IDENTIFYING POSTSECONDARY SUCCESS FOR COLLEGE STUDENTS WITH AND WITHOUT DISABILITIES

A dissertation to be submitted to the Kent State University Graduate School of Education, Health, and Human Services in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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The purpose of this qualitative study was to identify student perceptions and experiences of what was required to successfully transition and succeed in college. The researcher used focus group interviews to collect data from college students with and without disabilities. Participating students came from 6 universities, both in and outside of Ohio.

The two research questions answered in this study were: (1) How do students with disabilities and students without disabilities define success in college and barriers to success based on responses to focus group questions? and (2) Did students participating in the current research identify the same themes, categories, and subcategories that were identified in the original research (Webster, 2001, 2004)?

A total of 20 students with (12), and without (8), documented disabilities participated in the focus group interviews. Sixteen focus group questions were used in the interviews with topics that included: Transition into College, Supports and Services, College Experiences, and Personal Attributes.

RQ1: Overall responses to specific focus questions were similar for students with and without disabilities. Categories generated by both groups were consistent with factors discussed in the literature regarding success in college.
RQ2: Results showed that subcategories generated were generally similar to Webster’s taxonomy (61%); categories generated were very similar (88%); and themes generated were the same (100%).

The similarities in participants’ college experiences described by the awareness of themselves and the awareness of others indicated that all college students, in the current research and Webster’s study, identified similar indicators for achieving college success.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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postsecondary experiences. Special thanks to the instructors and professors who collaborated with Kent State University with the dissemination of the Disability Policy: Leadership for the 21st Century course. The orchestration of the Outreaching project would not have been possible without you.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The field of Special Education made considerable advances throughout the 20th and into the 21st century on the road to establishing equal opportunities for people with disabilities (Beirne-Smith, Patton, & Kim, 2005; Flexer, Baer, Luft, & Simmons, 2008; Stodden, Whelley, Chang, & Harding, 2001; Szymanski, Hanley-Maxwell, & Asselin, 1990; Wehman, 2006). As part of this progress, postsecondary institutions such as colleges and universities have made considerable gains to promote educational opportunities and access for students with disabilities, especially over the past 30 years (Rumrill, 1994; Shaw, 2009).

Achieving access to postsecondary education for individuals with disabilities was extremely limited prior to 1973. Individuals with disabilities were often subjected to discrimination due to a lack of legal protections to protect their civil rights (Gajar, 1998; Webster, Clary, & Griffith, 2005). The medical model of disability prevailed through the third quarter of the 20th century, and to some extent still exists (Beirne-Smith, Patton, & Kim, 2005; G. Williams, 2001). A person with a disability was seen as someone in need of being cured or fixed and was not considered to be a normal human being under this medical or deficit model (G. Williams, 2001). A commonly held stereotype regarding people with disabilities was that they had inferior abilities, and therefore could not succeed in postsecondary education.

Along with society’s hindering beliefs, competent and qualified persons with disabilities did not have legal recourse to challenge the subjective practices of
postsecondary institutions when they were denied admission based exclusively on their disability. The 14th amendment of the Constitution requires states to provide equal protection of people and to give due process any time action by the state adversely affects a person’s life, liberty, or property. However, it was not until the passage of several major laws, as well as subsequent legislation, that students with disabilities began to participate in postsecondary education in ever-escalating numbers (Newman, Wagner, Cameto, Knokey, & Shaver, 2010; Snyder & Dillow, 2010).

**Legislation Impacting Participation in Postsecondary Education**

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 applies to both public and private recipients of federal financial assistance and is enforced in large part by the Office for Civil Rights (OCR). Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act states, “no otherwise qualified person with a disability can be excluded from participating in, or be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program receiving federal assistance” (Latham, Latham, & Mandlawitz, 2008). Practically all postsecondary educational institutions in the United States currently receive some type of federal subsidies making them responsible to provide access and accommodations to students with appropriately documented disabilities. Specifically, Section 504 prohibits postsecondary institutions from (a) limiting the number of qualified students who can be admitted, (b) asking applicants if they have a disability, and (c) excluding students solely on the basis of their disability (Huefnner, 2000). Furthermore, Subpart E of the legislation concentrates on higher education and requires both public and private institutions to create appropriate
academic adjustments and reasonable modifications to the institutions’ procedures and policies to ensure full participation of students with disabilities (Latham et al., 2008).

Another piece of legislation that greatly affects students with disabilities is the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA; P.L. 101-336). The ADA was passed in 1990 and expanded the scope of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. The ADA prohibited discrimination, based on one’s disability, in the realms of (a) employment, (b) public services and transportation, (c) public accommodations, as well as (d) providing telecommunications relay services for individuals who have hearing impairments or deafness. Based on the ADA, colleges and universities could no longer legally deny access to their programs, services, or activities to persons with documented disabilities regardless of whether or not they received federal subsidies (Latham et al., 2008).

**Legislation Pertinent to the Preparation of Students Pursuing Postsecondary Education**

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA; P.L. 101-476) originally passed in 1990, amended as P.L. 105-17 in 1997, and reauthorized again under H.R. 1350, as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA 2004) formally promoted transition services, or the movement from secondary school to post-school activities, such as the world of work, or postsecondary education. IDEA provided access to a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) for students with disabilities in grades K-12. The creation of individualized education programs (IEPs) for each student as well as placing the student in a least restrictive environment (LRE) were hallmark benefits to students under IDEA. A specific part of the law was targeted at
secondary students moving from high school to postsecondary environments. This coordinated set of activities designed to successfully move a student from high school to post high school life was named transition.

The reauthorization of IDEA in 2004 brought several alterations in the definition of transition services by changing the previous outcome oriented process to results oriented and a concentration on improving the academic and functional achievement of an individual. In addition, the child’s strengths were to be taken into consideration along with the child’s needs, preferences, and interests, including access to postsecondary education. IDEIA (2004) also mandated the development of measurable postsecondary goals in the areas of postsecondary education and training, employment, and independent living, based on age-appropriate transition assessments. Students who indicate a desire to attend a postsecondary institution such as a 4-year college can obtain assistance with pertinent courses of study and transition services.

**Enrollment of Students With Disabilities in Postsecondary Education**

As a result of legislation, including the ADA Amendments Act of 2008 and the 2008 Higher Education Opportunity Act, the number of full-time college freshmen reporting disabilities increased dramatically over the past 30 years. With the provisions of legislation promoting transition, reinforced by the persistent work of people with disabilities and their advocates, students with disabilities are enrolling in 4-year colleges and universities at an increasing rate (Newman et al., 2010; Snyder & Dillow, 2010). The National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) presented estimates based on a survey of students enrolled in postsecondary institutions for the academic years 2003-04...
and 2007-08. Students with documented disabilities represented 11.3% of undergraduates in 2003-04 and 10.8% in 2007-08. Graduate students with disabilities enrolled in postsecondary institutions for the academic year 2007-08 was nearly 8% (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). The number of students with disabilities entering all kinds of postsecondary educational programs has practically quadrupled since 1978. Raue and Lewis (2011) estimated two- and 4-year institutions would be enrolling approximately 707,000 students with disabilities in the 2008-09 academic year. Approximately half of these students with disabilities were enrolled in 4-year postsecondary education institutions.

Legislation has supported the opportunity for students with disabilities to pursue postsecondary education. However, passage of legislation has not guaranteed the successful completion of a program of study. Even though students with disabilities are currently admitted into institutions of higher education in increasing numbers, admission does not necessarily guarantee that the student with a disability will be successful, for example, in their participation in campus life, or in navigating through a selected major. Moreover, when students enroll in classes and arrive on campus, they bring with them experiences and coursework which may or may not have prepared them for college. The increase in admission and participation for students with disabilities has not been matched by corresponding growth in knowledge and research on factors related to success in performance and completion.
Experiences of Students With Disabilities in Postsecondary Education

A growing body of research exists concerning students with disabilities in the postsecondary realm. Researchers have primarily used survey, descriptive, and group research methodologies (Farone, Hall, & Costello, 1998; Fine & Asch, 1988; Gajar, 1998; Lokuse, 2000) with few in-depth studies that explore the students’ point of view regarding transitioning to and succeeding in postsecondary education (Stodden, Stodden, & Gilmore 2000; U.S. Department of Education, 2003; Webster, 2001, 2004). Additionally, the concentration of prior research has been primarily for the purposes of identification and diagnosis (Gajar, 1998). For instance, data concerning student GPA, college admission numbers, and attrition rates have revealed important demographic trends (e.g., Henderson, 1992, 1995, 1999, 2001; Horn, 1988; Jones & Watson, 1990; NCES, 1999; U.S. Department of Education, 2011). Still, there is a lack of information concerning the supports and services that are most effective for students with disabilities in postsecondary education (Gajar, 1998; Sharpe, Johnson, Izzo, & Murray, 2005; Keim, McWhirter, & Bernstein, 1996; McGuire, Norlander, & Shaw, 1990; Sergeant, Carter, Sedlacek, & Scales, 1988; Sharpe & Stodden, 2000; U.S. Department of Education, 2011; Vogel & Adelman, 1990).

One area in which there is a shortage of research is on what students with disabilities recognize as effective supports and strategies needed to transition into and succeed in a postsecondary environment (Farone et al., 1998; Finn, 1998; Stodden et al., 2000; U.S. Department of Education, 2011; Webster, 2001, 2004). Additionally, the

Twenty-Fifth Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of the Individuals with
Disabilities Education Act (U.S. Department of Education, 2003) emphasized the importance and the need for the voices of students with disabilities, their experiences and perspectives, to be included in research regarding effective practices in transition. There is a need for continued research to address the characteristics, traits, and needs of postsecondary students with disabilities, as well as continuing to address students’ perspectives they consider effective transition practice (Dunn, 1995; Farone et al., 1998; Hicks-Coolick & Kurtz, 1997; Gajar, 1998; Stodden et al., 2000; Stodden & Conway, 2003; U.S. Department of Education, 2011; Webster, 2001, 2004). Postsecondary students with disabilities are a rich potential source of information on effective supports needed to transition into and succeed in postsecondary environments.

Historically, students with disabilities are represented as having difficulty in the realm of postsecondary education (Aune, 1991; Brinckerhoff, 1994; Brinckerhoff, Shaw, & McGuire, 1992). Yet many students with disabilities successfully complete their education, some at nearly the same percentage of students without disabilities (Greenbaum, Graham, & Scales, 1995; Sitlington, 2003; Vogel & Adelman, 1992). Greenbaum et al. (1995) found successful students are (a) motivated toward realistic goals, (b) academically prepared, and (c) effective self-advocates. Self-advocacy refers to a complex construct that includes an awareness of oneself, and an acceptance of one’s disability, knowledge of laws and policies, assertiveness, and problem-solving behaviors. Additionally, Levinson and Ohler (1998) found (a) average intelligence, (b) completion of an academically oriented curriculum, (c) success in English classes, (d) a grade point average of 2.5 or better, (e) motivation and persistence, (f) well-developed study skills
and strategies, and (g) well developed social and interpersonal skills, to be factors related to success for students with learning disabilities pursuing a postsecondary education.

Students with disabilities bound for college need to go through the same procedural processes as their non-disabled peers; however, because of their disabilities, they may encounter additional challenges (Sitlington, 2003). Many students with disabilities headed for college do not understand their own disabilities. Students have not learned how to describe their disability to others, or how the disability affects their learning. Often, students with disabilities struggle through elementary, middle, and high school and may not see themselves as having many strengths or abilities, which can then minimize their self-concept. Further, students with disabilities often lack the content preparation needed to succeed in college, or have not been trained with learning strategies that allow for the generalization of learned skilled across various settings (Vogel & Adelman, 1992). So, though students with disabilities now have access and supports in postsecondary education, factors related to success are still poorly understood.

Statement of the Research Problem

Data from the National Longitudinal Transition Study 2 (NLTS2; Wagner, Newman, Cameto, & Levine, 2005) showed the rate of postsecondary education participation by youth with disabilities more than doubled, the percentage increasing to 32% of youth who had been out of secondary school up to two years and had enrolled in a 2- or 4-year college or a postsecondary technical, vocational, or business school. Attendance at 4-year institutions increased considerably, up 8% since the first cohort in the initial NLTS. Still, in spite of increases in youth with disabilities participating in
postsecondary educational programs, youth in the general population are more than twice as likely as those with disabilities to attend some type of postsecondary program (Newman, Wagner, Cameto, & Knokey, 2009).

Additionally, NLTS and NLTS2 follow-up data (Wagner, D’Amico, Marder, Newman, & Blackorby, 1992; Wagner et al., 2005), as well as studies by Henderson (1992, 1995, 1999, 2001), Jones and Watson (1990), Murray, Goldstein, Nourse, and Edgar (2000), and the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES; Raue & Lewis, 2011) revealed retention rates in postsecondary programs continue to remain lower for students with disabilities compared to their peers in the general population. The number of students with disabilities who eventually graduated from college with a bachelors degree or higher had grown less dramatically than enrollment with a small increase from 14% in 1986 to 16% in 1994 (Harris & Associates, 1994). The most recent Harris poll (Harris & Associates, 2004) revealed students with disabilities who actually graduated with a bachelors degree dropped to 9% whereas students without disabilities graduated at 17%. When bachelor and graduate degrees were combined for both groups, persons with disabilities graduated a total of 14%, whereas persons without disabilities graduated at 25%. The Harris survey indicated that Americans with disabilities not only continue to lag far behind their non-disabled peers in many quality of life indicators, but only 14% of students with disabilities graduated from college. This is the same percentage of students who graduated in the 1986 survey (Harris & Associates, 2000).

Furthermore, students who go on to graduate take longer to complete their educational requirements than students without disabilities (Brinckerhoff, Shaw, &
McGuire, 2002). Many students with disabilities have not received the types of transition services that could produce more positive post-school outcomes (Shaw, 2009).

Transition services and activities can include opportunities to develop and practice self-determination skills, including self-advocacy and leadership, in addition to providing a strong voice in their own transition planning (Ankeny & Lehmann, 2010, 2011; DeFur & Korinek, 2010; Grigal, Test, Beattie, & Wood, 1997; Stodden et al., 2000; U.S. Department of Education, 2007; Webster, 2001, 2004).

To address perceptions of success in college, focus group interviews were used in this study. These interviews served as the primary means of collecting qualitative data for this study. Morgan (1997) broadly defined focus groups as a research technique that collects data through group interaction on a topic determined by the researcher. In focus group research it is the researcher’s interest that provides the focus, whereas the data come from the group interaction. A qualitative research approach was used in this study in order to efficiently and effectively acquire students’ thoughts and experiences. The field of special education also called for student voices to be heard. Students’ perspectives and experiences must be known in order to successfully prepare them, and those who will follow, for successful participation in postsecondary settings (Dowrick, Anderson, Heyer, & Acosta, 2005; Lehmann, Davies, & Laurin, 2000; Stodden et al., 2000; U.S. Department of Education, 1999; Webb, Patterson, Syverud, & Seabrooks-Blackmore, 2008; Webster, 2001, 2004).
Precursors to Present Study

The current study was based upon two federally funded demonstration grants at Kent State University. *Outreaching A Leadership and Systems Change Model for Students with Disabilities in Postsecondary Settings* was an outreach of a previous federal study, *Involving Self-Determined Students with Disabilities in Postsecondary Systems Change*. The projects were similar in that they both used the *Disability Policy: Leadership for the 21st Century* course as a means to teach basic components of leadership, self- and group advocacy, self-determination, conflict resolution, systems thinking, communication and collaboration, and disability culture to promote systems change on college campuses. A major difference between the two projects was that the *Involving* project initiated the Disability Policy course solely on one university campus (Kent State University) and the *Outreaching* project delivered the course to six universities using video-telecommunications.

Webster completed a dissertation (2001) and published a research article (2004) based upon the first project, *Giving Voice To Students With Disabilities Who Have Successfully Transitioned To College: Or How LL Slim Became The Best Darn Gimp On The Planet*. Her study was a qualitative analysis of 22 postsecondary students’ journals produced while participating in the Disability Policy leadership course offered on the Kent State Campus. All of Webster’s students had documented disabilities. Webster’s research resulted in the identification of themes, categories, and subcategories related to her students’ success in college.
As part of the *Outreaching* project, students *without* disabilities were invited to participate in the Disability Policy course. Therefore, the current study allowed for the comparison of students with and without disabilities. The researcher was interested in examining whether students with and without disabilities defined success and barriers to success in college in the same way. Also, by including students without disabilities in the current study, the researcher could discover if the themes, categories, and subcategories identified by Webster (2004) regarding success in college were specific to students with disabilities, or were the themes, categories, and subcategories shared by typical college students as well.

In the current study, the researcher examined how 20 students *with* (12) and *without* (8) disabilities defined success and barriers to their success in college based on responses to focus group questions. The researcher also wanted to determine if the 20 students identified the same themes, categories, and subcategories that were identified in Webster’s research (2004).

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to identify student perceptions and experiences of what was required to successfully transition into and succeed in college. This study also sought to identify themes, categories, and sub-categories recognized in Webster’s (2004) study pertaining to what her students with disabilities experienced in college. Focus group interviews were used to collect data from students with and without disabilities.
Research Questions

This study was guided by the following research questions.

Research Question 1: How do students with disabilities and students without disabilities define success in college and barriers to success based on responses to focus group questions?

Research Question 2: Did students participating in the current research identify the same themes, categories, and subcategories that were identified in the original research: Giving Voice to Students With Disabilities Who Have Successfully Transitioned to College (Webster, 2001)?
CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter addresses pertinent literature offering credence for this investigation. The chapter begins with an overview of (a) transitioning from high school to the postsecondary environment of college, including differences in legislative protection, academics, and social aspects; (b) benefits of transitioning to postsecondary education; (c) characteristics of students with disabilities in college; (d) supports that are currently in place; (e) skills of successful college students with disabilities; (f) self-determination and self-advocacy; and (g) *Giving Voice to Students With Disabilities Who Have Successfully Transitioned to College: or How LL Slim Became “The Best Darn Gimp on the Planet”* (Webster, 2001, 2004).

Transitioning From High School to College

Students in increasing numbers continue to seek entry into college and pursue success in the completion of their educational goals (Getzel & Thoma, 2006; Harris & Associates, 2004; Mull, Sitlington, & Alper, 2001; Murray et al., 2000). Completing a postsecondary education was the key to reaching employment and career goals for many students regardless of whether they had disabilities (Flexer et al., 2008; Murray et al., 2000; Sharpe et al., 2005). Yet, transition from high school to adulthood tends to be difficult for all adolescents, and often more challenging for students who have disabilities (Cowan, 2006; Halpern, 1992; Rusch, DeStefano, Chadsey-Rusch, Phelps, & Symanski, 1992, Szymanski, 1994; Webster, 2001, 2004; Wehman, 1996). The process of
transitioning from high school to college may require more planning for students with disabilities. Students with disabilities may not have had the opportunities, supports, or experiences necessary to develop the confidence, self-determination, social judgment, or self-management skills necessary to succeed the postsecondary arena (Martin & Marshall, 1995; Webster, 2001, 2004). Students lacking self-determination and self-esteem decrease the probability of success in postsecondary learning environments (DeFur, Getzel, & Trossi, 1996; Durlak, Rose, & Bursuck, 1994; Field & Hoffman, 1994; Field, Sarver, & Shaw, 2003; Reiff, Ginsberg, & Gerber, 1995; Thoma & Getzel, 2005).

Succeeding in postsecondary education is a difficult task for most students. Achieving success in college is even more challenging for students who have disabilities. Many components must come together for students with disabilities to engineer plans for success in college. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (2004) mandates, beginning at the age of 16, a statement of the student’s transition service needs that focus on the student’s course of study. This Federal legislation requires students with disabilities to receive support services in the transition from high school to post-secondary life. Other sources state transition planning must begin around late middle school or the ninth grade when high school course selection takes place (Cowen, 1993; Janiga & Costenbader, 2002; Skinner & Lindstrom, 2003; Turner & Simmons, 1996). Preparation for student’s participation in a postsecondary program of study should begin no later than age 14, as early as the student’s freshman year in high school (even though current government regulations call for planning to begin at age 16). The earlier a student
realizes a postsecondary education is desired, the sooner planning can begin to set the groundwork for appropriate academic, social, and financial preparation for college.

Research has shown participation in and completion of postsecondary education and training programs improved students’ self-esteem and increased likelihood of gaining employment for persons with and without disabilities (Dowrick et al., 2005; Fairweather & Shaver, 1991; Johnson, Sharpe, & Stodden, 2000; Reed, Kennett, Lewis, & Lund-Lucas, 2011; Stodden & Dowrick, 2000b). Researchers from the National Longitudinal Transition Study (NLTS) and NLTS2 also found postschool outcomes were better for students with disabilities who had a transition plan including specific postschool outcomes (i.e., plans to attend some form of postsecondary education; Blackorby & Wagner, 1996; Newman et al., 2009; Wagner et al., 2005).

**Differences Between High School and College**

In order to successfully transition from high school to a postsecondary education environment, all parties involved, especially the student, need to be aware of the differences that exist between high school and postsecondary education settings. A multitude of differences exist between high school and most colleges. Students should be trained to make the necessary arrangements in order to negotiate between the two realms. This educational component can be included in self-determination training in high school (Durlak et al., 1994; Getzel, 2008; Ward, 2005).

**Legislative Protection**

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) protects students identified as having a disability through their secondary education. The Local Education
Agency (LEA) is responsible for the identification of students to determine if a disability exists. Once a disability is identified that affects student learning, the LEA must appropriately attend to the educational needs of students on an IEP through high school, or until the student’s 22\textsuperscript{nd} birthday. The IDEA is prescriptive in providing important supports for children with disabilities. Although recent IDEA amendments promote student involvement in the IEP and transition planning process, most authority and responsibility rests with the LEA and parents. However, the role of the school and parents as primary decision makers terminates when the student reaches the age of majority. Once the student graduates from high school or reaches age 22, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) takes controlling legal authority. The student must assume the responsibility to self-advocate once he or she exits the legal protection of his or her IEP. After the student graduates from high school, and is over the age of 18, the parents have no legal authority over their child. Once a student with disabilities gains entry into college, the postsecondary institution is only required to respond to the student’s demonstrated needs. The Rehabilitation Act and ADA place the responsibility for identification, documentation, and requesting accommodations in the hands of the student alone (Field et al., 2003; Frank & Wade, 1993).

**Academic Differences**

In addition to legislation affecting a student’s transition from high school to college, there are also academic disparities students must navigate. Shaw, Brinckerhoff, Kistler, and McGuire (1991) charted differences between high school and college requirements. In high school students spend approximately six hours per day, 180 days a
year, which equates to 1,081 hours, in school. In college students usually sit in class for approximately 12 hours per week, for 28 weeks, for a total of 336 hours. Class size in high school can average from 25-30 students whereas there can be up to 300 students in a single class at the university level.

Study time in high school typically consists of the time it takes to complete homework, approximately 1-2 hours per day. In college students generally devote two hours of study per one hour in class; usually 3-4 hours per day. Tests are usually given on a weekly basis in high school, at the end of a chapter, with frequent quizzes. In college, 2-4 tests are administered per semester. In high school, grades are often based on the level of effort or level of improvement, and performance evaluations may be subjective. In college, however, satisfactory academic standing entails achieving grades of C or above, and performance is based on mastery of course content material.

In high school teachers often take attendance, or may check homework assignments or notebooks. Teachers often lecture directly from a textbook and use the chalkboard or worksheets. Teachers in high school communicate knowledge and facts. However, at the college level, instructors rarely take attendance and infrequently check homework or monitor students’ daily studies. Professors typically lecture from the beginning to end of class, and rarely teach directly from the textbook. College professors generally require the completion of research projects and urge students to integrate information from an assortment of sources.
Social Differences

Aside from profound academic differences between high school and college, there are also variations between freedoms and social support systems (Budny & Paul, 2003; Field et al., 2003; Janiga & Costenbader, 2002; Skinner & Lindstrom, 2003). Throughout the high school day, a student’s time is relatively structured. High school buildings are monitored. Limits are set on student by parents, teachers, administrators, and other adults. However, on the college campus managing time and personal freedoms can be one of the toughest obstacles a college student has to overcome. According to Janiga and Costenbader (2002), students with learning disabilities are more apt to display organizational skills deficits than their non-disabled peers. The structure once provided by the high school schedule, extracurricular activities, educators, and parents are not available to the college learner. Future postsecondary students can benefit from obtaining organizational skills necessary for achieving success in college. College bound students should be trained to (a) manage and organize their time; (b) carefully review syllabi, making notes of the attendance policies, due dates of assignments, as well as dates of quizzes and tests; (c) utilize daily and weekly planners; (d) create “to-do” lists; (e) take notes; (f) break large assignments in smaller sized, more manageable “chunks;” and (g) schedule daily times for study and visits to campus learning centers for tutoring.

Research emphasizes the importance of support in the adjustment of persons with disabilities throughout one’s lifetime (e.g., Greenbaum et al., 1995; Vogel & Adelman, 1992). Support for college-bound students can come from parents, significant others, and friends. Teachers, school counselors, and other school personnel can also play important
roles to support students in preparing for their lives after high school. Support activities can include individual counseling as well as support groups at the secondary level. Continued counseling support can be found on the majority of college campuses.

**Benefits of Transitioning to Postsecondary Education**

Young adults with disabilities drop out of high school at a rate two times higher than their peers without disabilities (American Youth Policy Forum/Center on Education Policy, 2002). In the United States the majority of high school seniors expect to attend some form of postsecondary education and almost half of these students expect to earn at least a bachelor’s degree (Gardner, 1987; Gray, 2002).

Continuing education after high school is only one option a student may choose in the developmental process toward adulthood. However, choosing to continue with a postsecondary education can yield benefits beyond gaining continued and advanced academic knowledge. Postsecondary education continues to be increasingly important to obtain quality employment—this is true for graduates with and without disabilities. However, for students with disabilities, significant relationships exist between a person’s disability, his or her level of education, and his or her employment outcomes (Benz, Doren, & Yovanoff, 1998; Blackorby & Wagner, 1996; Fairweather & Shaver, 1991; Wagner et al., 2005). Employment rates for people with disabilities have a strong positive correlation with educational level, yet their postsecondary enrollment levels remain low when compared to the general population (Snyder & Dillow, 2010; Stodden & Dowrick, 2000b). Individuals with disabilities enroll in postsecondary education at a rate that is 50% lower than that of the non-disabled general population (Dowrick et al., 2005).
Additionally, of those who enroll in postsecondary education, only 12% of individuals with disabilities actually graduate from college, as opposed to 23% of their non-disabled counterparts (National Organization on Disabilities, 2000).

To have the greatest participation in society, people with disabilities need to increase the levels of participation and completion in postsecondary education programs (Sharpe et al., 2005). Consequently, it is essential to appreciate the current issues affecting postsecondary access and success. It is also important to understand the issues that affect post-school employment outcomes for students with disabilities.

Obtaining postsecondary education is correlated not only with higher income, but also with lower rates of unemployment, and better overall quality of life (Francese, 2002; Gilson, 1996; Shaw, 2009). In addition to higher earnings college graduates have more career options, better promotion opportunities, and lower rates of unemployment (Dohm & Wyatt, 2002). Students who continue their education past high school optimize preparedness for their chosen careers. They learn creative thinking skills as well as technical skills necessary to take advantage of current and future trends in the job market (Stodden & Dowrick, 2000b). Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) found college graduates earn from 20% to 40% more money than persons who did not go to college over the course of their working life, and are less likely to be laid-off. Graduates from postsecondary education institutions enjoyed better health, higher self-esteem, greater career mobility, and had better interpersonal and problem-solving skills. Additionally, graduates were more tolerant in their views of others and open to new ideas, active politically and in community affairs, and apt to become leaders at work and in their
communities, when compared to high school graduates (Knox, Lindsay, & Kolb, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991).

DeFur et al. (1996) suggested employment demands in the future will continue to require training beyond high school. The highly skilled, high paying employment of the future will require a work-force with good problem-solving and interpersonal skills, as well as the ability to constantly learn on the job (Getzel, Stodden, & Briel, 2000; Hoye, 1978). Jobs that solely required the completion of high school, vocational, or technical programs now demand some type of postsecondary degree (Gray, 2002). It has been shown that college graduates with disabilities appear to have higher employment rates than persons with disabilities who have not earned a postsecondary degree (DeLoach, 1992; Harris & Associates, 2004). However, students with disabilities are still at a disadvantage in terms of securing employment when compared to students without disabilities (Harris & Associates, 2004; Rumrill, 1994; Shaw, 2009).

**Characteristics of Students in College**

Over the past few decades the number of students with disabilities entering postsecondary institutions has seen a dramatic increase (Blackorby & Wagner, 1996; Crank & Deshler, 2001; Henderson, 2001; Johnson et al., 2000; Snyder & Dillow, 2010; Shaw, 2009). The number of students who self-identify as having a disability has increased over 300% since 1977 (Henderson, 1995). Henderson (1999) reported that approximately 1 out of 11 freshmen in postsecondary institutions report having a disability. Henderson (2001) described students who reported disabilities that were enrolled in fall 2000 as full-time freshmen at public and independent 4-year colleges and
universities. Students are not only enrolling in postsecondary programs in greater numbers than ever before, there has also been a noticeable change in the nature of student disability types entering institutions of postsecondary education (Johnson et al., 2000). Between 1988 and 2000 the disability category of learning disability (a hidden disability) was the fastest growing disability category reported among students. By 2000, two out of five freshmen with disabilities cited having a learning disability (40%); this is an increase of 24% since 1988. In 1988, partially sighted or blind was the most common disability category of students; in 2000 it fell to third, with learning disability being first, and other, as the second highest category. Among freshmen who reported disabilities the actual number of students who were partially sighted or blind decreased from 30% to 16% (Henderson, 2001). Also, more and more individuals with developmental disabilities (e.g., intellectual disabilities, autism) are also exploring postsecondary educational opportunities.

By 1998, part-time students, full-time students, and students enrolled in graduate programs had risen to 10.5% of the postsecondary student population (Gajar, 1998). The National Council on Disability (2000) reported that as many as 17% of all students enrolled in postsecondary education programs are identified as having a disability. These ever increasing numbers and diversity of disability types have spurred important changes in the manner in which postsecondary institutions have had to address students’ needs. Postsecondary institutions are now challenged to provide their students with a full range of supports that ensure appropriate access to postsecondary education programs.
Characteristics of Successful Postsecondary School Students With Disabilities

Many characteristics of successful postsecondary school students have been identified over the past several decades (Aune, 1991; Vogel & Adelman, 1992; Tagayuna, Stodden, Chang, Zeleznik, & Whelley, 2005). Vogel and Adelman (1990) compared successful and unsuccessful college students with learning disabilities (LD) and reported the following characteristics of successful students. These successful students had: (a) good language skills, (b) high motivation, (c) positive attitude toward learning, (d) understanding and acceptance of disability, (e) rigorous high school courses, (f) use of few LD services in high school, and (g) extensive tutoring in college. In addition, Greenbaum et al. (1995) and Skinner and Lindstrom (2003) identified several other factors that influence success for college students with learning disabilities, including (a) determination and perseverance, (b) a strong support system, (c) average intelligence, (d) a mild disability, (e) completion of an academically oriented high school curriculum, (f) a high school GPA $\geq$ 2.5, (g) exposure to and successful practice with study skills and strategies, (h) positive social skills, (i) knowledge regarding the disability and how it affects educational attainment, and (j) possession of and utilization of self-advocacy skills.

Supports That are Currently in Place: Promising Practice

According to Johnson et al. (2000), there is no standard set criteria for what constitutes effective postsecondary support practices. However, research conducted in related fields (transition planning, supported employment, person-centered planning, and assistive technology) shows that there appears to be some degree of convergence regarding key components of effective supports in postsecondary education. Those
supports that are structured to facilitate self-efficacy, self-determination, and the development of social networks and natural supports tend to be associated with improved outcomes. In the postsecondary setting these supports may be acquired by way of study skills programs, student support groups, use of peer mentors, or other supports that assist individuals with disabilities in assimilating to university life and developing a sense of self-confidence and self-directedness (Johnson et al., 2000). Programs that have well-defined goals and strategies to measure progress tend to be more effective than those that do not.

Since 1990 there has been a 90% increase in the number of colleges and universities, technical institutions, community colleges, and vocational and technical centers that offer opportunities for persons with disabilities to continue their education (Pierangelo & Crane, 1997). Advances in assessment, instructional strategies, and the use of accommodations have made it feasible for more and more individuals with disabilities, including people with severe disabilities, to access and participate in these programs. Despite this encouraging trend, enrollment of young adults with disabilities in postsecondary programs is still 50% lower than the enrollment among the general population (Johnson et al., 2000; Tagayuna et al., 2005). Additionally, approximately one half of all students with disabilities fail to persist to the completion of their programs and graduate (Stodden & Conway, 2003).

Even though legislation provided students with and without disabilities access to postsecondary education, much more information is needed for professionals to better assist them in attaining 4-year degrees (Shaw, 2009; Shaw, Madaus, & Dukes, 2010).
The successful participation of students who do enroll in postsecondary institutions is, in part, measured by the types of supports, services, and opportunities that are provided by that institution (Christ & Stodden, 2005; Gilson, 1996; Shaw, 2009). Access and accommodation should not be limited to physical structures, or removal of barriers, but to include opportunities to develop social environments that are supportive, are peer directed, and encourage the growth and development of a sense of empowerment (Gilson, 1996; Stodden & Conway, 2003). Although access to the physical campus is imperative, postsecondary students with disabilities need more than accessibility accommodations in order to participate in and benefit from a postsecondary education.

Furthermore, Finn (1998) published on critical support services for college students with learning disabilities. Focus groups were used to investigate services and accommodations important to college students with learning disabilities (LD). The study included students from five universities that offered programs specifically for students with LD, or made special service accommodations available. The five most beneficial learning disability support services and accommodations included coursework accommodations, testing accommodations, LD staff members, peer support groups, and tutors. Note-takers, books on tape, and having papers proofread were coursework accommodations mentioned most often. Extended time to take a test, testing in a quiet room separate from other test takers, and having a test read aloud were the testing accommodations mentioned most often. Other results from the study highlighted the importance of self-esteem training for students with LD, promotion and student awareness
of LD services, and faculty programs aimed to increase awareness and to provide information concerning instructional and institutional accommodations.

Shaw (2009) described how the 2008-2009 recession reinforced the concept that postsecondary education is a key to productive outcomes for all Americans, especially Americans with disabilities. As increasing numbers of students with disabilities are interested in participating in postsecondary education, are participating in inclusive academic classrooms, and are graduating from secondary school with a regular diploma, more colleges and universities are developing programs and supports to address the needs of this population. Shaw delineated the differences between high school and postsecondary education destinations regarding legal responsibilities as well as the need for increased self-determination (e.g., self-advocacy) to succeed in the postsecondary education realm. The article included data from the NLTS2 (Newman et al., 2009) which addressed that postsecondary education was the primary goal for 80% of high school students with disabilities. This showed the need for practically every student to have a postsecondary education goal on their individual transition plan. The earlier the students states a desire to attend college following high school, the sooner transition professionals can adequately plan for an appropriate course of study and transition activities and services.

Even though progress has been made in addressing the needs of individuals with disabilities who aspire to proceed to college or another form of postsecondary education, a discrepancy continues to exist in postsecondary experiences between students with and without disabilities. This disparity has been attributed to many factors, including (a) an
understanding of one’s disability and its effect on work and educational choices (Gordon & Keiser, 1998); (b) career decision-making skills (Hitchings, Luzzo, & Retish, 1998); (c) understanding the rights and responsibilities in the postsecondary arena (Pitman & Slate, 1994; Stageberg, Fischer, & Barbut, 1996; Shaw, 2009); (d) effective self-advocacy and self-determination skills (Field et al., 2003; Janiga & Costenbader, 2002; Roessler & Rumrill, 1995; Field et al., 2003); and (e) academic and social skills required at the postsecondary level (Mull et al., 2001; Shaw, 2009).

Baer, Flexer, and McMahan (2005) acknowledged nine common themes identified by researchers, advocates, and policy makers as promising practice in transition. Although Kohler (1993) and Phelps and Hanley-Maxwell (1997) reviewed transition policy and research and found areas of disagreement regarding promising practices in transition for students with disabilities. Bear et al. (2005) remarked on the common themes of promising practices. They included: (a) student self-determination, including social skills and self-advocacy training; (b) ecological approaches, use of formal and informal supports; (c) individualized backward planning; (d) service coordination, and collaboration between agencies; (e) community experiences, such as paid work experiences; (f) access and accommodation technologies, assistive technology; (g) supports for postsecondary education; (h) systems change strategies, like vocational career education, secondary curricular reform, and inclusion; and (i) family involvement, where parents engaged in the transition process.

Presented in the next section are several predictors of students’ postsecondary success. These “promising practices” were designed to enhance the educational
performance and attainment of all students. First, students need to be prepared for postsecondary education long before they set foot on campus. As soon as students identify a desire to attend college the process of preparation for the student should begin. This process should include the assurance a college preparatory curriculum is pursued. Preparing students for what to expect during their transition into college is important for their increased chances of success. Students need to be taught that there are many differences between high school and college. The variations between high school and postsecondary education are great, not just academically but socially. Students benefit from precollege preparation in identifying these differences and preparing to success in the new environment (Knapp et al., 2005).

Family and community support are crucial in raising educational aspirations of students. Family and friends assist students to become prepared for college, as well as aid in assisting students until their college goals are met (i.e., graduation, degree attainment).

Pennington (2004) stated every high school student and his or her family need to be aware of the “million dollar decision,” the financial cost over one’s lifetime of not completing a college degree. Students at the greatest risk tend to receive less encouragement and support from their family and friends and receive less accurate information regarding preparing for and attending college (Pennington, 2004).

Financial aid and money for tuition and fees are important for achieving college success as well. Finney and Kelley (2004) reported college affordability depends on many factors such as the state of the economy and the amount of aid available for students from the state and the institution. Also, the ability to access small amounts of emergency funds
at key times can mean the difference between a student being able to stay in school or be forced to drop out.

Universities have an obligation to their students to establish expectations for high performance both in and out of the classroom, as well as to offer prompt feedback on how students are meeting the university’s expectations. The National Survey of Student Engagement (2005) mentioned new college students may not fully understand or appreciate their roles as learners at the university. Fewer students still utilize campus tutoring and other support services that said they would when beginning their college experiences. Faculty, staff, advisors, and student affairs personnel need to communicate expectations and provided feedback on student performance (i.e., Student Conduct Code).

To improve chances of achieving success in college, students need to find something (or someone) with whom to connect on campus. Students are more likely to engage, persist, and achieve their educational objectives if they are connected within the postsecondary environment (ASHE Higher Education Report, 2007).

Universities that create a student-centered culture and focus on student success are in a good position to assist their students in achieving their educational goals. Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt, and Associates (2005) discussed using effective educational practices, as well as using technology in order to promote student success (i.e., Universal Design for Instruction [UDI]).

Additionally, to promote student success on campus, university personnel should occasionally examine the student’s college experience, both in and out of the classroom. Many universities have comprehensive orientation programs, some that last throughout the
entire freshman year. During this time of transition new college students can check in with mentors and faculty to make sure they are on-track for success. Kuh et al. (2005) outlined the importance of keeping up with the university’s pursuit of excellence and following up with college students, as well as periodically reviewing campus priorities, policies, and practices to make sure students are receiving high quality supports and instruction.

The Association of American Colleges and Universities (2007) stated additional research is still needed to better understand the various characteristics of student performance before and during college to continue the development of a comprehensive theory of student success in college. Research needs to be continued in the following areas: Determining effective approaches for encouraging different types of students (i.e., first generation, low income, students of color, men, students with disabilities) to participate and benefit from postsecondary encouragement programs; develop additional ways to assess the ability to do college-level work; identify efficient ways for colleges to report back to high schools their graduates’ college performance and make use of that information; evaluate the performance of each state’s education system; determine the most efficient ways of using financial aid; develop additional indicators of success for different types of institutions and students; determine appropriate, responsible ways to measure, report, and use student success indicators for accountability and improvement; determine the elements of institutional culture at different types of postsecondary settings that are associated with student success; and determine what colleges can realistically do
and at what cost to assist academically underprepared students overcome their deficiencies when they begin college.

**Skills of Successful College Students With Disabilities**

The following section describes the characteristics that contribute to postsecondary success in students with various documented disabilities. On the basis of the mandates of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA; 2004), public schools need to take a proactive position and identify, evaluate, and provide appropriate services for students with disabilities. In direct contrast to IDEIA, the legislation supporting students with disabilities at the postsecondary level (Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and The Americans with Disabilities Act [ADA] of 1990) require students to act on their own behalves to receive support services from their postsecondary institution. Students with documented disabilities must provide their Student Accessibility Services (SAS) office with appropriate documentation of their disability in order to register with the SAS. Documentation can take the form of a student’s Evaluation Team Report (ETR) from high school or similar report verifying a disability is present. Once a student is registered with SAS they need to describe what specific accommodations are needed for their classes (i.e., note-takers, interpreters). It is the responsibility of the student to specify which accommodations are necessary for their learning needs. Once these accommodations are approved by SAS the student receives letters that can be given to instructors at the beginning of the semester stating the student is entitled to that specific accommodation. In order to achieve the most beneficial response to the accommodation letter it is best practice for the student to make plans to
speak with the instructor regarding the accommodations needed as soon as possible (however, not during class time).

All of the actions described regarding registering and receiving accommodations from SAS fall directly on the shoulders of the college student with disabilities. This is markedly different from what students were familiar with in high school when their needs were managed by their parent, teacher, or other personnel associated with their Individualized Education Program (IEP).

Students entering college must advocate for themselves in order to get their needs met. Many characteristics of high school students have been identified over the past 30 years (Aune, 1991; Vogel & Adelman, 1992; Dowrick et al., 2005). Vogel and Adelman (1990) reported over 20 years ago the following characteristics of successful college students: good language skills, high motivation, positive attitude toward learning, understanding and acceptance of the disability, rigorous high school courses, and use of few self-contained Learning Disabilities services in high school. Greenbaum et al. (1995) reported successful college students with Learning Disabilities (LD) were knowledgeable about their disability, were determined, were persevering, and had a strong support system. Because college students with disabilities must effectively explain their disability to instructors, tutors, peers, and advocate for the support they need, self-advocacy was identified as an important characteristic (Brinckerhoff et al., 1992; Karvonen, Test, Wood, Browder, & Algozantine, 2004).

Trainor (2005) stated self-advocacy is often mentioned during discussions on self-determination. She clarified that self-advocacy and self-determination are not one in
the same, but rather that self-advocacy is a sub-skill of self-determination. In order to be self-determined, students must advocate for their needs. A variety of skills (e.g., decision making, problem solving), attitudes (e.g., locus of control), and knowledge (e.g., self-awareness) have been identified as important for self-determination. Many definitions of self-determination exist (Field, 1996; Martin & Marshall, 1995; Ward & Kohler, 1996; Wehmeyer, 1996). The essential characteristics that define self-determined behavior emerge through the development and acquisition of many interrelated components. These components include: choice-making skills; decision-making skills; problem-solving skills; goal-setting and attainment skills; independence; risk-taking and safety skills; self-observation, evaluation and reinforcement skills; self-instruction skills; self-advocacy and leadership skills; internal locus of control; positive attributions of efficacy and outcome expectancy; self-awareness; and self-knowledge.

Many categories and subcategories were identified by students from both groups of students in the present study and in Webster’s, who responded during focus groups or wrote in journals regarding many of these elements of self-determination (e.g., problem solving, goal setting). Students with or without disabilities who look to pursue a college education, as well as current college students, would benefit from engaging in some type of self-determination training. The concept of self-determination is not as simple as one may first believe. It is a multifaceted concept with many interrelated components. Choice, decision making, and goal attainment are common ideas across definitions of self-determination. Evaluating oneself and one’s progress on goal attainment, acting on
self-evaluation, and self-regulating behaviors are also components of self-determination models (Martin & Marshal, 1995).

**Self-Determination and Self-Advocacy**

The transition from high school to postsecondary education is usually taxing for most typical students and particularly challenging for students who have disabilities. Often high school programs do not implement *promising or best practices* such as involving students when developing Individual Education Programs (IEPs; i.e., student led IEP meetings), providing instruction in learning strategies, and encouraging students to take college preparatory coursework (Shaw, 2009; J. M. Williams & O’Leary, 2001). Also, parents and students have viewed content tutoring, course waivers, and the use of as many accommodations as possible in high school as effective components in preparation for a student’s postsecondary education. The use of these short term solutions have resulted in a high percentage of students dropping out of high school, failing to pursue admission to higher education, and being ill-prepared to succeed in the postsecondary realm (Shaw, 2009; U.S. Department of Education, 2003).

While students with documented disabilities are in high school they are provided support through the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). IDEA is dogmatic in that it provides supports for all youth with disabilities. However, in many ways IDEA works counter-intuitively against successful outcomes in postsecondary education. Recently, IDEA amendments have encouraged more active student involvement in the IEP and transition planning processes. However, the reality is that most of the responsibility and authority remains with the student’s parents and the school.
Parents have historically acted as the principal advocates for their children, perhaps because students have typically not been adequately prepared to self-advocate (Field et al., 2003).

According to Philips (1990) self-advocacy can best be described as the expression and fulfillment of one’s needs. Self-determination is often considered a broader concept that includes self-advocacy (Field et al., 2003; Morningstar & Kleinhammer-Tramill, 1999). Becoming a successful self-advocate does not mean students must do everything for themselves, but to seek out and requisition assistance needed to accomplish a given task.

While a student is in high school it is ultimately the Local Education Agencies (LEAs) responsibility to identify, document, and provide appropriate placement and accommodation for the student. However, when the student leaves the secondary education system and enters the postsecondary system the onus rests solely with the student for issues related to self-identification, providing documentation, and requesting accommodations. The student must self-advocate because parents are not recognized as having authority in this realm. The postsecondary institution is only required to accommodate the student’s requested needs. As students with disabilities make the transition from high school to college they often may face more challenges than do their peers without disabilities. The inherent differences in the organization and expectations of high school and college are often extensive and radical. Some of the differences between high school and college include disparities of (a) time in class, (b) class size, (c) study time, (d) grading, (e) method of teaching by instructors, and (f) amount of freedom. In
practically every way, success in college requires more self-control, diligence, self-evaluation, decision making, and goal setting. Additionally, an institution is not obligated to accommodate a student’s need that has not been requested. College demands more self-determination than is expected of students in high school (Field et al., 2003; Lynch & Gussel, 1996; Shaw, 2009).

The Council for Exceptional Children’s Division on Career Development and Transition (DCDT) strongly took the position that self-determination skills need to be taught in order to facilitate a successful transition from secondary to postsecondary school life (Field, Martin, Miller, Ward, & Wehmeyer, 1998a). Steere and Cavaiuolo (2002) derived from their research that self-determination skills are vital in order for students to realize their preferred postschool transition outcomes. Stodden (2000) considered self-determination to be a critical set of skills that postsecondary students with disabilities need for a successful educational experience.

Many definitions of self-determination exist in the realm of transition studies (Abery, 1994; Knowlton, Turnbull, Backus, & Turnbull, 1988; Ward, 1988; Wehmeyer, 1992; Woolcock, Stodden, & Bisconer, 1992). Martin, Marshall, and Maxson (1993) described the three primary components of self-determination to be (a) skills, (b) attitudes and motivation, and (c) the student’s social environment. Self-determination involves more than solely possessing the skills necessary to make decisions and advocate for one’s needs. It also integrates attitudes and motivations regarding one’s abilities and opportunities for success. Self-determination could be defined as the student’s ability to define and achieve goals from a foundation of knowing and valuing oneself.
Self-determined students understand their disability, know their interests and skills, have a clear vision for the future, and can implement a plan to attain goals. Self-determined students can self-advocate, and will develop support to attain their desired goals (Martin et al., 1993). Self-determined students and adults are aware of their personal needs. They set goals centered on their needs, and actively pursue those goals (Martin & Marshall, 1995). A definition that is accepted by many experts in the field reads as follows: Self-determination is a combination of skills, knowledge, and beliefs that enable a person to engage in goal directed, self-regulated, autonomous behavior. An understanding of one’s strengths and limitations together with a belief in oneself as capable and effective are essential to self-determination. When acting on the basis of these skills and attitudes, individuals have greater ability to take control of their lives and assume the role of successful adults (Field, Martin, Miller, Ward, & Wehmeyer, 1998b).

Karvonen et al. (2004) conducted a study that examined six programs identified as placing a major emphasis on promoting self-determination with students with disabilities. They collected qualitative data to examine stakeholder perceptions of self-determination outcomes, described promising practices for promoting self-determination, and identified conditions supporting, and barriers inhibiting the successful implementation of those practices. Data were analyzed through a cross-case analysis and were represented as themes that reflected the perceptions of program success, site characteristics, promising practices, and factors that supported and/or hindered implementation. The overall purpose of the study was to understand the full range of self-determination-enhancing practices. At each of the six sites, students, teachers, and parents answered questions related to what
degree they felt the program helped students become more self-determined. Students articulated confidence in their future, demonstrated self-advocacy skills with their teachers, and verified the value of their new self-determination skills. There were examples where self-determination was not yet apparent within the intended program delivery, although very limited in number. Common strategies with all sites included the use of (a) curricula to teach self-determination skills, (b) teaching and coaching methods to enhance student participation in educational planning, and (c) non-instructional practices to enhance students’ choice- and decision-making skills.

Carter, Lane, Pierson, and Glaeser (2006) conducted a study that examined the self-determination of adolescents with emotional disturbance (ED) and learning disabilities (LD) from the perspectives of special educators, parents, and the students themselves. The self-determination of 85 high school students with ED ($n = 39$) and LD ($n = 46$) was evaluated by special educators, parents, and the students. Students ranged in age from 14.1 to 19.2 years ($M = 16.2$ years), with the majority of students being male (64.7%). Thirty-eight students were Caucasian (44.7%), 30 were Hispanic (35.3%), nine were African American (10.6%), and eight were Asian American or of other ethnicity (9.4%). Thirty-one students were in ninth grade (36.5%), 26 were in $10^{th}$ grade (30.6%), 16 were in $11^{th}$ grade (18.8%), and 12 were in $12^{th}$ grade (14.1%). Students attended one of four high schools randomly selected from all high schools in two large, culturally diverse suburban school districts in a western state. The AIR Self-Determination Scale (Wolman, Campeau, DuBois, Mithaug, & Stolarski, 1994) was used as an assessment instrument designed to measure students’ capacity for, and opportunity to engage in,
self-determined behavior. Sixty students with ED were randomly selected by school district staff from a roster of all students receiving special education services under the label of ED at all four participating high schools. Also, 60 students with LD were matched on grade level and gender to the ED sample. The AIR Self-Determination Scale was completed by students, their primary special education teacher, and one of their parents. Data were analyzed only for 85 students who had *AIR Self-Determination Scales* completed by all three respondents, which yielded a final participation rate of 70.8%. A series of two-way mixed analysis of variance (ANOVAs) were conducted to evaluate the effect of disability group (i.e., ED, LD) and respondent (i.e., student, educator, parent) on four of five *AIR Self-Determination Scales*: Ability, Perceptions, Opportunities at School, and Opportunities at Home. Disability group was a between-subjects factor and Respondent was a within-subjects factor. Significant interactions were followed by tests of simple effects to identify differences in self-determination associated with the disability label and the respondent. Also, a Pearson product moment correlation was performed separately for students, educators, and parents to determine the extent to which mean ratings on the Capacity and Opportunities sections were related. Results for Capacity for Self-Determination are as follows: *Ability*: An examination of the simple effects identified significant differences in ability ratings between respondents for adolescents with ED, $F(2, 76) = 10.95, MSe = 0.57, p < .001$, but not for adolescents with LD ($p = .899$). Post-hoc contrasts showed educators rated the ability of adolescents with ED to engage in self-determined behavior significantly lower than did students and parents. An examination of simple effects for disability group showed educators and parents each
rated the ability of adolescents with ED to engage in self-determined behaviors to be significantly lower than the ability of adolescents with LD. Significant differences in the ratings of students were not found. *Perceptions:* An examination of the simple effects identified significant differences between respondents for adolescents with ED, $F(1, 38) = 9.85, MSe = 0.52, p = 0.003$, with educators’ ratings significantly lower than students’ ratings. An examination of the simple effects for disability group showed the educators rated the perceptions of adolescents with ED regarding self-determined behaviors to be significantly lower than the perceptions of adolescents with LD. There were no differences found among students. *Knowledge:* An independent samples $t$ test was conducted to evaluate differences in educator ratings on the Knowledge scale as a function of disability group. Educators’ ratings of the knowledge of adolescents with ED regarding self-determination were significantly lower than their ratings of the knowledge of adolescents with LD, $t(85) = 4.54, p < .001, ES = -.98$. The authors also examined the *Opportunities* for Self-Determination both at school and at home. At school, the Disability (ED, LD) X Respondent (student, educator, parent) interaction was significant. An examination of the simple effects showed significant differences between respondents for adolescents with ED and for adolescents with LD. Post hoc contrasts showed educators rated adolescents with ED having more opportunities to engage in self-determined behaviors at school than students or parents. Also, post hoc contrasts showed that educators rated adolescents with LD as having significantly more opportunities to engage in self-determined behavior at school than did students or parents. Students with LD rated opportunities to self-determine at school lower than did parents.
An assessment of the simple effects for disability group indicated the students and parents each rated the opportunities for adolescents with ED to engage in self-determined behaviors at school to be significantly lower than the opportunities for adolescents with LD. There were no significant differences found in the ratings of educators. At home, the Disability (ED, LD) X Respondent (student, educator, parent) interaction was not significant. The main effect of the respondent was significant. Post-hoc contrast analysis of the main effect for respondent showed that parent ratings of opportunities were significantly higher than educator and student ratings. The main effect of disability group also was significant, with adolescents with ED being judged overall to have significantly fewer opportunities than adolescents with LD to engage in self-determined behaviors at home. Finally, the authors examined correlations between capacity and opportunity. Overall, a strong relationship was identified between ratings of students’ capacity for self-determination and opportunities to engage in self-determined behavior. Particularly, significant positive correlations between measures were identified for educators ($r = .65$, $p < .001$), parents ($r = .63$, $p < .001$), and students ($r = .67$, $p < .001$).

In addition, Getzel and Thoma (2006) conducted a qualitative study of what college students with learning disabilities and attention deficit disorder considered important self-determination skills for success. They used a series of focus group interviews with college students with disabilities regarding the importance of self-determination in their success in postsecondary settings. The authors used purposeful sampling to select focus groups participants. Postsecondary students with disabilities receiving supports and services related to their disability and identified as having
self-determination skills by staff at their respective Disability Support Services (DSS) office. A total of 34 students participated in the focus groups, ages ranged from 18 to 48 years of age (majority of students ranging between 18 and 23). Eighteen females and 16 males participated in the groups. Most students were sophomores and juniors, although freshmen and seniors were represented. Participants were mainly Caucasian (62%), and over one-third were African-American. Participants represented a broad range of disabilities including cerebral palsy, spinal cord injury, neurological-related disabilities, psychiatric disabilities, and hearing and visual impairments. Students identified as having learning disabilities or ADHD were the largest group. Researchers used a semi-structured interview process within the focus group format. A total of six locations for the focus groups were selected which included three community colleges and three college/university sites in different geographic areas across Virginia. The typical focus group was comprised of 6-10 participants. Groups ranged from 4 to 10 participants.

Three primary discussion questions with related probes were used to gather information. The questions and probes included: (a) what do you think a good advocate does to get services and supports they need; (b) what advocacy/self-determination skills are absolutely essential for staying in college and getting the supports you need; and (c) what suggestions do you have for our training format (training for high school students who are planning for their transition into postsecondary education)? Data analyses were conducted using information from scribe notes. Transcripts were developed for each focus group based on the scribe’s notes. Following the transcriptions, the information was analyzed and systematically coded for themes that emerged. The themes were then compared and
integrated across the major themes that emerged from the data analysis across all groups.

Results for the three research questions follow: Research Question 1: Identify which skills postsecondary students with disabilities described as being important to their success in postsecondary educational settings. Students identified many key component skills of self-determination as being necessary for their success, including: problem solving; understanding one’s own disability; goal setting; and self-management. Research Question 2: How did postsecondary students with disabilities learn these skills? Students with learning disabilities and AD/HD identified three primary ways they learned self-determination skills: Trial and error; Finding support from peers/mentors; and being taught by parents. Finally, Research Question 3: What suggestions do you have for training high school students with disabilities? Participants with LD or AD/HD submitted numerous suggestions for training high school students with disabilities who are preparing for transition to postsecondary educational settings. Suggestions included: (a) Beginning early in the education process. Students believed that learning self-determination skills should begin as early as possible. (b) Format for training. Students suggested using formats for all learning styles. They reported it was important to make the process more practical and include more real life activities. Some of the multiple formats included college students come in and talk with them; interactive workshops; written information such as fact sheets on disabilities, accommodations, resources, required testing; and career and college exploration activities. (c) Role of parents. Many participants with LD and AD/HD reported that parents needed to be more involved. Parents were asked to support, encourage and understand.
Adolescents with disabilities travel the road of transition into adulthood much the same way as their peers without disabilities. However, the presence of a disability can often require additional effort in order to facilitate self-awareness and self-respect (Field, Hoffman, & Posch, 1997). Adolescents/young adults require opportunities to become successful and learn self-advocacy and other self-determination skills that promote the learning process regarding one’s disability, including associated strengths, needs, and acquiring accommodations.

Many excellent curricula currently exist for students to increase their self-determination. Although each curriculum may offer a different approach to the delivery of instruction in self-determination, the main skills taught by self-determination curricula include (a) student self-awareness, (b) problem solving and decision skills, (c) goal setting, and (d) communication skills (Morningstar & Kleinhammer-Tramill, 1999).

When students enter the arena of postsecondary education it is essential they self-advocate in order to achieve personal success (Brinckerhoff, 1994; Getzel, 2008; Shaw, Madaus, & Banerjee, 2009; Webb, 2000). Examples of self-advocacy skills that may be used in the postsecondary setting include self-identification of one’s disability, self-initiated discussions regarding accommodations with instructors, and self-initiated scheduling for tutoring and other assistance.

Webster (2001, 2004) mentioned the paucity of student voices in the literature a decade ago. Since that time a number of articles have been published featuring the views of students concerning preparation for and success in postsecondary education.
There have been a handful of studies to give voice to college students with disabilities, offering a direct, personal, first-hand understanding of their needs. For instance, Finn (1998) conducted a focus group study with students who had learning disabilities. The author introduced the difficulties learning disabled students encountered in the transition from high school, which tends to be a more supportive environment, to the less supportive college environment. Finn described the state of the literature as saturated with examples of disability service provision from the practitioner’s standpoint, but lacking in students’ perspectives that concern the usefulness of services and accommodations. The focus groups were conducted at both 4- and 2-year institutions, and were designed to obtain students’ experiences, feelings, and attitudes regarding specific accommodations and services they found most useful. Respondents most often indicated coursework and testing accommodations as most important to their success in higher education. Respondents also indicated the benefits of peer support groups, tutors, and support/services provided by special education staff. A few participants suggested that better efforts should be made to educate faculty about learning disabilities.

Similarly, Farone et al. (1998), using a nominal group technique, found that students on their campus ranked issues of service provision, access (including physical, sensory, and informational), social inclusion, attitudinal barriers, and misunderstandings regarding hidden disabilities as their major concerns. Izzo, Hertzfeld, and Aaron (2001) also utilized focus groups (student and faculty) in their study and noted that self-determined students who had the skills needed to self-advocate at the beginning of
their classes had positive learning experiences, while interviews conducted by Hitchings et al. (2001) pointed to student’s lack of self-advocacy and self-knowledge skills regarding the impact of their disability on career exploration and planning.

One study to date has been conducted where the participants were involved in interactively journaling, over time, with the researcher on issues related to transitioning to and succeeding in a postsecondary environment. Webster (2001, 2004), in her dissertation and published article following her dissertation, gave voice to students by exploring what they viewed as effective transition practice and postsecondary services and supports. In addition, she brought to light other issues her students considered important in the successful transition to college.

**Giving Voice To Students (Webster, 2001) Review of Project**

The purpose of Webster’s (2001) qualitative study was to gain a better understanding of the first-hand postsecondary experiences of students with disabilities at a 4-year institution. Her research was based on a three year federally funded OSERS project entitled *Involving Self-Determined Students With Disabilities in Postsecondary Systems Change*. The purpose of the OSERS project was to address and increase successful participation of students with disabilities in postsecondary programs through student empowerment and institutional accommodation and support. The project involved the interaction between opportunities for systems change on campus and building capacity in self-determination. Self-determined students were prepared to define opportunities (i.e., access/accommodation) necessary for successful participation in postsecondary education.
The major goals of the project were: (a) to recruit and train students to serve as recruitment/retention, accommodation/access, and college life disability consultants on three task forces, formed under the auspices of the campus ADA committee; (b) to develop and implement strategies to support recruitment/retention, accommodation/access, and college life system changes; and (c) to develop, disseminate, and evaluate training programs and materials on the model and components on postsecondary systems change.

**Develop and Implement Strategies to Support Recruitment/Retention, Accommodation/Access, and College Life System Changes**

As part of the grant, students were trained in a *Disability Policy* seminar course. During the seminar students were asked to identify and choose one area of concern or interest from one of the three broad categories (recruitment/retention, accommodation/access, and college life) to positively affect systems change on campus. Students formed *task-force* groups depending on their personal concerns on campus. Each task-force wrote an *impact-plan* which was a blueprint for how the task-force was going to carry out its mission of change on campus. The impact-plans contained the information necessary to implement the group’s task-force mission. Impact-plans were written as the final project for the seminar. However, the following semester students were expected to carry out their impact-plans and subsequently affect systems change on campus by implementing their campaign. One of the task-force projects was to establish a campus organization called *Ability Unlimited* (AU). AU was a group composed of students, with and without disabilities, who met on a regular basis. Members of AU planned events such as movie nights, adapted sports events such as roller-hockey (wheel-chair hockey),
presentations from members of the disability community (e.g., Christopher Reeves), and constructed, maintained, and participated in a College On-Line Disability Awareness Community or (COLDAC). This project quickly grew into an official campus organization that is still affecting many aspects of recruitment/retention, accommodation/access, and college life to present day.

**Develop, Disseminate, and Evaluate Training Programs and Materials on the Model and Components on Postsecondary Systems Change**

The *Involving Self-Determined Students With Disabilities in Postsecondary Systems Change* project (Flexer, 1996) was developed with Webster’s curriculum in mind (e.g., training students in leadership, self- and group-advocacy, collaboration, effective communication, etc.). The follow up project, *Outreaching a Leadership and Systems Change Model for Students With Disabilities in Postsecondary Settings* (Griffith, Webster, & Flexer, 2001) was written to continue the development, dissemination, and evaluation of the *Involving Self-Determined Students With Disabilities in Postsecondary Systems Change* project.

**Current Research Pertaining to College Students With Disabilities**

Research on the factors related to the success of college students has continued to grow since Webster’s (2001) study. For example, Putney (2005) investigated factors related to success of college students with learning disabilities, ADHD, and ADD in her mixed methods doctoral dissertation. The purpose of her study was to identify variables present in successful and unsuccessful students with learning disabilities, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), and Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) while attending
college. Included in the study were 125 students enrolled in four colleges and universities located in the eastern United States. All students who participated were registered with the college’s disability support center and provided documentation of their disability. Putney’s study addressed the following research questions: (a) Is there a difference in grade point average (GPA) among those identified as a student with a learning disability, ADHD, and a combination of learning disability and ADHD? (b) Is motivation correlated with the success of a college student with a learning disability or ADHD? (c) Is there any difference in GPA among those labeled in elementary school, middle school, high school and college? (d) Are there significant differences in overall college GPA between students based on race, gender, IQ, and college major? (e) What are the academic and social experiences of college students with LD and ADHD? The study focused on experiences of college students with LD and ADHD and afforded an opportunity for students to address achievements as well as challenges while they transitioned into college.

Qualitative methods were used to answer the research question: What are the academic and social experiences of college students with LD and ADHD? Results showed students enjoyed active social lives and appeared to have adjusted well to college, however not at the beginning. Findings also indicated students were able to incorporate effective strategies that promoted success in college.

Quantitatively, the independent variables in this study were: (a) area of disability, (b) motivation, (c) when the student was identified with a disability, (d) race, (e) gender, (f) IQ, and (g) college major. The dependent variable in this study was student success as
measured by student’s overall college GPA. Results of the analysis of variance and Pearson product-moment correlations showed that differences in overall college GPA among students with LD, ADHD, or a combination of the two were not significant. A bivariate analysis revealed motivation displayed no correlation to student’s success as measured by student’s overall GPA. Analysis of variances (ANOVAs) indicated there were no statistically significant differences in overall college GPA among students labeled as LD and/or ADHD in elementary school, middle school, high school, and college. Additionally, there were no significant differences in overall college GPA between students based on race, gender, and college major. A bivariate analysis was run and showed no correlation between IQ and overall college GPA.

Additionally, a mixed methods study on self-advocacy, metacognition (knowledge of your own thoughts and the factors that influence your thinking), and transition of college freshmen with learning disabilities was conducted by Kosine (2006). Her study provided insight into issues that faced students with learning disabilities as they entered college. College freshmen with learning disabilities (LD) were compared with non-learning disabled college freshmen (NLD) on self-advocacy and metacognition. The two groups of students were recruited from a mid-sized western university in the United States. The LD group was recruited from the campus disability services office and the NLD group was recruited through random selection in college classrooms. A Self-Advocacy Questionnaire (SAQ) was created as a measure of self-advocacy behaviors evaluating three areas: (a) self-determination, (b) confidence, and (c) help seeking behaviors. Also, a Metacognitive Assessment Inventory (MAI) was used as a measure of
metacognitive skills (Schraw & Dennison, 1994). The MAI was an instrument that measures eight categories of metacognition. Participants from the LD group were interviewed regarding their high school to college transition.

Quantitatively, the LD group scored significantly lower than the NLD group on the help seeking variable \( (p < .05) \) on the SAQ. On the MAI, the LD group reported possessing significantly less awareness of: (a) how they learn, (b) their academic skill level, (c) their cognitive abilities, and (d) ways to correct learning errors. Data derived by the LD group showed significantly lower scores on Knowledge of Cognition \( (p < .05) \) and the Declarative Knowledge subscales \( (p < .01) \).

Qualitatively, interviews were conducted with four students from the LD group regarding their college transition experiences. The interviews revealed several themes: (a) students reported a lack of self-awareness of cognitive limitations and metacognitive skills; (b) students reported a lack of preparedness for the academic challenges of college; (c) students reported little or no transition planning from high school to college; (d) students reported being referred to disability support services, but not engaging services until they encountered academic failure; (e) students reported that they did not report their disability to their instructors because the college did this for them, or they were concerned how their instructors would react; and (f) students reported a general lack of academic preparedness for work at the college level.

Moreover, research by Hurst (2006) focused on students’ physical disabilities and impairment in adjustment to college life. Her research explored differences between students with and without disabilities in: (a) perceived social support, (b) coping style, (c)
self-efficacy, and (d) college adjustment. Also, the influence of athletic participation on the variables was examined in a sub-sample of students with disabilities. The author utilized surveys and interviews in her research. Results did not support differences between students with disabilities and students without disabilities on the study’s variables. Results suggested differences in college outcome variables (i.e., matriculation and persistence) were not a result of differences in disability status, but were the result of differences in (a) adjustment, (b) perceived social support, (c) self-efficacy, and (d) coping style.

Results from quantitative measures found the strongest correlations between self-efficacy, coping style, and adjustment factors. Results from qualitative interviews yielded students reporting more adjustment difficulties, perceived more challenges within the week, fewer factors that assisted with stress management, and additional factors that added to the experience of stress. Hurst (2006) cited a more active coping style, along with the use of reframing techniques, and the perception of shared social reality support were associated with fewer adjustment difficulties. Results from interviews also suggested participation in athletics for students with disabilities provides students with incentives, such as academic motivation, increased self-efficacy, and campus integration that may assist with adjustment to college life.

**Major Theoretical Perspectives on Student Success in College**

Literature on major theoretical perspectives on student success in college has used the concepts of *persistence* and *educational attainment* (or earning the desired degree or credential) in defining student success in college (Braxton; 2003; Pascarella & Terenzini,
These theories highlighted the importance of academic preparation and the quality of student experiences in college (ASHE Higher Education Report, 2007). Many of the theories involved multiple perspectives. Within these perspectives emerged many of the subcategories that have been presented by students in this study, and that of Webster’s research.

Perspectives presented in the following section are: Sociological, Organizational, Psychological, Cultural, and Economic. There is not one theoretical perspective that can sufficiently describe all the factors that influence student success in college. However several perspectives are presented.

**Sociological Perspectives**

Tinto (1993) stated students need to separate from family members and high school friends in order to go through a period of transition and interact in new ways with people in the new college environment and take on the normative values and behaviors of that environment. Academic and social integration are two ways students adjust to college life. Student persistence is a combination of the relationship between the student and the people in college (i.e., other students, professors) and the student’s home community (i.e., family and friends). For students to succeed in college they need to learn to function in this new environment and interact appropriately with new peers and faculty (Kuh & Love, 2000). Personal relationships both on and off campus can contribute to student success in college. The *social networks* perspective (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005) suggests the student’s relationships with faculty, staff and peers, as well as family, friends, and mentors, add to student satisfaction, persistence, and achievement in college.
Organizational Perspectives

Pike and Kuh (2005) offered organizational perspectives that stress the university structure and operations affect the student’s performance at college. Included are the university’s size, resources, selectivity, and faculty-to-student ratios. In this perspective, a student’s beliefs are affected by his or her experiences at the university that determines the student’s sense of belonging in college.

Psychological Perspectives

Bean and Eaton (2000) offered that personality traits like self-efficacy aid a student to persevere when confronted with academic and social challenges. This attitude-behavior theory proposed that students with a strong, well-developed self-concept are more confident regarding their ability to succeed. Students who are not as confident were more likely to give up when they faced difficult circumstances. Kuh (1999) continued to develop self-efficacy theory and suggested that students are inclined to search out certain kinds of activities during their college experience such as how to spend their time, which affects their performance both in and out of the classroom.

Cultural Perspectives

Historically underrepresented students have encountered challenges when arriving on campus that made it difficult for them to take advantage of the university’s resources for their education and personal development. Students’ perceptions of the university’s environment and values influence students’ satisfaction and how they participate in educational and social activities (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1995).
Economic Perspectives

Braxton (2003) described if a student believed that the cost of staying in college outweighs the perceived benefits, the student is at risk of exiting college before attaining his or her degree. College costs can include tuition and fees (as well as perceived lost income from not working). However, the benefits include increased future earnings, as well as attaining knowledge, skills, and enjoying a higher overall quality of life (Goldin, Katz, & Kuziemko, 2006).

Summary of Perspectives

Together these theoretical perspectives on student success account for many key factors that can shape students’ preparation for and success in college. Many of the perspectives are reflected in students’ focus group responses in the present study, as well as the writings of Webster’s students in their journal excerpts.
CHAPTER III

METHOD

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to gain a greater understanding of what it takes to be successful in college through examining the actual experiences and perceptions of students with and without disabilities as they transitioned into the postsecondary education arena. This study also intended to discern if the themes, categories, and subcategories were similar to those generated by college students with disabilities in a previous study (Webster, 2004) regarding achieving success in college.

This chapter addresses the methodology employed in conducting the present research study. Included in this chapter is the context for the present study, instruments used in the study, the theoretical basis for the use of focus groups as the means of collecting qualitative data, and the procedures used in gathering and analyzing data for the study.

Context for the Present Study

From 1996-2001 a federally funded OSERS project was conducted at Kent State University entitled, Involving Self-Determined Students With Disabilities in Postsecondary Systems Change (Flexer, 1996). This grant project was designed to affect systems change on the Kent Campus and was based on the assumption college students with disabilities had expertise in disability issues such as recruitment, retention, and access and accommodation. In 2001, the project director (Webster, 2001) successfully defended her doctoral dissertation, Giving Voice to Students With Disabilities Who Have
Successfully Transitioned to College: Or How LL Slim Became “The Best Darn Gimp on the Planet.” Her study was based upon data collected from college students with disabilities who participated in the grant and completed her seminar, *Disability Policy: Leadership for the 21st Century*. Webster’s position was if students had a clear understanding of how to be self-aware, self-determined, self- and group advocates, and could clearly articulate their knowledge to appropriate stakeholders at the university, then measures could be taken to improve the institution’s responsiveness to issues students with disabilities may have (Webster, 2001).

**Original Curriculum and Data Collection (Webster, 2001)**

In order to accomplish the goal of systems change on campus, students enrolled in a 3-credit hour *Disability Policy* seminar. The content was developed by Webster (2001). Webster, with the assistance of participating students, further developed and organized the curriculum. Participation in the seminar (course) facilitated students’ understanding of: (a) relevant legislation (including the Americans with Disabilities Act [ADA], Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973), past and present litigation, current campus policies, including policies that influence postsecondary institutions; (b) various issues affecting the disability community, including individual and societal attitudes and experiences, and the emerging civil rights movement for people with disabilities; (c) current research relating to students with disabilities in postsecondary arenas; (d) best programs and practices for students with disabilities on other college campuses; and (e) fundamental leadership skills, including self-determination, self- and group advocacy, collaboration, negotiation, coalition formation.

A second, three year (plus extension), OSERS grant project acquired by Kent State University, Outreaching a Leadership and Systems Change Model for Students With Disabilities in Postsecondary Settings (Griffith et al., 2001), was an outreach of the previous project Involving Self-Determined Students With Disabilities in Postsecondary Systems Change. The current researcher served as the project director of this grant and managed all facets of the delivery of the project.

The focus of the outreach project was intended to increase leadership and self-determination skills in students with disabilities in order to positively affect systems change on campus, not only at Kent State University, but at five other universities both in and out of Ohio.

The Disability Policy: Leadership for the 21st Century course was further developed for and by students with disabilities in postsecondary education (see Appendix A). The course offering was not limited to students with disabilities (see Appendix B).

During the Outreaching a Leadership and Systems Change Model for Students With Disabilities in Postsecondary Settings project, the Disability Policy course was outreached from the Kent State University campus (using video-teleconferencing) to the five universities. Participating universities’ enrollment information and participant demographics are represented in Table 1. The Disability Policy courses were taught by the researcher and the director of Student Disability Services (SAS) at Kent State University. The Disability Policy course was offered over a period of three years during
Table 1

*Students Participating in Outreach of Disability Policy Course/Seminar*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic Year</th>
<th>University</th>
<th>Number of Students</th>
<th>Students with Disabilities</th>
<th>Students without Disabilities</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
<th>Undergraduate Students</th>
<th>Graduate Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2002-2003</td>
<td>Kent State University</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>University of Louisville</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kent State University</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bowling Green State University</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Clarion University</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003-2004</td>
<td>Kent State University</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Central Michigan University</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kent State University</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kent State University -Stark Campus</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004-2005</td>
<td>Kent State University</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>90</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
the fall semester, beginning with the academic year 2002-2003. The facilitators or instructors of record serving the outreach universities were either professors in special education or directors of Student Disability Services at their respective universities. The researcher met with the facilitators at their outreach universities in the summer months prior to course delivery. Each facilitator was given a curriculum binder for the disability policy course that contained the articles, PowerPoint slides, assessments, and other materials needed to create handouts and resources for students on their end of the outreach. Lectures were led by instructors at Kent State University; however, the expertise and experience of the outreach facilitators were openly welcomed and appreciated during all segments of class.

Students involved with outreach of the disability policy course could follow along with the major points of the lecture by consulting the PowerPoint slides available in their curriculum binders. Students could receive the course materials in an alternate format depending on their needs. Through video-teleconferencing students at all sites could see the same materials, as well as one another. The Disability Policy course, including task force groups that initiated impact plans (which served as a final project), was executed in much the same manner as Webster’s (2001) project. Appendix C lists the task force/impact plan missions of all universities participating in the outreach project.

The Director of SAS at Kent State University instructed a second course using V-TEL video-teleconferencing equipment. This second section was delivered to two universities simultaneously: Bowling Green State University in Ohio, and Clarion
University of Pennsylvania. In this outreach, 11 students took the course at Kent State University, 14 at Clarion University, and 6 at Bowling Green State University. 

Central Michigan University was connected with Kent State University via Polycom video-teleconferencing in the second year of the outreach, academic year 2003-2004. The current researcher instructed this seminar with a professor of special education facilitating at Central Michigan University. Ten students participated in the course for Kent State University and nine students at Central Michigan University. The Director of SDS at Kent State University had six students and outreached the course to Kent State University’s Stark Campus with 13 students enrolled in the course. 

A total of 90 students participated in the Disability Policy: Leadership for the 21st Century course. Seventy-five students disclosed some type of disability and 15 students did not disclose having a documented disability. 

Validation of Themes Generated by Students in Original Grant (Webster, 2001). 

One of the purposes of the present study was to provide content validity to the themes produced by the students in Webster’s (2001) qualitative study. Webster’s primary research question was: What perceptions and expertise do college students with disabilities reveal regarding transition, postsecondary services and supports, and succeeding in a college environment? She analyzed student interactive journals from her disability policy courses. As categories materialized, she continued a process of sorting and defining the data, identifying themes, categories, sub-categories. The majority of students’ writing was classified under the theme Awareness of Self. Awareness of Self included categories that included an awareness of Skills and Abilities, Knowledge, and
Feelings. These categories were further extrapolated into sub-categories. The second theme that emerged from her reduction process was an Awareness of Others. Awareness of Others included the categories of Role of Society, Role of Family and Friends, and Role of Professionals. These categories were further reduced into sub-categories. The overview of Webster’s (2001) taxonomy of themes, categories, and sub-categories is displayed in Figure 1.

Research Questions for the Present Study

The purpose of the current qualitative study was to gain a greater understanding of what it takes to be successful in college through the examination of actual experiences and perceptions of students with and without disabilities as they transitioned into the postsecondary education arena; and secondly, to determine if results from the current study identified similar themes, categories, and sub-categories found in Webster’s (2004) study.

The qualitative procedures used in this study answered the following research questions.

Research Question 1: How do students with disabilities and students without disabilities define success in college and barriers to success based on responses to focus group questions?

Research Question 2: Did students participating in the current research identify the same themes, categories, and subcategories that were identified in the original research: Giving Voice to Students With Disabilities Who Have Successfully Transitioned to College: Or How LL Slim Became the Best Darn Gimp on the Planet (Webster, 2001)?
Figure 1. Themes, categories, and subcategories which emerged from journal entries of postsecondary students with disabilities in response to various disability policy course topics (Webster, 2001)
Theoretical Basis for Focus Group/Qualitative Methodology

Focus group interviews (focus groups) served as the primary means of collecting qualitative data in this study. The researcher used focus groups as a self-contained method, in which the focus groups served as the primary source of data (Morgan, 1997). In using a qualitative approach, the researcher based knowledge claims on discovery, insight, and understanding from the perspectives of those being studied. A systematic process of conducting research was used in the planning, formulation of research questions, and in collection and analysis data. The qualitative focus group approach corresponded best with the researcher’s research questions. The current researcher wanted to ascertain if students with and without disabilities would identify the same themes, categories, and subcategories presented by Webster (2001), when she analyzed students’ journal entries. As a qualitative researcher, the current author was interested in understanding how students interpreted their experiences, how their realities were constructed, and the meaning they attributed to their experiences.

Quantitative data collection and analysis would not have provided the rich student data necessary to answer the research questions of the current study. Qualitative measures were useful because they assisted the researcher meet the criteria for evaluating the “goodness” of participant responses (e.g., Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003) better than would a quantitative design approach. In this particular study the researcher was attempting to verify results from a previous study (Webster, 2001) by ascertaining if similar themes, categories, and sub-categories were found using focus group transcriptions opposed to data derived from student journals.
The qualitative data analysis used involved organization, classification, a search for patterns, descriptive write-ups, and synthesis to achieve an in-depth, holistic understanding regarding the topic of concern (Stainback & Stainback, 1989). In this study the topic of concern was the perception of students with and without disabilities regarding their transition into college. Focus group data collection and analysis is qualitative in nature. It provides researchers with detailed information regarding a particular topic by participants of a certain faction.

As a self-contained method, focus groups can either explore new research areas or examine well-known research questions from the researcher’s own perspective. The key distinguishing feature of a self-contained focus group is that the results of the research can stand on their own (Morgan, 1997).

**Instruments**

**Focus Group Interviews: Content**

According to Morgan (1997) any attempt to gather observations through interviewing (e.g., focus groups) requires attention to concrete issues of interview content. The goal was to construct a focus group protocol that covered particular topics of interest to the researcher and generated participant responses to those topics (i.e., focus group questions and responses of participants). The researcher’s intent was to gather focus group data concerning participant’s perceptions and experiences regarding their transition into and success in the postsecondary education arena (i.e., college). Interview questions were assembled based on transition literature and the researcher’s research questions for the current study.
Focus group sessions typically lasted approximately 1 hour (Morgan, 1997). Edmonds (1999) suggested within this time span it is important to maintain focus and not explore too many topics. Morgan (1997) also urged the use of four to five distinct topics or questions, with preplanned probes under each major topic. The researcher ran structured focus groups and limited the distinct topics to five, with preplanned questions and probes under each major topic. Major topics of the focus groups included: (a) Transition into College; (b) Supports and Services, used in transition into and in college; (c) Success in College; (d) College Experiences; and (e) Personal Attributes. Focus group questions are listed in Table 2.

**Conducting the Focus Groups**

The researcher served as the facilitator of the focus group interviews along with an aide who assisted with note taking and operating an audio-tape recorder. The focus group sessions were recorded and transcribed for analysis. The focus group sessions were held in a quiet and accessible conference room. The format of the focus group agenda included: (a) introductions, (b) warm-up period, (c) question period, and (d) summary (Bader & Rossi, 2002). During the introduction portion the researcher introduced himself and had student participants introduce themselves. The researcher described the general purpose of the session and identified in general terms the intended use of the focus group data. During the warm-up period the researcher reviewed the agenda and time-frames and charted the key topics and questions. Following the warm-up period, the researcher began the question period. The questions were asked in order. Each question had a pre-determined amount of discussion time, roughly five minutes per
Table 2

*Focus Group Interview Topics and Questions*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topics</th>
<th>Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Transition Into College</td>
<td>1. What were some of your experiences in transitioning from high school to college?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Do you feel that you were prepared for the demands of college academically?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Do you feel that you were prepared for the demands of college emotionally?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Do you feel that you were prepared for the demands of college socially?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. Do you feel that you were prepared for the demands of college financially?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supports and Services</td>
<td>6. What, if any, services did you use in the process of transitioning to college?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7. What, if any, services did you use while in college?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8. What, if any, supports did you have in place making your transition into college?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9. Were these supports kept in place through your college experience?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Success in College</td>
<td>10. Define what you think it means to be successful in college.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11. Do you feel you have been successful in college?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12. What did you do to be successful in college?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College Experiences</td>
<td>13. What did you like best about your college experience?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14. What did you like least about your college experience?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Attributes</td>
<td>15. Name 3 personal attributes that helped you succeed in college.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16. Name 3 personal attributes that you feel hindered your success in college.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
question. At the end of the session the researcher briefly summarized the main points of the discussion. Participants were given an opportunity to make any final statements at this time as well (Bader & Rossi, 2002).

**Data Collection**

Focus group interview data were collected in the form of researcher field notes, audio recordings of the entire group session, as well as participant responses jotted by an aide on poster paper. Morgan (1997) stated the principal means of capturing observations in a focus group is through audio taping. All participating students signed consent forms for audible recordings.

**Description of Participants for Current Study**

Sampling for this study was purposeful rather than random (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The sampling was also opportunistic (Patton, 1990). “Information-rich cases” (Patton, 1990, p. 181) were provided from the purposeful sampling, from which in-depth information of fundamental importance to the scope of the investigation was obtained. Seven students with disabilities, from KSU and various outreach universities, who participated in the Disability Policy course, composed a focus group. Four students without disabilities, from KSU and outreach universities, who participated in the Disability Policy course, also formed a focus group.

Two other groups of students participated in the research study. A sample of four undergraduate students, without disabilities, who took courses in the College of Education, Health, and Human Services at Kent State University, composed a focus group. Another sample of five undergraduate students registered with Kent State
University’s Student Accessibility Services (SAS) who had documented disabilities, composed a focus group. Students in all four groups answered the same focus group questions.

**Procedure**

This study was designed to explore the participants’ experiences and perceptions concerning transitioning into and succeeding in college. In an effort to acquire the most accurate representation of those experiences and perceptions, four samples of students (two with disabilities and two without disabilities) participated in focus group sessions (Edmonds, 1999; Krueger & Casey, 2000). The facilitator of the focus groups employed open-ended questions (see Table 2). Focus group interviews were transcribed prior to analysis.

**Focus Groups**

The target was to have six students in each focus group. However, hitting the target of six students per group did not occur. At least one student from each outreach university was represented in each group if possible. Two outreach universities did not have students without disabilities enrolled in the course: Central Michigan University and Kent State University-Stark Campus. Two focus group interviews were held in a hotel conference room to accommodate students traveling from out of town. The other two focus group interviews were held in a conference room in the College of Education. Interviews were audio taped and transcribed for analysis following each session. Each session took no longer than 1½ hours to complete. Participants received a $10.00 stipend
for their participation in the focus group interviews. Participation was voluntary and students were able to cease participation at any time during the session.

**Data Analysis**

**Analyzing the Focus Group Interviews**

The researcher began a content analysis of the focus group interviews using an *open coding* phase. In this phase the researcher examined the focus group transcripts for salient categories. Transcripts from each of the four groups were coded. The researcher identified *thought units*, which were not necessarily full sentences, from student responses (transcriptions) and matched them as closely as possible to Webster’s taxonomy. This process was performed for all four focus groups. The researcher aligned student’s thought units to categories, and subcategories under Webster’s taxonomies for *Awareness of Self* and *Awareness of Other* themes. The researcher continually looked for instances where student’s thought units represented categories, and subcategories under Webster’s themes, while continually searching though units (text sections) until they did not provide insight into a category (Creswell, 2007).

Thought units that did not *fit* into Webster’s taxonomy were incorporated into a parallel taxonomy (see Figure 2) and labeled accordingly. The researcher compared and contrasted categories and subcategories that emerged with the present study to that of Webster’s (2001) research.

For the purpose of the current research study, the four focus groups were combined into two. Two groups of students were analyzed in the current study: students with disabilities and students without disabilities.
Figure 2. Themes, categories, and subcategories that emerged from students’ focus group responses
Validity

Validity in a qualitative study does not involve the same implications as it does in quantitative research according to Creswell (2009). Qualitative research is not fundamentally concerned with generalizability, the external validity of applying results to new settings, people, or samples. Validity is viewed as strength of qualitative research. It is often used to suggest whether findings are accurate from the perspective of the researcher, the participants, or the readers of the documented accounts (Creswell & Miller, 2000). In order to check the accuracy of findings the researcher used member checking. Several participants in the study reviewed specific descriptions (thought units), with themes and categories to determine whether the thought units were placed accurately in the taxonomy. In addition to member checking, to strengthen the internal validity of the study, the researcher kept notes regarding his feelings and assumptions in an effort to recognize personal bias and keep these possible threats to validity in check.

Also, two students from Kent State University individually piloted the focus group questions to determine if the questions elicited responses across a wide enough spectrum. Focus group interview questions were refined subsequent to information gleaned from individual interviews and the transition literature.

Reliability

Reliability was defined as the extent to which the results of a measurement accurately represent the true magnitude or quality of a construct (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). Since researchers using qualitative (naturalistic) methods of inquiry presume a conviction of multiple realities (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), greater reliability was brought to
this study by the use of inter-rater reliability checks. Inter-rater checks were performed to ensure the greatest reliability of the categories generated by the data reduction process. A Kent State University professor was given 40% of the text units selected from focus group interview transcripts as representative of the categories that emerged from the current study. The professor was also given a list of definitions of the six major categories that emerged, and was asked to match the text units from the student focus group interviews to the categories. Inter-rater reliability was 96% for the sample, signifying considerable reliability in matching thought units to categories.

Tashakkori and Teddlie (1998) indicated one assumption underlying most methods of evaluating reliability was if a measurement is accurate, it should be repeatable over time, or obtainable with an identical method of measurement (e.g., a parallel test).

In the present research the researcher used students’ focus group transcriptions as opposed to students’ journal entries (Webster, 2001) to identify if similar themes, categories, and sub-categories would emerge concerning students’ experiences and perceptions of success in college.
CHAPTER IV
RESULTS

This chapter begins with a reintroduction of the research questions followed by the presentation of the results of the two research questions.

Research Question 1: How do students with disabilities and students without disabilities define success in college and barriers to success based on responses to focus group questions?

Research Question 2: Did students participating in the current research identify the same themes, categories, and subcategories that were identified in the original research: Giving Voice to Students With Disabilities Who Have Successfully Transitioned to College: Or How LL Slim Became the Best Darn Gimp on the Planet (Webster, 2001)?

Analysis of Results for Research Question 1

In order to answer the Research Question 1, “How do students with disabilities and students without disabilities define success in college and barriers to success based on responses to focus group questions?” the following focus group questions were used:

Define what you think it means to be successful in college.
What did you do to be successful in college?
What did you like best about your college experience?
What did you like least about your college experience?
Name 3 personal attributes that helped you succeed in college.
Name 3 personal attributes that you feel hindered your success in college.
In order to answer the research question, responses from all participants with disabilities \((n = 12)\) were grouped together, and responses from all students without disabilities \((n = 8)\) were grouped together.

Student responses to each focus group question related to success in college were analyzed and sorted into common topics (items 10-16 shown in Table 3). All participants responded affirmatively to focus group question 11, “Do you feel you have been successful in college?” No further analysis of this question is presented. For the purpose of discussion, results are presented regarding topics common to all respondents first, followed by those particular to groups with or without disabilities.

**Categories That Emerged From Focus Group Questions Related to Success in College**

During the focus group sessions students were asked to “Define what you think it means to be successful in college.” There were a total of 45 responses to this question with the majority of responses (24 or 53%) that fell into the *Application to Life and Work* category (see Table 4). Students responded strongly that learning for knowledge and gaining experiences for application in life was a measure of being successful in college. Students expressed that learning for knowledge did not take place solely in the classroom, but also in all other experiences students acquired during their time in college. One student with a disability said, “A lot of stuff I learned in college was outside of the classroom; grades are a small part of success.” Another student with a disability stated, “Getting good grades is great, but learning real world skills and getting a job after
## Table 3

**Focus Group Topics and Questions Related to Success in College and Resultant Categories**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topics</th>
<th>Question &amp; Categories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Success in College      | 10. Define what you think it means to be successful in college?  
|                         |   • Application to Life and Work  
|                         |   • Academic Success  
|                         |   • Personal Development and Accomplishment  
|                         | 11. Do you feel you have been successful in college?  
|                         | 12. What did you do to be successful in college?  
|                         |   • Leadership Skills  
|                         |   • Attitude/Outlook  
|                         |   • Work Ethic  
|                         |   • Social Networking  
|                         |   • Supports  
| College Experiences     | 13. What did you like *best* about your college experience?  
|                         |   • Personal Growth  
|                         |   • Academic Exploration  
|                         |   • Social Networking  
|                         | 14. What did you like *least* about your college experience?  
|                         |   • Academic Frustration  
|                         |   • Logistics  
|                         |   • Financial  
| Personal Attributes     | 15. Name 3 personal attributes that helped you succeed in college.  
|                         |   • Leadership  
|                         |   • Work Ethic  
|                         |   • Attitudes  
|                         | 16. Name 3 personal attributes that you feel hindered your success in college.  
|                         |   • Poor Work Ethic  
|                         |   • Poor Problem Solving  
|                         |   • Poor Communication |
Table 4

*Categories That Emerged From Focus Group Question: Define What You Think It Means to be Successful in College*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Students with Disabilities</th>
<th>Students without Disabilities</th>
<th>Both Groups Combined</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>f</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>f</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Application to Life and Work</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Success</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Development and Accomplishment</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>24</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

college, making use of what you learned, that’s college success.” Yet another student in the disability group responded,

> I don’t think success should be measured by your degree either. I’m sure if I stopped (attending college) now I would be perfectly successful because I’ve gained enough from the experience in college that I can apply them to my life. Success is not about your degree, or your major, or anything like that.

Similarly, a student without a disability said,

> Success in college is . . . even if you fail your test, or you get a “C,” and you’d rather get an “A,” but knowing that you learned the stuff. Learning the stuff is more important than getting the grade. You’re going to need to know that information when you get that job with your degree.
Another student without disabilities stated,

I think if you have a goal in mind and you know where you want to be in the future, it’s a lot easier to get there. You feel more successful about yourself and you will be more successful because you’ve enjoyed the stuff you’re learning and it just comes naturally because it’s what you are supposed to be doing.

_Academic success_ was the second common category to surface when students responded to defining what they thought it meant to be successful in college. Fourteen (31%) of the 45 student responses to the question, “Define what you think it means to be successful in college,” were included in the Academic Success category. Academic Success was described as getting good grades, passing one class at a time, graduating from college, and advancing to higher education. “Grades are important for graduate school” remarked a student with a disability and, “Of course . . . graduating!” stated a participant without a disability. Even though both groups commented on Academic Success, students who did not have disabilities offered considerably more comments (11 or 79%) in relation to students who had disabilities (3 or 21%).

During the focus group sessions, students were also asked, “What did you do to be successful in college?” There were a total of 40 responses to this question with the majority of responses falling into the Leadership Skills (10 or 25%) and Attitude/Outlook (10 or 25%) categories (see Table 5). Responses under Leadership Skills involved students having confidence and being aware of their strengths. Being a good leader, having good problem solving and self-advocacy skills were also mentioned by students as things they did to become successful in college. A student with a disability stated,
Table 5

*Categories That Emerged From the Focus Group Question: What Did You Do to be Successful in College*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Students with Disabilities</th>
<th>Students without Disabilities</th>
<th>Both Groups Combined</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>( f )</td>
<td>( % )</td>
<td>( f )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership Skills</td>
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<td>80</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude/Outlook</td>
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<td>60</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work Ethic</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Networking</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supports</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>26</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“I think confidence is really the key. You have to have confidence that no matter how hard it gets, you know? I’m better than this! So you need confidence.” Another participant with a disability mentioned, “Being a leader. Being on top of things—just taking charge!” Similarly, a student without disabilities said, “Things were difficult at first, but now I’m kind of getting a better grip on things. You need to be confident and know you can solve the problems that come your way.” Being determined, confident, and knowing your strengths and needs were the majority of responses that composed the Leadership Skills category.

In regard to the Attitude/Outlook category students said being respectful and tolerant of others’ attitudes and lifestyles was a measure of being successful in college.
Students also stated that having a sense of humor, being optimistic, passionate, and patient were things they did to be successful in college which also related to Attitude/Outlook. A student with a disability stated, “You really have to have a high tolerance for other people. You need to adapt to different people’s lifestyles and attitudes.” Another student with a disability mentioned, “That’s what I do. I don’t let anything, I try not to let anything get me down. I just take it as it comes and make the best of everything, and try to succeed!” A student without a disability stated, “Having a job that I love is great—it keeps me optimistic about pushing forward and finishing!”

*Work Ethic* was the next common category to emerge from this focus group question. Eight (20%) of the 40 student responses to the question, “What did you do to be successful in college?” were included in the Work Ethic category. The majority of responses consisted of students’ willingness to work hard, to strive to have determination, discipline, and perseverance, as well as good time-management skills. A student without disabilities remarked, “Determination, discipline, passion, the love of the field which you are going to go into when you graduate . . . all plays a huge part in being successful and being able to apply it to life.” Another student without disabilities stated managing her time effectively assisted with her college success. She said,

> I think time management helped me to become successful. My first year I had no idea and my second year was iffy. But now I am kind of gaining a grip on things. I know what is expected of me and know I can get a handle on things.

Students identified being out-going and out-spoken as keys to college success. A student with a documented disability stated, “I’ve learned that if you’re not outspoken with a
problem that you see on campus it’s never going to get changed. Unless I say, ‘Hey, this is what I need done,’ it’s not going to change.”

The final common category to emerge from this focus group question was Supports. This category received the fewest number of responses (4 or 10%) of the 40 student replies to the question, “What did you do to be successful in college?” Both groups offered two responses (50%). A student with disabilities offered, “I think what I did to be successful in a lot of ways was to use the support that was offered when I needed it.” A student without disabilities stated, “We juggle athletics and classes and personal lives. So, I think a good support system also needs to be in place. If we didn’t have our support systems in place we would not have done well.”

Categories Particular to a Disability or Non-Disability Group Related to the Topic: Success in College

The first category to emerge particular to a group related to the topic Success in College was Personal Development and Accomplishment. Seven (16%) of the 45 student responses to the question, “Define what you think it means to be successful in college,” were included in the Personal Development and Accomplishment category. Only students with disabilities expressed how college shaped their present and future personal development and they received a sense of completeness and accomplishment in learning about who they were as people. They spoke of becoming their own persons, as well as being a role-model for others. A student stated, “College shapes who you are and who you will become,” and also,
Success is acquiring a sense of completeness—I have learned so much about myself so far. I mean, academics is obviously what college is about, you get a degree, you get a good job. But I have learned so much about myself that I feel successful.

The second category to emerge particular to a group related to the topic Success in College was *Social Networking*. Eight (20%) of the 40 student responses to the question, “What did you do to be successful in college?” were included in the Social Networking category (see Table 5). Only students with disabilities gave responses that fell under this category. A student said, “Networking. Getting to know people and always having a connection; making friends always helps.” Succeeding in college also involved making connections as mentioned by another student: “Reaching out to make connections because you know what needs to be done.” Students with disabilities expressed communication with professors was also important to college success,

I made sure that I talked to all of my professors and I made it a point for them to know me. I’m kind of a nerd in the fact that I would always look up at least my psych professors before I had them. Another student stated, “I was kind of like her, I would make sure that all of my professors knew who I was and knew all about me, ‘this is what I need to succeed in your class. Can you help me?’”
Categories That Emerged From Focus Group Questions Related to College Experiences

The next focus group question asked to students was, “What did you like best about your college experience?” There were a total of 33 responses to this question with the majority of responses (17 or 52%) falling into the Personal Growth topic (see Table 6). Students expressed during college they learned what they were capable of doing and that college was a time of personal growth. Students reported college was a time of greater self-expression and independence compared to high school. A student without disabilities responded,

I never realized how much I relied on my parents until I came to school (college), especially when I made it out of the dorms. Living on my own makes me appreciate it. I like having my own money and being able to go back to my parents. I love being independent. I like to be able to do what I want and when I want. I like to do what makes me happy. During high school and the beginning of college I felt like I was trying to make others happy and now it’s more like I know what I want and I’m going to get it.

Another student without disabilities stated, “I think for me it was kind of like who I am. I have grown a lot since high school and I have come a long way. I am comfortable and confident with who I am.” A student without disabilities mentioned, “Learning how to think on your feet, and new experiences, at least for me, I don’t know, you just learn a lot about life. It’s not just the academics.” Another student with disabilities stated, “Of all the experiences I’ve been through I’ve made the best of (them)
Table 6

*Categories That Emerged From Focus Group Question: What Did You Like Best About Your College Experience?*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Students with Disabilities</th>
<th></th>
<th>Students without Disabilities</th>
<th></th>
<th>Both Groups Combined</th>
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<td>29</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Exploration</td>
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<td>34</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>66</td>
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<td>100</td>
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<td>Social Networking</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

and I’ve had a lot of fun. Just figuring out who I am and not being afraid of showing my beliefs or anything else now.” Another student with disabilities stated the following regarding what she liked best about her college experience: “It taught me what I am capable of. When I went away to school it proved it to me in a way that nothing else could have.”

The next common category to emerge from this focus group question was *Academic Exploration*. Nine (27%) of the 33 student responses to the question, “What did you like best about your college experience?” were included in the Academic Exploration category (see Table 6). Under this category students spoke about exploring various college majors, courses, and subjects. They expressed their learning experiences both in and out of the classroom. A student without disabilities remarked, “What I liked
most is learning new stuff. I like the culture.” A young woman with a disability responded,

I’m such a nerd because my favorite thing about college is like going to classes, and like, learning stuff that I haven’t learned before. I’m the friend that breaks out the book in the middle of a party and is like, “Oh, guess what I learned today! Let me read you this!” That’s me!

Another student with a disability responded, “I really like my lab classes, like my art and studio classes. I can go to the lab and do my thing. I really look forward to it!” An older student with a disability mentioned,

I’ve had four different majors. I wanted to try out this and I wanted to try out that, and I figured college was the time to do it. If it takes me nine years to get through, then so be it! I still have those experiences that I wouldn’t otherwise have. I took flying lessons, I was in my junior year, I was still taking architecture and design classes, and all of those things have benefitted me and I’m glad I did them!

A young woman, also with disabilities, stated,

I think I have just been really inspired. I mean when I am with all of these students in the classroom and they are sharing their ideas. And I have had really great professors. I like being able to just express myself. And in high school, like [student’s name] was saying, it was like you were in a box. But I’ve had the chance to really say “Hey, this is what I think!” And to get feedback and criticisms, and that has really been helpful.
The final common category to emerge from this focus group question was *Social Networking*. Seven (21%) of the 33 student responses for the question, “What did you like best about your college experience?” fell under the category of Social Networking. This category also emerged in the previous focus group question, “What did you do to be successful in college?” Students responded making connections with other people was one of the best parts of their college experience. A young man with a disability stated, “All the connections I’ve made. You know, whether they are 17, 19, or 45, you know. I am always going to be thankful that I met them. They are all a huge part of my life!” A different student with a disability mentioned, “The best thing for me is that I’m still in it! Not because of bad grades or anything, but because of everything I do, and who I’m learning from. There is so much diversity!” Another student with a disability said, I’m such a people person, and obviously I go the class and I get my stuff done, but I’ve made such good friends that I think that’s just such a positive in my college experience, and I consider that the best thing, so far, in college.

A student without disabilities mentioned, “I think for me, it is who I hang-out with. I have a bunch of guy and girl friends, and I think we’re all talking about what we’re doing next year. Road trips for sure!” Additionally, another student without documented disabilities announced, “I also enjoyed the peers that I’ve made.”

The next focus group question asked of participants was, “What did you like least about your college experience?” There were a total of 25 responses to this question with the majority of responses (13 or 52%) that fell into the *Academic Frustration* category (see Table 7). Students expressed during their college experience they were not pleased
Table 7

*Categories That Emerged From the Focus Group Question: What Did You Like Least About Your College Experience*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Students with Disabilities</th>
<th>Students without Disabilities</th>
<th>Both Groups Combined</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>f</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>f</td>
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<tr>
<td>Academic Frustration</td>
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<tr>
<td>Financial</td>
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<td>25</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

with the amount of time it was taking to get through their course of study. In part, this was due to the frustration with Liberal Education Requirements (LERs). Participants also expressed dissatisfaction with their advisors and/or professors. In addition, some students felt anxious or were frustrated with issues associated with gaining entrance into graduate school. A student without disabilities responded, “Papers. I hated writing papers. Just the mundane paperwork type of stuff you had to do every semester, every year.” Another student without disabilities mentioned, “Access to the advisor’s office and the professor was sometimes hard.” A young woman with a disability responded to another student’s comments regarding LERs.

Yeah, I agree, because there are some LERs that I’ve taken, I’m in the fashion program, and there are some LERs that I’m not going to use as a fashion person. If I cut all the LERs out, I’ve cut out like an entire year of college. And they’re
not going to be useful for my degree at all, and I’m not going to use them. I know that you go to college and they want you to be a well-rounded person and all that stuff, but it’s not, I don’t care about being well rounded!

Another student with disabilities expressed her frustration with not being accepted into graduate school.

I had worked for four years and accomplished everything I could have accomplished to the best of my abilities. Still, I got told I had to wait. That was really hard. It was kind of a blow to get a letter saying that I had fulfilled all of the requirements, but they didn’t have enough spots at this point to offer me one for graduate school.

Logistics was another common category to emerge from this focus group question. Eight (32%) of the 25 student responses to the question, “What did you like least about your college experience?” were included in the Logistics category. Under this category students recalled difficulties regarding administrative red-tape, difficulty getting around on campus, the weather in the mid-west, feeling confined to a smaller university community, and community bathrooms. A student without disabilities stated, “One of the things I liked least about it (college experience) is the red-tape and the mistakes in the red-tape. You know, mistakes in advising, mistakes in paperwork. You know, they lose your paperwork.” A young man with disabilities also responded, “I think the only bad thing is, you know, the restrictions they put on you when you are trying to get into a course, or something like that.” Still, another student with a disability stated,
I still have trouble. My worst experience still, is getting around on campus. I’m not in a wheelchair anymore. I can get around. I mean, it takes me a long time to get from one point to another. Even if I park in a handicap spot, I’m exhausted. A student without disabilities proclaimed, “Cold Kent days!” and a participant with disabilities responded, “Community bathrooms.” The following student was not happy about the “small-town” feel of her university. She stated,

I mean [name of university] was [in] a very small town and I don’t really like small towns. I didn’t realize that until then. I mean I did enjoy the social scene but it got really old really fast for me. And I just felt very confined and I mean I couldn’t go anywhere. It is kind of why I moved to Toledo.

The final common category to emerge from this focus group question was Financial. Four (16%) of the 25 student responses for the question, “What did you like least about your college experience?” fell under the Financial category. The four responses below the financial category was in regards to the cost of college. A student without disabilities exclaimed, “Books! The price of books! How can you pay $145 for books that the teacher uses for four hours tops!” Another student without documented disabilities answered, “Expensive tuition! We don’t get to see enough out of it!” Finally, a student with a disability stated, “I can’t even think of the worst thing, other than it costs a lot, and it’s going up every year!”
Categories Particular to a Disability or Non-Disability Group Related to College Experiences

There were no categories particular to a disability or non-disability group related to College Experiences. As shown in Table 7 students with disabilities generated a similar number of responses (7) compared to students without disabilities (6) regarding the Academic Frustration category (54%/46%). Also, when examining the Logistics theme, both groups responded with four statements each (50%). However, the content was different. Students with disabilities responded mainly with concerns regarding getting around on campus and the weather. A larger discrepancy in frequency was found for the Financial category where only one response came from a student with disabilities and three from students without disabilities (25%/75%), all pertaining to the high cost of college.

Common Categories Related to the Personal Attributes

“Name three personal attributes that helped you succeed in college” was the next focus group question asked to students. There were a total of 56 responses to that question with the majority of responses (25 or 45%) that surfaced in the Leadership category (see Table 8). Students expressed when they practiced tolerance, empathy, were kind to others, and had “good character;” these were positive characteristics or attributes that helped them succeed in college. Participants also mentioned practicing self-advocacy, being resourceful, problem solving, being organized, having confidence, ability, and self-esteem assisted them in achieving college success. A woman with disabilities stated,
Table 8

*Categories That Emerged From the Focus Group Question: Name Three Personal Attributes That Helped You Succeed in College*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
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<th>Students without Disabilities</th>
<th>Both Groups Combined</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td>(f)</td>
<td>(%)</td>
<td>(f)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Work Ethic</td>
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<tr>
<td>Attitudes</td>
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<td>54</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>34</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I think a big one is leadership. Which took me . . . I wasn’t always able to say what was wrong or ask for help and it took a while. But, I think being a leader in your own life in education is a big thing. Saying what you need changed because no one in college is going to follow you around and treat you like a baby and say, “Hey, do you need help with this? Hey, let’s do homework now!” So being a leader is a big thing.

Another participant from the disabilities group, a young man, stated,

Having a humble confidence in yourself. You can’t be bigger than the world or bigger than the university itself. I need to know that I can do things, but there are things I can’t do. There are things I need to work on. So, I think you need to be humble; but at the same time have the confidence that you can do this.
A student without disabilities mentioned, “For me, it was being able to find out what they [professors] want, and look for. I was really good at being able to get to know them, and what they wanted.” Another student without disabilities stated, “I am organized. If I was disorganized I don’t know what I would do!”

The next common category to emerge from this focus group question was *Work Ethic.* Twenty (36%) of the 56 student responses to the question, “Name three personal attributes that helped you succeed in college?” were included in the Work Ethic category. The Work Ethic category also emerged when students answered the focus question, “What did you do to be successful in college?” Under this category students mentioned their willingness to work hard, their tenacity, commitment, determination, perseverance, persistence, and dedication assisted them in attaining success in college. A student without disabilities said,

What helped me was my determination. I was determined to finish my degree. So, I think that really helped me quite a bit. My ability, and I know that sounds kind of weird; but I knew I could do it. I knew I had the ability to do it!

A participant with disabilities stated, “Tenacity! Sticking to your guns! Perseverance!” Another young lady with disabilities mentioned, “Showing up.” She went on to say,

There were days you know, that I hurt so bad; I just think that I don’t want to go to class. I just don’t want to, I can’t. But, *just showing up,* I think is really helpful. And once you’re there, in class, you say, “Okay, I can do this!”

A student without disabilities affirmed,
I’d say, and it always has a negative connotation; but, I’d say, to an extent you need to be *aggressive*. Because it’s your education and you’re going to get those professors who don’t care; but that can’t give you an excuse to give up on that class. Because it’s your grade and it’s your education!

*Attitudes* was the final common category to emerge from this focus group question. Eleven (20%) of the 56 student responses to the question, “Name three personal attributes that helped you succeed in college” were included in the Attitudes category. Attitude/Outlook was a topic that also emerged when students answered the focus question. “What did you do to be successful in college?” Students mentioned they needed to find a balance in order to achieve success in college. They also stated having a sense of humor, being optimistic, having a positive attitude, and having a sense of social adeptness were important to acquire collegiate success. A student without disabilities stated, “Being agreeable, in a way, helps; being pragmatic and open.” Another student without disabilities said, “It never hurts to be nice.” Students from the disability group mentioned, “Having a good attitude . . . being optimistic helps,” as well as,

A sense of humor! My MySpace is all about having a sense of humor. My MySpace is basically all about this girl who always has problems in college and she has this alter ego. But if, like, anything wrong happens in college, I’d like change it to her because it’s like making it this big joke.

An additional student with disabilities commented on having a sense of humor. She stated,
A sense of humor! I say that jokingly, but it’s the truth! I think the ability to laugh at yourself and laugh at some of the situations that you come across really helps; as well as being positive, and being willing to work hard.

“Name three personal attributes that you feel hindered your success in college” was the next focus group question asked to participants. There were a total of 30 responses to this question with the majority (15 or 50%) falling into the Poor Work Ethic category (see Table 9). Students expressed when they procrastinated, gave into distractions, were passive, had a lack of motivation, or when they basically managed their time poorly, these were attributes they felt hindered their success in college. Students from both groups mentioned “Procrastination!” as a hindrance to their college success. A participant with disabilities stated, “It’s always so easy to wait, and, wait, and wait, and then you’re like ‘why do I do that!’ and you keep doing it every time.” Similarly, a young woman without disabilities stated,

Being *too* social! You always got to be ‘where it’s at’ and ‘where it’s at’ doesn’t help you go and get your work done! I’m definitely in that boat for sure. Like, I don’t miss anything! I’m like, ‘Oh, guys I’ll see you over there!”

Further, a student without disabilities said,

I would say time management. Like, it’s absolutely such a horrible thing! I try my best to get to class on time and I don’t think it ever hinders my success; but I’m sure it does. Whereas, if I had not gotten to class late; if I had been early, I would have had time to ask a few questions. Like, I could have used that extra time in class instead of doing something else.
Table 9

*Categories That Emerged From the Focus Group Question: Name Three Personal Attributes That You Feel Hindered Your Success in College*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Students with Disabilities</th>
<th>Students without Disabilities</th>
<th>Both Groups Combined</th>
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<tbody>
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<td></td>
<td>( f )</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>( f )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor Work Ethic</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor Problem Solving</td>
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<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor Communication</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>19</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The next common category to emerge from this focus group question was *Poor Problem Solving*. Eleven (37%) of the 30 student responses to the question, “What did you like least about your college experience?” were included in the Poor Problem Solving category. Under this category students pointed at their perfectionism, poor organization, anxiety, worry, stubbornness, and poor decision making as attributes that kept them from achieving greater success in college.

A student without documented disabilities replied,

Sometimes I focus too much on a project that takes away from other projects. I just don’t know when to say it’s alright to . . . I mean, I’m not a perfectionist, but at times dwelling on one thing and not being able to let go, and then putting too much work into one thing.

A young woman with disabilities stated,
I think being stubborn and not asking for the help I needed. A big part of that was already having a visual disability, a disability you can see. I already felt below the educational level of, you know, like, all my friends that didn’t have a disability. All this help was given to me, “Hey, we’ll study together, here’s my notes for you,” and I would always be embarrassed that I might need extra help. I always denied it and said, “No. I’ll be fine.” And then come test time I always failed. Not necessarily failed and got an “F.” But, I always could have done better had I gotten that help. So being stubborn is a big hindrance.

Another young lady with a disability reported,

I worry about things; even after the fact. I’ll study for hours and hours and then I’ll go with my mom or friends or something, and I’d be like, “How about that question?” And they’d be like, “Let’s not talk about the test!” Because I will talk about it like two days afterward. And she’s like, “You did it! You’re done! Let’s move on!” And I have a hard time with that.

The final common category to emerge from this focus group question was Poor Communication. Four (13%) of the 30 student responses to the question, “Name 3 personal attributes that you feel hindered your success in college” were included in the Poor Communication category. Students mentioned a lack of self-advocacy and communication were detractors to their college success. A young woman with disabilities stated,

I think it would have been more helpful if I had gotten together with other students in the class, you know, and said, “Hey, let’s talk about the assignment”
and things like that. Because there are a lot of times when I had questions about things and I just didn’t ask anyone. I just tried to figure it all out on my own to the point where I was way off in another direction! And I didn’t go to the teacher. I mean, I had all the resources. I could have e-mailed. I could have talked with other people and gotten a sense, but I didn’t. I think that really hurt me.

Another student with disabilities answered,

Not communicating enough! If you don’t communicate with your friends or with your professors, let’s say you don’t take tests well, and when I don’t communicate with my professors and see what’s going on, then my test scores don’t, you know? If I take it in a big lecture hall, my test really doesn’t end up where I want it to be grade-wise. Therefore, I end up not having the kind of success I want to have in that class.

A student without disabilities mentioned,

When I was a freshman or first got here to [name of university] I was still shy and afraid to speak up; and I think that sometimes hinders my success to the point that I was always afraid to make the first move and say what I wanted. And I think that was a hindrance at first. You know, I’ve obviously gotten over that; now my motto is “The answer is always ‘No!’ if you never ask!”

Categories Particular to a Disability or Non-Disability Group Related to Personal Attributes

There were no categories particular to a disability or non-disability group related to Personal Attributes. However, there were some variations in frequency between the
two groups regarding the focus group question, “Name 3 personal attributes that helped you succeed in college.” As shown in Table 8 students with disabilities generated a similar percentage of responses (52%) regarding the Leadership category as students without disabilities (48%). When examining the Work Ethic category, however, students with disabilities offered the majority of responses (75%). Students with disabilities responded with more comments on dedication, persistence, and tenacity. Additionally, the 25 responses for the Leadership category were fairly evenly divided between students with disabilities (13 or 52%) and students without disabilities (12 or 48%).

There were also variations in frequency between groups regarding the focus group question, “Name 3 personal attributes that you feel hindered your success in College” (see Table 9). Students with disabilities generated a similar percentage of responses (47%) as their counterparts (53%) regarding the Poor Work Ethic category. When examining the Poor Problem Solving category, however, students with disabilities offered the majority of responses (9 or 82%). Students with disabilities responded with more comments on a lack of practicing self-advocacy and being stubborn. Students with disabilities also made more statements regarding perfectionist behaviors and spoke of anxiety and worry as detractors from college success due to ineffective problem solving. The number of responses was dissimilar between groups for Poor Communication with 75% of the offerings by students with disabilities. Students with disabilities expressed that not speaking up and not asking for help hindered their college success.
Analysis of Results for Research Question 2

Research Question 2 addressed the similarities between identified themes from this study and those found by Webster (2001, 2004). Focus group findings regarding college experiences of students with and without disabilities in the current study were compared to themes, categories, and subcategories found in written journals of 22 college students with disabilities in Webster’s (2004) study. Focus groups were conducted with 20 students with and without disabilities to generate responses for analysis.

Presentation of Findings

The emergence of two major themes: *Awareness of Self* and *Awareness of Others*, in the current study corresponded to those found in Webster’s (2004) study. For a description of Webster’s taxonomy see Figure 1. Participants in the current study generated thought units which were analyzed as described in Chapter 3 of this document and organized into subcategories, categories, and themes. Subcategories, categories, and themes were then compared to those described in Webster’s taxonomy as closely as possible. New categories, subcategories, and dimensions were created where overlap with Webster’s taxonomy did not occur (see Tables 10 and 11). A taxonomy of all themes, categories, and subcategories for students who participated in the focus groups is presented in Figure 3. The combined responses of students with and without disabilities are presented for each of the two major themes which correspond to Webster’s findings (2004), followed by any salient differences between the two focus groups in the current study. Finally, following each category a summary of Webster’s (2001, 2004) findings are presented for comparison.
Table 10

*Comparison of Awareness of Self Theme With Webster (2001, 2004)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Awareness of Self</th>
<th>Journals (Webster, 2004)</th>
<th>Focus Groups</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>f</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skills and Abilities</td>
<td>2,091 66</td>
<td>Skills and Abilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reflection</td>
<td>1,576 75</td>
<td>problem solving/resource</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reframing</td>
<td>204 10</td>
<td>reflection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>self-advocacy</td>
<td>131 6</td>
<td>self-advocacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>self-determination</td>
<td>116 6</td>
<td>coping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>perseverance/determination</td>
<td>37 2</td>
<td>self-determination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>problem solving/resource</td>
<td>27 1</td>
<td>perseverance/determination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge</td>
<td>765 24</td>
<td>Knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>self-knowledge</td>
<td>349 46</td>
<td>self-knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>empowerment</td>
<td>166 22</td>
<td>empowerment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>understanding differences</td>
<td>103 13</td>
<td>career related</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rights &amp; responsibilities</td>
<td>61 8</td>
<td>rights and responsibilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>career-related</td>
<td>35 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>self-efficacy</td>
<td>30 4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>services or lack of</td>
<td>21 2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feelings</td>
<td>316 10</td>
<td>Feelings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>injustices</td>
<td>84 26</td>
<td>anger/frustration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>anger/frustration</td>
<td>62 20</td>
<td>optimism</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*(table continues)*
Table 10 (continued)

*Comparison of Awareness of Self Theme With Webster (2001, 2004)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Awareness of Self</th>
<th>Journals (Webster, 2004)</th>
<th>Focus Groups</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$f$</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>self-esteem</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>empathy</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sense of belonging</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pride</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>being afraid</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shame/embarrassment</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3,172</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 11

Comparison of Awareness of Others Theme With Webster (2001)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Awareness of Others</th>
<th>Journal (Webster, 2001)</th>
<th>Focus Groups</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>( f )</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of Society</td>
<td>469</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>influence</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ignorance</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>inclusion</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>potential solutions</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>barriers</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>disability culture</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>language</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>technology</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>role models</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pity</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lack of resources</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of Professionals</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>obstacles</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>facilitators</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of Family and Friends</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>making a positive difference</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lacking in understanding</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>676</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 3. Categories and subcategories that emerged from the focus groups for the awareness of self theme
Awareness of Self

The Awareness of Self theme contained categories and subcategories that emerged from the analysis of focus group questions pertaining to participants’ transition into and experiences during their college years. The Awareness of Self theme was descriptive of the students’ combined awareness and evaluation of the role they played in their own successes and related barriers to success while transitioning into and negotiating their way through college. Responses of students related to their awareness of self were further delineated into three categories: (a) Skills and Abilities, (b) Knowledge, and (c) Feelings. These categories matched those found by Webster (2004).

Figure 4 illustrates the Awareness of Self theme and the subsequent categories and subcategories identified to support it. These categories were: Skills and Abilities, Knowledge, and Feelings. Skills and Abilities pertained to the aptitude to use one’s knowledge effectively; the processes and strategies used to transition into and succeed in college. Knowledge included an understanding and/or awareness of various types of knowledge regarding one’s self and environments used to transition into and succeed in college. The Feelings subcategory dealt with emotions personally experienced by participants associated with the transition into and succeeding in college.

Skills and abilities. The majority of focus group thought units that depicted an Awareness of Self involved the participants Skills and Abilities regarding transition into college and college life. The Skills and Abilities category contained the greatest frequency of thought units of all categories generated in the study. The 461 units constituted 56% of the entire frequency of units (830) for the Awareness of Self theme.
and 38% of all thought units from both Awareness of Self and Awareness of Others themes combined (1,219).

Subcategories that composed the Skills and Abilities category included: Problem Solving/Resourcefulness, Reflection, Self-Advocacy, Coping, Self-Determination, and Perseverance/Determination. All of the subcategories depicted various skills and abilities identified as important for the successful transition and continued success in college. The frequency of thought unit entries, as well as the percentage of the total thought units for the category of Skills and Abilities for a particular subcategory appear in Table 12.

**Problem solving/resourcefulness.** The first subcategory from the analysis of focus group responses under the Skills and Abilities category was *Problem Solving/Resourcefulness*. Participants’ responses regarding Problem Solving/Resourcefulness focused upon their development in defining personal, academic, social and other
Table 12

*Descriptive Statistics for Skills and Abilities Category*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subcategory</th>
<th>Students with Disabilities</th>
<th>Students without Disabilities</th>
<th>Both Groups Combined</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>f</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem Solving/Resourcefulness</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflection</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Advocacy</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coping</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Determination</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Determination/Perseverance</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

issues, and the process of accepting personal responsibility for solving them. Problem Solving/Resourcefulness was defined as taking a problem solving approach to barriers in life and exploring many possibilities to solve those problems. Students described how they resolved various problems and utilized resources successfully as they transitioned into and worked toward succeeding in college. The Problem Solving/Resourcefulness subcategory represented the greatest percentage (26%) of thought unit entries under Skills and Abilities. Participants mentioned they problem solved through managing their time more effectively, setting priorities, becoming and staying organized, and balancing their time between academic and social interests. Students also cited in order to solve problems effectively it was necessary to have needed services and resources available.
Substantial overlap of dimensions with both focus groups. Students from both groups mentioned time-management was an important factor or dimension in their transition into and success in college. Students also mentioned setting priorities, becoming and staying organized, and balancing their time between academic and social interests among dimensions that helped them succeed. In the following quotation a student with disabilities described his struggle to manage his time more effectively; to balance his time between his work and friends more efficiently so he could be less stressed.

[Before college] I never had that chance to say, “Oh yeah, let’s go out!” So, it was a big temptation for me. So, definitely, balancing work and friends! Not so much friends, but a timeline you know? I know if I put too much pressure on myself my head is going to blow! I get to the first of the semester and say, “Okay. I swear we are going to keep on track.” And then somehow it is March and you’ve got this, this, and this to do still!

Another participant with disabilities added the challenge of managing his time effectively was keeping him from being as successful as he could be in college. Now that he was in college his schedule was much different than in high school. He had to manage his time more effectively in order to succeed. He stated,

Yeah, I definitely think time management. You know in high school, it’s just assumed because you do your homework, like you said, is due the next day.

Where in college if you have math on Monday and then you don’t have it again
until Wednesday, you’re like, “I’ll do it tomorrow,” and then tomorrow rolls around, and you’re like, “I forgot about that!”

Similarly, a young woman without disabilities offered the following statements regarding her time-management struggle. Her message seemed to be she did better when she was busy keeping herself organized and on track. She said,

If I’m busy, that’s good for me. It keeps me, actually, organized. It helps me with time management. Because I know that I need to get my studies done. So for me being successful is actually keeping myself busy.

Students used a variety of services and resources to help solve their academic and daily living concerns. This student without disabilities made use of what was available to her to solve her commuter and non-traditional student, employment, social and financial issues. She offered, “I used [name of university] University’s commuter and non-traditional student services. I used that plus I started working there. I used student organizations, non-traditional student unions, and financial aid.” Many universities offer a large number of services and resources, however not all students use them.

An older student with disabilities made the following statements regarding her daily living needs.

I mean suddenly there were a lot of people I didn’t know. I was asking for help for a lot of different things and not having the same people to fall back on when I needed help. I had to go out and find totally different people and find out who did what and all that jazz!
Additionally, participants often had financial difficulties to contend with. Both groups made statements regarding solving problems related to financial situations. A student with disabilities made the following statements in regard to her financial challenges.

I kind of had, when I had a job, it was part-time for quite a while. So, I was used to having a little bit of spending money and not feeling bad about asking Mom and Dad for money and all of that stuff. Then, I went to college and suddenly I didn’t really have time to have a job and I wasn’t quite sure who I could ask. You know, what my boundaries were as far as what my parents could help with and not help with. All of a sudden I had to find a way to pay for things I hadn’t in the past, and it happened to be the same year my Dad got laid off.

A student without disabilities said, “Balancing life and home, school, work, laundry, cooking, and cleaning. I mean it’s just something that, my coming back to school was all financially related. Student loans were extra money for us, so financially I was ready.” For this student solving the financial piece of how she was going to pay for college was the key to accessing college and played a role in her college success.

Another way students solved problems and were resourceful was through “rolling with the changes” and adapting to new circumstances and situations encountered on and off campus. The following quote came from a participant with disabilities who responded with statements regarding his transition into college and how he adapted to his new postsecondary environment.
I wasn’t prepared—prepared—but, I wasn’t like, not prepared [for college]. But like, I’m pretty easy to adapt to things. So, I was thrown in and it was like, it wasn’t what I had expected! But, I was able to adapt. Like, “Oh, I’ve got to get my stuff done, and this is how I’ve got to do it!”

Additionally, a student without disabilities mentioned adjusting and adapting to other people helped in transitioning to and succeeding in college,

You get to know and adjust to personalities and that helps. Also, being able to adapt to the people you work with and the situations that you are in. Being pragmatic and open; going with the flow.

*Dimensions specific to a particular group.* There were no dimensions specifically mentioned by students with or without disabilities. Students from both groups recalled experiences regarding time management, staying organized, setting priorities, and balancing interests.

*Problem solving/resourcefulness summary.* Students’ responses that fell under the Problem Solving/Resourcefulness subcategory were descriptive of how they solved various problems and utilized resources available to them in order to successfully transition into and succeed in college. Time-management was an important factor in their transition into and success in college. Students’ responses regarding the Problem Solving/Resourcefulness subcategory involved managing time more effectively, setting priorities, becoming more organized, balancing time between academic and social interests, getting a handle on financial troubles, and adapting to new situations, all important to their college success. The students’ ability to solve problems and to be
resourceful by using as many available services and resources was a skill and ability both groups of students identified as being important to their successful transition into college.

Comparison with Webster’s participants. Students with and without disabilities who participated in the focus group sessions contributed 26% of thought units to the Problem Solving/Resourcefulness subcategory which was the greatest percentage of a subcategory under the Awareness of Self theme. Whereas students with disabilities in Webster’s (2004) study had the fewest text units (1%) under Problem Solving/Resourcefulness, as they responded through their journal entries. Entries from Webster’s students’ journals were often more cogent and structured as a whole compared to the responses from focus group participants. This is perhaps due to Webster’s students having more time to process, write, and edit their journal entries. Be that as it may, the responses from Webster’s students, even though fewer in number, conveyed a similar message regarding the subcategory of Problem Solving/Resourcefulness. Her students responded with their experiences of investigating many possible solutions before making an important decision. Webster’s students also were able to “think well on their feet,” as well as the ability to use the resources available to them to make the best decisions possible in order to succeed in college.

Reflection. The second subcategory from the analysis focus group responses under Skills and Abilities was Reflection. Reflection was defined as the ability to be introspective, to reveal and learn from one’s experiences. Students’ statements that composed the Reflection subcategory were reflective and insightful as participants often recognized complex issues as they commented on their pre-college and college
experiences. Students described how their reflections and revelations assisted in their successful transition into college. The Reflection subcategory represented the second greatest percentage (22%) of thought unit entries under Skills and Abilities. Participants reflected primarily on adjusting to the demands of college which included balancing academic and social pursuits, academic and broader “real-life” learning, and balancing the use of emotional energy.

*Figure 5. Reflection*

*Substantial overlap of dimensions with both focus groups.* One of the main dimensions of *Reflection* was Adjusting to the Demands of College. Students reflected primarily on their adjustment from high school to college. A student with disabilities
spoke of the adjustments he had to make regarding his new-found freedom. He also referred to the added levels of pressure in the college environment. He stated, “Adjusting and getting acquainted with the freedom as well as the level of pressure I put on myself, because of, you know, I don’t have someone saying, ‘Don’t forget to do this!’” Additionally, another student with a disability reflected on her struggle to adjust to college life.

I wasn’t prepared for working double time from what I did in high school. I think I was prepared for the workload, but struggled. I went to college and suddenly I didn’t really have time to have a job and I wasn’t quite sure who I could ask, you know, what my boundaries were as far as what my parents could help with and not help with.

Students without disabilities also reflected on adjusting to the demands of college. A student recalled the following regarding one of the differences between high school and college academics. She stated,

In high school you could not do your homework, and do it when your teacher is walking around. Write in some random numbers and get the points. In college, you can’t do that. You have to do the work. [If] you don’t read the syllabus, you’re in trouble!

Another dimension of Reflection was the challenge and importance of balancing social and academic pursuits. Many of these students, who were away from their families for the first time in their lives for a significant period of time, were faced with making decisions without their parents to consult for guidance. Students mentioned the freedom
of being away from the watchful eye of parents, and the structure that was often provided by parents, made the transition into college challenging. Participants often found it was difficult to achieve a “balance.” A balance between going out and partying or staying in and studying; a balance between going home or staying on campus; or a balance of energy use. A student with a disability mentioned the following regarding her conflicting desires of going out and having a good time or achieving academic success. She stated, “I kind of evaluated coming out, and I realized I can’t live and party all the time. I’m never going to get finished with school!” A participant without disabilities stated having a balance between academics and social time is also important. She stated the following, I think, also to have a social and academic life, which has been hard for me to balance both of them. You know, you need to have room for a social life, yet you don’t need to be a social butterfly.

A student without disabilities added, after receiving an academic degree hopefully there will be a balance of college memories between the academic and social life. The participant stated, Well, I mean, after you graduate, honestly, you hopefully are, like, going to have a degree. Then you can look back on your college days, and know that there was a good balance. Like, you’re serious, and know your schoolwork and everything, you’re serious about that. But, then you also had your social life—there was a good balance of them.

Students from both groups commented that college is a time of learning and exploration. College is a place to receive an education; however not just in the
classroom, but virtually everywhere on and off campus. Both groups acknowledged there needs to be balance between working diligently on academics and socializing with friends. Similarly, the next dimension shared between both groups was the notion earning high marks was only part of what it meant to be successful in college; broader life learning was important as well. A young woman with a disability mentioned getting good grades was an important part of college. However, other “real world” experiences gained from college life were also critical for achieving success. She offered,

I think to be successful in college . . . I’ve always been a person who thinks “yes, you have to get good grades,” but grades can only take you so far. Obviously to score a good report card means you have to get the grades, but you also, if you can’t live in the real world, you’re kind of dumb!

A participant without disabilities stated you need to get everything out of the college experience you can. He said, “I would say, my definition of being successful in college, you know, of course you want to graduate. But, you gotta get out everything you can [from the college experience]!”

Finally, students from both groups reflected on the balance between going home to see family and friends and staying on campus. Both groups mentioned the dissonance experienced when they went home to visit. On one hand students were happy to see their family and friends; on the other hand, they were anxious to get back to campus and resume their independent lives. A student with disabilities offered the following about missing her brother at home. She stated, “It’s kind of like, sad. But like, it’s not like I’m not going to see him [her brother] again because our family is really close. So, it’s kind
of like weird to be away.” Additionally, a student without disabilities made the subsequent statements regarding his visits home.

I go home and my mom will still do my laundry and things like that. But you know, my dad still treats me like I’m 10 years old and I was so sick of that my senior year. It’s still kind of like that. But I’m only, I just go home on Saturday nights, that’s it. And that’s what I did last year too. I come back as soon as I’m done working. Like, I don’t know, I would rather be here [college] than home; that’s how I was all last year.

*Dimensions specific to a particular group.* Students who had disabilities generated an additional topic not discussed by the group of students who did not have documented disabilities. Students with disabilities reflected about the struggle to do things on their own or to ask for assistance. They fought to achieve the balance between being independent or interdependent. A young woman with disabilities responded it was and will continue to be an ongoing challenge for her to ask for assistance. She stated,

It was a balancing act of figuring out what I was comfortable with asking for, and then I felt like, I don’t know, that was probably a big thing for me. I was getting to the place where it was okay to ask for help. I think that is something I will work on for the rest of my life.

Another participant with a disability spoke about asking for support in college as well. He reflected that it is not just people who have disabilities who need assistance in college.
Yeah, I agree with what a lot of people are saying with not wanting to ask for help because they feel like you have to be successful and prove to everyone that you can do it; you don’t realize that most people need help.

Finally, another dimension reflected upon by a particular group, also students who had disabilities, was balancing the use of emotional and physical energy. A young man expressed the need to do everything with great intensity; whether it was academic or social. He stated, “You have to do everything you are doing with the same attitude and the same intensity as you would in studying for an exam or if you are going to be out with a friend.” On the other hand students with disabilities also mentioned there were “days you know that I hurt so bad.” It was often difficult for students with physical disabilities to get around campus and do everything they wanted to do. An older student with a physical disability reflected the following concerning her struggle to have the physical energy to get from point A to point B on campus. She stated, “I putter like a turtle when I’m going to school but . . . you see the swamp at the end of the road.”

Reflection summary. Students reflected mostly on the challenge and importance of balancing social and academic pursuits. Participants often found it was difficult to achieve this “balance.” The balance between going out and having a good time with friends or staying home and working on a project; the balance between going home to see family or staying on campus to develop new friendships; or the balance of energy use and intensity. Students from both groups reflected on college being a place where learning opportunities were all around. Whether students were in a large lecture hall with 200 people or learning how to adjust a harness on the rock-climbing wall; the opportunities to
learn and to grow were nearly unlimited. Students reflected that balance, in all aspects of college life, was important to achieving success in college.

*Comparison with Webster’s participants.* Participants with and without documented disabilities who contributed in the focus group sessions supplied 22% of thought units to the *Reflection* subcategory. This was the second largest amount under the Awareness of Self theme. Whereas students with disabilities in Webster’s (2004) research had the greatest percentage (75%) of text units under *Reflection*, as they responded through their journal entries. The topics Webster’s participants reflected on cut across all of her other categories, subcategories, and dimensions. Her students reflected on class assignments and activities, goal setting, self-knowledge, and empathy, to name a few. Her participants also reflected on categories that fell under the Awareness of Others theme such as Role of Society and Role of Professionals. Webster’s students also wrote about their experiences as they transitioned into college. As dimensions under the Reflection subcategory Webster identified *insightfulness*, or the ability to synthesize and make leaps of abstraction. She also identified *recognizing complex issues*, which she defined as having the ability to understand that answers are not necessarily “right” and that issues can be very complex. Through the process of journaling, which by nature was an introspective and contemplative process, Webster’s students’ journal responses were highly reflective and insightful and they recognized complex issues across other categories. This differed from the students with and without disabilities who participated in the focus groups sessions as they reflected mainly on the adjustment to college and how to achieve balance in facets of their college life.
**Self-advocacy.** The Third subcategory from the analysis focus group responses under the Skills and Abilities category was *Self-Advocacy*. Both groups responded with statements supporting the Self-Advocacy subcategory which was defined as the ability to effectively express one’s views to others and to communicate one’s needs to get them met. Students mentioned talking to professors and asking them for help were important factors in their transition into and success in college. Students also commented on the process of becoming more personally responsible for their education, advocating for their needs, and making more responsible academic choices. Practicing self-advocacy in postsecondary education proved to be a challenge for many students who participated in the focus group discussions.

*Figure 6. Self-Advocacy*
Substantial overlap of dimensions with both focus groups. Many students entering college faced the challenges of speaking up for themselves and advocating for their own needs for the first time. Students mentioned communicating with educators in high school was much easier than talking with professors at the college level. In college the communicating of needs falls on the student, whereas in high school this is not necessarily the case. Students stated advocating for themselves was not always easy since they were accustomed to having their needs taken care of by others in high school.

In the focus group interviews both groups of students commented on the importance of communicating with college professors. A student with disabilities stated, [In college] I had to go out and say, “This is what I need, I need help with this. These are the accommodations I need.” I mean, I have always had trouble asking for help because I’ve always been told this is the help I am going to get. So in college it’s a big deal to ask for help. It was hard for me.

Furthermore, another student with a disability stated there were times when you have to be aggressive when you are advocating for what you need; being aggressive; being insistent she received the information she needed from her classes and professors. She added,

I’d have to say, and it always has a negative connotation. But I’d say, to an extent you have to be aggressive. Because it’s your education and you’re going to get those professors who don’t care, and you’re going to get professors that you can’t understand. But that can’t give you an excuse to give up on their class.
A participant without disabilities mentioned how she advocated for herself. Having the mindset her tuition was paying for the professors’ salary, she believed she had the right to advocate for her need to be clear about the subject matter before she left the classroom. She offered the following,

You know, the first day of class I went and talked to every single professor. If I didn’t understand something I made the professor stay there and explain it to me. You know, because he wasn’t leaving, or she wasn’t leaving until I knew exactly what he or she was talking about. Some of them don’t like me because of that, but I was paying their salary!

Participants also presented responses about becoming more personally responsible for their education, advocating for their needs, and making more responsible academic choices. In addition to advocating for their needs with their professors, students advocated for themselves outside of the classroom. A student with disabilities stated in order to be a catalyst for systems change on campus she needed to act. She exclaimed,

I’ve learned that if you are not out-spoken with a problem you see on campus it’s never going to get changed. Unless we say, “Hey, this is what needs to be done, what do I need to do to go about getting this changed?” It’s not going to get changed unless you point it out. And if you just don’t deal with it it’s not going to change!

A student without disabilities spoke about advocating for her needs with a friend.
I kind of adapted quickly because I had a really good friend that I met who was very good at time-management and I made her teach me right away because I knew I was going to fall down from that.

Students with disabilities often talked about using student disability services at their university to get various academic needs met. The following student with disabilities advocated for herself by inquiring when tutoring services were offered. She said, “I talked to the student accessibilities in order to find out when they have tutoring, because you know, you might only have two classes per day, so then you go to tutoring.”

A student without disabilities also commented on advocating for herself to get back on campus after she got kicked out. “When I first came to [name of university] I got kicked out my freshman year because I had a lot of fun, and luckily, after I got kicked out, I talked to the right people and they gave me another chance.”

Dimensions specific to a particular group. Students with disabilities in particular voiced they did not practice self-advocacy as well as they would have liked in college. Students often mentioned they “tried to go it alone” without asking for help from professors or others. A participant recalled,

Because there are a lot of times when I had questions about things and I didn’t ask anyone. I just tried to figure it all out on my own to the point where I was off in another direction and I didn’t go to my teacher.

Another student described how her lack of self-advocacy negatively affected her emotionally and academically. She stated,
Because for about a semester and a half I didn’t even tell them [professors] I could get extra time for tests so I just took the class and I have test anxiety, so I rushed through it and it really hurt me.

Finally, another student said she did not want to ask for assistance because she thought people assumed she already needed extra help because of her disability.

I think being stubborn and not asking for the help I needed. So going into college that is how I felt. I think that is another reason I didn’t want to ask for help. Because people already assumed that I needed the extra help because of my visual disability. So, I just wanted to make the point that I don’t think it would be the same if I were able-bodied.

*Self-advocacy summary.* Students with and without disabilities mentioned practicing self-advocacy was an important factor in their transition into and success in college. They said talking to professors and asking for help was important as well as talking about the process of becoming more personally responsible for their education, advocating for their needs, and making more responsible academic choices. Participants continued to practice advocating for their own needs in college often despite the lack of practice of these skills in high school. Students’ responses revealed their need to speak up and advocate for what they needed to succeed in college. Some students mentioned by not advocating for themselves it made their lives more difficult; however it was a learning experience. Students spoke of advocating for their *rights and responsibilities* (see Figure 4) under the Knowledge category. Participants stressed being outspoken,
even aggressive, in advocating for their aspirations was necessary in order to achieve success transitioning into college.

Comparison with Webster’s participants. Students with and without disabilities who contributed to the focus group sessions supplied 16% of thought units to the Self-Advocacy subcategory, the third largest amount, under the Awareness of Self theme. Whereas students with disabilities who journaled in Webster’s (2004) research had lesser percentage (6%) of text units for Self-Advocacy, under the Awareness of Self theme. The dimensions identified by Webster’s participants also dealt with their need to practice self-advocacy in order to be successful in college. Her students mentioned self-advocacy training would have been beneficial in high school in preparation for the college setting. Her students mentioned having role-models as well as opportunities to practice self-advocacy would have benefitted them in their transition into college. Since all of Webster’s students had a documented disability they often journaled on issues of disclosure of their disability and the possibility of potential negative consequences by disclosing one’s disability. Webster defined disclosure as issues surrounding disclosing one’s disability. Students with disabilities who participated in the focus groups sessions expressed similar views. Webster also identified communication, the ability to express oneself and to be understood by the listener, as well as the ability to be effective on the receiving end. Finally, Webster identified collaboration, which she defined as the ability to work with others in an empowering framework as dimensions under the Self-Advocacy subcategory. Webster’s students also wrote about the appropriateness of communicating in a forceful or gentle manner depending on the circumstances, as well as
being a good listener on the other side of an exchange. Through the process of journaling Webster’s students also wrote about the collaborative process and how it is not always an easy practice. Webster’s dimensions did not differ greatly from the students with and without disabilities who participated in the focus groups sessions. Both groups of students expressed the importance of communicating and to effectively expressing one’s views in order to get their needs met.

**Coping.** The fourth subcategory to emerge from the analysis of focus group responses under the Skills and Abilities category was *Coping*. Both students with and without documented disabilities responded with statements that supported the Coping subcategory. Coping was defined as strategies for managing the stressors related to becoming a college student. Participants mentioned reframing, or the ability to turn a situation around and see possibilities in or learn from what initially appear to be negative situations (Webster, 2004), as well as using humor, defined as the ability to laugh at oneself as well as others, to see the humor inherent in all situations, and appreciate others’ use of humor (Webster, 2004), to cope with difficult situations were important factors in their transition into and success in college. Participants also shared experiences of coping with financial issues, having a high tolerance for the behavior of others, and the exercising of patience were important for a successful transition into college.

*Substantial overlap of dimensions with both focus groups.* Participants with and without disabilities commented on the importance of having the ability to “see the positive” in less than optimal situations, to reframe, and to maintain a positive attitude whenever possible. A student with disabilities commented on the importance of
focusing on the positive, centering on what *could* be done in a situation to make it better. She reframed the situation to make it more palatable.

A lot of times if you have the ability to focus on what you *can* do and what you can bring to a classroom, or to a discussion, or whatever, it really helps you to be a lot more positive about the experience. It just makes it a lot easier to get through the experience, whatever it is.

Another student with a disability reframed a situation where she did not get the grade she desired. However, she believed she knew the material and thought having the knowledge was more important than getting the grade she hoped for. She stated,

I don’t take tests very well. But, I know that I knew the stuff. And I think success in college is knowing that you learned the stuff. And learning the stuff is more important than getting the grade.
Similarly, a participant who did not have a documented disability reframed the high cost of a college education; she said, “All that money, I think, ends up not mattering in the long run. If you didn’t come to college you would probably work for minimum wage for 25 years.”

_Dimensions specific to a particular group._ Students also used humor to cope with stressful and difficult situations. All responses regarding students coping through the use of humor came from students with disabilities. A woman who had a portion of her brain removed stated, “I should say the last time I was in a hurry and ended up parking on campus, it took my mother and I three hours to find the vehicle. I’m a blonde with half a brain, okay!” Another participant informed the group that a good sense of humor is important in order to achieve college success. She shared how she used her social networking site to cope with stressful events.

My MySpace is all about a good sense of humor. My MySpace is about this girl who always has problems in college and she’s an alter ego. But, if like anything wrong happens in college I’d like change it to be about her, because, you know, it’s like making it this big joke! So, if a person is like, you know, crying because I was like two minutes late for my class and my professor locked me out, I’d put it on my MySpace and write about it or something like that.

Additionally, students voiced they had to cope with the pressure and anxiety of financial issues transitioning to and in college. Most of the responses that dealt with financial issues came from students without disabilities. A student talked about how she coped with financial problems through getting loans and working part-time.
I’ll tell you, I maxed out my Stafford loans, and all that I could get. And, like I said, I worked part-time you know. My Mom did the best she could, and you know, I didn’t have everything I wanted. I mean, I had everything I needed. I didn’t have everything I wanted to have as an incoming freshman, as a teenager, and that sort of thing.

Another student informed the group she worked during the summers at a job that helped to build her resume. However it did not pay a lot of money, if any. She said, “My summer job, because I work at summer camps to build up my resume. So they pay you in hugs and ‘high-fives,’ so that doesn’t really help out during the school year.”

Finally, only students with disabilities made statements about exercising patience as they made their transition to college life. A participant mentioned the following about coping with an environment where there is so much diversity. The student stated, “I think having a high tolerance for other people, and adapting to different lifestyles and different attitudes. Having the patience, and keeping the patience while we’re still arguing with some of the programs and systems and different things.”

*Coping summary.* Students mentioned reframing, using humor, and having a high tolerance for the behaviors of others, or exercising patience, were ways in which they coped with difficult situations in their transition into and success in college. Participants also shared incidences of coping with financial issues they struggled with during their college experience. As one participant put it, “I just make the best of it and deal with it. I just take it as it comes, and make the best of everything.” Even though students from both groups identified they used coping strategies to achieve success in their transition to
college, students with disabilities made the majority of responses (68%; see Table 12). Making the best out of a bad situation and trying to see the bright side of a situation was the essence of most of the responses from both groups under the Coping subcategory.

*Comparison with Webster’s participants.* Students who contributed to the focus group sessions supplied 13% of thought units to the subcategory Coping, the fourth largest amount, under the Awareness of Self theme. However, students with disabilities who journaled in Webster’s (2004) study had smaller percentage (10%) of text units for Reframing; yet, still the second greatest amount of responses under the Awareness of Self theme. The dimensions under Webster’s (2004) subcategory of Reframing were Desire to Change, defined as recognizing areas in one’s life that need change and having the motivation to do what is necessary to work toward achieving that change, as well as being motivated to change society; Humor; Coping, and Pacing Oneself, defined as the ability to avoid burn-out, and to pick one’s battles so as not to grow weary (Webster, 2004). Students in Webster’s study described conditions where they accepted the reactions of others in regard to their disability, not letting other’s negative reaction to their disability become a negative experience. Webster’s students also took a negative situation and found a “window of opportunity” in it. Her students also used Humor as a means of Reframing situations related to their disability that could be taken in a negative manner. Webster’s dimensions did not differ greatly from students with and without disabilities who participated in the focus groups sessions. Both groups of participants expressed the importance of Coping and Reframing in order to successfully transition and succeed in the college environment. Students in the focus groups did not necessarily
discuss pacing themselves and exhibiting a desire to change, at least not enough to merit a separate dimension.

*Self-determination.* The fifth subcategory under the Skills and Abilities category was *Self-Determination.* Both participants with and without documented disabilities responded with statements that supported the Self-Determination subcategory which was defined as taking advantage of the chances and opportunities to practice one’s skills and abilities and to make and learn from informed choices (Webster, 2004). Students shared experiences of “becoming their own person” through the process of exercising free will and exploring a myriad of educational and independent living options in a new postsecondary environment. In addition to exploring this new life away from home students identified interests and took risks as they identified goals. Participants responded having the opportunity to make choices as well as setting and pursuing the

*Figure 8. Self-Determination*
achievement of goals were important aspects leading to a successful transition into
college.

*Substantial overlap of dimensions with both focus groups.* Both students with and
without documented disabilities responded with statements that supported the
Self-Determination subcategory. Participants offered responses that demonstrated their
capacity to take advantage of opportunities to practice skills and abilities to advance the
pursuit of their ambitions. In the following quote, a student with disabilities stated she
was not going to conform to the will of others any longer; she was going to follow her
bliss and pursue desires for a better future on her own terms.

Here is what I want to do and I enjoy what I am doing and in the process of that
insisting on that gave me a sense of completeness. And now I’m becoming my
own person and sticking to what I believe. And if someone doesn’t agree with
that, then they’re a waste of my time and you know. I’m not going to change now
for someone else.

Similarly, a student without a documented disability also talked about making the most
out of opportunities offered to her in college. She spoke about making herself happy and
pursuing a path of her choice.

I think the reason I think I have been successful is because I have taken advantage
of the opportunities that I’ve had. I love being independent. I like being able to
do what I want and when I want. I like to do what makes me happy. During high
school and beginning of college I felt like I was trying to make others happy and
now it’s more like I know what I want and I am going to get it. It gets back to the
whole independence thing. I really liked that. In high school there was not a lot
of independence and when you come here, school isn’t [in a] set form like
7:30- 3:30; you pick everything. What time you want your classes; everything is
what you want and how you want it.

Students talked about the pursuit of personal and academic goals as a way to
achieve success in college. A student with a disability mentioned she became more
goal-oriented in college—she felt she had to be in order to succeed at the postsecondary
level.

So, now I’m like completely focused. I want to get good grades. I’m getting my
grades up. My GPA is going up. I’ve just been really goal oriented. And I think
I have, like through my whole life. But through the independence of college, the
goals have been on another level. So I’m kind of away from my game-show
network addiction that I have and I’m being goal oriented!

Similarly students without disabilities voiced comparable responses. One student
mentioned the following in regard to having specific goals in mind in order to succeed in
college.

Coming here to get my degree, and be out of here in four years, you know, I wish
it could be longer. I think it definitely helps to have a specific goal set in mind,
like you know, you’re coming here to get done in four years and I think that helps.

*Dimensions specific to a particular group.* Both groups of students with and
without disabilities made responses regarding becoming more independent, setting goals,
and working to pursue those goals. However, students with disabilities also stressed the
importance of making sure their needs were met in regard to their disability issues, being proactive in making sure they did whatever was necessary to become successful on campus. In college there are many more opportunities to learn and grow. However, in order to be successful it is necessary to have the skills and abilities to succeed in these new opportunities. A student recalled his high school experiences as like “being in a box” and that he never really had the opportunity to voice his thoughts in the secondary arena. In college though, he had the opportunity to be more self-determined. He acquired what he needed in order to succeed, as well as voiced his thoughts, and received feedback.

In high school it was like, like [another student] was saying, it was like you were in a box. But, I’ve had the chance to really say “hey, this is what I think” and to get feedback and get criticisms and things like that and that has been really helpful.

Self-determination summary. Participants shared experiences of growing in independence, setting goals, and pursuing goals. Students did this through the process of exploring the many opportunities the educational and independent living options college life has to offer. Students discovered and explored this new way of life away from home. They identified new interests and explored opportunities that were often risky as they identified and pursued goals. Participants mentioned the satisfaction gained from making their own decisions. Students made decisions from everything from where they were going to live to what they were going to study as a major. They made conscious choices to use their skills and abilities to make decisions for themselves in every aspect of their
lives. For most students it was the first time in their lives they had the opportunity to explore new opportunities and make their own decisions on many different levels. Students mentioned having these opportunities to make their own choices, as well as setting and pursuing the achievement of goals, were important factors leading to success in college.

Comparison with Webster’s participants. Participants who responded to the focus group sessions supplied 13% of thought units to the Self-Determination subcategory, the second least amount, under the Awareness of Self theme. On the other hand, students with disabilities who journaled in Webster’s (2004) study had a smaller percentage (6%) of text units for Self-Determination under the Awareness of Self theme. The dimensions under Webster’s subcategory of Self-Determination were Goal Setting and Risk Taking. Goal Setting was defined as the ability to set realistic objectives, and Risk Taking, as taking chances in order to achieve one’s desired outcome (Webster, 2004). Webster’s dimensions did not differ greatly from the students with and without disabilities who participated in the focus groups sessions. Her students identified the importance of making choices to create their own destiny; to create goals and strive to achieve those goals in order to acquire a desired outcome. Webster’s students also identified that with goal creation comes some risk taking—a chance to be taken in order to attain future success. Both groups of students who responded through focus groups or journaling expressed the importance of goal setting and choice making to successfully transition into and succeed in the college environment. A student from Webster’s research journaled:
“We act on the world and have choices relative to the creation of our own destiny” (Webster, 2001, p. 104). Students in the focus groups supported this perspective.

Perseverance/Determination. The final subcategory under the Skills and Abilities category was Perseverance/Determination defined as the ability to hold fast to one’s vision or plan of action, despite obstacles which may appear (Webster, 2004). Both of the groups responded with statements that supported this subcategory. Participants mentioned never ceasing the pursuit of academic and personal goals, continuing to work on areas of difficulty, overcoming obstacles; and in some cases, overcoming limitations of disabilities were important factors in their transition into and success in college.

Substantial overlap of dimensions with both focus groups. Both groups of students with and without disabilities mentioned the continuous quest to pursue goals and persevere in the face of adversity. The perseverance and determination to
graduate—doing whatever it takes to succeed; being tenacious, working hard, in the
pursuit of their goals—were frequent entries within the Perseverance/Determination
subcategory. A student with a documented disability made the following statements
about the commitment to persevere in the pursuit of her goals. She mentioned staying
committed and “showing up” no matter what.

I have to remember what my goals are and adjust and reset those goals, you know,
when I need to. But it’s just a commitment I make. You know. But, one time I
missed a final because I was injured the night before. I was devastated, but then I
had to realize that it is beyond my control. But, 99% of the time, it’s just a
commitment that I am going to show up no matter what.

Similarly, another participant with a disability stated being aggressive, being insistent she
received the information needed from her classes and professors.

I’d have to say, and it always has a negative connotation, but I’d say, to an extent
you have to be aggressive. Because it’s your education and you’re going to get
those professors who don’t care, and you’re going to get professors that you can’t
understand. But that can’t give you an excuse to give up on their class.

Another student, without a disability, mentioned that her determination to finish
her degree, and taking the initiative to achieve that goal, assisted her in succeeding in
college.

I think one of the three [personal attributes] I can think of right now, that helped
me, is determination. I have to say this, and when I got to [name of university], is
that I was determined to finish my degree. Another was my initiative, which
comes back to determination. But, I had the initiative; I wanted to get it done!
You know I want to get things done and so, I think those are the things that really helped [to succeed in college].

**Dimensions specific to a particular group.** Students who had documented disabilities offered responses about accepting their limitations and continuing to work on aspects of their lives that needed improvement. A student stated, “I just take it as it comes and make the best of everything and try to succeed. I screw up and then I get back on track!” Another student, a young woman, offered she did not feel prepared for college at all. She felt like she was going to fail. Yet, with her physical disabilities, she was determined to succeed with the use of her brain, in spite of her head injury.

I didn’t really feel prepared at all [for college]. I didn’t know what to expect. I had had a head injury and I was afraid that I was going to fail. You know I had all of these physical challenges I was dealing with and I thought this is all I have left, my brain. And I felt like I had to achieve very high.

**Perseverance/Determination summary.** Participants’ responses grouped under the **Perseverance/Determination subcategory** were descriptive of students never ceasing in the pursuit of their academic and personal goals. Students stated they had goals they would remain steadfast to accomplishing; whether graduating in four years, earning a particular grade in a course, or simply getting to class each day. Students shared accepting their limitations, pushing forward regardless of personal hardship or disability; continuing to work on areas of their lives in need of improvement. Students presented
overcoming obstacles, and in some cases, overcoming the limitations of their disabilities, as important factors in their transition into and success in college.

Comparison with Webster’s participants. Students who responded to the focus group sessions supplied 10% of thought units to the Perseverance/Determination subcategory, the least amount under the Awareness of Self theme. Webster identified a smaller percentage (2%) of text units for students with disabilities who journaled in her study for the Perseverance/Determination subcategory under the Awareness of Self theme. Webster’s dimensions did not differ substantially from the students with and without disabilities who participated in the focus groups sessions. Some of her students wrote of the “importance of persevering and being determined to achieve desired outcomes” (Webster, 2001, p. 106). Students from the focus groups said essentially the same thing. However Webster’s students focused on issues related directly to their disability, whereas students in the focus groups, even those who had disabilities, mentioned persevering in various ways, without mentioning their disability.

Knowledge. The second greatest amount of focus group thought units that depicted an Awareness of Self involved participants’ Knowledge regarding transition into college and college life. Knowledge was defined as an understanding and/or awareness of various types of knowledge or information needed to successfully transition into college. The Knowledge category contained the second greatest frequency of thought units of all categories under the Awareness of Self or Awareness of Others themes. The 194 thought units constituted 23% of the entire frequency of units (830) for the
Awareness of Self theme and 16% of all thought units from both Awareness of Self and Awareness of Others themes combined (1,219).

Subcategories that composed the Knowledge category included: Self-Awareness, Empowerment, Career Related, and Rights and Responsibilities. All of the subcategories depicted various types of Knowledge identified as important for the successful transition into and continued success in college. The frequency of thought unit entries, as well as the percentage of total thought units for the category of Knowledge given for a particular subcategory, appear in Table 13.

Table 13

*Descriptive Statistics for Knowledge Category*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subcategory</th>
<th>Students with Disabilities</th>
<th>Students without Disabilities</th>
<th>Both Groups Combined</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Self-Knowledge</td>
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<td>Empowerment</td>
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<td>Rights and Responsibilities</td>
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<td></td>
<td>194</td>
<td>100</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Self-knowledge.** Self-Knowledge was the first subcategory under the Knowledge category and defined as the ability to understand oneself (strengths, needs, etc.) and one’s interactions with the environment (Webster, 2001). Participants’ responses that fell
under Self-Knowledge were descriptive of their knowledge of strengths and needs.

Knowledge and an awareness of personal learning styles, interests and preferences, academic preparation, daily living and social preferences, and knowledge regarding one’s limitations and bad habits, such as procrastination, were also identified as necessary to successfully transition into and succeed in college.

*Substantial overlap of dimensions with both focus groups.* Students from both groups mentioned having self-knowledge was an important factor in their collegiate success. Participants spoke primarily of their strengths and needs. A student with a disability stated, “I think being aware of your strengths (is important for success in college). I think a lot of times when you have a disability people focus on what you can’t do.” A participant without disabilities said one of her needs or preferences was to have less free-time. She recognized if she had too much time on her hands she had a tendency
to get into trouble. She stated, “Because I had so much free time and that’s what made me not as successful.”

Students also responded with statements that described their personal learning style and academic preparation. A participant with disabilities stated,

I feel academically I was fine. I wasn’t prepared to be up all night working and I wasn’t prepared for working double time from what I did in high school. But I think I was prepared for the workload, but struggled.

A student without disabilities mentioned her preference for summer classes as opposed to longer semesters; she said,

It [summer classes] is a faster pace, I like having them only be like 4 weeks or 6 weeks. I don’t like things dragged out because that’s, I mean you see me the first day of school, I am ready to go that first month and I start losing my fire in me pretty quick.

Participants talked about their knowledge of interactions with people in their new environment on campus. A participant with disabilities made the following observations regarding his peers, as well as his own knowledge about himself. He said,

It’s weird because some kids were like, a lot of them, I notice, were really sheltered, and then they’re here and they have no rules. So they’re like passed out puking somewhere, and it’s like, where as I, I mean, I was sheltered. But I had like, my room to like, do what I want. So like, I know when to stop doing something, and I know what’s good and what’s, like, not.
Similarly, a student without disabilities expressed if she continued to live around the party atmosphere at her school she would not be successful. She moved a short distance from campus. She stated, “And making some decisions that I knew were good for me. I don’t live in [name of university] anymore, I live in Toledo. [I] can’t live around that party scene.”

Finally, participants identified self-knowledge regarding their use of procrastination and perfectionism. Students overwhelmingly verbalized procrastination as the leading factor that truly kept them from achieving maximum success in college.

In the following quotation a student with disabilities acknowledged her tendency for perfection, a form of procrastination, when completing academic projects.

You know I am too much of a perfectionist. I just want everything done the right way and that has really hurt me because then I get overwhelmed and I am doing more than I really need to do and I have a hard time with that . . . [I think it helps] if you are more aware of what your limitations are—what expectations you can place on yourself rather than expecting perfection.

A participant without disabilities interjected the following statements regarding procrastination.

Yeah, but then I’m a big procrastinator too. So I think that if I am doing a project up to 5 minutes before it’s due that would make me come in late and makes me 5 minutes late before class, like, I have always been like that. I’ve gotten better with it but I’m still working on it.
Dimensions specific to a particular group. Students with and without disabilities responded to the Self-Knowledge subcategory. There were no dimensions specific to a particular group.

Self-knowledge summary. Students’ replies that fell under Self-Knowledge were descriptive of knowledge of their strengths and needs, knowledge and awareness of personal learning styles, interests and preferences, academic preparation, daily living and social preferences, and knowledge of their limitations and hindrances to college success, such as procrastination and perfectionism. The participants’ ability to understand themselves and their interaction with their environment was identified by participants from all groups not just in an academic sense, but also in day-to-day life activities, as contributing to their success transitioning into college. The Self-Knowledge category was robust and contained numerous student statements pertaining to knowledge that assisted them as well as kept them from succeeding in college as fully as possible. One of the leading dimensions under Self-Knowledge was procrastination. Regardless of whether or not students had a disability they identified procrastination—putting off less desirable schoolwork to take part in more pleasurable activities was mentioned by many as a detractor to success.

Comparison with Webster’s participants. Participants who responded to the focus group sessions supplied 41% of thought units to the Self-Knowledge subcategory, the greatest amount under the Knowledge category. However, students with disabilities who had journaled in Webster’s (2004) study had a greater percentage (46%) of text units for the Self-Knowledge subcategory. Webster’s dimensions differed from the students with
and without disabilities who participated in the focus groups sessions. Most of Webster’s dimensions were disability specific, including acceptance of disability, lack of acceptance of disability, understanding the impact of disability, and self-fulfilling prophecy, defined as understanding that a person can become what they have been labeled by others (Webster, 2001). Webster also included the dimension of self-efficacy under Self-Knowledge. However, there was a substantial amount of overlap with Webster’s definition of Self-Knowledge in that participants from both groups, journal and focus groups, who acknowledged strengths, areas of need, and interacting with one’s environment.

**Empowerment.** Empowerment was the second subcategory under the Knowledge category and was defined as one’s use of knowledge as an empowering experience (Webster, 2004). Participants’ responses that fell under this subcategory were descriptive of their increased self-efficacy or confidence in themselves as well as their passion and drive to succeed in order to effectively transition into and succeed in college.

![Figure 11. Empowerment](image)
Substantial overlap of dimensions with both focus groups. Both of the groups responded with statements that supported the Empowerment subcategory. Students mentioned having confidence in their knowledge and abilities was an important factor in their transition into and success in college. Participants made statements about having a purpose, and being outgoing, based on the knowledge they have what it takes to succeed. In the following quotation a student with disabilities described his assurance in himself and the knowledge that no matter how difficult things got he believed he would succeed.

I think confidence is really key and you can’t just be “woe is me!” You know how that gets. You have to have confidence that no matter how hard it gets, you know, ‘I’m better than this!’ I need to know that I can do things, but there are things that I can’t do. There are things that I need to work on. So, think you need to be humble, but at the same time have the confidence to know that you can do this.

A participant without documented disabilities stated that he knew he could do the work in college. Even if his grades are not always high, he tried his best, which produced confidence.

And you know, beyond anything else, I think confidence in yourself to know that you can do the work, do well, you know even if your best is a B or a C, you know you have done your best. And if you know you have done your best that will ultimately produce confidence in yourself.
Similarly, a student with a disability stated, “If you know you have done your best that will ultimately produce confidence in yourself.” Furthermore, a participant without disabilities stated, “I am comfortable and confident with who I am!”

Students also made statements regarding having a purpose, having the passion and the drive to succeed. A student with disabilities stated the following about being focused and being in college for a purpose.

So, now I’m like completely focused. Now I’m in a position that I can start to help other people and knowing that I have purpose to be there. So, that is probably what I liked best [about my college experience] and just the sense that I can do this and I can be successful.

Another student with disabilities declared, “Being on top of things—Just taking charge!”

A participant without disabilities mentioned she has come a long way since beginning her college experience. She made some decisions she knew were good for her.

I have grown so much in the last 4 years that I have been in college. I have learned that I grew in self-confidence, self-esteem, um, knowledge, you know. So, I am successful. But, finally understanding and knowing how I want to do things now and actually being able to manage everything and making some decisions that I knew were good for me.

Another student without documented disabilities described the confidence and passion she felt in knowing what she wanted to study prior to entering college (psychology).
Oh, your confidence is through the roof! Because you know that you’re not really experimenting with different majors. I mean, I had a lot of friends who went through three or four majors, I just, so, I think there’s a lot to be said because I knew what the outcome was going to be. Running towards that goal, it’s a lot less stressful because I’m just confident in knowing what I want to do.

*Dimensions specific to a particular group.* There were no dimensions specific to a particular group of students regarding the Empowerment subcategory. Both groups of focus group participants with and without disabilities mentioned having confidence in their knowledge and abilities, as well as having a purpose, passion, and the drive to succeed, was an important factor in their transition into and success in college.

*Empowerment summary.* Participants’ responses placed under the Empowerment subcategory were descriptive of students’ increased self-efficacy or confidence in themselves, in addition to their passion and drive to succeed. Students felt empowered by their sense of purpose, and were outgoing in their quest to accomplish their goals in order to effectively transition into and succeed in college. Participants felt empowered by their knowledge of what they wanted to study, the importance of their major, the reason they are in college and pursuing their degree. Students stated they were empowered as they achieved small victories and accomplishments that built esteem.

*Comparison with Webster’s participants.* Participants who responded to the focus group sessions supplied 34% of thought units to the Empowerment subcategory, the second greatest under the Knowledge category. Students with disabilities who had journaled in Webster’s (2004) study had a slightly smaller percentage (22%) of text units
for Empowerment; however, it also ranked second under the Knowledge category. Webster’s students offered written responses grouped into three dimensions under Empowerment. These three dimensions included seeing commonalities, or having the ability to recognize similarities to others and the synergy that comes with the recognition; empowering others, or using one’s knowledge to empower others; and disempowerment, defined as an awareness of a lack of knowledge as a disempowering experience (Webster, 2001). Webster’s dimensions differed from students with and without disabilities who participated in the focus groups sessions; however both groups of students offered responses of feeling empowered. Most of Webster’s students wrote about feeling empowered by reading the Disability Policy course text or other readings and exercises from the course (see Appendix A). Webster’s students focused on issues related directly to their disability—especially under disempowering experiences, where participants felt disempowered by being ill-informed regarding disability services.

**Career-related.** The third subcategory to develop under the Knowledge category was *Career Related* knowledge. Career Related knowledge was defined as knowledge related to one’s past, present, or future, and included responses that dealt with choosing a career path. Participants’ responses that fell under this subcategory related to their decisions with career selection and preparation for a career after college. Both of the groups responded with statements that supported the Career Related subcategory. Students mentioned deciding on and preparing for a career was an important factor in their transition into and success in college. Participants also stated applying what was
learned in college, especially in their major, in their future careers, was an important factor contributing to collegiate success.

![Diagram showing categories of awareness of self, knowledge, career-related, career selection, and career preparation]

*Figure 12. Career-Related*

*Substantial overlap of dimensions with both focus groups.* Only students without documented disabilities responded with a substantial number of statements that supported the Career Related knowledge subcategory. Students with disabilities mentioned that “Getting a job after [college], and making use of what you learned” was an important aspect of being successful in college. Another participant stated she wanted to “contribute to society” by continuing to pursue her educational interests into a meaningful career in her chosen field. Very few responses were given to this subcategory by students with disabilities.

*Dimensions specific to a particular group.* The majority of statements that composed the Career Related knowledge came from students who did not have
disabilities. In the following statement a participant described one of her career preparatory experiences.

It was actually for freshman students in my major, which was at that point going to be sports medicine, athletic training. And we had a shadowing program. So, I actually used that program and shadowed one of the athletic trainers down there during football, spring football practice. So, that was a weeklong shadowing program where you went and followed them [trainers] around during practice.

Another student stated, “I also think that, that you’re supposed to decide what your career is going to be, the one career for the rest of your life.” Participants made statements about applying what they learned in college to their future jobs and careers. A student talked about what she thought it may take to be a teacher and how she will need to know how to apply the knowledge she gained in college to her future profession.

I think that were all pretty much, to be a teacher, you need to be like social, you know what I’m saying? Like, you have to talk to people and, like, carry yourself. So I think that helped me . . . And I think a lot of it is application. Right now, being Education students, we are really not going to know what it is like until we get out in the world and apply what we have learned.

Another student stated the following in regards to application of knowledge and skills to a future career: “I mean you may have learned all that you want, you may have absorbed everything, but if you can’t apply it practically, you can’t, I don’t think that is being successful.”
The importance of a student’s major was a dimension discussed by both groups of students. Participants said once they began taking courses within their chosen field of study academics became more interesting and enjoyable. Students vocalized getting away from Liberal Education Requirement (LER) classes and into courses pertaining to why they were in college to begin with made a big difference in their satisfaction and motivation. A participant without disabilities said, “I was a lot more successful when I got into my major” and “It became very motivational once I got involved with my major and it’s (courses) something you care about.”

**Career related summary.** Students’ responses that fell under Career Related knowledge pertained to their decisions on career selection, preparation for a career after college, and how their major influenced success. Participants mentioned college assisted them in preparing for and selecting a career after exiting college, as well as applying the knowledge they learned in their future careers. A student getting into classes directly tied to their major also was stated to be influential to college success. Even though both groups responded with statements that supported the Career Related knowledge subcategory, a great majority of responses were offered by students without disabilities.

**Comparison with Webster’s participants.** Students who responded to the focus group sessions supplied 17% of thought units to the Career Related subcategory, the third greatest under the Knowledge category. Students with disabilities who had journaled in Webster’s (2004) study had a smaller percentage (5%) of text units for Career Related knowledge. Webster’s students supplied written responses taking into consideration a student’s strengths and interests, as well as journaling on issues related to gaining
employment—such as networking. Webster’s students also responded with concerns about the possibility of being discriminated against or having problems acquiring a career with benefits.

Rights and responsibilities. The fourth and final subcategory to develop under the Knowledge category was Rights and Responsibilities, which was defined as knowledge of one’s rights and responsibilities. Students’ responses related to their knowledge of personal responsibilities, including making responsible financial decisions leading up to and during their college experience. Both of the groups responded with statements that supported the Rights and Responsibilities subcategory. Under the Skills and Abilities category students mentioned Self-Advocacy was an important factor in succeeding in college. Students said it was important to take responsibility for their personal and

![Figure 13. Rights and Responsibilities](image-url)
educational needs to successfully transition into college. In order for students to advocate for themselves they needed the knowledge of their rights and responsibilities first. Participants needed the knowledge of their rights and responsibilities in order to appropriately advocate for them.

Substantial overlap of dimensions with both focus groups. Students talked about knowledge of personal and educational responsibilities. In the following passage a student with disabilities shared her thoughts about personal responsibility regarding her education.

Obviously I go to class and I get my stuff done. You just have to keep going you know. Professors don’t listen, and honestly don’t care. But you have to just get yourself through it because it’s your grade and your education, and you’re responsible!

Participants made statements regarding knowledge of their responsibility to make efforts to pay their way through college and make more responsible financial choices. A student without disabilities stated,

Once I lived off campus too. Everyone was getting their rent checks for that month. I never really had to worry about that either. Now I have a job and everything. I pay rent. I pay my bills, because you realize they [parents] are paying for school. So now, I pay rent. I pay my grocery bills. I pay for electricity. Because I kind of took it for granted, and realized that you’re 20, 21 years old. You need to start taking responsibility for yourself! Once I graduate
my parents aren’t going to be there with a check going, “Here you go! Here’s your rent for the month!”

*Dimensions specific to a particular group.* Students with disabilities gave examples stating it was their responsibility to know what rights they had regarding accommodations they were entitled to after registering with Student Accessibility Services. A participant mentioned the following in regard to her responsibility to find a note-taker in her class.

I mean just little things like having to find someone to be a note-taker. And walking into a classroom and not knowing anybody was an interesting experience in the sense that in high school even though I had note-takers then, I would always know someone in the class.

Students with disabilities needed to have knowledge of their rights and responsibilities in order to appropriately advocate for themselves. In addition to what typical college students need, students with disabilities need to be aware of what is necessary in order to access Student Accessibility Services.

*Rights and responsibilities summary.* The majority of participants’ responses related to their knowledge of personal responsibilities, including making responsible financial decisions. Both of the groups responded with statements that supported the Rights and Responsibilities subcategory with both groups commenting on the importance of knowledge regarding their rights and responsibilities concerning finances. Students with disabilities weighed in on the importance of knowledge regarding their rights and
responsibilities as students with disabilities in order to access the supports necessary to achieve college success.

*Comparison with Webster’s participants.* Participants who responded to the focus group sessions contributed 8% of thought units to the Rights and Responsibilities subcategory, the least percentage under the Knowledge category. Students with disabilities who had journaled in Webster’s (2004) study had the same percentage (8%) of text units for knowledge of Rights and Responsibilities. Webster’s definition of rights and responsibilities was defined as knowledge of one’s rights and responsibilities as a person with a disability. Also under this dimension she documented the opposite of knowledge, lack of knowledge, which she defined as lacking information about one’s rights and responsibilities. Students from Webster’s group journaled primarily about knowing and upholding their responsibilities as students with disabilities and using the knowledge to appropriately self-advocate for one’s needs and desires. Webster’s students also responded to their lack of knowledge regarding their rights of students with disabilities through passage of laws such as the ADA and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act.

Students responded taking into consideration a student’s strengths and interests, as well as journaling on issues related to gaining employment, such as networking. Webster’s students also responded with concerns about the possibility of being discriminated against or having problems acquiring a career with benefits.

*Feelings.* The third and least amount of focus group thought units that depicted an Awareness of Self involved the participants *Feelings* during the transition into college
and college during life. Feelings were defined as emotions associated with transitioning into college. The Feelings category contained the third greatest frequency of thought units of all categories under the Awareness of Self or Awareness of Others themes. The 175 units constituted 21% of the entire frequency of units (830) for the Awareness of Self theme and 14% of all thought units from both Awareness of Self and Awareness of Others themes combined (1,219).

Subcategories that composed the Feelings category included: Anger/Frustration, Optimism, Being Afraid, and Shame/Embarrassment. All of the subcategories depicted feelings students expressed as they transitioned into college and the feelings associated with their experiences in college. The frequency of thought unit entries, as well as the percentage of the total thought units for the Feelings category, given for a particular subcategory, appear in Table 14.

Table 14

Descriptive Statistics for Feelings Category

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subcategory</th>
<th>Students with Disabilities</th>
<th>Students without Disabilities</th>
<th>Both Groups Combined</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>f</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anger/Frustration</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Optimism</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being Afraid</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shame/Embarrassment</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>175</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Anger/Frustration. The first subcategory from the analysis focus group responses under the Feelings category was Anger/Frustration which was defined as feeling angry and/or frustrated towards an individual or situation (Webster, 2004). Participants’ responses regarding Anger/Frustration focused mainly upon their issues with administrative “red-tape” and administrative mistakes. This “red-tape” and administrative mistakes were made by university personnel, and had to do with having to take undesired classes [i.e., Liberal Education Requirements (LERs)], and a student’s personal time and effort in completing class assignments and exams not equating to a desired grade in a class. Students described how they were angered and/or frustrated during their transition into college and during their college experience. The Anger/Frustration subcategory represented the greatest percentage (46%) of

Figure 14. Anger/Frustration
thought unit entries under Feelings. Participants mentioned they experienced anger/frustration when dealing with the “bureaucracy,” and the “hoop-jumping” necessary to earn a degree, from university offices and services providers. Students also expressed taking undesired college courses, such as LERs and other courses not related to their major, however necessary for graduation, were a source of anger and frustration. Participants were also not content with putting in the hours and effort into preparing course assignments, and studying for exams, only to receive an unexpected, lower grade, than they thought they would be given or deserved.

Substantial overlap of dimensions with both focus groups. Participants talked about experiencing administrative “red-tape” or difficulty getting past bureaucratic policies that did not meet their needs. In the following quote a student with disabilities expressed her frustration with university policy only having a limited number of slots available for graduate study in her field.

I had worked for 4 years and accomplished everything I think I could have accomplished to the best of my abilities. Still, got told I had to wait [for a place in graduate school]. That was really hard. It was kind of a blow to get that letter saying that I was, I had fulfilled all the requirements, but they didn’t have enough spots at this point to offer me one for graduate school. I think that was really hard because I felt like what I had worked for wasn’t really happening the way I wanted it to.

Another source of frustration for students was the necessity to take courses required for earning their degree they did not find interesting or worthwhile—most of
which were LERs. The LERs were viewed as a “necessary evil” one must endure in order to graduate. A student without disabilities stated,

> It just seems irrelevant—there is no motivation. You aren’t going to use a lot of what you learn in the LER classes. I still feel like it is not going to help me educate a bunch of 6 year olds the same. It gets really frustrating.

Students were also frustrated by their personal time and effort spent on preparing course projects or studying for exams that translated into a lower grade than they expected. Their investment of time and effort did not always yield the expected and desired outcome. A participant with disabilities said,

> So, I feel like I’m prepared in that way [academic]. But, my grades have never been anything great, you know? I tried really, really hard and it’s so disappointing that you know when you study all weekend and you don’t do anything else besides, you know? You can’t hang out with your friends, or whatever, because you have to study. And your test doesn’t come out as well as you had planned, which happens all the time.

*Dimensions specific to a particular group.* In addition to the anger/frustration associated with administrative “red-tape,” LERs, and personal effort not equating to a desired grade, that students from both groups experienced, a few other exemplars of anger/frustration were identified from students who had disabilities. Students with disabilities mentioned issues related to their disability led to feelings of anger/frustration due to issues such as fatigue, exhaustion, and overcoming mobility obstacles, as well as asking for and getting assistance. Students with disabilities experienced administrative
“red-tape” issues along with the other groups; however their issues were also disability related. A participant mentioned the following regarding her difficulties getting around on campus.

I moved into the family housing over there in the summer time, about a month before class had started. Well, I had absolutely no privileges to get rides on the buses or anything like that until classes started, and that was a disaster!

Students who did not have disabilities expressed anger/frustration with the high cost of college, including the high cost of tuition, books and parking. A student proclaimed, “Books! The price! How can you pay $145 for books that the teacher only uses for an hour—tops!” Another participant exclaimed, “I pay whatever, $5,000 a semester, [they] tell me I can’t park here and make me pay for a rec [recreation] pass this summer. It’s crazy!”

Anger/Frustration summary. Students’ responses regarding Anger/Frustration focused on their issues with administrative “red-tape,” the need to take undesired LER classes, and their time and effort not equating to the attainment of a desired grade in a class. Participants illustrated how they were frustrated during their transition into college and during their college experience by university policies they did not agree with, or find to be fair. Even though both groups responded with statements that supported the Anger/Frustration subcategory, a slight majority of responses were offered by students without disabilities.

Comparison with Webster’s participants. Participants who responded to the focus group sessions supplied 46% of thought units to the Anger/Frustration subcategory, the
highest under the Feelings category. Students with disabilities who had journaled in Webster’s (2004) study had a slightly smaller percentage (20%) of text units for Anger/Frustration; however, ranked second under the Feelings category. Webster’s students offered written responses under Anger/Frustration that included dimensions of hopelessness, or feeling particular situations will never get better, and powerlessness or being in a situation where one feels powerless due to “handicaps” created by people and/or the environment (Webster, 2004). Webster’s students also wrote about being angry and/or frustrated by other’s ignorance and assumptions about them as people with disabilities. Her students were also angered and frustrated over poor quality of services, and lack of accommodations.

**Optimism.** The second subcategory from the analysis of focus group responses under Feelings was Optimism, which was defined as feeling hopeful about the future and chances of achieving ones vision (Webster, 2004). Participants’ responses regarding Optimism focused mainly upon issues with the ability to stay positive about their college experience, both academic and social. Students also revealed their positive outlook in regard to gaining the supports needed to succeed in college. Students described how they had a positive attitude during their transition into college and during their college experience. The Optimism subcategory represented 32% of thought unit entries under Feelings.

**Substantial overlap of dimensions with both focus groups.** Both groups mentioned feeling optimistic and positive about life during college. Students from both groups were able to see the bright side of things—knowing that if a current situation was difficult, it
Figure 15. Optimism

would eventually improve. A student with disabilities said the following about rough
times not lasting forever: “Along with that the acceptance that just about anything is
short-term. So, yea, you have tolerance, but you also know that it is not going to last
long.” Also, a student without disabilities mentioned even though things did not work
out exactly as planned, she was optimistic things will eventually come around. She
stated,

I think that was really hard because I felt like what I had worked for wasn’t really
happening the way I wanted it to. But I mean there is a lesson there, so, I don’t
know, we’ll get there eventually!

Both groups of students mentioned they were optimistic about life and success
following college. A student without disabilities stated the following about her
excitement about going into the business field. She said, “I am actually really excited
about the business field and knowing exactly where I want to go [after college].”
Dimensions specific to a particular group. In addition to staying positive and optimistic when times were difficult, a few other exemplars of Optimism were identified by students with disabilities. Students who had disabilities mentioned they were optimistic that their support systems would help them succeed in college. A student stated the following regarding her positive feelings towards Student Accessibility Services (SAS) assisting her in college.

I can’t do everything myself but they [SAS] are going to give me some help. They’re not going to do everything for me but they’re going to guide me through this. So, that was a really emotionally positive thing for me.

Optimism summary. Participants mentioned they experienced happiness and excitement regarding their transition into and experiences in college. Even though there were periods of difficulty and tough times, there was also the feeling that difficult times will not last—that things would get better. The “ability to stay positive” was also mentioned in Skills and Abilities under the subcategory of Coping where students mentioned they “reframed” difficult, negative situations, to give them a more positive spin. Students’ responses concerning Optimism focused primarily on issues with their ability to stay positive during college experiences, both academic and social. Participants also stated maintaining a positive outlook concerning supports they needed to succeed in the college setting.

Comparison with Webster’s participants. Students who responded to the focus group sessions supplied 32% of thought units to the Optimism subcategory, the second highest under the Feelings category. Webster (2004) did not create a subcategory
specifically for Optimism; instead she labeled optimism as a dimension of Self-Esteem. Students who responded through journaling with Webster contributed 16% of thought units to her Self-Esteem subcategory (which contained the optimism dimension). Self-esteem was defined by Webster as feeling good about oneself and that one has the ability necessary to achieve one’s goals. Her students journaled on finding a “silver-lining” in situations that seemed rather dire. Optimism, again, can be seen as a type of reframing, as seen in the Skills and Abilities category.

**Being afraid.** The third subcategory from the analysis focus group responses under Feelings was Being Afraid. This subcategory was defined as having a fear of certain situations, or feelings of fear transitioning into college. Participants’ responses regarding Being Afraid focused chiefly on issues with being afraid, anxious, or nervous during their interactions with peers and with professors. The Being Afraid subcategory represented the second smallest percentage (17%) of thought unit entries under Feelings. Participants mentioned they experienced fear during interactions like meeting new people, participating in class, and communicating with their professors. Students were also afraid of being unprepared for the emotional demands of college.

**Substantial overlap of dimensions with both groups.** Both of the groups mentioned Being Afraid in the transition to or during their college experience. A student without disabilities mentioned she was very uncomfortable with raising her hand or interacting in a particular class. She said, “I never raise my hand to ask a question and I would never go up and ask her something, she had no idea who I was. I was very uncomfortable.” Another student without a documented disability mentioned just trying
Figure 16. Being Afraid

to meet new people in college can be anxiety/fear inducing. She stated, “You know, trying to meet new people, you know, it was scary!”

Students felt uncomfortable talking to professors and instructors. A student with a disability recalled fears she had when asking for additional help from a professor. She stated.

You kind of feel like the teacher’s going to be like “what the hell’s wrong with you!?” Like, “I sat down with you and I walked you through this.” But it’s so easy to screw it up. And then I’m afraid to go back the next time because they’re [professors] like “Oh, you still didn’t do well, I helped you 3 times with that,” and, I mean, obviously they would never say that to you, but you just feel like “Oh, my gosh! How many times can they reinforce it to me?” which is hard sometimes.
Dimensions specific to a particular group. In addition to being afraid of interacting with people on campus, another example of Being Afraid was identified by students without disabilities. Students who did not have disabilities mentioned they were afraid of being underdeveloped emotionally for college. A participant stated the following about living on her own in the dorms, and how it can be a lot for a young person to deal with.

I realized you really were going to stay in that dorm for the amount of time that you were going to, and it was a very young age, very young. I don’t think our emotions are ever prepared for that type of a groove!

Students with disabilities were afraid or worried for different reasons than students without documented disabilities. The following student stated, “I was worried that I might need more support than in high school.” Another student with disabilities mentioned the following in regard to talking with professors about accommodations, “The paranoia of taking that step, overall they [professors] have been wonderful. But, the pressure of every semester, walking up to a total stranger, saying ‘Hi, I’m [student’s name], could I spend a little time with you?’ was frightening.”

Being afraid summary. Students’ responses concerning Being Afraid focused primarily on their fear or anxiety experienced when meeting new people, participating in class, and communicating with their professors. Participants also experienced fear or anxiety by feeling unprepared for the emotional demands of college. Students expressed being fearful or anxious when speaking up in class, asking questions, or talking with professors outside of class. Participants described how they were worried, nervous, and
felt great amounts of pressure. Several students expressed the fear of failure during their transition into college and during their college experience.

Comparison with Webster’s participants. Participants who responded to the focus group sessions supplied 17% of thought units to the Being Afraid subcategory, the third highest under the Feelings category. Students with disabilities who had journaled in Webster’s (2004) study had a smaller percentage (4%) of text units for Being Afraid, under the Feelings category. Webster defined Being Afraid as having a fear of certain situations or feeling of fear related to one’s disability. Her students expressed written responses which included fear of what others might think of them—the fear of appearing weak and out of control. Her students also wrote about the fear of change and the fear of failure; fearing perhaps they would not be able to “cut it” in college. Finally, Webster’s students mentioned the fear of the unknown. One of her students was fearful and anxious wondering if her visual impairment would progress to full blindness.

Shame/Embarrassment. Shame/Embarrassment was the fourth subcategory from the analysis of focus group responses under Feelings. Shame/Embarrassment was defined as feeling ashamed or humiliated in the processes of transitioning into college. Participants’ responses regarding this subcategory centered chiefly on issues with needing and requesting extra academic assistance, and also with academic underachievement or failure. The Shame/Embarrassment subcategory represented the lowest percentage (5%) of thought unit entries under Feelings.
Both groups mentioned experiencing *Shame/Embarrassment* in the transition to or during their college experience. In the following quote from a student without disabilities she stated that she felt uncomfortable asking professors for help. She said, “Science and math are just not my main forte. And you actually had to go up to the professors and ask for help more than them coming to you, and I always felt weird doing that.”

Similarly, a student with disabilities mentioned she did not want people to know about the things she could not do well. She admitted, “I used to try and hide my weaknesses; I didn’t want anyone to know I couldn’t do a certain thing.” In addition to the shame/embarrassment of needing and requesting additional academic assistance, students were ashamed and/or embarrassed of underachieving academically. Students were also embarrassed by the thought of failing out of college. A student with documented disabilities stated,
Being stubborn and not asking for the help I needed. A big part of that was already having a visual disability—a disability you can see. And I already felt below the educational level of, you know, like all my friends that didn’t have a disability.

A participant without a documented disability voiced she was embarrassed because she failed out of college during her first attempt straight out of high school. She shared.

When I first came to [name of college] I got kicked out my freshman year, because I had a lot of fun! And luckily after I got kicked out, I talked to the right people and they gave me another chance. It was really embarrassing that I couldn’t cut it at the college level.

*Dimensions specific to particular groups.* There were no dimensions specific to a particular group of students regarding the Shame/Embarrassment subcategory. Both groups of students identified similar dimensions for the Shame/Embarrassment subcategory.

*Shame/embarrassment summary.* Participants mentioned they experienced Shame/Embarrassment when they needed to request academic assistance, when they underperformed academically, or even failed out of school. Students with and without disabilities stated they felt embarrassed when requesting accommodations and educational supplements such as extra time on tests or tutoring. Participants also felt ashamed when they underperformed academically, taking longer than four years to graduate, or flunking out of college altogether.
Comparison with Webster’s participants. Participants who responded to the focus group sessions supplied 5% of thought units to the Shame/Embarrassment subcategory, the lowest under the Feelings category. Students with disabilities who had journaled in Webster’s (2004) study had almost the same percentage (4%) of text units for Shame/Embarrassment, under the Feelings category. Webster defined Shame/Embarrassment as feeling ashamed or humiliated because of one’s disability. Her students expressed in written responses embarrassing situations due to professional’s lack of knowledge regarding confidentiality and professors yelling out questions regarding a student’s disability across the room. Webster’s students also wrote about taking longer to finish their degrees. One of her participants had journaled about how she felt stupid and embarrassed because she was held back in high school, and was a year behind in college. Finally, some of Webster’s students mentioned they felt ashamed because of their disabilities. One of her students wrote she was taught to be ashamed of her disability which made it difficult for her to function in school, yet she stayed silent.

The Awareness of Self theme contained categories and subcategories that emerged from the analysis of focus group questions that pertained to participants’ transition into and experiences during their college years. The Awareness of Self theme was evocative of students’ combined awareness and assessment of the roles they played in their own successes and barriers when transitioning into and living their experiences throughout college. Student’s experiences from both groups, students with and without disabilities, related to transitioning into and navigating their way through college on the way to personal achievement and success.
The Awareness of Others theme also contained categories, subcategories, and dimensions that emerged from the analysis of focus group questions pertaining to participants’ transition into and experiences during their college years. The Awareness of Others theme was descriptive of students’ combined awareness and evaluation of the role others played in their own successes and barriers related to transitioning into and negotiating their way to college success. Responses of students in discussing their awareness of others were further delineated into four categories: (a) Role of Family and Friends, (b) Role of Society, (c) Role of Professionals, and (d) Role of Interpersonal Networks. These categories were not identical to those found by Webster (2004).

Figure 18 illustrates the Awareness of Others theme and the subsequent categories and subcategories identified in order to support it. These categories were: Role of Family and Friends, Role of Society, Role of Professionals, and the Role of Interpersonal Networks. The Role of Family and Friends category dealt with the role family and friends played in determining the success of a student transitioning into and in the college environment. Role of Society pertained to the role society as a whole played in determining the success of a student transitioning into and in the college environment. The Role of Professionals included information regarding the role of teachers/instructors and other professional service providers played in determining the success of a student transitioning into the college environment. And finally, a category not presented by Webster (2004), the Role of Interpersonal Networks related to the role a student’s
Figure 18. Categories and subcategories that emerged from the focus groups for the awareness of others theme
interpersonal networks played in determining success transitioning into the college environment.

**Role of family and friends.** The majority of focus group thought units that depicted an Awareness of Others involved the participant’s *Role of Family and Friends* in the transition into college and during college life. Student’s spoke of ways family and friends impacted their lives in college—either acting as *facilitators* or *obstacles* to their success. The Role of Family and Friends category contained the greatest frequency of thought units of all categories under the Awareness of Others theme. The 126 thought units constituted 32% of the entire frequency of thought units (389) for the Awareness of Others theme and 10% of all thought units from both Awareness of Self and Awareness of Others themes combined (1,219).

Subcategories that composed the Role of Family and Friends category included *Facilitators—Making a Positive Difference* and *Obstacles—Making Success Difficult*. Facilitators—Making a Positive Difference marked where family and friends assisted in the student’s transition to and experiences in college, and Obstacles—Making Success Difficult where family and friends made succeeding in college difficult for students. Both of the subcategories depicted how family members and friends were either facilitators in making a positive difference in student’s success in college, or were obstacles that made achieving success more difficult. The frequency of thought unit entries, as well as the percentage of total thought units for the category of Role of Family and Friends including the two subcategories appear in Table 15.
Table 15

Descriptive Statistics for Role of Family and Friends Category

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subcategory</th>
<th>Students with Disabilities</th>
<th>Students without Disabilities</th>
<th>Both Groups Combined</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Facilitators—Making a Positive Difference</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obstacles—Making Success Difficult</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Role of family and friends: Facilitators—Making a positive difference.

Participants’ responses regarding the Role of Family and Friends focused primarily upon Facilitators—Making a Positive Difference by offering various means of support. Facilitators—Making a Positive Difference was defined as ‘known’ others such as family and friends who provided support and/or encouragement by word or actions and who have made a positive difference in the student’s life (Webster, 2004). Participants identified family and friends as supports as they transitioned into college by assisting students with their temporal needs by offering guidance from experience, a conveyance of a belief that they could succeed, offering emotional support, and acting as role-models, as well as providing monetary support. Friends provided the same supports provided by family with the exception of financial support which came solely from family. The Facilitators—Making a Positive Difference subcategory represented, by far, the greatest
Figure 19. Role of family and friends: Facilitators—Making a positive difference

percentage (97%) of thought unit entries under Role of Family and Friends. Participants mentioned that family and friends assisted them by providing transportation, filling out applications, and providing information about college and college life. Students also mentioned family and friends acted as models for emulation who imparted wisdom from their own collegiate experiences. In addition, participants stated parents offered monetary support in an effort to aid in their success in college.

Substantial overlap of dimensions with both focus groups. Students from both groups mentioned support of family and friends, and family and friend’s belief in them was an important factor in their transition into and success in college. In the following quotation a student without documented disabilities described how her parents’ support was beneficial to her success in many aspects of her life while she was in college, both social/emotional and academic. She stated,
My parents are probably my greatest support. I’m lucky because both of them are college graduates and they kind of in their own way comparing me, it’s just kind of, you know, they may know what to do to keep me in line, with like, everything. You know, they know what to tell me if I was ever getting down, or if I was ever, like, had any questions, even regarding school. I would call my mom a lot just to help me with some of the school things like English. She was really good at that.

A student with disabilities also commented on the support he received from family. In his case family acted as a sounding board. Family was there for him, to listen to his concerns, and “talk things over” with him.

But I would say the biggest part of it was my family letting me talk things over and get things right and discussed what it was that I wanted to do and what I needed to do. That type of thing.

Family and friends also acted as role models for students. A participant with documented disabilities mentioned she received support from a friend on how to manage her time more effectively at college. She said.

I had a lot of friends who were really good at time management. I just didn’t, I tried to pick up on it. But they were awesome at it. So, when they knew I was having problems they were also a support system for me.

Additionally, a student with disabilities stated the following regarding family and friends as supports, especially family acting as role models.

Definitely my parents and extended family and the good friends were quite the support. I would say the biggest part of it was my family letting me talk things
over and get things right and discussed what it was that I wanted to do and what I
needed to do and that type of thing— the actual people who have gone through
college and [have had] those experiences [are] my grandmother and my brother.
Participants from both groups expressed that family offered financial support as a
way of making a positive difference in their transition into and in college. A student
without documented disabilities stated the following regarding the situation she would
have been in had her grandparents not assisted with college tuition, and her mom
managing her college funds. She declared.

I was very fortunate that my grandparents gave all the grandchildren stacks of
money for college to ensure that we got an education. So, in that sense I was
really good financially. Now that I may go an extra year, I might have a little
struggle. But, my mom actually managed all of that money. So if it had not been
for her I would probably be up a creek without a paddle about now!
A participant with disabilities also added the following statements regarding the
support received from her family.

Financially, by my freshman year, my parents and grandparents always, from the
time I was little always taught me how to save. So, I had about $10,000 saved by
the time I graduated high school. And I’m very, very thankful that they taught me
that!

*Dimensions specific to a particular group.* There were no dimensions that were
specifically mentioned by students with or without disabilities. Both groups of students
mentioned receiving emotional support, having family and friends act as role models, and family providing financial support.

*Role of family and friends summary.* Participants’ responses regarding the Role of Family and Friends focused chiefly on how family members and friends facilitated students to succeed in college. Family and friends aided participants by providing emotional support, letting students know there were people who backed them and wanted to see them do well. Family and friends also assisted students as role models who contributed to participant success by offering examples of succeeding in the college environment and imparting wisdom to their student. Finally, families, both immediate and extended, aided by offering financial assistance in paying tuition and other college expenses.

*Comparison with Webster’s participants.* Participants who responded to the focus group sessions supplied 97% of thought units to the Role of Family and Friends: Facilitators—Making a Positive Difference subcategory. This was the greatest amount under the Awareness of Others theme. On the other hand, students with disabilities who journaled in Webster’s (2004) study had much smaller percentage (8%) of text units for Role of Family and Friends: Making a Positive Difference under the Awareness of Others theme. Webster’s students wrote about family and friends teaching and supporting them throughout their college experience. Her students’ responses did not differ greatly from the responses of students with and without disabilities who participated in the focus groups sessions. Webster’s students identified family and friends lending them support in similar ways. Webster identified Role Models under Role of Society. The present
study included “teaching” by parents as role modeling. Webster’s students did not specifically mention financial support of family and friends in her research.

*Role of family and friends: Obstacles—Making success difficult.* Participant responses regarding the Role of Family and Friends focused secondarily upon *Obstacles—Making Success Difficult.* In this subcategory family and friends were identified as obstacles to student success by offering either too little or too much support. Obstacles—Making Success Difficult was defined as family and friends who provided very little or too much support by word or actions making success difficult in the student’s life. Participants identified family and friends as either “desiring to see them fail” or “overly”-supporting students before and after they transitioned into college. Family and friends created these obstacles by purposefully creating a negative atmosphere for students, or over-assisting students with their daily needs, creating a dependent student who lacks self-determination skills. The Obstacles—Making Success
Difficult subcategory represented, by far, the least percentage (3%) of thought unit entries under Role of Family and Friends.

Substantial overlap of dimensions with both focus groups. Student responses regarding Obstacles—Making Success Difficult focused primarily on a lack of support or over-support. Some students mentioned family and friends did not want them to succeed or that family members did too much for them before they entered college which inhibited student success. Parents did not assist in developing student independence enough for them to succeed in the college environment. These dimensions were shared by students who had disabilities. A student mentioned the following in regard to an ex-family member who did not want her to succeed in college. She stated.

I wanted to say on the opposite. I had some family and friends who were great too, but probably one of the biggest encouragements to me was, like, people who either, well, like my jerky ex-husband, or various other people who didn’t want me to succeed.

Also, a participant without disabilities mentioned that he was not prepared for certain aspects of college because his mother took care of nearly all of his living needs. He did not learn many independent living skills before setting off for college, which made his transition to the college environment difficult. He stated, “I had a very close family so everything was ready to go. Dinner was ready at a certain time. My mom did my laundry. Yeah, so a lot of those things . . . I was not prepared.”

Dimensions specific to a particular group. There were no dimensions that were specifically mentioned by students with or without disabilities. Both groups of students
mentioned how parents or friends had created obstacles that made achieving success in college difficult.

**Obstacles—Making success difficult summary.** There were a handful of student responses that identified family as obstacles to their success. Certain family members, or ex-family members, expressed they did not want participants to succeed. Family and friends did this by not offering support, offering negative statements, or in some cases, offering too much assistance before college where students did not develop the necessary life-skills to live as independently as they would have preferred.

**Comparison with Webster’s participants.** Participants who responded in the focus group sessions contributed 3% of thought units to the Role of Family and Friends: Obstacles—Making Success Difficult subcategory, the least amount, under the Awareness of Others theme. On the other hand, students with disabilities who journaled in Webster’s (2004) study had much greater percentage (46%) of text units for Role of Family and Friends, Lacking in Understanding (as opposed to Obstacles—Making Success Difficult). Webster named her subcategory Lacking in Understanding, which she described as family and friends who were lacking in understanding, however well-meaning their intentions might be. Webster’s participants described family members’ difficulty accepting their child’s disabilities. Her students wrote about family and friends not understanding the student’s condition and often times their pain. Webster’s students’ responses differed from the responses of students with and without disabilities who participated in the focus groups sessions in that her participants’ families and friends were Lacking in Understanding of the participants’ disabling conditions.
Webster’s students identified family and friends who did not intentionally attempt to make the students’ life in college more difficult; however family and friends did often make success more difficult due to their lack of understanding the students’ disabilities.

**Role of society.** The second largest number of thought units under Awareness of Others involved the *Role of Society* in the transition into college and college life. Students spoke of the ways in which society or society’s resources impacted their lives in college. Society or society’s resources acted as either facilitators or obstacles to their success. Ninety-four thought units constituted 24% of total thought units (389) for the Awareness of Others theme. Role of Society comprised 8% of all thought units from both Awareness of Self and Awareness of others themes combined (1,219).

Subcategories that composed the Role of Society category included:

*Facilitators—Making a Positive Difference,* and *Obstacles—Making Success Difficult.*

Facilitators—Making a Positive Difference where society and society’s resources assisted in the student’s transition to and successful experiences in college, and

Obstacles—Making Success Difficult, where society made succeeding in college difficult for students. The frequency of thought unit entries, as well as the percentage of total thought units for the category of Role of Society including the two subcategories appear in Table 16.
Table 16

*Descriptive Statistics for Role of Society Category*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subcategory</th>
<th>Students with Disabilities</th>
<th>Students without Disabilities</th>
<th>Both Groups Combined</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Facilitators—Making a Positive Difference</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obstacles—Making Success Difficult</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Role of society: Facilitators—Making a positive difference.** Student responses regarding the Role of Society focused primarily upon *Facilitators—Making a Positive Difference* by offering various means of support. Facilitators—Making a Positive Difference was defined as ‘known’ others in society, and resources provided by society, who have provided support and/or encouragement by word or actions and who have made a positive difference in the student’s life (Webster, 2004). Participants identified various providers in society that made a positive difference in their lives while in college. Some of the services provided by society and used by students were: transportation services, financial institutions, university residential and food services, university Student Disability Service (SDS) services, and outside agencies, such as the Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation (BVR), Social Security Administration (SSA), and *Upward Bound*. Personnel from these “service providers” offered guidance and emotional support to build
confidence, provided educational and career development support, as well as provided monetary support to increase their chances of attaining collegiate success. The Facilitators—Making a Positive Difference subcategory represented the greatest percentage (63%) of thought unit entries under Role of Society.

Figure 21. Role of society: Facilitators—Making a positive difference

Substantial overlap of dimensions with both focus groups. Students from both groups mentioned support from society, especially university transportation services, housing and food services, employment (both on and off campus), financial aid and other government programs, were important factors in their transition into and success in college. Students stated they used transportation systems that were in place on campus and in the community. A student without documented disabilities stated, “I take the bus all the time,” as did many others students. Participants expressed they used residential/dorm and food services and that these services made a positive difference in
their transition into and in college. A student with disabilities stated, “We were all required to live in the dorms for at least two years, so we used residence services, and food services.” Students also received support from co-workers at their places of employment. A student without documented disabilities mentioned the following in regard to her job and how the company was assisting with her career.

I work at Best Buy now and I really want to go to the corporate field there. So they’re really supportive. Best Buy is actually giving me money for school and the managers, and the district, and corporate people, they all actually, they’ve all talked to me.

Participants expressed receiving government financial assistance made a positive difference in their transition to college. Many students would not have had the opportunity to receive a college education without federal financial assistance. A student without disabilities stated, “[I received] grant money and loans and all that. Everybody that I ran into, if they haven’t been helpful, the next person has been.” Another participant without disabilities mentioned the following regarding the necessity of acquiring financial aid. “It was a good thing that I went to an in-state school. If I didn’t I probably wouldn’t have gone to college. I mean I qualified for the maximum Pell-grants I could get.” Students also benefitted from other federal and state programs. In the following quote a student with disabilities shared her experience with *Upward Bound*, a federally funded program that provided fundamental support to participants in their preparation for entrance into college. She stated,
Luckily, though for me, I did a program called *Upward Bound*. Which, we have one here. But I did mine at [name of University]. That program *really* prepared me for college. So, I had that after my high school.

*Dimensions specific to a particular group.* Participants from both groups mentioned that support from society was an important factor in their successful transition into and continued success in college. However, only students with disabilities made statements regarding the importance of the support received from society regarding access to services from the Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (BVR) and Student Accessibility Services (SAS) at their colleges. In the following quote a young woman described how her doctor connected her with BVR and how BVR assisted her with acquiring financial benefits invaluable to her success in accessing and succeeding in college. She stated,

> Luckily after one of my surgeries the doctor referred me to a place called BVR in [name of city]. They helped me pay for my first year of school. They almost paid for all of it—I think they didn’t pay for my food. They paid for everything else.

Students with disabilities mentioned Student Accessibility Services (SAS) at their respective universities provided services such as extra time on tests, note-taking services, and a quiet location to take exams. A student stated, “I had OCD [Obsessive/Compulsive Disorder]. The Office for Students with Disabilities—that is where I did my test taking. I did all my testing there, and got my note-takers there.”

*Facilitators—Making a positive difference summary.* Students’ responses regarding the Role of Society centered largely on how society was a facilitator in
assisting them succeed in college. Society aided students by providing supports and resources as participants transitioned into college. Outside agencies such as the Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation (BVR), *Upward Bound*, community employers, transportation services, daycare for student’s children, religious institutions, university residential and food services, financial services, and academic accommodations were identified as resources students used to increase their success. Students also mentioned how society provided obstacles making it difficult to achieve collegiate success by erecting physical as well as attitudinal barriers and not providing adequate services to students with disabilities. Students stated that without the resources provided by society achieving success in college would be difficult.

*Comparison with Webster’s participants.* Participants who responded to the focus group sessions supplied 63% of thought units to the Role of Society: Facilitators—Making a Positive Difference subcategory, the greatest amount, under the Awareness of Others theme. Students with disabilities who journaled in Webster’s (2001, 2004) study did not identify Facilitators—Making a Positive Difference or Obstacles—Making Success Difficult as subcategories. She identified 11 subcategories her students’ journaled about, including: influence of society, ignorance, role-models, language, technology, pity, barriers, inclusion, lack of services, potential solutions, and disability culture. Sixty-nine percent of students’ text units were identified by Webster under Role of Society beneath her Awareness of Other theme. Webster identified Role of Society as the most written about subcategory under Awareness of Others (see Table 11). Webster’s students wrote about ways society had an impact on the lives of people with disabilities. However, as far
as society making a positive difference in the lives of students with disabilities she identified the Influence of Society. She also identified Role Models, Positive use of Language, Technology, Inclusion, Potential Solutions, and Disability Culture as subcategories under Role of Society. Webster’s students’ responses differed from the responses of students with and without disabilities who participated in the focus groups sessions. Her students identified many more subcategories under Role of Society as students with disabilities.

**Role of society: Obstacles—Making success difficult.** Participants’ responses regarding the Role of Society focused secondarily upon Obstacles—Making Success Difficult or ways society created obstacles for students to succeed in college. Obstacles—Making Success Difficult was defined as resources *not* provided by society; and people in society who have *not* provided support and/or encouragement by word or actions. Students identified society, and resources not provided by society, as obstacles as they transitioned into college. The Obstacles—Making Success Difficult subcategory represented the lesser percentage (37%) of thought unit entries under Role of Society.

**No overlap of dimensions between focus groups.** Only participants who had documented disabilities identified society as an obstacle as they transitioned into college. Students mentioned society created attitudinal and physical barriers for them as they transitioned into college. In the following example, a classroom peer seemed upset the participant received extra time on tests as an accommodation for her disability. The peer did not seem to understand academic accommodations sanctioned by the university’s
Figure 22. Role of society: Obstacles—Making success difficult

Student Accessibility Services office. The participant felt discriminated against. She stated the following,

I had extra time for test taking. And I actually had students come up to me and say, “Well, of course you are getting good grades, you have more time than everyone else!” This and that, you know. The whole thing about being in a wheelchair.

Participants with disabilities also mentioned physical barriers made success difficult. Barriers such as: getting around on campus, having to travel long distances in inclement mid-west weather, and difficulty in acquiring accessible parking permits.

Finally, students stated a lack of provided resources and services by society such as BVR and SAS funding. A student described how she was cut off from rehabilitation funding sources before she finished her program. She stated,
It was just one of those things I don’t think I was prepared for when Rehab and some of the other programs that were helping me pay for things, said, “well, now we’re done helping you.” It’s kind of the same situation.

**Obstacles—Making success difficult summary.** Students with disabilities responses regarding the Role of Society focused on ways in which society created obstacles for students to succeed in college. Students mentioned society created attitudinal as well as physical barriers in their quest to succeed in college. Participants described situations when they felt unaccepted by peers and professors. Students described feeling looked down upon as attitudinal barriers as well. Participants spoke of physical barriers that made it difficult to get around on campus and that it took a lot of time and energy to get from place to place on campus. Students also expressed difficulty accessing documentation to acquire accessible parking permits.

**Comparison with Webster’s participants.** All participants with disabilities who responded during the focus group sessions supplied 37% of thought units to the Role of Society, Obstacles—Making Success Difficult subcategory. Webster identified Barriers as a subcategory under Role of Society. She also identified attitudinal and physical as dimensions of Barriers. Ten percent of students’ text units were identified by Webster under Role of Society beneath her Awareness of Other theme. She defined attitudinal barriers as barriers created by society or the individual, due to negative attitudes towards persons with disabilities. She identified physical barriers as those that prevented persons with mobility, sight, and hearing disabilities from gaining access. Webster’s students’ journaled about similar experiences as they encountered attitudinal and physical
boundaries during their college experiences. Her students also identified other aspects of barriers including barriers imposed from government regulations and lack of community support.

**Role of professionals.** The *Role of Professionals* accounted for the third largest number of thought units under Awareness of Others. Ninety thought units constituted 23% of the entire frequency of thought units (389) for the Awareness of Others theme and 7% of all thought units from both Awareness of Self and Awareness of Others themes combined (1,219).

Subcategories that composed the Role of Professionals category included *Facilitators—Making a Positive Difference* and *Obstacles—Making Success Difficult*. Facilitators—Making a Positive Difference was where the Role of Professionals assisted in the students’ transition into college, and Obstacles—Making Success Difficult where the Role of Professionals made succeeding in college difficult for students. The frequency of thought unit entries, as well as the percentage of total thought units for the category of Role of Professionals including the two subcategories appear in Table 17.

**Role of professionals: Facilitators—Making a positive difference.** Participants’ responses regarding the Role of Professionals focused primarily on professionals who made a positive difference in the life of a student in college by offering various means of support. Facilitators—Making a Positive Difference was defined as service providers in high school or college who had provided support and/or encouragement by word or actions and who made a positive difference in the student’s life. Facilitators—Making a Positive Difference was further pared into dimensions of *High School* and *College*, as
Table 17

Descriptive Statistics for Role of Professionals Category

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subcategory</th>
<th>Students with Disabilities %</th>
<th>Students without Disabilities %</th>
<th>Both Groups Combined %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Facilitators—Making a Positive Difference</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>67 74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obstacles—Making Success</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>23 26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 23. Role of professionals: Facilitators—Making a positive difference
participants received support from both professionals in high school and college. Students identified professionals as supports as they transitioned into college by assisting students with their immediate needs by offering guidance, support, and empowering students with a belief they could succeed through academic preparation and guidance. The Facilitators—Making a Positive Difference subcategory represented, by a substantial margin, the greatest percentage (74%) of thought unit entries under Role of Professionals.

*Substantial overlap of dimensions with both groups: High school.* Participants from both groups mentioned support from professionals was an important factor in their transition into and success in college. Students stated high school teachers were supportive of their aspirations to attend college and assisted participants with their academic preparation. Participants stated high school teachers were facilitators in their achievement of success in college. In the following quotation a student without disabilities shared how her high school teacher pressed her to enroll in a more challenging science course to help prepare for college academics. She said,

I took Chemistry [in high school] and I loved it. But it was because of my teacher! And she really worked hard with me in there! So, she made me like really enjoy it, and so instead of taking biology like everyone else, I was like, “Oh, I can do chemistry!” in college.

Additionally, a student with disabilities mentioned his teacher, knowing the student was going to pursue a college education, offered guidance throughout the participants final year in high school. He stated,
I had some teachers who kind of searched me out and gave me bits and pieces of advice throughout my senior year, knowing that I was going to college. About going to office hours, getting to know professors, stuff like that.

*Substantial overlap of dimensions with both groups: College.* Students from both groups also affirmed college professors and advisors were supportive and an important factor in their transition into and success in college. Participants stated college professors and advisors were Facilitators—Making a Positive Difference in their achievement of success in college. A student with documented disabilities shared in the following quote how her college professors had been apparently more accommodating to her than perhaps other educators she had in the past. She said, “They [professors] have been quite helpful working with me compared to all of the teachers who just shunned me for being stupid rather than different.” Another student with disabilities stated her psychology professor facilitated her success in college as he counseled her regarding the flexibility of a degree in psychology. She stated,

> My psychology professors were helpful, like, there was one in particular; [he said] you can use the psychology field for almost anything that you want to do. If you graduated with a psychology degree you can do tons of different things. You really have to know what you want to do and then you have to make the degree work for you.

College advisors were another group of professionals who acted as facilitators who made a positive difference in students’ achieving success. A participant without
disabilities described how an advisor assisted her in getting back-on-track after she was
kicked out of college.

When I first came to Kent I got kicked out my freshman year because I had a lot
of fun. And luckily after I got kicked out I talked to the right people and they
gave me another chance. It was really embarrassing that I couldn’t cut it at the
college level. From then on she [advisor] lit a fire cracker under my butt and I’ve
been good ever since!

Students affirmed their college professors and advisors were facilitators who
made a positive difference in their achievement of success in college. Participants from
both groups mentioned how professionals took a personal interest in them and assisted
them in achieving their goals.

Dimensions specific to a particular group. There were no dimensions specific to
particular groups in students’ responses in the Role of Professionals: Facilitators—
Making a Positive Difference subcategory.

Facilitators—Making a Positive Difference Summary. Students’ responses
regarding the Role of Professionals centered primarily upon receiving support from
teachers and advisors in both high school and college arenas. Participants stated their
high school teachers prepared them for college and for the transition into postsecondary
education—both academically and knowledge they needed to succeed in knowing the
differences between high school and college; differences involving the magnitude in
terms of academic rigor, including variations in course scheduling, time in-class,
study-time, format in which assignments and exams are given, and amount of free-time.
Comparison with Webster’s participants. Participants who responded to the focus group sessions supplied 74% of thought units to the Role of Family and Friends, Facilitators—Making a Positive Difference. On the other hand, students with disabilities who journaled in Webster’s (2004) study had a smaller percentage (41%) of text units for Role of Professionals, Making a Positive Difference under the Awareness of Others theme. Webster defined facilitators as professionals who have acted in a way that facilitated the vision and/or expressed need of a person with a disability. She identified SDS Supportive, as a dimension of professionals as facilitators. She described ways Student Disability Services (SDS) supported her students. Webster’s students expressed in their journaling how professionals were supportive in assisting students overcome obstacles. Students needed assistance with getting courses waived, access to administrative personnel, and access to student accessibility services (SAS) providing appropriate accommodations. These supports were often in place throughout the participant’s college experience. Her students also identified professionals in high school and in college who supported them in achieving their goals. Webster’s students’ responses did not differ greatly from the responses of students with and without disabilities who participated in the focus groups sessions. However, the majority of students in the present study found professionals to be facilitators, the minority of students in Webster’s study expressed professionals as facilitators (they wrote about professionals primarily as obstacles).
Role of professionals: Obstacles—Making success difficult. Students’ responses regarding the Role of Professionals centered secondarily upon the lack of support from instructors and advisors in both high school and college arenas. Participants stated some of their high school teachers neglected to prepare them for the transition into postsecondary education—both academically and the knowledge and skills they would need to succeed in college (e.g., knowing the differences between high school and college). These differences involved the magnitude in terms of academic rigor, including variations in course scheduling, time-in class, study-time, format in which assignments and exams are given, and amount of free-time. The Obstacles—Making Success Difficult subcategory represented the lesser percentage (26%) of thought unit entries under Role of Professionals. Participants mentioned professionals failed them in high school by not sufficiently preparing them for college or supporting their college aspirations. Students also made statements in regard to their college professors, instructors, and advisors, stating their actions or words were detrimental to their success in college.

Substantial overlap of dimensions with both groups: High school. Students from both groups stated some their high school teachers were not helpful in preparing them for college. In the following quote a student without disabilities shared thoughts on how she was prepared academically; however, she was not prepared for the skill-set needed for college. She stated,

Academically I felt like I was very prepared for college, but I still felt that there was some places that I wasn’t prepared for college. Because they [high school teachers] don’t prepare you for things like your time management, and they don’t
prepare you for things like, if you only had class once a week, how do deal with that kind of thing. You know? Stuff like that.

A student with disabilities also mentioned her lack of preparation in high school. She stated, “My high school did not prepare me for college and that is why it took me 10 years out of high school to go to college.” Additionally, another participant with disabilities mentioned everything was done for her as far as her Individual Education Program (IEP) was concerned. In high school she was not a major participant in her IEP meetings and therefore did not feel prepared to make the individual and personal decisions necessary in the college environment. She stated, “My IEP in high school, I
was basically told these are the accommodations we are going to give you. This is what we are going to do for you. Everything was done for me!”

*Substantial overlap of dimensions with both groups: College.* Students from both groups acknowledged some college professors and advisors were not supportive and/or accessible during their transition into college. Participants stated their college professors and advisors were often obstacles who made success difficult in their pursuit of success in college. A student with documented disabilities shared in the following quote how her high school teachers pushed her harder than her college instructors.

I’m honestly kind of disappointed. Because I feel like I could do a lot more with it—I just don’t feel like they [college instructors] push us enough. Where in high school I was pushed, and pushed, and pushed!

Another student without disabilities stated the following regarding the inaccessibility of advisors and professors.

So, that was one thing that I liked least about it [college]. You know, access to the advisor office or to our professor, or advisor, was sometimes hard. And, you know, getting through the red tape in this university can be quite a chore.

*Dimensions specific to a particular group.* There were no dimensions specific to particular groups in students’ responses in the Role of Professionals: Obstacles—Making Success Difficult subcategory.

*Obstacles—Making success difficult summary.* Participants’ responses regarding the Role of Professionals centered secondarily upon a lack of support from instructors and advisors in the postsecondary arena. Students stated their college instructors were
often difficult to contact for consulting—the same was mentioned regarding access to college advisors. Participants also mentioned they were not “pushed” to succeed by their college educators the way they were in high school. A student with disabilities revealed a coping strategy she used. She told herself, *everything is short-term,* including the need to deal with instructors and/or advisors she perceived as sub-par. She stated, “I think one of my biggest factors is keeping in mind that everything is short-term. You know? Overall, I’ve had some very beautiful professors, but I have also had some *doosies!*”

*Comparison with Webster’s participants.* Students who responded to the focus group sessions supplied 26% of thought units to the Role of Family and Friends: Facilitators—Making a Positive Difference. Conversely, students with disabilities who journaled in Webster’s (2004) study had a greater percentage (59%) of text units for Role of Professionals, as obstacles, under the Awareness of Others theme. The majority of Webster’s students found professionals to be obstacles, as opposed to facilitators in their quest for college success. The participants of Webster’s study felt professionals created obstacles. She identified SDS Unsupportive, as a dimension of Professionals as Obstacles and described ways Student Disability Services (SDS) did not support students appropriately. Webster’s students expressed in their writing that professionals became obstacles by acting as if they knew what was better for students than the students themselves—often having a patronizing attitude. Professionals were also seen as lacking in understanding, or appeared to be more concerned with pleasing their superiors rather than assisting the student. Professionals were also seen by Webster’s students as fostering dependence, rather than independence. In addition, her participants thought
SDS was unsupportive. Students wrote about how they felt uncomfortable receiving services, or they received poor quality of services.

**Role of interpersonal networks.** The *Role of Interpersonal Networks* category constituted the smallest number of thought units of all categories under the Awareness of Others theme. Students spoke of how meeting new people and making personal connections impacted their lives in college and acted as facilitators or obstacles to their success. The 81 thought units comprised 21% of the entire frequency of thought units (389) for the Awareness of Others theme and 7% of all thought units from both Awareness of Self and Awareness of others themes combined (1,219).

Subcategories that composed the Role of Interpersonal Networks included *Facilitators—Making a Positive Difference* and *Obstacles—Making Success Difficult*. Thought units that fell under the subcategory Facilitators—Making a Positive Difference pertained to participants meeting new people and making connections with others which assisted in the students’ transition to and experiences in college. Conversely, thought units under Obstacles—Making Success Difficult concerned participants developing new connections made succeeding in college more difficult for students. The frequency of thought unit entries, as well as the percentage of total thought units for the category of Role of Interpersonal Networks, including the two subcategories, appear in Table 18.
Table 18

*Descriptive Statistics for Role of Interpersonal Networks Category*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subcategory</th>
<th>Students with Disabilities</th>
<th>Students without Disabilities</th>
<th>Both Groups Combined</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Facilitators—Making a Positive Difference</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obstacles—Making Success Difficult</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Role of interpersonal networks: Facilitators—Making a positive difference.*

Participants’ responses regarding the *Role of Interpersonal Networks* centered primarily upon *Facilitators—Making a Positive Difference*. Students made connections at college to achieve friendships and working relationships in order to achieve postsecondary goals. Facilitators—Making a Positive Difference was defined as “known” others such as other newly developed relationships with students and/or university personnel who have provided support and/or encouragement by word or actions and who have made a positive difference in the student’s life (adapted from Webster, 2001). Using interpersonal networks students reached out to new people, often by engaging others in class, leisure activities, and work. Some students joined clubs and fraternities. The Facilitators—Making a Positive Difference subcategory strongly represented the greatest percentage (94%) of thought unit entries under Role of Interpersonal Networks.
Figure 25. Role of interpersonal networks: Facilitators—Making a positive difference

Substantial overlap of dimensions with both focus groups. Students from both groups mentioned building interpersonal networks was an important aspect in their transition into and success in college. A student without documented disabilities contributed the following quote regarding newly made upperclassmen friends. “They [friends who began college earlier] really, like, helped me understand what I should do because they had already lived it, so they definitely help to make those networking friends.” A student with disabilities also mentioned networking and getting to know new people on campus. She stated, “Networking, getting to know people. I’ve also made a lot of good friends along the way . . . I became good friends with them and they knew everything about campus.” Another student with disabilities proclaimed the following in relation to making connections with new people on campus: “Another thing is all the connections I made. I met a lot of people who definitely will be a part of my life for the rest of my life!” Students without disabilities also contributed to the importance of
developing friendship networks. “Yeah, I was ready to go. I love meeting people! I want to move to a city when I graduate because I want to meet new people.” Another student without disabilities stated what a difference making connections with new people meant to her. She said, “That made a whole lot of difference also [making friends on campus], maybe because making friends with the people that stay [on campus] on the weekends—that’s a biggie!”

Dimensions specific to a particular group. In addition to meeting people in classes, work situations, or other common locations on campus, students without disabilities mentioned joining student organizations and clubs. In the following quote a young woman spoke about her participation in a campus club. She stated, “I joined the Board of Administration Club, and through that I held leadership roles. I was President, V.P., Treasurer, you name it—I held the office!” Students without documented disabilities also mentioned joining fraternities and sororities, “Going Greek!” as another method of branching out and experiencing campus life and engaging with new people. The following student described his engagement in his fraternal social network. He stated, “I joined a fraternity or whatever. I loved it for four years! Like, I’m done with it now, but that was awesome! Like it was the greatest time in my life!

Role of interpersonal networks: Facilitators—Making a positive difference summary. Participants’ responses regarding the Role of Interpersonal Networks focused mainly on how students met people and developed new friendships and relationships. Students mentioned developing interpersonal networks assisted them in gaining the most out of their college experience. Participants mentioned meeting new people through
participation in intramural sports, using the recreation center, participating in university sponsored sporting and arts events, “Going Greek,” and participation in other clubs and activities on campus. Students also stated they did not want to “miss out” on social opportunities— they wanted to be engaged in campus life.

Comparison with Webster’s participants. The Role of Interpersonal Networks was not identified by Webster as a category that represented her students thought units in their journal writing.

Role of interpersonal networks: Obstacles—Making success difficult.
Participants’ responses regarding the Role of Interpersonal Networks focused minimally on Obstacles—Making Success Difficult. This subcategory was defined as “know” others such as other newly developed relationships with students and/or university personnel who have not provided support and/or encouragement by word or actions and who have created an obstacle in the student’s life (adapted from Webster, 2001). A few participants mentioned other students’ behaviors distracted participants from their college goals. There were reports of students who lived in residence halls who occasionally acted as obstacles: behaviors such as peers being intoxicated and disorderly which was distracting from the academic pursuits of some participants. The Obstacles—Making Success Difficult subcategory greatly represented the lesser percentage (6%) of thought unit entries under Role of Interpersonal Networks.
No overlap of dimensions between focus groups. Only participants who did not have documented disabilities identified interpersonal networks as an obstacle as they transitioned into college. Students mentioned interpersonal networks occasionally created barriers for them as they strived to succeed in college. In the following example, a participant seemed to describe his perceptions of how some students were not working towards succeeding in college. These peers were perhaps distracting him from his goal attainment and success. He stated, “It’s weird because some kids were, like, a lot of them, I noticed, were really sheltered. They’re here and they have no rules! So they’re like passed out puking somewhere!” Another participant added, “A lot of the kids on my floor are always in the one room playing video games and listening to music.”

Role of interpersonal networks: Obstacles—Making success difficult summary. Role of Interpersonal Networks focused minimally upon Obstacles—Making Success Difficult. A few students mentioned how the behavior of others sometimes distracted them from their college goals. These few participants reported when living in the dorms
occasionally other students also living in the residence halls would drink alcohol, get loud, and distracted others.

*Comparison with Webster’s participants.* Role of Interpersonal Networks was not identified by Webster as a category that represented her students thought units in their journal writing.
CHAPTER V
DISCUSSION

This chapter concludes the qualitative investigation regarding the perceptions of students with and without disabilities concerning their transition into and success in college. The study evolved from outcomes of two federal grants pertaining to the involvement of students with disabilities in systems change on college campuses. The purpose of the current study was to elaborate upon results obtained by a previous investigator (Webster, 2001, 2004) who focused on the transition of students with disabilities at one university. Her results were based on written journals from students associated with a Disability Policy course developed as part of the initial grant.

The current study focused on students who participated in the second grant and extended Webster’s research findings by including students with and without disabilities from six universities. Some had taken the Disability Policy course and some had not. The current study examined whether students with disabilities would differ from their peers without disabilities in defining success and barriers to success in college. Further, responses of focus groups were analyzed in the current study to determine if participants with and without disabilities would identify the same themes expressed in written journals by Webster’s participants regarding successful matriculation into college and ongoing success once there.

In this chapter overall findings are summarized and discussed in relation to Webster’s results and in relation to the literature on transition. Conclusions are then
delineated followed by limitations and recommendations for best practice and future research.

Research Question 1

Summary of Research Question 1

How do students with disabilities and students without disabilities define success in college and barriers to success based on responses to focus group questions?

In this section a summary and discussion of similarities and differences in responses to specific focus group questions of students with and without disabilities relating to success and barriers to success in college are presented.

Overall responses to specific focus group questions dealing with success in college were similar for students with and without disabilities. The categories generated by both groups were consistent with those factors discussed in the literature regarding success in college. Factors leading to success for students with disabilities in the current study coincided with those cited by numerous authors (Shaw, 2009; Skinner & Lindstrom, 2003; Tagayuna et al., 2005). Generating research-based characteristics such as: (a) positive social skills (Skinner & Lindstrom, 2003); (b) understanding of one’s strengths and limitations (Hitchings et al., 1998); (c) perseverance and motivation Tagayuna et al., 2005); (d) an understanding of one’s disability and its effect on work and educational choices (Roessler & Rumrill, 1998; Field et al., 2003); (e) effective self-advocacy and self-determination skills (Field et al., 2003; Janiga & Costenbader, 2002) and (f) positive attitude toward learning (Vogel & Adelman, 1990), the students with
disabilities in the current study reflected best practice within their own preparation and experiences.

The categories generated by students with and without disabilities regarding success are also evident in the literature on college students in general. Bean and Eaton (2000) offered that personality traits like self-efficacy push a student to persevere when confronted with academic and social challenges. The attitude-behavior theory (Kuh, 1999) proposed that students with a strong, well-developed self-concept are more confident regarding their ability to succeed. Kuh suggested that students are inclined to search out certain kinds of activities and experiences during their college experience and these decisions regarding how they spend their time affect their performance both in and out of the classroom.

**Differences Between Groups in the Current Study**

All categories mentioned by students without disabilities were also mentioned by students without disabilities in response to success-based focus group questions. Students with disabilities discussed two additional topics: *Personal Development and Accomplishment* and *Social Networking (related to success).* Students without disabilities did discuss social networking in relation to what they liked best about college, but they did not discuss social networking as part of what it means to be a successful college student.

One exception was in the responses students with disabilities gave to how they defined *what it meant to be successful in college.* Under the category of *Personal Development and Accomplishment* students with disabilities stated they received a sense
of completeness and accomplishment in learning about who they were as people, as well as the process of how they become their own person during their college years.

Participants with documented disabilities also responded that being a role-model for others was a component of being successful in college.

In discussing Social Networking, students with disabilities also said that getting to know people, making friends, and forming connections with professors and instructors were related to their success in college. Kuh and Love (2000) stated that in order for all students to succeed in college they need to learn to function in a new college environment and interact appropriately with new peers and faculty.

Students with disabilities are less likely to be included in social extra-curricular activities in high school, and often do not have much input into their IEPs. College may be the first time these students have the opportunity to do these things on their own, and therefore it is not surprising participants would discuss these as accomplishments under the definition of what it means to be successful. Students with disabilities also discussed social networking with people in order to fulfill academic or independent living needs (e.g., communicating with professors regarding accommodations or securing personal care attendants). The literature highlights the importance of having both personal and academic supports in place as key components to being successful in college (Tagayuna et al., 2005). Social networking may have emerged for students with disabilities partly because they needed to form relationships with other students (as natural supports), friends, and instructors for assistance in order to achieve academic and social success in college. But several participants identified social outreach as a personal accomplishment
because of positive experiences with peers for the first time. Students mentioned being accepted by peers and being included socially. For these students their college experiences were very different from high school experiences.

The vast majority of thought units sorted into topics for each category were similar for students with and without disabilities. For example, under the category of Leadership, students from both groups mentioned the importance of having solid problem solving and self-advocacy skills. Problem solving and self-advocacy are also components of self-determination as presented in the literature for students with and without disabilities (Field et al., 2003; Getzel, 2008; Trainor, 2005; Webb et al., 2009).

**Some Variations Between Groups**

Some of the responses sorted, for example, under the category of Leadership were dissimilar, for the two groups. Problem solving for a student with disabilities was often related to securing supports for getting to class, and acquiring accommodations for courses. Problem solving for students without disabilities revolved around juggling their time to get to athletic events and other appointments in their personal lives (i.e., going out to a party or heading home for the weekend to see family and friends). Obviously for students with disabilities problem solving more often revolved around key factors that had a significant impact on their academic success (Martinez & Klopott, 2003). Students without disabilities more often discussed making responsible choices between social activities and on task academic behavior.

Another example of differences between the two groups concerned the category *Attitude/Outlook*. Both groups mentioned the importance of a positive attitude/outlook.
College students with disabilities mentioned “adapting to others’ negative attitudes” and “not letting situations get them down.” As part of keeping a positive attitude, students with disabilities mentioned more of occasions where they needed to reframe, as a way to cope or adapt when presented with negative attitudes of others. These differences suggest students with disabilities often needed personal strength to remain positive regarding issues not present, or taken for granted by students without disabilities. The importance of a positive attitude and the ability to reframe situations is documented in the literature regarding success in college.

Responses from students without documented disabilities regarding Attitude/Outlook focused on issues such as having a job while attending college to assist with finances. These students talked about “keeping a positive outlook” while taking on added responsibilities, or trying to balance their work and academics. These differences suggest students without disabilities are learning how to balance social, academic, and work responsibilities, whereas students with disabilities using considerable energy, and trying to stay positive while focusing mostly on academic demands (Tinto, 1993, 1998).

Research Question 1 Conclusion

Given the summary and discussion of similarities and differences regarding responses to specific focus group questions, the experiences and perceptions of students with and without disabilities were overwhelmingly similar. All participants stated in order to be successful in college they needed leadership qualities that included: effective communication skills and self-determination; a solid work ethic, pushing forward even
when circumstances are difficult (i.e., perseverance); maintaining a positive attitude; as well as, building and using appropriate supports in order to accomplish their goals.

Students with or without disabilities also revealed they had to overcome obstacles. Shared areas of difficulty included: procrastination; logistical hassles, such as getting around on campus; dealing with administrative “red-tape;” and financial challenges such as paying for college tuition, books, and living expenses (Scorgie, Kildal, & Wilgosh, 2010; Tinto, 1993, 1998).

Overall, from the examination of seven focus group questions (10-16), only two categories emerged as different between the two groups. Only students with disabilities mentioned *Personal Development and Accomplishment* or *Social Networking*. These results suggest that students with documented disabilities may still not be given enough opportunities for independent personal development during high school years. For the students with disabilities in this study college success included the development of social connections as well as demonstration they could make it academically on their own.

In considering the study by Kuh and Love (2002) omission of statements regarding personal development and social networking by students without disabilities suggests that respondents may have assumed skills in these areas are already present, or are taken for granted. It is obvious that students without disabilities do participate in organizations, fraternities, sororities, and sports while attending college, and they clearly do network socially, as several students reported having to cut down on socializing to be successful in college.
Legislation supports a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE; IDEIA, 2004) for students with documented disabilities. Results of the current study show great strides have been made in this area, as a “leveling of the playing field,” for students with disabilities to achieve readiness for postsecondary education.

As suggested by the students in this study, however, there are still areas needing improvement. The fact that students with disabilities discussed social networking as a personal accomplishment and a defining factor in success suggest they may not obtain enough opportunities for developing these skills in high school. Many of these skills are acquired outside the classroom and/or outside of school, and students with disabilities may still have limited opportunities for part time jobs, extra-curricular activities, or invitations to social events with peers (Shaw, 2009).

Theoretical movement towards improvement in the area of *Personal Development and Accomplishment* for high-school students with disabilities has been made by the plan to have students to hold their own IEP meetings (i.e., inviting participants, acquiring conference room, determining transition and annual goals for meeting, activities/services to meet goals, chairing the meeting, etc.). According to this best practice, secondary educators should be assisting students to acquire self-determination skills and practice those skills necessary to prepare for and run their own IEP meeting. In everyday practice, unfortunately, students generally do not run their own meetings. Whether due to logistics of getting the team together, or because teachers and parents do not feel students are ready, students with disabilities are not given enough responsibility for academic and
social choices. When these students enter the postsecondary environment they are “forced,” by law, to act on their own behalf (ADA, 1990). If students do not act, for example, by registering for Student Accessibility Services, they will not be eligible for the supports that may be necessary for them to achieve academic and social support beyond high school. It would make sense then that students with disabilities, after accomplishing these things on their own, mention them as personal accomplishment and social networking. This most certainly contributes to their view of success in college as more than solely attaining a degree (academic success) or applying knowledge learned in college towards their future careers and life (Application to Life and Work).

Research Question 2

Summary of Research Question 2

Did students participating in the current research identify the same themes, categories, and subcategories that were identified in the original research: *Giving Voice to Students With Disabilities Who Have Successfully Transitioned to College: Or How LL Slim Became the Best Darn Gimp on the Planet* (Webster, 2001)?

Summary and Discussion of Themes in Relation to Webster’s Study

Content from *all* focus group questions related to students’ transition from high school into college, including: preparedness for the demands of college academically, emotionally/socially, and financially; supports and services used in the transition into college; success in college; services used; college experiences; and personal attributes, were collapsed into dimensions, subcategories, categories, and themes, and compared between students with and without disabilities. These results were then compared to
Webster’s (2001, 2004) research. Results showed that subcategories generated were generally similar (61%); categories generated were very similar (88%); and themes generated were the same (100%).

Responses from students in both studies, students with and without disabilities in the present study, and students with disabilities in Webster’s study, were used to develop taxonomies (see Figures 1 and 3). These taxonomies included themes, categories, and subcategories. The themes were the same in both studies: Awareness of Self and Awareness of Others. The summary and discussion of each theme, including categories and subcategories of each study, are presented in the following sections.

**Summary and Comparisons of Awareness of Self Theme With Webster’s (2001) Study**

Responses from both groups of students in the current study were readily fit into the same categories identified by Webster for the theme Awareness of Self: (a) Skills and Abilities, (b) Knowledge, and (c) Feelings. Subcategories under the category of *Skills and Abilities* were the same for both studies. Under the category *Knowledge*, students in the current study did not produce any responses falling under Webster’s subcategories of Self-Efficacy, Understanding Differences, and Services or Lack of Services. Students in both studies generated responses under the subcategories of Self-Knowledge, Empowerment, Career-Related, and Rights and Responsibilities. Under the *Feelings* category students in both studies generated responses for the subcategories of Anger/Frustration, Optimism, Being Afraid, and Shame/Embarrassment. Webster’s
participants additionally generated the subcategories of Sense of Belonging, Pride, Injustice, Self-Esteem, and Empathy.

**Category of Skills and Abilities Under Awareness of Self Theme**

Students with and without disabilities generated 19 similar dimensions under the category of Skills and Abilities. Students with disabilities discussed the seven additional dimensions of: (a) Balancing Emotional and Physical Energy, (b) Balancing Independence and Interdependence, (c) Patience, (d) Using Humor, (e) Not Practicing Self-Advocacy, (f) Pursuing Goals Related to Disability, and (g) Accepting Limitations.

The Skills and Abilities category was the *powerhouse* category under the theme of Awareness of Self and touched upon most of the characteristics of successful students found in the literature. All of the subcategories from Problem Solving/Resourcefulness to Perseverance/Determination have been embedded in the “successful transition to postsecondary education for students with disabilities” articles over the past 20 years (Cowan, 2006; Mull et al., 2001; Neubert & Redd, 2008; Shaw, 2009; Stodden & Dowrick, 2000a; Webb, Patterson, Syverud, & Seabrooks-Blackmore, 2009).

Virtually all subcategories and dimensions reported by students in the current study regarding Skills and Abilities concurred with those in the literature for students with and without disabilities. Getzel (2008) stated self-management skills, which are closely tied with self-determination skills, are needed by college students with disabilities. Self-management skills included time-management, organizational skills, and study skills. Students with and without disabilities in the current study identified problem solving skills related to those reported in the literature such as organizational
skills, time-management, and goal setting (setting priorities) as areas with which they struggled, and for students with disabilities areas with which they needed assistance (Getzel & Thoma, 2006; Hong, Ivy, Gonzalez, & Ehrensberger, 2007).

Field (1996), like many other authors, identified one of the components of self-determination to be self-advocacy, which she defined as students taking action on their own behalf. Self-advocacy is considered to be a large component of self-determination and necessary for the successful transition from high school to postsecondary education (Eckes & Ochoa, 2005; Field, 1996; Hadley, 2006; Walker & Test, 2011; Wood, Fowler, Uphold, & Test, 2005). Students in the current research discussed “becoming their own person” through the process of exercising independence personally and academically. Students with disabilities in the current study revealed at times they did not practice self-advocacy, and this fits with the need for learning and practice in this area per the topic’s inclusion in Webster’s (2001) original curriculum.

Students from both groups spoke of never ceasing in the pursuit of their goals, no matter what obstacles they encountered. According to the literature on typical college students, one of the indicators of student success in postsecondary education is persistence (Harris, 1998). Persistence through the difficult times separates students who drop out of college from those who go on to goal attainment, and graduate. If students do not persist, and do not persevere to work through obstacles, they will surely fail in postsecondary education (Braxton; 2003; Engstrom & Tinto, 2008; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1986).
Category of Knowledge Under Self-Awareness Theme

The Knowledge Category was comprised of the three subcategories of Self-Knowledge, Empowerment, and Career-Related Knowledge. Students from the current study as well as those in Webster’s study recognized Self-Knowledge was necessary for succeeding in college. Students must recognize their own strengths and needs in order to effectively discern what supports they will need to succeed. Hitchings et al. (2001) found that successful students with learning disabilities understand the severity and nature of their disabilities, they know their strengths and weaknesses, and can determine their own career path.

Empowerment was mentioned by all groups of students, both in Webster’s and in the current study. Students reported increased self-efficacy, or confidence. They had a passion and drive to succeed. Students mentioned they felt empowered by their sense of purpose. They were proactive in their mission to accomplish their goals (Scorgie et al., 2010).

Career-Related knowledge was mentioned by students in both studies. In the current study, students with and without disabilities discussed the Importance of Major. Identifying, selecting, or trying out college majors right for them, based on the students’ strengths, preferences, interests, and needs, was mentioned by both groups. In the current study, however, only the students without disabilities went a step beyond major, and talked about Career Selection and Career Preparation. There is a large body of literature regarding career development and students with disabilities in high school and college (i.e., Hitchings et al., 2001; Lindstrom, Doren, & Miesch, 2011; Whelley, Radtke,
Burgstahler, & Christ, 2003). It is not clear whether students with disabilities in the current study had not considered the link between major of interest and likelihood of major leading to employment. It is well-established that students with disabilities are underemployed or more likely to be unemployed in comparison to their nondisabled peers with college degrees. Several authors have discussed the need for better advisement to assist students with disabilities in choosing a field of study which is more likely to match their skill set.

Students in the current study reported knowledge of their personal, educational, and financial Rights and Responsibilities. Students in Webster’s study wrote about lack of knowledge regarding their rights and responsibilities as people with disabilities. This may suggest that gains have been in the last 10 years in informing students with disabilities who are entering postsecondary education of legislation impacting them.

Category of Feelings Under Awareness of Self Theme

Participants from both studies identified Feelings regarding transition into college. Anger/Frustration was at the top of the list in the current study, as well as the related Injustices subcategory from Webster’s participants. Students from the current study talked about experiencing administrative “red-tape” or difficulty getting past bureaucratic policies that did not meet their needs, such as taking courses not related to their major. Students with disabilities from both studies identified feelings of anger and frustration due to issues related to their disability. Students mentioned they were frustrated and angered by being “handicapped” by the lack of supports and
accommodations available within the community. Participants without disabilities mentioned being angered and frustrated over the cost of college.

However, students were also Optimistic. Participants mentioned feeling optimistic about college life, even with its many challenges. Students looked forward to their lives after college with optimism. Students with documented disabilities in the current study were optimistic that their on-campus supports would help them achieve success in college.

Students in the current study, with and without disabilities, as well as Webster’s students, voiced Being Afraid in their transition into college. In the current study, students with disabilities were afraid of interacting with peers, speaking in class, or to professors. Students without disabilities were also afraid of the Emotional Demands that were expected of students at such an early age. Students with disabilities in the current study were afraid of Speaking About Disability Issues because they were not always sure how others would respond. Students in Webster’s study were also afraid. They were afraid of what others might think of them, of change, of failure, and of fear of the unknown.

Finally, students in the current study, with and without disabilities, as well as Webster’s students, expressed feelings of Shame/Embarrassment. Students with and without disabilities in the current study stated they were ashamed or embarrassed with Needing Extra Assistance and Academic Underachievement/Failure (i.e., getting poor grades, failing out of school). Webster’s students were embarrassed because
professionals did not respect the confidentiality of their disability, being held back grades due to disability, and feeling ashamed because of one’s disability.

**Conclusion of Awareness of Self**

Participants in this study were in touch with how their skills and abilities, knowledge, and feelings affected their level of success in college. *All* students attained a greater degree of success in college when they utilized skills associated with self-determination. The development of self-determination skills do not appear from out of the blue. Students need to be trained, and given sufficient opportunities to practice skills associated with self-determination (i.e., self-advocacy, choice-making, goal-development) in the community. The skill-sets of self-determined students develop over time. For instance, the process of becoming *self-aware* takes time, effort, and often a struggle with coming-to-grips with one’s disability issues (accepting a disability is part of one’s life).

**Summary and Comparison of Awareness of Others With Webster (2001)**

Responses regarding the theme Awareness of Others by students in the current study fit into Webster’s categories under this theme: (a) the Role of Society, (b) Role of Professionals, and (c) Role of Family and Friends. The additional category of *Role of Interpersonal Networks* was discussed by students in the present study.

For each category listed above, responses fell into the same subcategories, Facilitators and Obstacles. Webster sorted her participants’ responses into more detailed subcategories than did the current researcher; however content of responses across studies were mostly similar. For instance, Webster’s subcategories for Role of Family
and Friends included (a) Making a Positive Difference, and (b) Lacking in Understanding. Subcategories that comprised Webster’s Role of Society category included: Influence, Ignorance, Inclusion, Potential Solutions, Disability Culture, Language, Technology, Pity, and Lack of Resources. Subcategories that composed Webster’s Role of Professionals category were the same as the current study: Facilitators and Obstacles.

**Discussion of Awareness of Others**

Under the theme Awareness of Others, the *Role of Family and Friends* was the most talked about category by students who participated in focus group interviews. Students with and without disabilities overwhelmingly identified family and friends as supports as students transitioned into college. Family and friends assisted with students’ daily needs through offering guidance, letting students know they believed the students could accomplish their goals, offering emotional support, acting as role-models, and assisting with financial needs. Throughout focus group discussions students wove thoughts of how family and friends aided in their triumphs, and comforted through hard times.

*Role of Society*, the second category under the Awareness of Others theme, was not a major factor for students without documented disabilities in attaining success in college. However, for student with disabilities *Society* was named a great facilitator, as well as a creator of obstacles. Societal agencies provided aid and support through the Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation (BVR) and Student Accessibility Services (SAS). Without the aid of these and other services students would not have achieved the level of
success reported; perhaps some students would not have even had the opportunity (without financial assistance provided by BVR). Role of society included government subsidized university SAS supports (Christ, 2008; Christ & Stodden, 2005; Dowrick et al., 2005; Stodden et al., 2001).

In the current study society provided obstacles to success, only to students with disabilities, by presenting physical and attitudinal barriers. Students felt unaccepted by typical students and professors. Students felt looked down upon because of their disabilities. Students also expressed difficulty getting around on campus, and taking a long time to get from building to building. Students with disabilities often found it difficult to navigate through typical daily activities, especially in inclement weather. Webster’s students identified similar obstacles.

Students with and without disabilities rather equally expressed how the Role of Professionals facilitated their successful transition into college. Some students felt high school teachers prepared them for college academically, and for the overall transition into college. However, this was not always the case. A student stated her teacher said “college would be very similar to high school,” yet other students revealed very different experiences; they were not prepared for the demands of college academically or otherwise.

A similar situation was revealed when students with and without disabilities discussed Professionals in college. Students experienced professionals in college as facilitators and obstacles too. Some participants, both students with and without disabilities, raved about the support and assistance received at the postsecondary level,
while others had the opposite experience. Some students stated they were challenged
greater academically in high school than in college. Students with disabilities reported
experiencing more obstacles from professionals than students without disabilities.
Webster’s students identified similar dimensions as professionals often lacked
understanding and created obstacles. According to some participants in Webster’s study,
professionals acted as though they knew what college students with disabilities needed
better than the students themselves.

The *Role of Interpersonal Networks* was not identified as a subcategory by
Webster. Students with and without disabilities talked about how meeting new people,
but not necessarily friends (making personal connections and contacts), impacted
academics, career goals, and personal lives, positively. College proved a time of
connecting with a variety of people in classes, staff in departments, and those with similar
and dissimilar interests. Whether students were making contacts for employment,
academics, or social engagements, college was viewed by participants as a place to
branch-out and grow, in regard to interpersonal experiences.

**Conclusion of Awareness of Others**

Students with and without documented disabilities identified similar categories
and subcategories under the Awareness of Others theme, with the addition of the
development of interpersonal connections under Role of Interpersonal Networks. Even
more than the Awareness of Self theme, students with disabilities recognized specific
dimensions of the categories and subcategories in Awareness of Others in relation to how
disability impacted their experiences with others. Nonetheless, similarities between
students with and without disabilities greatly outnumbered differences. Students with and without disabilities were impacted by family and friends, society, professionals, and interpersonal networks. The great majority of these relationships contributed to students’ success as they transitioned onto the college campus. To a much smaller extent, roles of family and friends, society, professionals, and interpersonal networks detracted from students’ success in college. In summary, both groups of students recognized the services and supports needed to assist them in succeeding in college.

The Awareness of Others theme presented the role of family and friends, society, professionals, and interpersonal networks. These groups either facilitated students’ success or presented an obstacle to it. Basically, the roles can be seen as providers of supports and services, or detractors to access of supports and services. College students, to succeed in college, benefit from knowing what types of supports and services are needed. They profit from being assertive enough to acquire appropriate supports and services, and keep them in place. Again, as part of being self-determined, the student should monitor and reevaluate supports over time to determine if supports are aiding in progress toward achievement of their goals.

**Conclusion**

Results from the focus group interviews provided insight into postsecondary experiences of 20 college students with and without documented disabilities. When results were compared with Webster’s 22 students with documented disabilities, the evidence of similar experiences concerning college success was compelling. The similarities in their college experiences described by the awareness of themselves and
their awareness of others indicated all college students in both studies identified similar skills, abilities, and knowledge to succeed in college. Students also experienced similar feelings as they transitioned from high school into college. Students were aware of the supports necessary to succeed in college. Perhaps these supports of family and friends, society, and professionals were not always utilized to the greatest extent possible; however, students knew supports and services were there for the asking. There is substantial evidence students are more successful, and have more satisfying and fulfilling adult lives when they are instructed in and practice self-determination. All students could benefit from exploring, learning, and putting into practice the essential skills of self-determination. Perseverance, the appropriate use of supports and services, and well-practiced skills in self-determination should equate to a successful college experience. These results show that progress has been made in the field of transition services for students with disabilities, but that more effort could be focused on the areas of personal growth and social networking.

**Limitations of Current Study**

A potential limitation of this study was the actual focus group questions asked to the two groups of students. The questions were formed based on the literature regarding the transition of students with disabilities into postsecondary environments. Student responses were based solely on the questions posed by the researcher. Additionally, the study could have been strengthened if the researcher involved the participants more in the research process, from question generation, to data analysis, to the final interpretation of the results. An additional possible limitation to this study is the generalizability of the
results. As with any qualitative research study, the results cannot be generalized to populations beyond the sample (Creswell, 2007). Generalizations that are confirmed over and over (as with replication studies) lead to the development of theories. Focus groups can provide trustworthy naturalistic data that also lead to important insights about human behavior, but are not set up to generalize in the same way as survey research (Fern, 2001). However, Webster used a sample of 22 students from one Northeast Ohio university. The researcher utilized 20 students, with and without disabilities, from a Northeast Ohio university, as well as five other universities in and out of Ohio (all adjacent to Ohio). This component of the method of research suggests that findings are similar across settings in different states, at different institutions of higher learning, and across students with and without disabilities.

**Recommendations for Best Practice and Future Research**

The literature over the past 25 years has supported the importance of self-determination training as best practice to prepare students for successful transitions into adult life (Getzel, 2008; Izzo & Lamb, 2003; Ward, 2005). Recommendation for best practice in transition for students with a postsecondary education goal would be to extend self-determination training beyond the academic areas. Students with and without documented disabilities need to improve interaction and problem-solving with peers and instructors in one way or another in order to be successful in college. This study suggested that students with disabilities still see these skills as personal accomplishments when effective. Both groups of students need to advocate for their own preferences and interests, taking into account their own strengths and needs. Results here suggest that
student without disabilities (whether accurate or not) take these skills for granted, and do not mention them as something to be improved. It is possible that students with disabilities who are used to being faced with their limitations may make more accurate self-assessments in the areas of personal growth and social networking, or that they still see their own challenges in these areas. These results suggest the need for more research focusing on the experiences of secondary level student outside the classroom and within the community. Supports, learning, and experiences in social, extra-curricular, and vocational experiences for college bound students with disabilities may close the gap regarding college completion even more.
Disability Policy: Leadership for the 21st Century Syllabus

(Original course/syllabus constructed by Dr. Deborah Webster)
Fall 2003, Kent State University & Central Michigan University
Wednesday 4:30-7:00
White Hall, Room 210

Instructor: Kent State University: Tom Hoza
414 (C) White Hall, Kent, Ohio 44242-0001
E-mail: thoza@kent.edu
Phone: 330.672.0589

Office Hours: Monday 9:30-11:30 am
Wednesday 1:00-3:00 pm

Facilitator: Central Michigan University: Dr. Suzanne Shellady
E-mail: shell1sm@cmich.edu
Phone: 989.774.3507

Text and Readings:


✓ Handouts will also be distributed throughout the course.
✓ Additional readings will be posted on WebCT or handouts will be given in class.

WebCT

Students will be responsible for accessing information from WebCT.
Check mail, calendar, discussion boards and course materials several times per week to keep up-to-date with newly posted information.
All power point slides will be posted on WebCT as well.

WebCT can be accessed by the URL http://class.kent.edu
Click onto log-on page
Enter WebCT ID (which is the first portion of your e-mail- example: thoza) in the top box.
Enter Password (which is your social security number, unless changed) in bottom box.
This should grant you access to *Disability Policy: Leadership in the 21st Century* on WebCT.

If you experience difficulties with accessing WebCT please contact the helpdesk at 330.672.4357 (KSU) or Tom Hoza at 330.672.0589.

This course will be using **POLCOM teleconferencing** equipment to connect Kent State University with the Central Michigan University. This technology uses an Internet 2 connection to transmit audio and video signals. Please follow the subsequent protocol when the universities are connected.

1. For the first 5 weeks of class please state your name before you speak/comment. This is to facilitate better group cohesion by familiarizing ourselves with students from both schools.
2. Avoid making unnecessary noise when others are speaking (speakers on table are sensitive).
3. When addressing the class make an effort to include both the students in your classroom, as well as our peers at the outreach location. This can be accomplished by speaking directly to the students in our room, as well as into the camera. Students on the other side of the camera can tend to feel isolated if direct visual contact is not made.
4. Strive to include everyone in the discussions- It can be easy for one site to dominate the discussion. Make an effort to be mindful of others attempts to add to the conversation. This forum varies from the dynamics of having all present, in body, in one room.
5. With or without this technology, please respect others views and perspectives. They can and should be addressed for the benefit of all to reach a deeper understanding of students who have disabilities as well as those who currently do not. We are all here to learn about disability policy and disability culture and everything that is included therein. We all come from different places and have varying experiences regarding the topics that will be addressed in this class. *Disrespect will not be tolerated.*
6. The use of this technology gives both universities the opportunity to experience the perspectives of students from other locations. We are interested to see how students from both locations view various topics.

Course Description: The course is designed to introduce the student to policy and other disability-related issues that affect postsecondary students with disabilities; in addition to developing the skills necessary to impact policy.

Course Objectives:
The student will:

- Know and understand pertinent legislation (such as the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973), litigation, campus policies and their impact on postsecondary institutions
• Understand issues pertaining to the disability community, such as societal/individual attitudes and experiences, and the emerging civil rights movement.
• Know and understand current research relating to students with disabilities in postsecondary environments.
• Be aware of other exemplary practices and programs for students with disabilities on other campuses
• Develop basic leadership skills, including self-determination, self- and group-advocacy, negotiation, collaboration, and forming coalitions.
• Choose one of the three campus ADA Task Forces (recruitment/retention; access/accommodation; college life) on which to serve, and
• Develop an impact plan that is designed to affect policy implementation as it relates to students with disabilities in postsecondary settings.

Course Requirements:

Attendance and participation:
Attendance is mandatory, students are expected to attend and participate in every class meeting. In order to be an effective team member you must not only be committed to achieving your task forces’ goals and objectives, but be able to communicate with others, solve problems, and voice your opinions, concerns, and potential solutions. Therefore attendance and active participation in class activities is essential.

Attendance: Students will be responsible for providing written statements on the reason for their absence. Excused absences will be granted for illness, family or personal emergency. University policy for absences will be enforced.

Participation: Students will contribute to the discussion of the class no less than 2 occasions per class meeting. The greater the participation, the greater the dynamics of the discussions/activities will be- for all students.
• Students will earn 2 points per class meeting (2 x 15 weeks). One point will be earned for attendance and one point will be earned for participation each class meeting.
Attendance and participation make up 30% of final grade.

Journaling: Developing the skills involved in leadership and self-determination is not a concept that you “memorize,” but rather a concept that permeates every aspect of your life. In addition, it requires a lot of reflection and practice. For every class (starting with the first class), you will need to complete one journal entry in which you thoughtfully write about the readings, lecture, class discussions and related activities for the evening, and link them to the reality of your life outside this classroom. Do not summarize what we talked about or you read, but tell me what you think about the information. In addition, at times you will be asked to respond to specific questions in your journal. The
journal can be handwritten, but must be legible. Plan on writing at least two pages per week. Journal entries will be handed in on a weekly basis. Journals for the previous week will be returned with points and comments the following class meeting.

• Students will earn 4 points per journal. A total of 13 journal entries will be handed in out of 15. Students will be able to waive 2 journal entries of their choice, except for the first (on Leadership) and final journal entry (an evaluation of the course). Journal entries will comprise 50% of final grade.

Journals can be e-mailed to instructor before class meeting (must be in Microsoft Word). Journals can also be turned in on the day of class (either legibly hand-written, or in a 12 point font, double-spaced, word document.)

Rubric for Grading Journal entries:

**DISABILITY POLICY: LEADERSHIP FOR THE 21st CENTURY**
Grade Point Distribution for Journals

Addressed issue(s) arising from class and/or assigned topics(s) (1)............................

Related personal experiences and/or insights to class and/or assigned topic(s) (1) ______

Addressed Issue(s) in a thorough manner (1)..............................................................

Journal handed in on time (1)........................................................................................

Total Score..............................

**Final Project:** Each student will work in a small group to develop an *Impact Plan* with goals for their involvement in systems change at KSU or Central Michigan University. More in depth information on the nature of the plan will be given in class. This project will be worth 20 points- 20% of final grade.

**Grading:**

**Attendance/Participation:** 30%

**Journals:** 50%

**Final Project:** 20%
Final grades for this course will be assigned according to the College of Education.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>% Required</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>90% or above</td>
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<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>80% or above</td>
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<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>70% or above</td>
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<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>60% or above</td>
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<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>59% or below</td>
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</table>

**For Students with Disabilities:** Kent State University recognizes its responsibilities for creating an institutional climate in which students with disabilities can thrive. If you have a disability for which you require special accommodations to promote your learning in this class, please contact me as soon as possible to discuss your needs. Student Disability Services (SDS), is the organization on campus which can help with special accommodations. You may wish to contact SDS at 330.672.3391 (KSU) to verify your eligibility and the options for accommodating your disability.

For students at Central Michigan University contact your office of disability services (989.774.3018).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dates</th>
<th>Topics</th>
<th>Readings/Assignments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>August</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>General Overview of Grant &amp; Course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class #1</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Handouts: “I Don’t Want to be Normal” &amp; The History of Disability: • A History of Otherness • Journal Entry on Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Self-Awareness and Empowerment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class #2</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Parables on Leadership; • Keirsey Character &amp; Temperament Sorter II <a href="http://keirsey.com">http://keirsey.com</a>; • Journal on thoughts elicited from reading “Parables on Leadership.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class #3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Lynch and Gussel (1996) Article- Disclosure and self-Advocacy....; • Journal on Thoughts from reading Lynch &amp; Gussel, and/or Foundational Principles of Leadership handout and/or insights from class discussions. • Review PowerPoint slides on Self-Determination and Advocacy.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Class #4  | 17  | Self-Determination and Advocacy | • Introduction and Chapter 1 in NO PITY  
• Journal on Intro/Chapter 1.  
• Complete *InQ: Assessing Your Thinking Profile*.  
• Review PowerPoint slides On *Disability Culture*. |
| Class #5  | 24  | Disability Culture | • Chapters 2 & 3 in NO PITY  
• Journal on thoughts, feelings and insights from readings. |
| **October**  
Class #6  | 1  | Introduction To Impact Plans | • Read Chapter 4 in NO PITY.  
• Journal on thoughts, feelings and insights from readings.  
• Complete *What’s My Communication Style?* |
| Class #7  | 8  | Collaboration & Communication | Chapter 4 – NO PITY  
Journal on………… |
| Class #8  | 15 | Conflict Resolution | Chapter 5 – NO PITY |
| Class #9  | 22 | Disclosure Policy, Litigation & Legislation | Frank & Wade (1993) Article |
| Class#10 | 29 | Disclosure Policy, Litigation & Legislation Continued | Chapter 6 – NO PITY |
| **November**  
Class #11 | 5  | Initial Meeting Of Task Forces | Chapter 7 – NO PITY |
| Class #12 | 12 | Goal Setting | Chapters 8 & 9 - NO PITY  
Stebnicki, Sibrava & Rice-Mason (1998) Article |
| Class #13 | 19 | Systems Thinking | Chapter 10 |
|          | 26 | Thanksgiving (No Class) |  |
For your first journal entry due on September 3rd, please answer the following questions, in addition to responding to the readings or topics discussed in class:

- What does the term Leadership mean to you?
- What characteristics of a leader do you feel you already possess?
- Do you believe that people are “born leaders,” or do you think leadership is something that can be learned?

*It is the student’s responsibility to withdraw from the class.
APPENDIX B

DISABILITY POLICY RECRUITMENT FLYER
Disability Policy:

Leadership For The 21st Century

Fall 2004
Wednesdays 4:30-7:00 pm

*Stipend Available ($300)  *3 credit course

- Curious about ways to empower yourself?
- Want to learn about laws relating to disability & how these laws affect YOU?
- Want to make your experience at KSU the most productive it can possibly be?

For more information, contact:

Tom Hoza
330-672-0589
414 (C) White Hall
thoza@kent.edu
APPENDIX C

IMPACT PLAN MISSIONS
Impact Plan Missions

2002-2003

**Mission:** (a) To research what other Universities have in place for after hours transportation for student with disabilities. To network with people/offices involved with transportation and find information from the University Transportation Office and the City of Kent Bus Service about after hour transportation.
(b) To expand the hours and range of service areas and stop with accessible transportation.

**University:** Kent State University

**Status:** Completed goals of project: Team worked on goals, however transportation system was taken over by PARTA (county run transportation agency)
Members continued to work with this group in conjunction with Ability Unlimited.

**Mission:** To improve services and supports for the SDS by holding professors, staff, and students accountable for the understanding of students’ accommodations in an effort to better serve and accommodate all.

**University:** Kent State University

**Status:** Partially completed goals of project.

**Mission:** (a) To promote a greater understanding of disabilities and appropriate accommodations at the University of Louisville by providing resources and assistance for members of the faculty and staff. (b) To promote retention and graduation rates of students with disabilities and encouraging students to remain firm in their determination to attain graduation.

**University:** University of Louisville

**Status:** Completed goals of project.

**Mission:** To improve recruitment and retention of high school students entering college.

**University:** Kent State University

**Status:** Students partially completed goals of their project.

**Mission:** To improve campus employment opportunities for students with disabilities.

**University:** Kent State University

**Status:** Partially completed goals of their project.

**Mission:** To provide access and information regarding accessibility to buildings and facilities on campus through means of an accessible map.

**University:** Kent State University

**Status:** Completed goals of their project.
**Mission:** To increase access and accommodations on campus.
**University:** Clarion University
**Status:** Partially completed goals of their project.

**Mission:** To increase self-advocacy for students on campus through workshops.
**University:** Clarion University
**Status:** Partially completed goals of their project.

**Mission:** *Open Doors:* A Plan to inform students with disabilities about how to make the most of their university experience:
**University:** Clarion University
**Status:** Partially completed goals of their project.

**Mission:** *Finding Clarion’s Best Kept Secret.* Increase awareness around campus and surrounding community. Educate the university and the community, give motivation, create positive environments, promote self-advocacy, and develop leadership through understanding.
**University:** Clarion University
**Status:** Partially completed goals of their project.

**Mission:** To establish awareness and further understanding among incoming freshman about disabilities, and to incorporate disabilities into the cultural aspects of diversity.
**University:** Bowling Green State University
**Status:** Partially completed goals of their project.

**Mission:** To educate faculty on their role and responsibilities in working with student and disabilities under ADA accommodations and beyond.
**University:** Bowling Green State University
**Status:** Partially completed goals of their project.

**2003-2004**

**Mission:** To increase signage alteration and closed caption accessibility
**University:** Kent State University – Stark Campus
**Status:** Partially completed goals of their project.

**Mission:** *Universality By Design:* To address issues of physical barriers on campus, based on student need.
**University:** Kent State University
**Status:** Partially completed goals of their project.

**Mission:** To improve high school students awareness of available services through educational outreach.
University: Kent State University  
Status: Partially completed goals of their project.

Mission: To empower SDS members throughout their careers at CMU, increase awareness of the rights and responsibilities of these students and provide opportunities to network with students facing similar challenges.

University: Central Michigan University  
Status: Partially completed goals of their project.

Mission: The purpose of this Task Force project is to implement a disability awareness seminar on the campus of Central Michigan University, Mt. Pleasant, Michigan in the year 2004 addressing the concerns of all disabled students regarding disability accommodations, rights, accessibility to post-secondary education, and the education of the faculty, staff, and general public regarding persons with disabilities. It is our mission to leave this campus a better place for future disabled students than we entered the halls of academia.

University: Central Michigan University  
Status: Partially completed goals of their project.

2004-2005

Mission: Our mission is to improve snow and ice removal of all sidewalks, ramps and entrances to buildings on the campus of Kent State University on weekdays and especially on weekends.

University: Kent State University  
Status: Partially completed goals of their project.
REFERENCES


Hoye, K. B. (1978, July). Integrating school-to-work into pre-service teacher education. Paper presented At Conference for Professors of Education in Ohio, Kent, OH.


Webster, D. D. (2001). *Giving voice to students with disabilities who have successfully transitioned to college: Or how LL Slim became “the best darn gimp on the planet.”* Dissertation Abstracts International (UMI No. 3014153)


