students participating in this study also reported a variety of goals or reasons for attending the community college.

Obtaining an Associate's degree was the most frequent goal listed (70%) by the students responding to the LDSQ questionnaire, and by three of the students in the focus groups. Forty percent of the students indicated that their goals also included transfer to a 4-year college on the LDSQ. Other goals indicated on the LDSQ were to: update job-related skills (10%), obtain a certificate (10%), take courses for self-improvement/ personal enjoyment (20%), and complete a course at the college because it was offered at a time that fit into their schedule (10%). One student from College B indicated that he had no definite purpose in mind.

When describing their reasons or goals in their own words rather than from a preset checklist of items, there were more unique responses from the students. Karen and Carol both stated their goals were to further their education so that they can get a better

job. David's goals were to "get an education in religion to learn what I need to know about the ministry so that I can get my ministry license, and to further my education and get my Associate's degree." James cited "lower tuition rates" as his reason for attending a 2-year college, and Michael stated "it's very close to home and easy for me to get to school."

When responding to the LDSQ survey item, "What were your reasons for selecting this particular 2-year college?" half of the students in the focus groups stated that they chose to attend their 2-year college in particular because of its proximity to their home. Paula, Rachel, and James stated that their college had been recommended by friends or neighbors. Stacey commented:

> This college was my first choice even though it was not closer to my home. I picked here because there are more Black students here. I think this college is a good one for me even though I had gone to another college for a year and it was okay, but I came back here because I like the environment.

It is a notable point that Stacey reported feeling more comfortable in an educational setting that had a diverse student body. Writers in the area of "campus climate" report that a critical mass of minority students (and faculty) is needed to create a campus or program environment that is supportive of minority students. A critical mass, or that point at which minority students generally feel at home on predominantly White campuses, has been defined as 30% minority representation (Ponterotto, et al, 1995). Stacey could have chosen to attend any of the local community colleges, but selected College B in particular for its diverse student body. The goals and reasons cited for

attending the community college by the study participants in this study are consistent with findings documented by the USDE (1993), Brint and Karabel (1998), and Cohen and Brawer (2003).

*Research Question 3: What are factors identified by LD students that may negatively impact their continued enrollment in their community college?*

The U. S. Department of Education (2002) reported seven risk factors to be negatively associated with persistence and degree attainment in its *Profile of Undergraduates in U.S. Post-secondary Institutions: 1999-2000.* These factors were: 1) delaying enrollment by a year or more after high school graduation; 2) attending part-time; 3) being financially independent; 4) having children; 5) being a single parent; 6) working full-time while enrolled; and 7) being a high school dropout or a GED recipient. The students participating in this study were asked specifically about three of these factors – finances, caring for dependents, and working full-time, in addition to five other factors.

The students who participated in the focus group sessions were asked "How likely is it that the following issues would cause you to withdraw from class or from this college?" The following list of issues was presented: a) working full-time, b) caring for dependents, c) academically unprepared, d) lack of finances, e) transfer to a 4-year college, f) transfer to a different 2-year college, g) inadequate accommodations for your disability, h) feeling a lack of support.

*Working full-time*

Most of the students (90%) indicated that working full-time would not cause them to withdraw from class or the college, and related that they would continue with

their studies. Karen who works part-time stated, “Not likely. I don't work full-time right now, but if I did I'd just try to get all of my classes at night.” James is also employed part-time and stated, “No, I would curtail the number of classes I'd take in a week just because I couldn't function too well that way." Jane is currently employed full-time, but does not feel that this would cause her to stop attending classes. Michael is not currently working, but felt that working full-time would potentially alter his selection of which college to attend, “I'm low on money right now. It depends on how much I'm being paid. The rules at my dad's house are you are either working or going to school, or both. So, I might go to the vo-tech, a cheaper school."

*Caring for dependents*

Only two students indicated that caring for dependents would likely cause them to withdraw from class or the college, while the majority of students related that they would continue their studies by working around their class schedules. Michael stated that he would likely have to stop attending classes because he would have to get a job in order to take care of a child. James related the following thoughts:

> It would most likely cause me to drop because I'm already working part-time, and if I had dependents to take care of I would have to probably work full-time to cover them and that wouldn't be enough time for anything else.

Karen stated, “I wouldn't drop out I'd just talk to the teachers and tell them that my son's got a doctor's appointment or that I just need to get that one day off.” Paula shared that it was not likely that she would stop attending due to caring for dependents and stated, “I have an Aunt that's in the hospital having surgery right now, and the

teachers are willing to work with you. They'll go on-line with you and text you or call you on the phone." Carol concurred, "Not likely. I have two a 3-year old and a 5-year old, and my son is a disabled child. I sometimes have to skip class just to take him to another town to see a specialist there, so they're willing to work with you and help."

*Academically unprepared*

None of the students indicated that being academically unprepared would cause them to withdraw from class or college, and student comments reflected a determination to be successful in their coursework. Karen and Rachel both agreed, "No, I would continue to go and get the extra help that I needed." Paula stated, "Not likely, if I have something that I have to work harder for it just make me achieve my goals even more." Carol concurred with this statement, "I agree with Paula. I'm learning disabled so some of the things I have to do is kind of hard for me, but that just pushes me harder." James added, "I think I would keep going I think, I don't see any reason why not. I would just take the course over and over again as much as I could until I'm successful." Michael stated, "Not likely, that just means try harder." Jane also mentioned that she had "plenty of mentors" to help her with her studies. Stacey related some of her personal frustrations regarding her schoolwork, but also related her desire to continue with her education:

> I have a lot of frustration about my homework and some things frustrate me and I think I'm not going to make it, but I have to stop thinking negative of myself and think positive of myself that I will make it and keep going.

Andrea completed K-12 in Kentucky. She felt that the teachers were "good, nice and did their job", but stated "they only teach you what you comprehend in the

classroom. Things I wasn't taught in K-12 so I may be on a totally different level than others are, so when you hit college its like you're a lost soul." Andrea further stated, "I just don't feel like I was prepared for school [college] after I graduated from high school for the options I have like trade school or vo-tech or something so that I won't be staying in school for so long, over ten years."

Andrea felt that if she had been challenged more in the K-12 setting, she would have been in a better situation when entering college and completing college-level work. Although Andrea said she had not been made aware of her higher education options prior to leaving high school, she certainly is aware of the alternates now. She continues to pursue her Associate's degree rather than switch to an alternate educational setting. Perhaps there is a reason for Andrea's educational choice that even she may not be consciously aware of.

*Lack of finances*

Only two of the students indicated that lack of finances would cause them to withdraw from the class or college, and this break in enrollment would be temporary, just to allow them to save enough funds to return to college. Karen stated, "Just for one semester, just until I get the money saved up and I would go back again." Rachel responded that lack of finances would "probably" cause her to withdraw. Paula shared:

> I don't think I'd drop it. I have an Uncle who dropped out of college because he has a learning disability too. He dropped out of college and he's willing to help me with anything that I need, all of my family is, because I'm the first grand baby that goes to college. That's very helpful.

Carol was thankful for the financial assistance that was available to her, "Well

this college offers financial aid so it pays for your tuition and your books and your supplies." Michael stated, "I'd get a bunch of jobs and hope that they don't mess up your college schedule and get the books." Jane shared, "I'm there now [with laughter]. No, I would beg and borrow." Andrea also commented, "I'd make a way. I mean I try to save and I spend money wisely and budget wisely." Andrea has taken out school loans and paid for tutoring through the Sylvan Learning Center, which she says has been very costly.

Stacey shared that she feared that she may need to stay out of school a semester since her financial aid is based on academic performance. Stacey related:

> Right now I don't have a car, I ride a bus. And further on in my school with my books and tuition I know there is help out there that I can apply for. I'm having some financial problems right now because I think they're going to take my grant away from me because of my GPA, and then I would have to stay out of school for a semester. I went to school in the summer and didn't pass one of my classes and that dropped my GPA.

Although each of the students seemed to experience some degree of financial constraint, it is very apparent that these students do intend to continue to pursue their education even in the face of intermittent financial concerns.

*Transfer to a 4-year college*

David was the only student who indicated that transferring to a 4-year college would "likely" cause him to withdraw from the 2-year college, because he had an interest in attending a 4-year baptist institution. The other students intended to remain at their 2-year college until they obtained their degree. Michael mentioned, "It would depend on

where the 4-year college is because of transportation. I don't have a car right now and if I could get there by bus." Karen stated, “I don't plan on transferring to a 4-year college. I will get my Associates degree here, graduate and find a job." James related, “No. I want to get my degree here also so that I can take advantage of a Bachelor's degree program in business that this college has set up with a local 4-year college, where I can then keep taking my Bachelor's coursework here on this campus." Jane also commented, “I wouldn't go to a 4-year college until I finish my degree here."

*Transfer to a different 2-year college*

Four students indicated that transferring to a different 2-year college would cause them to withdraw from their current institution, and gave various reasons. David and Rachel responded, “Yes, likely” and “Probably” respectively, but gave no additional explanation. Michael responded, “Same thing as for transferring to a 4-year college, depends on where it is." Andrea stated, “If I get the same outcome out of it, if I feel like it’s a good school, but I think this college is a good college." James stated, “No, I wouldn't consider transferring. I'm happy here there's no reason to go elsewhere”, and Jane added, “No, I will finish my degree here."

*Inadequate accommodations for your disability*

The majority of students (90%) indicated that inadequate accommodations for their disability would not cause them to withdraw from class or the college, and stated that they would still continue to pursue their education. James was the only student who stated he would withdraw, “Yes, because it’s been very helpful what I've gotten so far. I don't know how I would have done some of the stuff without it” [accommodations]. Michael stated that he would not withdraw, “No, that just means I'd have to try harder."

Karen, Paula and Carol all indicated that the support was adequate at their college. Paula shared:

> It seems like to me the counselors are trying hard to get you everything. Like if they need to get you something they will get on the phone and call your teacher from the high school or your professors, and then they'll work with you. So I think I'm getting what I need.

*Feeling a lack of support*

All of the students indicated that feeling a lack of support would not cause them to withdraw from class or from the college. Most of the students did feel that they had the support that they needed to achieve their educational goals. Karen stated, “No, I've got all the support that I need here." Paula responded:

> The teachers are great here. I really like it. The one reason that I really came here was for my friend, she has a learning disability too and she needs some support so we're here to kind of back each other up. If we ever need help with teachers, the counselors are there for us.

Carol added, “No. I'd stay here even if I didn't have the support, I'm willing to further my education." David commented, “No. I'm the type of person that doesn't give up on something. If I go for it I'm going through and through, as long as I've got to, to pray I'm going to get through it and don't give up." Stacey echoed the thoughts shared by other students:

> If I didn't have any support I would give up on myself and tell myself I can't do it. But I have that support from friends, family, and church members. People support me as I educate myself, I haven't

graduated yet but they support me.

Andrea's perspective was not as positive, although she too indicated that she would not stop attending the college if there were a lack of support. Andrea has been pursuing a college degree for ten years, and related that she knew she had many gaps and deficiencies that needed to be addressed with zero-level courses before going into a major. Andrea stated, “So, it's not like I've been goofing off, God knows I wanted to be gone a long time ago, but all those gaps and deficiencies were there.” Andrea related two instances of teachers at a local 4-year college who were “understanding and sincere” and worked with her when she was in their classes. One of the teachers had a brother who was special needs and was willing to work alongside Andrea as she utilized the Sylvan Learning Center for assistance, and another teacher offered tutoring. Andrea stated, “That was just a blessing because there aren't a lot of teachers like that." She also shared the following thoughts regarding personnel in the community college:

> I'd like for them [teachers, administrators] to just listen to a student that is special needs. Ask that student how can we accommodate, not to be disrespectful to a person who isn't special needs but I really don't feel they really understand if they weren't special needs or their child wasn't [pause] I don't think they understand, that they weren't properly trained.

Andrea did not feel that because a person had a higher degree such as a PhD that they would automatically know how to accommodate her. Andrea stated that she was not a straight A student, and that she thought professors really focus more on the straight A student than the “student that’s struggling, trying hard to do whatever it takes [to succeed].” Andrea was upset because she felt that some teachers did not concern

themselves with the LD student. She stated “We’re on the bottom of the barrel. I don’t think they pay any attention to students like myself. It's like they will listen to you but it's in one ear and out the other. I'm looking at your actions. We talked about this [accommodations] a couple of months ago [speaking to a teacher] but I don't see that you've made any changes to accommodate a person who is special needs.."

Andrea believed that when she talks with a dean or someone with a higher education than herself, that they may “come off like they’re listening and they are concerned but as time goes along I don’t see any changes. She said it’s disappointing to feel that the professor or dean may think ‘she wants to talk so we’ll talk’, but that it [the meeting] is really not intended to help her. Andrea commented that “it would be nice if they could get special needs teachers for each subject in a college.”

It was very disheartening to listen to Andrea as she poured out her feelings about her interactions with professors and deans. The researcher wondered what motivated Andrea to keep pursuing her goal of completing an Associates’ degree in the face of all of the negativity and disappointments she had faced. Andrea stated:

> God is keeping me on my feet, that’s all I can think of just praying, reading my bible trying to stay in the word. I don’t want to be another statistic, that I’m special needs and take pity for myself. I have friends who are special needs who do that, but I don’t want to be one of those people. I’m going to do whatever it takes, but it would be nice if a person sits and listens to you, that they would try to make some type of accommodation, some type of way to help that person. If that person is doing whatever it takes, I need someone to help me also. I don't want

someone to just listen to me and don't take any action on it.

Andrea mentioned that when she did talk with a professor or dean, they listened to her concerns but gave no feedback. She felt that it would be nice if "they [the students] had some other way besides going to the person who is over the accommodations and getting the paper. When you take it to the teacher they take and look at the form and all but the accommodation is not there, you're not being accommodated."

Andrea is not the only person in her family who is special needs [Andrea used this term instead of LD]. She believed that others in her family who were special needs made excuses for themselves and did not finish school because they were discouraged. Andrea finished high school on time, and feels that if the college had teachers for special needs students with each subject she would not have been in college as long [ten years]. She also commented that it is discouraging after high school when you go to college and say you are special needs, because "they [the professors] look at you different or some of them who don't know any better say 'oh she's just another brain dead person that we've got to deal with'. It seems like all the colleges are the same, you check off the paper of what your needs are and you give it to the professor, but the accommodations aren't there."

When asked if she thought the lack of support came at the level of the classroom, Andrea responded, "Yes I think its individual professors. I think they just need to be trained to be mindful that everyone is not a straight A student." If professors are not addressing the needs of the LD students, this would indeed pose problems for those students as they attempt to realize their educational goals. Educators and administrators must be sensitive and aware of the issues and concerns of LD students, and be willing to

actively participate in the accommodation process. Without attention to these important factors, more LD students may opt not to continue their education in the community college setting.

The researcher observes that there is conflict between Andrea's desired educational goals and her perception of making only slow progress towards them. The researcher wonders if there is a point in some instances, when it would be appropriate for the counselor to advise an LD student to pursue another educational path. Andrea currently has a "C" average, but it appears that she must make a great amount of effort to maintain this level. Perhaps this is part of the frustration that she feels, and that the accommodations element is another piece of the larger puzzle concerning Andrea.

Only two of the students participating in this study resemble the traditional-age college student profile. The remainder of the participants fit the profile of U. S. undergraduates in one or more of the categories of part-time attendance, financial independence, having children, being a single parent, and working full-time (USDE, 2002). There was a mixture of findings in this group of students; however, the situations that have been cited in the literature as risk factors negatively associated with persistence and degree attainment do not appear to be perceived as insurmountable barriers among this particular group of students.

*Research Question 4: To what extent do LD students perceive Disability Support Services Departments to be effective in assisting them to obtain their educational goals in the community college?*

The students from both colleges indicated that the DSSDs were effective in assisting them to obtain their educational goals. A rating of 3.75 was reported for

College A and a rating of 4.16 was reported for College B on the LDSQ questionnaire. A Likert scale with a range of 1 to 5 was utilized. Level 1 indicated “not effective” and Level 5 indicated “highly effective." The lowest ratings for College A (3.0) was given by David and Carol. David wished to pursue his education at a 4-year Baptist college, and has completed four semesters at College A. This was Carol’s first semester attending College A. It is interesting to note that the student who has been attending College A the longest, as well as a student who is attending the college for the first time both gave the lowest ratings for the college. Andrea gave College B a “1.0” rating. She has had complaints to register regarding the accommodations at college B as was noted in the earlier text discussion, and her Likert rating reflects this.

The LDSQ findings were verified in the focus group when participants were asked “Do you feel the Disability Support Services Department at this 2-year college has helped you to be successful in completing your educational goals? Please explain and/or relate any specific examples." Only one student, Andrea from College B, did not believe that the DSSD services were helpful, she replied, “No, I don't think the accommodation is there.” The other students all had positive remarks regarding the effectiveness of DSSD services at their institution. Michael stated, “I've used the testing room for my written final mid-terms in English and it helped because I had more time to do it." Jane stated, “Yes. I know it's always there if I need to fall back on it.” Karen responded, “Yes, when I went to the counselor she makes sure that I’m only taking the classes that I need and that I’m not taking anything that I don’t need." Paula shared,

> Yes, I think so. The only thing I see about the counselors was that when I enrolled she wanted to put me back in classes that I’ve already

> taken that she deemed suitable for me. But the one thing that I want is that I want to be challenged I want to push my way through I don't want everyone to help me out and all that. So I kind of took upon myself to ask her to put me in harder classes than she wanted me to be in.

Carol and David both gave College A a "3.0" or "neutral" rating in response to the LDSQ survey item, yet had positive comments to offer during the focus group session. Carol concurred with Karen and Patricia and stated, "Everything is okay. I agree with everything. They're putting me in the right courses that I need to be in and that I need to [be able to] study harder." And David commented, "Yes, because if a person needs help with something they can come to a counselor and they will help them with the situation that they have. It not only helps them but they can also learn something by receiving help from another person and get more knowledge."

David's low or average rating may be reflective of his desire to pursue courses at a 4-year Baptist college to pursue his degree in a more "Christian environment." He stated that if he had to start college over again that the Baptist college would be his choice, rather than his current institution. Carol marked a "3.0" response on all of her Likert scale ratings perhaps indicating a response set (Ary, et al, 2002). Carol's comments were positive during the focus group setting in regards to her opportunity for involvement with the happenings on campus, the financial assistance provided by the college, and the willingness of faculty and staff to help her. Based on these comments, the researcher concluded that Carol's focus group comments are more reflective of her true feelings regarding the assistance of DSSD services than her Likert rating.

The AACC (Barnett, 1992) reported that LDs are the largest single category served by disability service offices in community colleges. Additionally, some campuses have developed strong programs to assist a growing number of students with a range of LDs. The staff in DSSDs provide academic services, work to improve physical access, advise students of their rights and advocate for students with disabilities (Komives & Woodard, 2003).

While many national surveys have focused on the numbers and types of services available, there must be attention paid to the outcomes of DSSD services for LD students pursuing educational goals. Barnett (1992) cited the need to track students and measure outcomes in the area of DSSD program evaluation. The majority students in this study indicated that the DSSD services offered at both colleges were effective in assisting them with their educational goals, and this is important information the DSSDs should be aware of in order to guide future planning of services.

*Research Question 5: How satisfied are LD students with the Disability Support Services available at their community college?*

The students from both colleges indicated that they were satisfied with DSSD services with a rating of 4.25 and 4.33 for College A and College B respectively, on the LDSQ questionnaire. A Likert scale with a range of 1 to 5 was utilized. Level 1 indicated "not satisfied" and Level 5 indicated "highly satisfied". The lowest rating of "3.0" for College A came from Carol. As previously mentioned, Carol marked "3.0" for all of her Likert ratings, so it is unclear how accurately this rating reflects her true feelings since no focus group question specifically addressed this question. Andrea gave College B a rating of "2.0" indicating that she was "slightly unsatisfied" with the DSSD

services. This is most likely to be a true reflection of her feelings, based on her prior comments.

Low (2000), states that students are seen as individuals with definite expectations about their campus experience, and that satisfaction with college occurs when the expectation is met or exceeded by an institution. Student satisfaction should be part of the assessment and evaluation conducted in all higher education settings. According to Noel –Levitz (2005), collecting student satisfaction data on a regular basis will enable campuses to determine where they are best serving students and determine areas where they may improve services.

Student satisfaction can be affected by the services received from staff in the community college setting. It is important to be aware of student satisfaction in the DSSD area, since satisfied students are more likely to be successful students (Noel-Levitz, 2005). This assertion is extremely important in the case of the LD student, since a lack of satisfaction with services could contribute to decreased student retention among this population.

*Research Question 6: How satisfied are LD students with the disability counselor(s) at their community college?*

Finn (1999) reported that LD staff had an extraordinary impact on the students' perceptions, attitudes, and success. This question sought some exploration into the relationship that the LD students had with the disability counselor. The intent was to hopefully discover if there was any discrepancy between student satisfaction with the DSSD services, and student satisfaction with the disability counselor.

The students from both colleges indicated that they were satisfied with the DSSD

counselors at a 4.25 and 4.67 level for College A and College B respectively, on the LDSQ questionnaire. A Likert scale with a range of 1 to 5 was utilized. Level 1 indicated “not satisfied” and Level 5 indicated “highly satisfied." Carol from College A and Andrea from College B each indicated a rating of “3.0." Just as before, Carol gave a “3.0” rating for all of her Likert responses. Andrea’s “3.0” rating for the disability counselor was the highest Likert rating she had given on any of her responses.

These findings were verified when the focus group participants were asked, "Do you feel that you have had a positive relationship with your disability support services counselor(s) at this institution? Please explain and/or relate any specific examples." All of the students responded positively regarding their relationship with the DSSD counselors, and half of the students also commented that they only talk with the counselors one to three times in a semester. David and Michael described the counselors as displaying “friendliness” and as being “cooperative." Jane shared, “Yes, when I went in to see her she was really helpful and anything I would ask she would answer." John shared, “Yes, I agree. Nothing specific, but I usually see the counselor once a semester and she signs some papers and we chat a little bit. Other than that I don’t see her very much." Stacey commented:

> I have a good relationship with the counselor because anything that I need to ask her, her door is always open. I know they have another counselor here to but I don’t know her I just use the main counselor who is in this building, the other counselor is in the student services area. If I have a class on this side of campus I’m closer to this counselor.

Andrea, who has had the most negative experiences of all the students

participating in the study, had positive comments to add regarding the counselor:

> Yes, she's a good lady, she's a nice lady. But I know she's been trained to do a specific job just like at the 4-year college. I can tell when I'm talking to them that they've been trained on what a special needs student is, and that the teachers haven't been specifically trained.

It is important to ask this question of the LD students. According to Noel-Levitz (2005), student satisfaction is impacted by many factors such as services received from staff and administrators. If the LD students were not satisfied with the disability counselor, this could present a barrier for these students for seeking out the DSSD services. A lack of satisfaction with the disability counselor could prevent the LD student from returning to speak with the disability counselor whenever an issue arose regarding accommodation or progression. If this were the case, LD student retention could potentially be affected.

*Research Question 7: How do Disability Support Services Departments currently evaluate student satisfaction with their services in the community college?*

The purpose of this question was to determine how the DSSDs of each college obtained information on student satisfaction. As previously cited in Low (2000) and Noel-Levitz (2005), student satisfaction data should be collected routinely. This will help to determine where the students are best being served, and to determine areas where there may need to be an improvement of services.

The DSSD counselor from College A responded “No” to item number twelve on the DSQ questionnaire, which asked, "Does your DSSD conduct student surveys to obtain feedback regarding student satisfaction with disability support services at your

institution?" The DSSD counselor from College B responded, "No, but we are in the process of developing something." This appears to be an area of evaluation that each college may wish to address in the future as part of strategies implemented to enhance LD student retention.

*Research Question 8: What specific data are currently collected by Disability Support Services Departments regarding the progression and retention of LD students in the community college?*

The specific question asked on the DSQ questionnaire was, "How does your disability support services department track the progress (by semester) and retention rate (fall to spring) of LD students who utilize your services?" The counselor from College A reported that it tracks the progress of all students who use DSSD services by semester, and Fall to Spring. This is most likely done by tracking enrollment, although a question asking for explicit details of the methods used was not asked on the DSQ questionnaire. The counselor from College B reported that the only method used to track the progress of LD students who use DSSD services is "through self-report of the student."

While there may be information obtained informally when each LD student returns to obtain accommodation forms for each semester, there was apparently no specific information formally collected on the progress and retention rate of the LD students attending each college. As noted by Barnett (1992), some colleges have begun tracking students and measuring outcomes, but there is "still much to be accomplished in DSSD program evaluation." This is yet another area of evaluation that each college may wish to address in the future as part of strategies implemented to enhance LD student progression and retention.

The researcher did note that there was some information collected at both colleges regarding where the LD students go after leaving the institution. The counselors for both colleges reported that some of their students with LDs go on to work in various work environments such as professional settings, while some go on to work in technical and clerical settings. The LD students from both colleges were also similar in that some of them went on to other 2-year and 4-year colleges, or for independent/specialized training after leaving the institution.

*Additional Focus Group Findings*

This section will present some of the additional findings that were obtained from the focus group sessions. This information does not provide answers to the specific research questions formulated for this study; however, it does bring more understanding of the LD students' perceptions regarding their educational experiences.

The students rated the quality of education at both colleges as: average (10%), good (20%), very good (20%), excellent (20%), and outstanding (10%) when asked, "What is our overall impression of the quality of education at this 2-year college?"College B received the "excellent" and "outstanding" ratings. Paula and Carol from College A did not indicate a rating but Paula stated, "I like this college better than my high school because the teachers actually work with you", and Carol agreed, "I agree. My high school was like seven or eight years ago and they didn't hardly work with you, but I also like this school because they are willing to help." Karen from College A stated, "Very good. I get everything that I need here." Stacey from College B stated, "They have an excellent education plan for me even though I run into the bad professors you can

also run into some good professors and they have an excellent tutoring system here, I'm more comfortable with my tutors."

All of the students responded affirmatively when asked, “Do you intend to continue your education at this community college? Please explain why or why not.” Paula from College A stated, “I'm staying here until I get my Associates degree, but then I'm transferring to a 4-year university." James from College B remarked, “Yes, because I want a Bachelor's degree and this is a step up and I just need to keep on going from there." Jane, also from College B commented:

> Yes and no. I will get all of my credits except history here and I'm going to go to another 2-year college to get my history. There is a professor there that teaches high school history and he teaches summer history at that college and he's a really good teacher.

The majority of students (80%) indicated that they would again choose to attend their 2-year college when asked, “If you could start college over, would you choose to attend this 2-year college? Please explain why or why not.” Michael from College B shared, “Yes, because it’s close to home and I know I can get here easily. I could walk, ride a bike or take the bus. I can live at home, at another school it would cost more to live on campus." Stacey, also from College B shared, “Yes. I would start with this college even if my kids were to come and say mom go to this college [a different college]. I would say start at a small college first, then go to a big college. So yes I would come back." David from College A, who listed majors of ministry and psychology stated, “Honestly no. I would chose a nearby 4-year Baptist university,

because I could be in a better Christian environment and I could learn more about God than I could here."

Half of the focus group participants indicated that no changes or improvements were needed in the DSSDs when asked, “What, if any, changes or improvements would you suggest for the disability support services department at this 2-year college that would be most effective in assisting you in completing your educational goals?” Karen from College A commented, “I don't think they need to make any changes. I have everything that I need." Paula, also from College A, shared the following comment and fellow student Carol concurred:

> I don’t think that there is anything that they can change, I just think that maybe a little bit more time, because it seemed like at the beginning when we were enrolling they were trying to rush us through. I think if they spent a little more time with us to get to know us better. It’s hard with all these kids enrolling and stuff but I think that if they sit with the disability kids that need a little extra help, that may improve a little bit more on that. Maybe we come in a little earlier or a little later than the regular kids, that way we can actually sit down and [the student will] talk about 'okay I need this because of this and this', instead of [the counselor saying] 'okay we’re going to do this and this'. Because it’s a really big rush with all those kids trying to enroll, so I completely understand, but I think just maybe a little more time to make sure everything is perfect, not oh my gosh 'I’ve got to get this done before this date' and all that.

Stacey, a student from College B, was concerned that her financial aid might be

stopped due to her low GPA. Stacey had taken a summer course [a more compressed time frame] and did not do well in the course, which dropped her GPA. She commented:

> The only thing I can think of is they can have more help for students who have financial problems. And I get frustrated with my advisor because I can't get into some of the classes I want because she says I'm not prepared and I'm like [frustration noted in tone of voice and non-verbal facial gestures] just give me the class I want and just enroll me in this class.

Andrea was attending College B. She had by far the most negative experiences to share during the focus group session, and had the following to say regarding improvements she felt were needed at her college:

> More teachers need to be trained and understand that everybody's not a straight A student. I know a lot of professors say how they were straight A students, their wife was, their children were. But those of us special needs or learning disabled students are at the bottom of the barrel and just aren't spoke of.

James, the business major attending College B, was politely direct and very specific with his comments regarding what needed to be changed at his college. He offered the following comments:

> A more uniform way of test taking either taking the test the day before or after, something uniform binding to the professors. I'm thinking, assuming that there's not that many of us disability students, so it should be easy to find someone to put us on file so that whoever is running

the desk would know that we're not necessarily the ones cheating. And just finding better software support and offering longer time periods and separating classes [to avoid distracting a learning disabled student who requires extra time to complete testing].

Data analysis of the focus group interview responses was completed via the use of NUDIST QSR N6 Software, a computer software program for qualitative data analysis. NUDIST is an acronym for the accurate description of Non-numerical Unstructured Data Indexing Searching and Theorizing. It was originally derived from a major research project in qualitative computing conducted over two decades. The program was designed as a toolkit based on coding text documents such as interview transcripts, field notes, focus groups interviews, journals, and structured qualitative questionnaires, and analyzing and exploring that coding (NUDIST, 2002).

There are many methodologies in qualitative research that center around coding data, and the NUDIST QSR N6 software is able to support any methodology or philosophy preferred by the researcher. There are three tools for available for use: coders, text search, and node search. These operate on two complementary sets of data: 1) the document system holds all document data and research notes, as well as memos made by the researcher; and 2) the node system, which represents all topics and categories that matter to the research project, as well as memos made by the researcher (NUDIST, 2002).

The researcher imported the transcripts of the focus group sessions into the NUDIST QSR N6 program as word documents. A *text search* was then conducted, and reports were generated which listed the frequency of usage of search terms, and the report

also numbered and displayed the text lines where the search terms appeared. The program refers to these items as nodes or codes.

The researcher selected the following search terms that were believed to be reflective of the focus group comments, and the frequency of appearance for each search term is listed in parentheses. The search terms were: Time (38), Help (32), Teacher/Professor (30), Degree (17), Hard (13), Support (12), Stay/Staying (11), Education (10), Try (10), Tutor/Tutoring (9), Understand (9), Testing (6), Stop (6), Listen (3), Give up (3), Frustrate/Frustration (2). The text search results were moved into the *free node* category, and were placed into four groupings: succeed, perseverance, understanding, and personal accountability. Some of the nodes did appear in more than one grouping.

Next, a Boolean search was conducted using the *Search and Compare Nodes* function to determine the overlap of the free nodes within each grouping. The *overlap* function finds overlapping text passages coded at any of the selected nodes. Overlap was noted in three of the four free nodes in the *succeed* grouping. Overlap was noted in nine of the eleven free nodes in the *perseverance* grouping. Overlap was noted in six of the seven free nodes in the *understanding* grouping. Overlap was noted in two of the four free nodes in the *personal accountability* grouping. The four themes which emerged from the data analysis are presented in the remaining portion of this chapter.

*Theme # 1 Desire to succeed and accomplish goals*

Being enrolled as a student pursuing a college degree was in itself an accomplishment for the LD students. Many of the students commented that they were attending college when other people they knew, some with LD, among friends, family,

co-workers and fellow students had become frustrated and quit school, made excuses and stopped attending, or had never finished high school. Paula related that her uncle had quit college because he had an LD, but her goal was to complete a law degree like her mother. Michael related that he had finished high school, something his father had not done. Completing a college degree would also be an accomplishment that his father had not achieved.

Successfully completing each course was also very meaningful for the students. Stacey spoke with pride when she recounted making a passing grade in a reading course at a different community college, after a previous reading teacher at College B had inquired why she was even in college if she had such a low reading level. Andrea related that she knew she had not passed a particular course based on "knowledge" alone, but that she had tried very hard and did everything the teacher asked her to do and extra work to be successful in the course. Andrea said that she did not "want to be another statistic." She spoke of friends who were special needs who took pity on themselves and stopped going to school, and she did not want to be "one of those people."

Each success in coursework provided a sense of accomplishment, placing the students one step closer to achieving their educational goals. Educators, faculty, and staff working in academic settings such as the community college, should view student learning as the highest priority and strive to make every effort to facilitate student success in their educational endeavors.

*Theme # 2 Perseverance*

The LD students had the tenacity to confront and overcome challenges encountered during their educational journey. Challenges and frustrations mentioned by

several of the students such as financial constraints, a lack of space for testing, individual professors being unwilling to accommodate or being insensitive to the issues of the LD students, did not deter these students from pursuing their goals. Andrea mentioned that she had been pursuing a degree for ten years, but that she was willing to do "whatever it takes" to reach her goal. Stacey was experiencing some financial difficulties and stated, "Right now I don't have a car, I ride a bus." She also mentioned that she knew that in the future there would be help she could apply for to help with her books and tuition. Michael stated he would get more jobs in order to pay for his books if needed, and Jane smiled and stated she would "beg and borrow" to help finance her education.

David stated emphatically, "I'm the type of person that doesn't give up on something. If I go for it I'm going through and through, as long as I've got to, to pray I'm going to get through it and don't give up." James also typified this same outlook and related that he would "take the course over and over again as much as I could until I'm successful."

These students had a willingness to try harder than other students may have to, and to stick with it until they achieved their goals. This should be applauded in the educational setting, and educators, staff, and administrators should all work to accentuate the spirit of determination displayed by the LD students.

*Theme # 3 Desire for understanding*

The LD students sought understanding of their issues and concerns from those who do not have an LD. This would include family members, fellow students, and college personnel such as faculty, staff and administrators. Stacey felt that some professors "don't understand students with disabilities" and felt that they sometimes

“expect more of the [disability] student” than from the students who do not have a learning disability. In one particular course Stacey felt that the teacher was being harder on her than on the other students.

James related how one professor was hesitant to give tests in the testing center [to accommodate his need for additional time] because a student in the past had found a way to cheat using that system. James suggested that, “it should be easy to find someone to put us [LD students] on file so that whoever is running the desk would know that we’re not necessarily the ones cheating.” James also mentioned how initially there are always questions from fellow classmates such as, “Why are you always in the testing center?” and “Why don’t you come with us?”. He believes the questions are asked because the other students don't always understand his need for additional testing time in the testing center, rather than testing in class with the rest of the students.

Andrea shared, “I've had some good teachers that understood the situation and asked 'How can I help you?' and say 'I don't understand what special needs is could you explain to me what it is?'” Although some professors were honest about not knowing how to help LD students, Andrea questioned how they could accommodate a student if, “their kids weren't special needs, they weren't special needs, nor their husbands or wives." Andrea also felt that some teachers could not relate to the LD student, she stated, “I don't think they can relate, I think that's what it is. I don't think they do things like that to try to be cold to you, they just don't know how to accommodate.” Andrea related that she had some good professors who understood the situation and some that “just don't care." She felt “more teachers need to be trained and understand that everybody's not a straight A student."

Andrea had met with departmental Deans to discuss her issues at different points in time and was frustrated because she felt what she said went "in one ear and out the other", and that there were no "actions" or "changes" made. She felt that LD students are "at the bottom of the barrel", and that there seemed to be "more focus on the straight A student, than the student that's struggling trying hard to do whatever it takes" [to be successful in a course].

On a more positive note, Carol smiled as she recounted the support she had received from her grandparents who had brought her to and from school everyday since she started attending classes at College A. Stacey was thankful for the support she received from her friends, family, and church members. She felt, "If I didn't have any support I would give up on myself and tell myself I can't do it. But I have that support from friends, family, and church members. People support me as I educate myself....I haven't graduated yet but they support me."

Interpersonal elements and interactions do have an impact on the perceptions and experiences of LD students attending the community college. Sensitivity, awareness, and understanding from others, or a lack thereof, may potentially have either a positive or a negative impact on the goal attainment of LD students.

*Theme # 4 Sense of personal accountability*

The LD students seemed to have a full awareness of their strengths and shortcomings. There appeared to be an acceptance of their need to do their part to make every personal effort possible to reach their goals, regardless of circumstances that may be present in their learning environment at any particular time.

Karen and Rachel both agreed they would, "continue to go and get the extra help"

that they needed in order to be successful in their coursework. Paula stated, “If I have something that I have to work harder for, it just make me achieve my goals even more." Carol also shared, “I'm learning disabled so some of the things I have to do is kind of hard for me, but that just pushes me harder." Michael also stated he would just “try harder” if there were inadequate accommodations for his disability.

Paula further stated that, “The one thing that I want is that I want to be challenged, I want to push my way through. I don’t want everyone to help me out and all that.” Paula also stated that she knew if they [the students] ever need help with teachers, the counselors are there for them. Stacey related, “If I say 'What is that word?' that means I need help that doesn't mean you make fun of me, because I don't like that and I will cry I will really cry.” Whenever Stacey requested help it was because she really needed the additional help. She would seek out extra help even if she might be exposing herself to ridicule from classmates or the professor.

It is very clear that these students continually put forward their best efforts in their studies, and will seek out additional assistance and support when needed. There was no finger pointing to any particular challenges or barriers as the reason for any lack of success with their studies that may have been encountered. However there was a keen sense of being personally responsible for attaining their educational goals.

# CHAPTER FIVE

## Conclusions and Recommendations

### *Overview*

The purpose of this study was to obtain information regarding the experiences of students with learning disabilities (LDs) in the community college. A particular focus within this study was to examine the perceived effectiveness of Disability Support Services Department (DSSD) services and the impact on the progression and retention of students with LDs towards their educational goals. The first portion of this chapter will include a discussion related to the findings of the study, which will be followed by specific conclusions and recommendations for community colleges.

Both colleges had comparable student services, recreational facilities, and library resources. College B is an urban institution with a student enrollment approximately three times larger than that of College A, the rural institution. College A has a federal Student Support Services grant, and registered approximately ten percent more LD students out of total disabilities reported to its DSSD than were reported at College B.

The resources and availability of accommodations were similar at both colleges, yet the students from College A had been retained at the institution longer on average, and had slightly higher GPAs than those attending College B. Based on the focus group comments, there appears to have been a better rapport established between the faculty and the LD students who attended College A. This might be reflective of the larger number of students that the faculty at the urban institution is required to instruct, compared to the smaller student enrollment at the rural institution. Faculty workload issues in the community college may potentially decrease the amount of time faculty has

to interact with LD students in need of accommodation. This is an area the colleges may wish to explore among their faculty.

According to Cohen and Brawer (2003, p. 205), "students with disabilities are twice as likely to drop out of school as are students with no physical or learning disabilities." Reasons that may account for this statistic may be that these students have limited self-perception, self-esteem, and knowledge of effective studying and job skills. Each of these factors could present barriers to the establishment of rapport between LD students and faculty, which could contribute to decreased student retention. This points to the vital role that personal and career counseling services, and study skills training play in the educational setting for LD and other disabled students. College A does not currently offer career counseling or study skills training. Addressing these factors may well be critical to whether or not these students continue to pursue further education.

Overall, the students attending both colleges were satisfied with DSSD services and feel they were effective in assisting them to achieve their educational goals. This is supported by the Likert scale averages provided by the students on the LDSQ questionnaire, and comments from the focus group sessions. Those students who perceived that they were making good progress towards their educational goals were also those who were most satisfied with the DSSD services and the disability counselors.

The lowest rating for effectiveness of DSSD services at College A was given by a student who wished he had selected a 4-year Baptist institution to study in a more "Christian environment" and attain his ministry goals. The lowest ratings for effectiveness of DSSD services, satisfaction with DSSD services and the disability counselor at College B was given by a student who felt that there were no

accommodations present and that the professors did not care or understand LD students. This same student had many negative experiences to share and had very few positive experiences, as cited in Chapter IV. The researcher did wonder if perhaps this might be a reflection of this particular student's personality and lived experiences, which may have influenced her perceptions of what occurred in her interactions with the faculty. Otherwise, if the interactions with the faculty were actually as poor as she has related, then these revelations are and should be disturbing to all educators.

The specific area that was problematic for the students attending College A related to registration assistance. The specific areas that were problematic for the students attending College B related to a lack of availability of separate testing locations, instances of unwillingness of professors to accommodate LD students, and lack of knowledge and sensitivity regarding students with learning disabilities among the faculty.

Although College A reported that it has registration assistance for students with disabilities, some students reported that they felt rushed during registration and did not have enough time to have a discussion about their class selections with the counselors. One student from College A who expressed difficulty in this area was the youngest student in the focus group and was completing her second semester of college. The other student who expressed difficulty in this area was completing her first semester of college. The remaining students from College A had completed four semesters of college, and did not report any problems related to registration.

The first year of college is a critical point regarding student retention. The literature has documented that new student orientation programs, registration assistance, and intensive academic advising of at-risk students have been successful strategies that

can enhance student retention in the community college (Miller & Pope, 2003; Wild & Ebbers, 2002; Walleri, et al, 1997). Attention to these important elements could potentially enhance student retention among the students attending the community college.

A difficulty related to the lack of separate testing facilities was reported by a student attending College B. This student was one of the youngest of the focus group participants, had completed two semesters of college, worked part-time, and was the only full-time student attending this college. This student felt that he could not have done as well as he has done academically without the accommodations provided by the college. He was however frustrated by the time constraints for testing, and when he had to test with his classmates who were noisy on occasion. Some of the difficulty experienced by this student is accounted for by the fact that he is a business major and is required to utilize computer software programs that the other students would not encounter. The other students attending College B did not report any problems in this area, and expressed appreciation for the extra time given to take examinations in the alternate testing area.

Lack of satisfaction regarding the testing facilities available to accommodate the LD student may result in the student deciding to stop attending the college. This would not be a desirable outcome for colleges who are seeking to retain students and facilitate attainment of their educational goals. The community college would need to be aware of any potential student dissatisfaction. This could be accomplished through student surveys, which neither college currently conducts.

Although both colleges reported utilizing many methods to assist faculty and staff in working with students with disabilities, there were some reported instances at College

B of unwillingness of professors to accommodate LD students, and lack of knowledge and sensitivity regarding students with learning disabilities among the faculty that need to be addressed by community colleges. The two students who reported the most difficulty with interactions with professors were the oldest participants in the focus group, had completed one semester at the college and had also completed course work at other 2-year and 4-year colleges. Both students were black females, and one was employed full-time, while the other was not employed.

These two students were complimentary of the DSSD staff at College B and reported no problems with faculty or staff from other colleges they had attended. One student stated that she returned from another 2-year college particularly because she liked the student diversity at College B. The literature has reported on factors that can negatively impact teacher perceptions about disabilities, such as a negative attitudinal environment, lack of exposure to students with disability, and the great impact that LD staff has on student perceptions, attitudes, and success (Prentice, 2002; Chelberg, et al, 1998).

The literature also addresses student retention challenges specifically related to minority students. O'Donnell and Green-Merritt (1997) pointed to the existence of few minority role models in leadership positions, and inadequate preparation of faculty, staff, and students to live in a multicultural society, among other factors that affect the recruitment and retention of minority students. Chesler and Crowfoot (1989) cited institutional culture and organizational structure as two elements which account for the core values and assumptions regarding how people should behave, address if social networks exclude people of color, or if post-recruitment support for students and faculty

of color is minimal. Despite efforts to recruit minorities and enhance diversity of college campuses, it is the "strong actions" that will change the "way things are usually done" on campuses regarding the day-to-day experiences of minorities at predominantly white institutions, more so than strong institutional statements in support of diversity and an inclusive climate (Chin, et al, 2002; Hurtado, 1992; Turner, et al, 1996).

College B is a predominantly white institution, and lists growing a multicultural student body and exceptional quality and diversity of personnel as part of its strategic vision. While College B does have diversity in its student population, the faculty is predominantly white. The examples of difficulty related by these students relate directly to their status as LD students in need of accommodation and assistance from the faculty members with whom they had courses. It is unclear whether the faculty members involved were minority or non-minority faculty. In this instance, it cannot be concluded that being a student with an LD and also being a minority has had a cumulative effect regarding the negative experiences of these two students. Given that the two students were also older students [in approximately their third and fourth decades of life] there may have been generational issues at play during their interactions with the faculty, who were likely to have been close in age to that of these students.

The students participating in this study have brought forward their experiences and insights that can provide guidance for community colleges as they plan to assist LD students in their educational pursuits. The colleges sampled in this research study both have many positive characteristics which help to facilitate LD student progression and retention. There are however some areas that require attention to further enhance the college's abilities in these areas. Based on the results of this study, the following

conclusions and recommendations are offered for community colleges that desire to assist students with learning disabilities to achieve their educational goals.

*Conclusion # 1*

The community colleges need to increase services offered for the LD students in the areas of registration and testing facilities. According to Cocchi (1997), "It is the Disability Services offered by the college that can be a deciding factor for the student regarding the choice of institution." Additional emphasis should be placed in the college's printed literature and web page sites to inform disabled students that registration assistance is available. Separate enrollment periods should also be made available for students with disabilities. This would perhaps require additional resource commitment from the college's administration, in order to obtain additional staff during enrollment periods at the beginning of each semester. Overload pay could be made available for current full-time staff who fulfill this need, or additional temporary staff could be retained during enrollment periods. Additional testing facilities should be secured for students who need extra time and/or a quiet testing environment. This would perhaps again require additional resource commitment from the college's administration, and would greatly enhance the accommodations available as more students with LDs enroll in courses at community colleges.

*Conclusion # 2*

The community colleges need to address unwillingness of professors to accommodate LD students, and the lack of knowledge and sensitivity regarding LD students among the faculty, staff, administrators, and students. It is wonderful to have a wide array of DSSD services, but if the students feel that they are not being assisted at the

level of the classroom where instruction takes place, then there must be an intervention to address these developments. Efforts must be made to avoid creating a less than positive and supportive learning experience for students with learning disabilities.

Prentice (2002) stated, “few teachers in community colleges have any significant prior exposure to disability. As a result, disabled persons may feel misunderstood in educational settings and negatively affected by teacher perceptions about disabilities." Prentice recommends “training for faculty and staff members in the community college in four areas to better serve students with disabilities: creating receptive environments, becoming aware of language, applying the ADA to community college settings, and promoting success of students with disabilities.”

Finn (1999) found that LD staff had an extraordinary impact on the students' perceptions, attitudes, and success. In the case of students with disability, hiring disability counselors who are sensitive to the special concerns of learning and other disabled students is a must. Chelberg, et al (1998) addressed campus climate for disabled students, and identified four access environments that must be addressed for people with disabilities: *physical*, *informational, programmatic/policy,* and *attitudinal.* According to Chelberg, et al, “the attitudinal environment is the most intangible of the four environments, and changes in the attitudinal environment typically take place through one-to-one interaction with people with disabilities.”

The researcher has had first hand experience as an educator in the community college setting. The researcher and fellow professors were not always aware or understanding of the issues of students who had learning disabilities. In retrospect, it is quite obvious that the lack of understanding came from this ignorance. Education is the

key that will allow faculty, staff and administrators to be enlightened regarding the area of disability as a whole, to be aware of LD issues, and the crucial role that they can play in facilitating or hindering educational goal attainment of students with LD.

An in-service should be developed to enhance awareness and facilitate understanding regarding students with disabilities among all college employees. This presentation focusing on the definition and characteristics of LD; the rights, issues, needs, and accommodations available to students with disabilities, and instructional strategies could be offered to all employees annually as a mandatory faculty and staff development offering. This could perhaps be accomplished via a DSSD presentation or via other mechanisms, such as securing speakers from the state or national level. Another option would be to develop an on-line tutorial as a mandatory annual training module, which could include streaming video vignettes depicting positive and negative scenarios between students with disabilities and others, to facilitate competency and sensitivity among all faculty, staff, and administrators.

The college should adopt a proactive approach to address a potential lack of knowledge and/or sensitivity among the student body by ensuring that an organization such as an ABLE/disABLEd Club is available to all students. This club could help to create greater awareness among the student body and the public regarding the rights of persons with disabilities through: 1) providing advocacy for the rights of students with disability; 2) explaining the responsibility of the campus to disabled students and all students; and 3) providing information to all students regarding the rights, privileges, and benefits of students with disabilities on and off campus.

An example would be the ABLE Student Organization established at Kennesaw

State University in Kennesaw, Georgia (Kennesaw State University, 2007). The mission of ABLE (Advocacy – Boldness – Leadership – Empowerment) is to "advocate on behalf of and heighten awareness of students with disAbilities in the Kennesaw State University community." This group was developed to "present views and raise awareness of students with and without disAbilities at Kennesaw State University. We are lively group enacted to enhance the college experience for all with disAbilities. Membership is free and is open to all regardless of age, gender, race, color, religion and ability."

*Conclusion # 3*

The community colleges should conduct surveys to determine student satisfaction with DSSD services, and for evaluation of the effectiveness of the services. It is likely that an unsatisfied student will not be retained at the college. As noted by Barnett (1992), "although some colleges have begun tracking students and measuring outcomes, there still is much to be accomplished in the area of Disability Support Services program evaluation." Finn (1999) also recommends evaluation of LD programs by colleges and universities to identify services in need of improvement.

According to Noel-Levitz (2005):

> Student satisfaction measurement is a core element of any comprehensive institutional assessment plan, and is an integral part of the assessment regularly conducted by higher education institutions. Collecting satisfaction data from students on a regular basis will enable campuses to determine where they are best serving students and where there are areas for improvement. Satisfied students are more likely to be successful students,...many factors impact student satisfaction such as:

academic factors, and interaction with faculty, as well as the services they receive from staff and administrators.

The DSSDs should conduct surveys to obtain information on student satisfaction with its services and to evaluate the effectiveness of its services each semester, or minimally conduct an annual evaluation. This could be accomplished by mailing a survey form to each student registered with the DSSD just prior to mid-term or at the end of each semester. The survey could be conducted via e-mail or traditional mail delivery. Conducting evaluations mid-term would allow for formative evaluations and would be informative regarding issues that could be addressed immediately rather than at the end of the semester or academic year.

The colleges should implement an early warning system that would notify the DSSD when an LD student stops attending class or does not re-enroll in a subsequent semester, to allow for follow-up and intervention to facilitate student retention. The Retention Task Force of Mountain Empire Community College in Big Stone Gap, Virginia recommended a comprehensive campus retention plan which would include:

> 1) a college-wide attendance policy, or faculty being encouraged to take class attendance so students having attendance problems can be identified; and 2) a process for monitoring student behaviors associated with failure (e.g., excessive absenteeism, failing grades, failure to turn in assignments, etc), so that intervention strategies can be employed to help at-risk students succeed (Sydow & Sandel, 1998).

A useful strategy utilized by the community and technical colleges in Washington State involved developing a list of indicators to track students over time, which allows for

assessment of the types of programs that need to be developed and implemented to increase student retention rates. One of these indicators involved tracking the percent of degree-seeking students who did not re-enroll in a two year period, after attending only one quarter (Wild & Ebbers, 2002). Every campus should develop its own set of indicators to assist with monitoring of students to facilitate student retention.

*Implications for Future Research*

As cited in the limitations section of this paper, a small, non-random sample was obtained for analysis in this research study, which limits the generalizability of the results to other populations. The use of one coder may potentially affect the validity of the qualitative analysis. Future research conducted in this area should utilize a larger sample size, and seek to obtain participants from a larger number of community college campuses throughout a multi-state area. A research team with additional coders should be utilized to enhance the validity of the qualitative analysis.

An additional area of focus would be to obtain information regarding faculty attitudes toward LD students. According to Campinha-Bacote (2003), cultural competence is "a process that involves cultural desire, cultural awareness, cultural knowledge, cultural skill (conducting culturally sensitive assessments) and cultural encounters."(p. 125). Cultural desire is defined as the motivation to "want to" engage in the process of becoming culturally competent, which is different from a feeling of "having to" participate in the process (p.126). Examination of the degree of cultural desire would be useful for identification of attitudinal barriers among faculty. It would also be informative to conduct an analysis of faculty workload and its impact on the time faculty has available to interact with LD students in need of accommodation.

These changes would greatly enhance the information available on the experiences of LD students who attend the community college, and give further insight into additional ways in which Disability Support Services Departments, Student Services Departments, administrators, and faculty can assist LD and other disabled students to achieve their educational goals.

*Summary*

This research study examined the experiences of students with learning disabilities who were attending two community colleges in the south central United States. Additional information was obtained regarding the students' perceptions of the effectiveness of disability support services and satisfaction with those services. The findings from this research revealed both positive and negative experiences of LD students during their education at the community college. Obtaining an Associate's degree was the goal cited most frequently by the LD students. Overall, the LD students were satisfied with DSSD services and felt they were effective in assisting them to achieve their educational goals.

The study findings revealed that community colleges possess many characteristics which help to facilitate LD student progression, retention, and educational goal attainment, and also illuminated areas that require additional attention by community colleges, such as: availability of services, attitudinal barriers, and processes for evaluation. The researcher proposes that a careful review of the research findings, recommendations, and suggested focus areas for future research will provide guidance to further enhance the abilities of community colleges to assist LD and other disabled students to achieve their educational goals.

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# APPENDICES

# APPENDIX A

# IRB APPROVAL LETTER

The University of Oklahoma

OFFICE FOR HUMAN RESEARCH PARTICIPANT PROTECTION

**IRB Number:** 11424
**Approval Date:** September 13, 2006

September 13, 2006

Voncella McCleary-Jones
Educational Leadership and Policy Studies

**RE: Students with Learning Disabilities in the Community College: Their Goals, Issues, Challenges and Successes**

Dear McCleary-Jones:

On behalf of the Institutional Review Board (IRB), I have reviewed and granted expedited approval of the above-referenced research study. This study meets the criteria for expedited approval category 6, 7. It is my judgment as Chairperson of the IRB that the rights and welfare of individuals who may be asked to participate in this study will be respected; that the proposed research, including the process of obtaining informed consent, will be conducted in a manner consistent with the requirements of 45 CFR 46 as amended; and that the research involves no more than minimal risk to participants.

This letter documents approval to conduct the research as described:

Consent form - Subject Dated: September 11, 2006 Revised - Student
Consent form - Subject Dated: September 11, 2006 Revised - Staff Counselor
IRB Application Dated: September 11, 2006 Revised
Consent form - Other Dated: August 22, 2006 Tape Recorded Interview - Student
Survey Instrument Dated: August 22, 2006 Disability Services Questionnnaire - Staff
Survey Instrument Dated: August 22, 2006 Demographic Data Sheet - Staff
Letter Dated: August 22, 2006 Letter of Introduction - Staff
Survey Instrument Dated: August 22, 2006 Learning Disability Student Questionnnaire
Survey Instrument Dated: August 22, 2006 Demographic Data Sheet - Student
Letter Dated: August 22, 2006 Letter of Introduction - Student
Protocol Dated: August 22, 2006
Letter Dated: April 25, 2006 Letter of Support - Seminole State College
Letter Dated: January 24, 2006 Letter of Support - Rose State College

As principal investigator of this protocol, it is your responsibility to make sure that this study is conducted as approved. Any modifications to the protocol or consent form, initiated by you or by the sponsor, will require prior approval, which you may request by completing a protocol modification form. All study records, including copies of signed consent forms, must be retained for three (3) years after termination of the study.

The approval granted expires on September 12, 2007. Should you wish to maintain this protocol in an active status beyond that date, you will need to provide the IRB with an IRB Application for Continuing Review (Progress Report) summarizing study results to date. The IRB will request an IRB Application for Continuing Review from you approximately two months before the anniversary date of your current approval.

If you have questions about these procedures, or need any additional assistance from the IRB, please call the IRB office at (405) 325-8110 or send an email to irb@ou.edu.

Cordially,

Lynn Devenport, Ph.D.
Vice-Chair, Institutional Review Board

660 Parrington Oval, Suite 316, Norman, Oklahoma 73019-3085 PHONE: (405) 325-8110 FAX: (405) 325-2373

The University of Oklahoma

OFFICE FOR HUMAN RESEARCH PARTICIPANT PROTECTION

**IRB Number: 11424**
**Amendment Approval Date: December 04, 2006**

December 05, 2006

Voncella McCleary-Jones
Educational Leadership and Policy Studies

**RE: IRB No. 11424: Students with Learning Disabilities in the Community College: Their Goals, Issues, Challenges and Successes**

Dear McCleary-Jones:

On behalf of the Institutional Review Board (IRB), I have reviewed your protocol modification form. It is my judgement that this modification allows for the rights and welfare of the research subjects to be respected. Further, it has been determined that the study will continue to be conducted in a manner consistent with the requirements of 45 CFR 46 as amended; and that the potential benefits to subjects and others warrant the risks subjects may choose to incur.

This letter documents approval to conduct the research as described in:

Amend Form Dated: November 30, 2006

**Amendment Summary:**

Change computer software to analyze data collection from NVIVO to NUDIST for this study.

This letter covers only the approval of the above referenced modification. All other conditions, including the original expiration date, from the approval granted September 13, 2006 are still effective.

Any proposed change in approved research including the protocol, consent document, or other recruitment materials cannot be initiated without IRB approval except when necessary to eliminate immediate hazards to participants. Changes in approved research initiated without IRB approval to eliminate immediate hazards to the participant must be promptly reported to the IRB. Completion of approved research must be reported to the IRB. If consent form revisions are a part of this modification, you will be provided with a new stamped copy of your consent form. Please use this stamped copy for all future consent documentation. Please discontinue use of all outdated versions of this consent form.

If you have any questions about these procedures or need additional assistance, please do not hesitate to call the IRB office at (405) 325-8110 or send an email to irb@ou.edu.

Cordially,

E. Laurette Taylor, Ph.D.
Chair, Institutional Review Board

*Ltr_Amend_Final_Appv_Exp*

APPENDIX B

STUDY CONSENT FORMS

INFORMED CONSENT
TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

| | |
|---|---|
| PROJECT TITLE: | Students with Learning Disabilities in the Community College: Their Goals, Issues, Challenges and Successes |
| PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: | Ms. Voncella McCleary-Jones, PhD Candidate |
| CONTACT | 2704N.W.161stStreet<br>Edmond,OK73013<br>(405)330-1876<br>b-vjones@cox.net,<br>Voncella-McCleary-Jones@ouhsc.edu<br>Voncella.Mc-Cleary-Jones-1@ou.edu |

You are being asked to volunteer for a research study. This study is being conducted at community colleges in the south central United States. You were selected as a possible participant because you self-identified as having a learning disability to the Disability Support Services Department at your institution. Please read this form and ask any questions that you may have before agreeing to take part in this study.

The sponsor of the study is: Graduate College of Education.

Purpose of the Research Study

The purpose of this study is to obtain information regarding the experiences of students with learning disabilities (LDs) in the community college. A particular focus within this study will be to examine the perceived effectiveness of Disability Support Services Departments (DSSDs) services and their impact on the progression and retention of students with LDs towards their educational goals.

Procedures

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to do the following things:

Students – A) Complete a consent form, demographic data sheet, and LDSQ survey. The demographic data sheet should require 5 minutes to complete, and the LDSQ is a 13-item questionnaire that should require approximately 20 minutes for completion. B) Return one copy of the consent form within two weeks via the self-addressed stamped envelope provided. C) Indicate on your consent form if you would agree to participate in a focus group interview session at your institution. D) Focus group interviews will be conducted with approximately 4 – 8 students from your institution. The focus group interviews will last approximately 1 to 2 hours in duration for the session that will be conducted at your institution. The session will be audio taped to allow accurate transcription of data.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study

The study has the following risks: There are no foreseeable risks anticipated for participants of the study, beyond those present in routine daily life.

The benefits to participation are: T he information obtained through this research study will be informative for Disability Support Services Departments in the development of assessment measures to document the effectiveness of disability services provided, and for planning and development of additional services for LD and other disabled students who attend the community college. Students with LD who utilize the services of the DSSDs will benefit from the restructuring of current services and/ or the development of additional services designed to facilitate their attainment of their educational goals.

Compensation

You will be reimbursed for your time and participation in this study: Student participants will be paid $20.00 in cash upon completion of the focus group session.

Voluntary Nature of the Study

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not result in penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time.

Confidentiality

The records of this study will be kept private. In published reports, there will be no information included that will make it possible to identify the research participant. Research records will be stored securely. A number will be assigned and placed on each consent form as a method of tracking returned consent forms. Students who participate in the focus group session will be given a pseudonym which will be committed to memory by the researcher, and only approved researchers will have access to the records. The place of research will be identified as “a community college in the south central United States”. All audio tapes and transcription notes will be kept in a securely locked

place, and only the researcher will have access to them. All data will be kept intact for the 3 year period specified by the IRB, and will be destroyed after data analysis is completed.

Participants' names will not be linked with their responses unless the participant specifically agrees to be identified. Please select one of the following options.

___ I prefer to leave my identity unacknowledged when documenting findings; please do not release my name when citing the findings.
___ I consent to the use of my name when recording findings and that I may be quoted directly.

Audio Taping of Study Activities:

To assist with accurate recording of participant responses, interviews may be recorded on an audio recording device during the focus group interview at your institution. Participants have the right to refuse to allow such taping without penalty. Please select one of the following options.

_____ I consent to the use of audio recording.
_____ I do not consent to the use of audio recording.

Participation in Focus Group Interview

Students will be asked to participate in a focus group interview session with approximately 4-8 students at your institution, which will last approximately 1 to 2 hours. Please select one of the following options.

_____ I consent to participate in a focus group interview.
_____ I do not consent to participate in a focus group interview.

Please include your contact information below if you do consent to participate in a focus group, so that you may be contacted to schedule a meeting time that is convenient for you.

Name:
_____
Address:
_____
Telephone Number: ( )

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher(s) conducting this study can be contacted at: Principal investigator, Voncella McCleary-Jones at (405) 330-1876, b-vjones@cox.net or Voncella-McCleary-Jones@ouhsc.edu or Voncella.Mc-Cleary-Jones-1@ou.edu. Doctoral faculty advisor, Dr. Debra Gutierrez at (405) 325-7941, gutierrez@ou.edu. You are encouraged to contact the researcher(s) if you have any questions.

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the University of Oklahoma – Norman Campus Institutional Review Board (OU-NC IRB) at 405.325.8110 or irb@ou.edu.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records. If you are not given a copy of this consent form, please request one.

STATEMENT OF CONSENT

I have read the above information. I have asked questions and have received satisfactory answers. I consent to participate in the study.

Signature Date

INFORMED CONSENT
TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

| | |
|---|---|
| PROJECT TITLE: | Students with Learning Disabilities in the Community College: Their Goals, Issues, Challenges and Successes |
| PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: | Ms. Voncella McCleary-Jones, PhD Candidate |
| CONTACT | 2704N.W.161stStreet<br>Edmond,OK73013<br>(405)330-1876<br>b-vjones@cox.net,<br>Voncella-McCleary-Jones@ouhsc.edu<br>Voncella.Mc-Cleary-Jones-1@ou.edu |

You are being asked to volunteer for a research study. This study is being conducted at community colleges in the south central United States. You were selected as a possible participant because you are a Disability Support Services counselor. Please read this form and ask any questions that you may have before agreeing to take part in this study.

The sponsor of the study is: Graduate College of Education.

Purpose of the Research Study

The purpose of this study is to obtain information regarding the experiences of students with learning disabilities (LDs) in the community college. A particular focus within this study will be to examine the perceived effectiveness of Disability Support Services Departments (DSSDs) services and their impact on the progression and retention of students with LDs towards their educational goals.

Procedures

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to do the following things:

Disability support services counselors – A) Complete a consent form, demographic data sheet, and DSQ survey that will be sent to you via U. S. postal mail. B) Return the requested information within two weeks via the self-addressed stamped envelope provided. The demographic data sheet should require 5 minutes to complete, and the DSQ survey is a 14-item questionnaire that should require approximately 30 minutes for completion. C) Distribute packet with a letter of introduction and two consent forms to

students attending your institution who have self-identified as having a LD in the current academic term (Fall 2006).

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study

The study has the following risks: There are no foreseeable risks anticipated for participants of the study, beyond those present in routine daily life.

The benefits to participation are: T he information obtained through this research study will be informative for Disability Support Services Departments in the development of assessment measures to document the effectiveness of disability services provided, and for planning and development of additional services for LD and other disabled students who attend the community college. Students with LD who utilize the services of the DSSDs will benefit from the restructuring of current services and/ or the development of additional services designed to facilitate their attainment of their educational goals.

Compensation

There will be no monetary reimbursement for your time and participation in this study.

Voluntary Nature of the Study

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not result in penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time.

Confidentiality

The records of this study will be kept private. In published reports, there will be no information included that will make it possible to identify the research participant. Research records will be stored securely. A number will be assigned and placed on each consent form as a method of tracking returned consent forms. Counselors who participate in the study will be given a pseudonym which will be committed to memory by the researcher, and only approved researchers will have access to the records. The place of research will be identified as "a community college in the south central United States". All research documents will be kept in a securely locked place, and only the researcher will have access to them. All data will be kept intact for the 3 year period specified by the IRB, and will be destroyed after data analysis is completed.

Participants' names will not be linked with their responses unless the participant specifically agrees to be identified. Please select one of the following options.

___ I prefer to leave my identity unacknowledged when documenting findings; please do not release my name when citing the findings.

___ I consent to the use of my name when recording findings and that I may be quoted directly.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher(s) conducting this study can be contacted at: Principal investigator, Voncella McCleary-Jones at (405) 330-1876, b-vjones@cox.net or Voncella-McCleary-Jones@ouhsc.edu or Voncella.Mc-Cleary-Jones-1@ou.edu. Doctoral faculty advisor, Dr. Debra Gutierrez at (405) 325-7941, gutierrez@ou.edu. You are encouraged to contact the researcher(s) if you have any questions.

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the University of Oklahoma – Norman Campus Institutional Review Board (OU-NC IRB) at 405.325.8110 or irb@ou.edu.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records. If you are not given a copy of this consent form, please request one.

STATEMENT OF CONSENT

I have read the above information. I have asked questions and have received satisfactory answers. I consent to participate in the study.

Signature Date

TAPE RECORDED INTERVIEW CONSENT SCRIPT

XX XX, 2006

Dear Study Participant :

I am a nursing faculty member and a PhD candidate graduate student under the direction of professor Dr. Debra Gutierrez in the Graduate College of Education, Educational Leadership and Policy Studies in the Adult and Higher Education Administration Department at The University of Oklahoma. I invite you to participate in an interview as part of a research study being conducted under the auspices of the University of Oklahoma-Norman Campus and entitled "Students with Learning Disabilities in the Community College: Their Goals, Issues, Challenges and Successes". The purpose of this study is to obtain information regarding the experiences of students with learning disabilities (LDs) in the community college. A particular focus within this study will be to examine the perceived effectiveness of Disability Support Services Departments (DSSDs) services and their impact on the progression and retention of students with LDs towards their educational goals.
**Participants in this study must be 18 years of age or older.

Your participation will involve the completion of a demographic data sheet, Learning Disability Student Questionnaire (LDSQ), and participation in a student focus group interview with approximately 4-8 students at your institution. The focus group interview will be audio tape recorded. The focus group interview should only take about 1 – 2 hours. Your involvement in the study is voluntary, and you may choose not to participate or to stop at any time. The results of the research study may be published, but your name will not be used. In fact, the published results will be presented in summary form only. Your identity will not be associated with your responses in any published format.

The findings from this project will provide information on the experiences of students with learning disabilities and the impact that Disability Support Services Departments have in facilitating educational goal attainment among students with learning disabilities who attend the community college, with no cost to you other than the time it takes for the completion of the questionnaires and the focus group interview session.

If you have any questions about this research project, please feel free to call me Voncella McCleary-Jones at (405) 330-1876, or send e-mail to b-vjones@cox.net, or Voncella-McCleary-Jones@ouhsc.edu, or Voncella.Mc-Cleary-Jones-1@ou.edu. You may contact my faculty sponsor Dr. Debra Gutierrez at (405) 325-7941, or send e-mail to gutierrez@ou.edu. Questions about your rights as a research participant or concerns about the project should be directed to the Institutional Review Board at The University of Oklahoma-Norman Campus at (405) 325-8110 or irb@ou.edu.

I would like to audio-tape this focus group interview. Do I have your permission to audio-tape the interview? _____ Yes _____ No

Thanks for your help!
Sincerely,
Voncella McCleary-Jones
PhD Candidate, University of Oklahoma, Norman, OK

APPENDIX C

LETTER OF INTRODUCTION – STUDENT

Voncella McCleary-Jones MS,RN,BC
2704 N. W. 161st Street
Edmond, OK 73013
Home phone: (405) 330-1876
Work phone: (405) 271-1491, ext. 49167
Email: b-vjones@cox.net or Voncella.Mc-Cleary-Jones-1@ou.edu" Voncella.Mc-Cleary-Jones-1@ou.edu

XX, XX, 2006

Ms, Mr
xxx Street
XX, Oklahoma

Dear Student,
I am a nursing faculty member at the University of Oklahoma, College of Nursing in Oklahoma City, OK, and I am currently completing doctoral studies in the Graduate College of Education at the University of Oklahoma in Norman, OK. I have obtained approval from the Institutional Review Board of the University of Oklahoma to conduct a research study entitled " Students with Disabilities in the Community College: Their Goals, Issues, Challenges and Successes".
This research study will utilize the Learning Disability Student Questionnaire (LDSQ) to survey a sample of students attending Oklahoma community colleges who have self-identified as having a learning disability, and the Disability Services Questionnaire (DSQ) to survey disability support services counselors. Data will be collected during a focus group session that will be conducted at your institution. The information obtained through this research study will be informative for Disability Support Services Departments and students with learning disabilities who utilize the services of the Disability Support Services Departments.
I would like to obtain your consent to participate in this research study. Your participation is voluntary and you may refuse or discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefit. Enclosed you will find two consent forms. If you agree to participate in this study, please return one consent form in the self-addressed stamped envelope provided within two weeks of receipt. Please retain one copy of the consent form for your records. Following the receipt of your consent form, you will be contacted regarding the date, time, and location of the focus group session which will be conducted at your institution. You will be paid $20.00 cash when you complete the focus group session, which will last approximately one to two hours.
Thank you in advance for your consideration of this request to participate in this very important research study.

Sincerely,

Voncella McCleary-Jones MS,RN,BC
Nursing Instructor/ University of Oklahoma College of Nursing - OKC, OK
PhD Candidate, University of Oklahoma, Norman, OK
Enclosures (2)

APPENDIX D

DEMOGRAPHIC DATA SHEET – STUDENT

Demographic Data Sheet– Student

Directions: Please complete the following survey by indicating your response to each item in the space provided.

1. What is your current age in years? _____

2. What is your gender? _____ Male _____ Female

3. What is your racial identification? (Mark only one)

_____ African American or Black

_____ Native American (Indian, Alaskan, Hawaiian)

_____ Caucasian or White

_____ Mexican American, Mexican Origin

_____ Asian American, Oriental, Pacific Islander

_____ Puerto Rican, Cuban, Other Latino or Hispanic

_____ Other: _____

_____ I Prefer Not to Respond.

4. What is your current marital status?

_____ Unmarried (Including Single, Divorced, and Widowed)

_____ Married

_____ Separated

_____ I Prefer Not to Respond.

5. What is your current enrollment status at this college?

_____ Full-time Student (12 or more semester credit hours)
_____ Part-time Student (Less than 12 semester credit hours)

APPENDIX E

LEARNING DISABILITY STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE (LDSQ)

Learning Disability Student Questionnaire (LDSQ)

Directions: Please complete the following survey by indicating your response to each item in the space provided. The survey should take approximately 20 minutes to complete.

1. How many semesters of college have you completed? _____

2. How many semesters have you completed at this institution? _____

3. What is your current grade point average (GPA)? _____

4. What is your major? _____
   □ Check here if Undecided

5. Do you currently use any services available through the disability support services department at this institution? _____ Yes _____ No

6. How were you informed of the existence of a disability support services department at this institution?

7. What is your specific learning disability for which you have requested accommodations from the disability support services department?

8. How frequently do you contact the disability support services department?

_____ Weekly
_____ Monthly
_____ Once a semester
_____ Twice a semester
_____ Other (Specify):

9. Which disability support services have you used at this institution?(Please check all that apply).

| | |
|---|---|
| _____ Disability support services office | _____ Textbooks on tape |
| _____ Disability- specific scholarships | _____ Tutoring |
| _____ Disability resource handbook | _____ Alternative exam format/ extra time |
| _____ Special orientation | _____ Course substitution or waiver |
| _____ Registration assistance | _____ Independent living skills training |
| _____ Emergency evacuation | _____ Career counseling |
| _____ Transportation | _____ Job-seeking skills training |
| _____ Extracurricular campus activities | _____ Job placement |
| _____ Adapted sports/ physical education | _____ Study skills training |
| _____ Counseling (personal) | _____ Self-advocacy training |
| _____ Disability- specific assessment | _____ Transfer assistance |
| _____ Learning center lab | _____ Note takers/scribes/readers |
| _____ Interpreters (sign language) | _____ Adaptive equipment and technology (e.g., assistive listening devices, talking computers) |
| _____ Disability benefits counseling (e.g., Vocational Rehab. services, SSI, SSDI, Medicare, Medicaid) | |
| _____ None | _____ Other (Specify): |

10. What were your goals for attending this 2-year college? (Mark all that apply)

____ complete a certificate program
____ obtain an associate degree
____ transfer to a 4-year college
____ obtain or update job-related skills
____ self-improvement/personal enjoyment

____ change careers
____ no definite purpose in mind
____ other (please specify) _____

11. How effective has the disability support services department been in assisting you with your educational goals? (Please use the 1-5 scale provided below, and . circle your response).

1- not effective 2- slightly ineffective 3- neutral 4- slightly effective 5- highly effective

12. How satisfied are you with the disability support services available at this institution? (Please use the 1-5 scale provided below, and circle your response).

1- not satisfied 2- slightly unsatisfied 3- neutral 4- slightly satisfied 5- highly satisfied

13. How satisfied are you with your disabilities support services counselor(s)? (Please use the 1-5 scale provided below, and circle your response).

1- not satisfied 2- slightly unsatisfied 3- neutral 4- slightly satisfied 5- highly satisfied

APPENDIX F

LETTER OF INTRODUCTION – STAFF

Voncella McCleary-Jones MS,RN,BC
2704 N. W. 161st Street
Edmond, OK 73013
Home phone: (405) 330-1876
Work phone: (405) 271-1491, ext. 49167
Email: b-vjones@cox.net or Voncella.Mc-Cleary-Jones-1@ou.edu" Voncella.Mc-Cleary-Jones-1@ou.edu

XX,XX 2006
Dr, Ms, Mr
Disability Support Services
XX Community College
xxx Street
XX, Oklahoma

Dear Counselor,
I am a nursing faculty member at the University of Oklahoma College of Nursing in OKC, OK, and I am currently completing doctoral studies in the Graduate College of Education at the University of Oklahoma in Norman, OK. I have obtained approval from the Institutional Review Board of the University of Oklahoma to conduct a research study entitled " Students with Disabilities in the Community College: Their Goals, Issues, Challenges and Successes".
This research study will utilize the Disability Services Questionnaire (DSQ) and the Learning Disability Student Questionnaire (LDSQ) to survey a sample of disability support services counselors and students attending Oklahoma community colleges who have self-identified as having a learning disability. Additionally, you are asked to distribute the information packets provided via U.S. Postal mail service to students who have self-identified as having a learning disability and are currently (Fall 2006) using disability support services available at your institution. The information obtained through this research study will be informative for Disability Support Services Departments and students with learning disabilities who utilize the services of the Disability Support Services Departments.
I would like to obtain your consent to participate in this research study. Attached you will find two consent forms, a demographic data sheet, and the DSQ survey form. Participation is voluntary and you may refuse or discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefit. If you agree to participate in this study, please return all documents via the self-addressed stamped envelope provided within two weeks of receipt. Please retain one copy of the consent form for your records.
Thank you in advance for your consideration of this request to participate in this very important research study.

Sincerely,

Voncella McCleary-Jones MS,RN,BC
Nursing Instructor/ University of Oklahoma College of Nursing – OKC, OK
PhD Candidate, University of Oklahoma, Norman, OK

Enclosures (4)

APPENDIX G

DEMOGRAPHIC DATA SHEET – STAFF

Demographic Data Sheet– Staff
Directions: Please complete the following survey by indicating your response to each item in the space provided.

1. What is your current age in years? _____

2. What is your gender? _____ Male _____ Female

3. What is your racial identification? (Mark only one)

| | |
|---|---|
| _____ African American or Black | _____ Asian American, Oriental, Pacific Islander |
| _____ Native American (Indian, Alaskan, Hawaiian) | _____ Puerto Rican, Cuban, Other Latino or Hispanic |
| _____ Caucasian or White | _____ Other: _____ |
| _____ Mexican American, Mexican Origin | _____ I Prefer Not to Respond. |

4. What is the highest academic credential you have earned?

| | |
|---|---|
| _____ High School Diploma or GED | _____ Master's Degree/ 1st professional |
| _____ Associate's Degree | _____ Doctorate Degree |
| _____ Bachelor's Degree | |

5. What is your specific position title? _____

6. How many years have you been in this position? _____

7. What specific training or education did you receive for this position?

8. Does your institution have a disability support services department?
□ Yes □ No
*If no, Please specify where disability students report at your institution.

APPENDIX H

DISABILITY SERVICES QUESTIONNAIRE (DSQ)

Disability Services Questionnaire (DSQ)
Directions: Please complete the following survey by indicating your response to each item in the space provided. The survey should take approximately 30 minutes to complete.

1. What is the unduplicated student headcount of your institution for the following terms? Spring 2006 _____ Fall 2006 _____

2. Does your institution currently have a federal Student Support Services Grant?

   _____ Yes _____ No

3. ENROLLMENT/ GRADUATION. Please base your answers on Spring 2006 headcount. Estimated numbers are acceptable.

| | Gender | Race/Ethnicity |
|---|---|---|
| Students registered for Disability Support Services (DSS) | ____ Male<br>____ Female | _____ African American _____ Native American / Alaskan<br>_____ Asian/ Pacific Islander _____ White (Non-Hispanic)<br>_____ Hispanic/ Latino |
| Associate's Degrees earned by students registered for DSS | ____ Male<br>____ Female | _____ African American _____ Native American / Alaskan<br>_____ Asian/ Pacific Islander _____ White (Non-Hispanic)<br>_____ Hispanic/ Latino |
| Certificates earned by students registered for DSS | ____ Male<br>____ Female | _____ African American _____ Native American / Alaskan<br>_____ Asian/ Pacific Islander _____ White (Non-Hispanic)<br>_____ Hispanic/ Latino |
| Total Headcount enrollment | ____ Male<br>____ Female | _____ African American _____ Native American / Alaskan<br>_____ Asian/ Pacific Islander _____ White (Non-Hispanic)<br>_____ Hispanic/ Latino |

4. NUMBER OF STUDENTS REGISTERED FOR DISABILITY SUPPORT SERVICES BY CATEGORY. Please report the number of students by specific disabilities, and then the total number with any disability. Please provide counts for the 2006 term if possible. If your institution can provide counts for only one of these academic periods, please indicate the specific term here □ Spring 2006 or □ Fall 2006, and report those counts below. Some students may fall into more than one category; in these cases give numbers for the primary category only.

a. _____ Hearing impairment (i.e., deaf or hard of hearing)

b. _____ Visual impairment (blindness, or impairment not correctable with glasses)

c. _____ Orthopedic/ mobility impairment

d. _____ Speech/ language impairment

e. _____ Learning disabilities (LD)

f. _____ Attention deficit/ Hyperactivity disorder

g. _____ Mental retardation

h. _____ Mental illness (emotional, behavioral disorders)

i. _____ Head injuries

j. _____ Health impairment (chronic medical illness)

k. Other (specify) _____
_____

* Total number of disabilities reported _____

5. SUPPORT SERVICES AND ACCOMMODATIONS ABLE TO MEET THE NEEDS OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES. Please check all support services or accommodations provided to a student with a disability of ANY type during the 2006 term.

| | |
|---|---|
| _____ Disability support services office | _____ Textbooks on tape |
| _____ Disability- specific scholarships | _____ Tutoring |
| _____ Disability resource handbook | _____ Alternative exam format/ extra time |
| _____ Special orientation | _____ Course substitution or waiver |
| _____ Registration assistance | _____ Independent living skills training |
| _____ Emergency evacuation | _____ Career counseling |
| _____ Transportation | _____ Job-seeking skills training |
| _____ Extracurricular campus activities | _____ Job placement |
| _____ Adapted sports/ physical education | _____ Study skills training |
| _____ Counseling (personal) | _____ Self-advocacy training |
| _____ Disability- specific assessment | _____ Transfer assistance |
| _____ Learning center lab | _____ Note takers/scribes/readers |
| _____ Interpreters (sign language) | _____ Adaptive equipment and technology (e.g., assistive listening devices, talking computers) |
| _____ Disability benefits counseling (e.g., Vocational Rehab. services, SSI, SSDI, Medicare, Medicaid) | |
| _____ Other (Specify): | |

6. SUPPORT SERVICES AND ACCOMMODATIONS ABLE TO MEET THE NEEDS OF STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES (LD). Please check all support services or accommodations provided to a student with a Learning Disability during the 2006 term.

| | |
|---|---|
| _____ Disability support services office | _____ Textbooks on tape |
| _____ Disability- specific scholarships | _____ Tutoring (specialized LD) |
| _____ Disability resource handbook | _____ Alternative exam format/ extra time |
| _____ Special orientation | _____ Course substitution or waiver |
| _____ Registration assistance | _____ Independent living skills training |
| _____ Emergency evacuation | _____ Career counseling |
| _____ Transportation | _____ Job-seeking skills training |
| _____ Extracurricular campus activities | _____ Job placement |
| _____ Adapted sports/ physical education | _____ Study skills training |
| _____ Counseling (personal) | _____ Self-advocacy training |
| _____ Disability- specific assessment | _____ Transfer assistance |
| _____ Learning center lab | _____ Note takers/scribes/readers |
| _____ Interpreters (sign language) | _____ Adaptive equipment and technology (e.g., assistive listening devices, talking computers) |
| _____ Disability benefits counseling (e.g., Vocational Rehab. services, SSI, SSDI, Medicare, Medicaid) | |
| _____ Other (Specify): | |

7. Which of the following kinds of education materials or activities, if any, does your institution provide for faculty and staff designed to assist them in working with students with disabilities?

a. _____ Faculty/ staff handbook

b. _____ Annual mailings to faculty/ staff

c. _____ Workshops and presentations to faculty groups

d. _____ One-on-one discussions with faculty / staff who request information or assistance

e. _____ Information resources (e.g., books, videotapes) available for faculty/ staff use

f. _____ Other (specify) _____

8. How does your disability support services department track the progress (by semester)and retention rate (fall to spring) of ALL students with disabilities who utilize your services?

9. How does your disability support services department track the progress (by semester) and retention rate (fall to spring) of LD students who utilize your services?

10. Do you feel your disability support services department has effective services and adequate resources for disabled students? (Please use the 1-5 scale provided below, and circle your response).

1- not effective 2- slightly ineffective 3- neutral 4- slightly effective 5- highly effective

11. Do you feel your disability support services department has effective services and adequate resources for LD students? (Please use the 1-5 scale provided below, and circle your response).

1- not effective 2- slightly ineffective 3- neutral 4- slightly effective 5- highly effective

12. Does your disability support services department conduct student surveys to obtain feedback regarding student satisfaction with disability support services at your institution? _____ Yes _____ No

If yes, please provide the name of the standardized survey utilized, or include a copy of the specific survey utilized by your institution.

| Name of Survey Instrument: |
|---|
| |

13. Please indicate where your students with ANY disability who utilized disability support services go after leaving your institution. (1=most, 2=some, 3= few)

| Work | Education | Other |
|---|---|---|
| _____ Professional | _____ Other 2-year college | _____ Please specify: |
| _____ Technical | _____ 4-year college/ university | |
| _____ Clerical | _____ Independent/ specialized training | |
| _____ Other | _____ Other | |
| _____ Don't know | _____ Don't know | |

14. Please indicate where your students with LD who utilized disability support services go after leaving your institution. (1=most, 2=some, 3= few)

| Work | Education | Other |
|---|---|---|
| _____ Professional | _____ Other 2-year college | _____ Please specify: |
| _____ Technical | _____ 4-year college/ university | |
| _____ Clerical | _____ Independent/ specialized training | |
| _____ Other | _____ Other | |
| _____ Don't know | _____ Don't know | |

# APPENDIX I

## FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Focus Group Interview Questions

1) What were some of your reasons or goals for entering a 2-year college to pursue your education?
2) What were your reasons for selecting this particular 2-year college?
3) What is your overall impression of the quality of education at this 2-year college?
4) Do you intend to continue your education at this community college? Please explain why or why not.
5) If you could start college over, would you choose to attend this 2-year college? Please explain why or why not.
6) Describe the experiences, positive or negative, that you've encountered as an LD student at this college.
7) How likely is it that the following issues would cause you to withdraw from class or from this college?
   a) Working full-time b) Caring for dependents c) Academically unprepared d) Lack of finances e) Transfer to a 4-year college or university f) Transfer to a different 2-year college g) inadequate accommodations for your disability h) feeling a lack of support
8) Do you feel the disability support services department at this 2-year college has helped you to be successful in completing your educational goals? Please explain and/or relate any specific examples.
9) Do you feel that you have had a positive relationship with your disability support services counselor(s) at this institution? Please explain and/or relate any specific examples.
10) What, if any, changes or improvements would you suggest for the disability support services department at this 2-year college, that would be most effective in assisting you in completing your educational goals?

# APPENDIX J

## STUDENT PARTICIPANT SUMMARIES

College A Participants

CAROL
Caucasian female. Married and attending college full-time. First semester of college. Major: Nursing.

DAVID
Caucasian male. Single and attending college full-time. Has completed four semesters of college with a 3.0 GPA. Majors: Ministry and Psychology.

KAREN
Caucasian female. Married and attending college full-time, while employed part-time. Has completed four semesters of college with a 3.0 GPA. Major: Child Development.

PAULA
Caucasian female. Single and attending college full-time. Has completed one semester of college with a 3.4 GPA. Major: Law.

College B Participants

ANDREA
African-American female. Single and attending college part-time, while employed full-time. Has completed one semester at College B and also takes classes at a 4-year university. Lists GPA as "C average". Major: Psychology.

JAMES
Caucasian male. Single and attending college full-time, while employed part-time. Has completed two semesters of college with a 4.0 GPA. Major: Business.

JANE
Caucasian female. Single and attending college part-time, while employed full-time. First semester of college. Major: Social Work.

MICHAEL
Caucasian male. Single and attending college part-time. First semester of college. Major: Undecided.

RACHEL
Caucasian female. Single and attending college part-time. First semester of college. Major: Pre-education.

STACEY
African-American female. Single and attending college part-time. Has completed one semester at College B with a 1.95 GPA and has also taken classes at another 2-year college. Major: Criminal Justice.