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Self-determination of students with disabilities in post-secondary education

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SELF-DETERMINATION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES IN
POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of Educational Leadership, Research and Counseling

by
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B.A., Louisiana State University, 1992
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May, 2005

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Participants

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ABSTRACT

This research study sought to discover how students with disabilities utilized self-determination in the pursuit of and participation in post-secondary education. Qualitative methods were employed in this study, specifically the use of multiple case studies with embedded units of analysis. Students with a disability, who possessed self-determination and were currently enrolled in an institution of higher education, were the primary participants in this study. Additional information was gathered from parents, professionals, or other individuals who were familiar with the student's pursuit of and participation in postsecondary education. Embedded units of analysis for study consisted of information and skills designed to enhance self-determination, access to opportunities to exhibit self-determination, and facilitative support from others. Data gathering consisted of interviews with multiple sources that were able to provide rich information regarding the phenomenon of self-determination. The constant comparative method was used for data analysis. Findings support the theoretical assumptions that self-determination is enhanced through information and skills designed to enhance self-determination, access to opportunities to exhibit self-determination, and facilitative support from others. Other themes that emerged from the data include use of accommodations, problem-solving, stickability attitude, and a family member working in an institution of higher education.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Lindsey is a 32-year-old female who was born with Cerebral Palsy, a condition that is usually acquired during fetal development or near the time of birth. The disorder is characterized by loss of movement or loss of other nerve functions. This loss of movement usually affects the limbs and can vary widely in the degree of severity (American Medical Association Family Medical Guide, 1987).

At the time of Lindsey's birth, doctors told Lindsey's parents that her Cerebral Palsy was so severe that she would never walk and would never talk. Doctors suggested that Lindsey's parents put her in an institution for the developmentally disabled, but they refused to do so. Instead they chose to raise Lindsey in their home along with her older brother, Jeff. They were a family.

In 1975, Lindsey started kindergarten. There were many things that Lindsey was not able to do. She could not write because she did not have the fine motor skills necessary to hold a pencil. She could not recite the alphabet because she could not speak. She could not participate in regular physical education because she did not have control over her gross motor skills. Lindsey even had difficulty at mealtime because she could not feed herself.

Lindsey's school system was not set up to provide one on one assistance to her, but Lindsey was determined to complete her education in a regular school. Therefore her grandmother brought her to school every day and waited outside the classroom in case she needed assistance. The other students assisted her in class by

turning pages in her book and writing down her assignments. Lindsey's grandmother would bring Lindsey home for lunch so that she could feed her. With these supports, Lindsey remained in school and she learned to read.

When Lindsey entered high school, like many other high school aged children, she had dreams and goals that she was determined to accomplish. She dreamed of being a cheerleader for her high school. She wanted to be a camp counselor for other children with disabilities. She set a goal of graduating from high school and attending college at her local university. Lindsey hoped that she would eventually get a job so that she could support herself financially. Most importantly, she wanted to be as independent as possible, to be in control of her life. Lindsey even dreamed of getting married one day.

Although Lindsey used a wheelchair for mobility and could not speak, she became the mascot for her high school cheerleading squad. She never missed a practice and she never missed a game. Then, she became a camp counselor and served as a role model for other children with disabilities. Lindsey graduated from high school in May of 1992 and wanted to follow through with her goal of attending college. The odds were against Lindsey. Studies show that only one-fourth of students with disabilities go on to postsecondary education, as compared to students without disabilities (Blackorby & Wagner, 1996; Fairweather & Shaver, 1991; Wagner, Blackorby & Hebbler, 1993). However, students with disabilities are more likely to reach their goals if they possess self-determination skills (Everson, 2001;

Wehmeyer, 1992; Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 1997), and Lindsey was definitely determined.

Lindsey began the University of Louisiana at Lafayette in August of 1992 and was able to physically get to classes with the support of a motorized wheelchair and an accessible van. In addition, she received support services through the University's Disability Services Office. Her support services included notetakers so that she would have a hard copy of the class notes. Lindsey also received tests in an alternative test format. Since Lindsey was unable to write, the alternative test format allowed her to read the test question and then answer the test question by nodding her head yes or no. Lindsey also used assistive technology in the form of an accessible computer. The computer allowed Lindsey to type class papers by controlling the keyboard from a switch attached to her forehead.

With her goals set, and the accommodations provided, Lindsey was able to graduate from the University of Louisiana at Lafayette in 1998. In 2001, Lindsey reached another one of her long-term goals; she became the wife of Dr. Milton Lynch. Today, Lindsey is a college graduate; she owns her own business and is happily married. To this day, Lindsey is still unable to walk and unable to talk, but she possessed the self-determination necessary for her to reach all of her long-term goals.

Lindsey's success in reaching her long-term goals, and specifically her goal of a post-secondary education, is not the norm for persons with disabilities. In fact, studies show that students with disabilities are less likely to complete post-secondary

education than their non-disabled peers (Bursuck, Rose, Cowen & Yahaya, 1989; Sitlington & Frank, 1990). What was it about Lindsey or Lindsey's situation that made her able to reach so many of her long-term goals? Why are some students with disabilities successful in higher education and others are not?

Some special education experts would say that it is Lindsey's self-determination skills that enabled her to be so successful: her ability to set goals, to identify steps necessary to reach those goals, and to problem-solve barriers along the way. But what exactly is self-determination, and how do students utilize self-determination within the context of post-secondary education?

This chapter explores the concept of self-determination, its key components, and a theory of self-determination as a developmental process. It also identifies how self-determination emerged as a topic of research, and explores self-determination in the context of secondary and post-secondary education. Furthermore, this chapter states the problem and purpose for this research, and outlines the research questions directing this study.

Self-Determination

One of the earliest definitions of self-determination in the special education literature was provided by Ward (1988), who defines self-determination as "the attitudes which lead people to define goals for themselves and the ability to take the initiative to achieve those goals" (p. 2). Wehmeyer (1996) defines self-determination as "acting as the primary causal agent in one's life and making choices and decisions regarding one's quality of life free from undue external influence or interference" (p.

22). According to Wehmeyer, individuals are self-determined if their actions reflect four essential characteristics: (a) the individual acted autonomously, (b) the behaviors were self-regulated, (c) the person initiated and responded to events in a psychologically empowered manner, and (d) the person acted in a self-realizing manner. Field, Hoffman, and Posch (1997) define self-determination as “the ability to identify and achieve goals based on a foundation of knowing and valuing oneself” (p. 164). Finally, Martin and Marshall (1995) provide a more practical way of defining a self-determined individual as an individual who

knows how to choose – they know what they want and how to get it. From an awareness of personal needs, self-determined individuals choose goals, then doggedly pursue them. This involves asserting an individual’s presence, making his or her needs known, evaluating progress toward meeting goals, adjusting performance and creating unique approaches to solve problems (p. 147).

All of these definitions of self-determination vary somewhat; however, what is central to all of them are the concepts of choice, control, and freedom (Field, 1996). For the purposes of this study, self-determination is defined as “the attitudes which lead people to define goals for themselves and the ability to take the initiative to achieve those goals” (Ward, 1988, p. 2). In this study, self-determination is operationalized as the actions of 1.) setting goals, 2.) identifying steps necessary to reach goals, and 3.) problem-solving barriers to goal attainment. This construct of self-determination and its operationalization are more fully understood by taking into consideration several theoretical assumptions derived from the psychology and disability literature.

Self-Determination Theory

Self-determination theory, rooted in psychological research, can be described as

a macro-theory of human motivation concerned with the development and functioning of personality within social contexts. The theory focuses on the degree to which human behaviors are volitional or self-determined – that is, the degree to which people endorse their actions at the highest level of reflection and engage in the actions with a full sense of choice (www.psych.rochester.edu/SDT/theory.html).

The social environment with which a person is engaged can either facilitate or suppress an individual's natural inclination towards self-determination.

(www.psych.rochester.edu/SDT/theory.html).

In the disability literature, Powers and Deshler (2002) propose three theoretical assumptions for the enhancement of self-determination:

1. Information and skills that foster a person's capacities for decision making and self direction (e.g. strategies for planning, achieving goals, developing partnerships with others, and self-management);
2. Access to opportunities to express self-determination (e.g. participation in a full range of educational opportunities, having control over supports and resources);
3. Facilitative support from others (e.g. family, friends, professionals, and mentors) (p. 11).

The self-determination theory from the psychological literature and the theoretical assumptions derived from the disability literature are similar in that they both point out the impact that society (support from others) has on an individual's self-determination. In addition, the self-determination theory mimics the emphasis on choice that is a key component in the definitions of self-determination from the disability literature. It is important to note the similarities between the self-

determination theory found in the psychology literature and what is reported on self-determination in the disability literature because it gives more credence to each of them. However, in order to provide clarity in this research, the theoretical assumptions from the disability literature will be used to guide this study.

The term self-determination was first identified in the disability literature in 1972 (Erwin & Brown, 2003; Wehmeyer, 1998). Since then there has been a growing body of literature dedicated to defining the term, developing theories, and confirming the importance of self-determination for individuals with disabilities. To better understand the psychology-based theory of self-determination and the theoretical assumptions of what factors enhance self-determination, it is important to understand how self-determination emerged as a construct related to individuals with disabilities.

The Emergence of Self-determination

Although self-determination was identified in the literature over 30 years ago, (Erwin & Brown, 2003; Wehmeyer, 1998) it is a relatively new construct in the lives of individuals with disabilities. The emergence of self-determination has been a slow process that began with the enactment of the Education for all Handicapped Children Act of 1975. Since then, several other key pieces of federal legislation and the implementation of federal initiatives have collectively formed the stepping stones in the development of self-determination.

The Education for All Handicapped Children Act

The first piece of legislation that paved the way for self-determination was the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (PL 94-142) (Ward, 1998).

This law guaranteed an education to all children with disabilities, and emphasized that the education should be provided in the least restrictive environment possible. This law, often referred to as Public Law 94-142, established that each child should have an Individualized Education Program (IEP) plan developed. Furthermore, Public Law 94-142 permitted children to attend their IEP planning meetings, when appropriate (20 U.S.C. § 1400 *et seq.*).

Although the law permitted children to be involved in the IEP process, “anecdotal information indicated that most students did not attend their IEP meetings. Therefore, one can assume that the other IEP committee members (i.e. parents, teachers, administrators) almost never considered the child’s attendance to be appropriate” (Ward, 1998, p. xiv). Despite the anecdotal lack of participation by children, Public Law 94-142 did initiate a federal pattern of establishing the rights of children with disabilities to be self-determined. It was almost 15 years later before any other significant federal steps were taken in regards to self-determination.

The Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services

In January of 1989, the United States Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS) embarked on several self-determination initiatives. Their initial step was to support a national conference of individuals with disabilities, educators, parents, and state and local administrators with the purpose of recommending federal activities to promote self-determination (Ward, 1999). Following the conference, “a discretionary funding program was launched through the Secondary Education and Transitional Services for Youth with

Disabilities Program to support 26 demonstration projects of self-determination models during fiscal years 1990 – 1993. The focus of these projects was to identify and teach students skills necessary for self-determination, as well as to identify system-wide activities that would help students have more input in the decisions that affected their lives” (Ward & Kohler, 1996, p. 3). The initial demonstration projects were successful in the sense that they collectively emphasized the need for further research on self-determination. Furthermore, the U.S. Department of Education was prompted by the original demonstration projects to fund additional self-determination research and demonstration projects.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

As OSERS was implementing demonstration models to identify and teach self-determination skills to students with disabilities, The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1990 (PL 101-476) was being created with a special focus on federally mandated transition services. Transition services are defined in the law as

a coordinated set of activities for a student, designed within an outcome oriented process, which promotes movement from school to post-school activities, including post-secondary education, vocational training, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation. The coordinated set of activities shall be based upon the individual student’s needs, taking into account the student’s preferences and interests, and shall include instruction, community experiences, the development of employment and other post-school adult living objectives, and, when appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation. (20 U.S.C. § 1401 [a][19])

In response to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1990 (IDEA), the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), developed regulations for the law, mandating that “all students, beginning no later than age 16-- and at a younger age, if determined appropriate—be invited to attend the Individualized Education Program (IEP) meeting at which a transition plan is to be developed” (34 C.F.R. § 300.344[c]). IDEA, reinforced by the OSEP regulations, provided a national emphasis on the rights of individuals with disabilities to be included in plans that affect their lives.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Amendment of 1997 (PL 105-17) further strengthened the federal requirements mandating transition planning for all youth with disabilities. The regulations outlined three key factors that changed the way transition services had been provided in the past. These factors include: that transition planning be conducted for all students, ages 14 and older, that students be invited to their transition planning meetings, and that decisions be based on the student’s interests and preferences. These three factors gave students legal rights to choice and control in their lives, thus an opportunity to be self-determined.

On December 3, 2004, President George W. Bush signed another reauthorization IDEA called the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA). This IDEA reauthorization (P.L. 108-446) changed the required minimum age for transition planning back to age 16, however, the law was simultaneously strengthened in terms of a focus on postsecondary education. Although the 1990 law did list postsecondary education as one of the possible

postsecondary activities, the 2004 reauthorization declares that transition planning should include “appropriate measurable postsecondary goals based upon age appropriate transition assessments...” (P.L. 108-446 § 614 [aa]).

Ideally, the transition process should be a planning process, which identifies activities that lead to student identified goals. This process should be facilitated for all students with disabilities beginning at age 16 and should be reviewed at least annually. Although not explicitly stated, this transition process that allows students choice and control, is a mechanism for teaching and learning self-determination.

Self-Determination and Secondary Education

The Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services initiatives, and the amendments to the Individuals with Disabilities Act not only established rights for students with disabilities but also outlined responsibilities for secondary schools. Schools were given the significant responsibility of adequately preparing students for adult life. In doing so, not only were they responsible for ensuring that students with disabilities complete their high school education, but they were also responsible for promoting their transition from secondary education to employment and post-secondary education (Powers & Deshler, 2002).

In secondary education, it is the school system’s responsibility to identify the student’s disability. Furthermore, the school system is legally responsible for providing the appropriate accommodations. Many times, students are identified early in their education as having a disability, and despite the federal laws giving students

rights to be involved in decisions affecting their lives, decisions regarding accommodations are often made absent the student's input.

Providing appropriate transition services, which includes involving students in the process and giving them an opportunity to be self-determined is a win-win situation. The school system lives up to their responsibilities as identified in federal laws, and the student is given the tools necessary for success in adult life. This success is supported by a study conducted by Halpern, Yovanoff, Doren, and Benz (1995) which found that student participation in transition planning was associated with post-secondary success. However, despite laws mandating transition services, not all students with disabilities are receiving transition services. In fact, a survey conducted in Minnesota of adolescents with disabilities found that, of almost 1,500 youth surveyed, only 50 percent had heard of transition planning (Wright, 1996).

As a result of federal mandates, students with disabilities increasingly gained the right to be included in planning that affected their lives. Research on self-determination identified factors that increased self-determination, and model programs taught students with disabilities the self-determination skills necessary to be successful in achieving post-school outcomes.

Self-Determination and Post-secondary Education

The number of individuals with disabilities attending post-secondary education programs has substantially increased in the past two decades. In 1998 it was estimated that more than 9 percent of college first year students and more than 10 percent of all college students experienced a disability, up from 3 percent in 1978

(Gajar, 1998). However, despite these advances, a lower percentage of people with disabilities attend post-secondary school, compared to individuals without disabilities. It is estimated that youth with disabilities transition to post-secondary education at only about one-fourth the rate of youth without disabilities and one-third the rate of economically disadvantaged youth (Blackorby & Wagner, 1996; Fairweather & Shaver, 1991).

Accommodations

Although students with disabilities are showing up in higher education in greater numbers, they do not fare as well as their nondisabled peers. Individualized support plays a critical role in promoting the success of post-secondary students with disabilities. The decision to go to school is only the first step. Students must also access the appropriate accommodations necessary for them to be successful in post-secondary education. However, again, this is often a fundamental shift from their experiences in secondary school, where the school system is legally responsible for identifying and providing accommodations. The responsibility is now the student's.

When appropriate services are provided, students with disabilities succeed at levels commensurate with their abilities and with their nondisabled peers (Dalke, 1993; Gajoar, Murphy, & Hunt, 1982). Likewise, failure to seek appropriate support is associated with reduced grade-point averages and early withdrawal from school (Dalke, 1993). Important post-secondary educational supports include programs to prepare college entry, tutoring, assistive technology, adaptive equipment, accommodations and compensatory techniques, advocacy, counseling, peer support,

career planning, job-seeking skills, internships, and career placement with follow-up (Power & Deshler, 2002).

Again, the issue at hand here is that although supports are generally available, it is student's responsibility to self identify and make their accommodation needs known. This is a fundamental shift in service delivery from secondary schools to post-secondary education. Whereas in secondary education it was the school system's legal responsibility to identify children with disabilities and ensure that proper supports were provided, in post-secondary education the student has full responsibility. This shift in responsibility amplifies the importance of a transition process including self-determination training and building the capacities of youth to act as key agents in their educational decision making, planning, and instruction (Powers & Deshler, 2002).

The U.S. Department of Education Strategic Plan, 1998 – 2002, describes post-secondary education as “America's traditional gateway to the professions, more challenging jobs, and higher wages” (p. 21). It is clear that post-secondary education enhances an individual's chances of achieving high status, wealth, and job stability (Bidwell, 1989; Gingerich, 1996; Tinto, 1987). Evidence suggests that as a whole, students with disabilities have demonstrated improvement in their rates of school completion, employment, and post-secondary participation (Clark, 1990; Gajar, 1998; Henderson, 1995). However, their success remains well below that of their peers without disabilities and critical barriers, such as accessibility and the lack of skills necessary for success in college, must be addressed if youth with disabilities are to

successfully assume valued roles as full citizens in our society (Powers & Deshler, 2002).

Gender Differences

The historical difficulty individuals with disabilities have had in gaining access to post-secondary education mimics the experiences of women. It has only been within the past 30 years, with the passage of Title IX of the Education Amendments in 1972, that women have gained full legal rights to equal participation in post-secondary education. Despite the right to full participation, research indicates that the experiences of women in post-secondary education differ from those of men (Hensley, 2003; Pinar, 2003; Ropers-Huilman, 2003). These differences are found in paternalistic attitudes, violence and security issues, and also in self esteem of women in post-secondary education. (Hensley, 2003; Pinar, 2003; Ropers-Huilman, 2003) Although much has been learned over the years regarding the differences in post-secondary education experiences of women and men, very little is known about differences in self-determination between men and women. Exploration into self-determination between men and women will provide a broader insight into a fuller understanding of the construct of self-determination

Problem Statement

Not all students with disabilities have the self-determination skills necessary to reach their post-secondary education goals. Federal laws over the past thirty years, and research literature over the past 10 years emphasize the importance of self-determination skills on post-secondary school outcomes for students with disabilities.

(Clark, 1990; Gajar, 1998; Henderson, 1995) Although there have been several self-determination models, instructional strategies, and curriculum developed over the past decade (Eisenman & Chamberlin, 2001; Everson, 2001; Field & Hoffman, 1996; Halpern, Herr, Wolf, Doven, Johnson, & Lawson, 1977; Powers, 1997), there are no studies that explore how students with disabilities utilize self-determination in general, nor are there any studies that explore the utilization of self-determination in the pursuit of, and participation in, post-secondary education. Professionals in the disability field cannot determine the role of self-determination in post-secondary education until they can describe how it is exhibited in that context. Furthermore, professionals who work with disability issues or gender issues can not fully understand self-determination as an issue related to gender unless the differences between the self-determination of women and men is explored.

On a broad level, this study will contribute to educational knowledge about students with disabilities in general. More specifically, this study will contribute to educational knowledge by enhancing the literature related to students with disabilities in post-secondary education, the literature on self-determination, and the literature on self-determination as it relates to gender. This study will also help fill a gap in the literature on self-determination within the context of post-secondary education. Finally, this study can contribute to practice by identifying how students with disabilities utilize self-determination skills. Information gained from this study can be used by professionals who implement self-determination training programs. Those programs can then be refined to meet students' needs in a more appropriate way, with

the ultimate goal of further enhancing the self-determination skills of students with disabilities.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore how students with disabilities use self-determination in the pursuit of, and participation in, post-secondary education. Literature has already examined the various self-determination training models, curricula, instructional strategies, teachers' knowledge of self-determination, and the short-term effects of self-determination training. However, professionals do not know how students with disabilities utilize self-determination in real life situations. For example, little is known regarding how students utilize self-determination, i.e. setting goals, identifying steps to reach goals, and problem-solving barriers along the way. Understanding how students are utilizing self-determination, specifically in regards to the pursuit of, and participation in, post-secondary education will help professionals better understand the real impact of self-determination training.

Research Questions

The research questions are guided by the theoretical assumptions that self-determination is enhanced through:

1. Information and skills that foster a person's capacities for decision making and self direction (e.g. strategies for planning, achieving goals, developing partnerships with others, and self-management);
2. Access to opportunities to express self-determination (e.g. participation in a full range of educational opportunities, having control over supports and resources);
3. Facilitative support from others (e.g. family, friends, professionals, and mentors) (Powers & Deshler, 2002, p. 11).

As such, the research questions are:

1. How has self-determination training influenced students' post-secondary education goals?
2. What opportunities have students pursued to express their self-determination?
3. How have others supported students in their self-determination?
4. What are the similarities and differences in the utilization of self-determination in post-secondary education between men and women?

Summary

In summary, self-determination is a relatively new construct in the lives of individuals with disabilities and gives individuals choice, control and freedom in decisions affecting their lives. Self-determination should be a major emphasis as students transition from secondary school to post-secondary education, and studies indicate that student participation in transition planning is associated with post-secondary success. However, professionals do not know how students utilize self-determination in the pursuit of, and participation in, post-secondary education. Therefore, this research will explore the utilization of self-determination within the context of postsecondary education. Chapter two of this proposal reviews the literature on self-determination, including how self-determination and its key components are defined, and the existing research on self-determination. Chapter three is devoted to a discussion of the methodology for this study including the rationale for using qualitative methods.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

As stated in the introduction, self-determination is a relatively new construct in the disability literature; however it is one which is extremely important in the lives of individuals with disabilities. This chapter begins by outlining the steps taken to find all relevant literature. Second, this chapter defines self-determination and elaborates on its key components. This chapter then introduces the available literature to support the theoretical assumptions that self-determination is enhanced through information and skills, access to opportunities to express self-determination, and facilitative support from others. Furthermore, this chapter presents literature which emphasizes other factors related to self-determination, and emphasizes the importance of self-determination in terms of post-secondary school outcomes for individuals with disabilities. Finally, this chapter elaborates on the historical post-secondary experiences of women as compared to men, and demonstrates the need to study the differences between men and women with disabilities.

Literature Search

Several steps were employed in the search for applicable literature. First of all, a determination was made regarding the topics which would be applicable to this study. The narrowest scope included self-determination of students with disabilities in post-secondary education. In addition, the topics directly related to the research questions were also included: information and skills designed to enhance self-

determination, capacity and opportunities to exhibit self-determination, facilitative support from others, and the intersect of disability and gender.

Using these topics as a guide to searching for literature, the following combinations of terms were used in database searches: disability and self-determination, disability and higher education, disability and post-secondary education, disability and self-determination and women, disability and higher education and female, disability and higher education and gender, disability and higher education and accommodations, disability and self-determination and family, disability and higher education and decision making, disability and choice-making and higher education, disability and higher education and problem-solving, disability and higher education and self-determination, disability and higher education and transition.

These search terms were used to search the following databases: Academic Search Premier, Education Resources Information Center (ERIC), and Psychological Abstracts (PsycINFO). Academic Search Premier is a collection of 7,962 scholarly journals. The Education Resources Information Center (ERIC) covers educational research and resources, and the Psychological Abstracts (PsycINFO) includes information from over 1300 journals, dissertations, and technical reports concerning psychology and related disciplines.

In addition to reviewing these databases, I reviewed the reference lists of all related journal articles and books to identify other possible sources of information. I also contacted the Center on Self-Determination and inquired about new research

being conducted on self-determination, and leading authors in the field of self-determination. Finally, I used the Web of Knowledge to identify cited sources from lead authors in the field of self-determination. The authors whose work I tracked are as follows: Michael Wehmeyer, Laurie Powers, M. J. Ward, S. Field, and D. Deshler. These authors were chosen because they either developed self-determination instruments or were regularly cited by others regarding self-determination.

Self-Determination Defined

Although there are numerous definitions of self-determination, the underlying emphasis among all of them is choice, control, and freedom (Field, 1996). Choice implies that individuals with disabilities should not be limited by their disability from access to options which are available to individuals without disabilities. Control means that individuals with disabilities can and should be the primary agent that regulates decisions and actions in their lives. And freedom emphasizes a basic fundamental right of all citizens, including those with disabilities. As so eloquently stated in the Rehabilitation Act, and further supported by the research findings of Congress and reported in the Developmental Disabilities Bill of Rights Act of 2000 (P.L. 106-402), “the acquisition of a disability, whether it be by birth, accident, injury, or the aging process, does not diminish the rights of an individual to full participation in society, nor does it diminish their rights as full citizens of that society.”

For purposes of this study, the definition of self-determination proposed by Ward (1988) will be used as a basis for further understanding self-determination.

Ward (1988) defines self-determination as “the attitudes which lead people to define goals for themselves and the ability to take the initiative to achieve those goals” (p. 2). Therefore, this definition of self-determination is operationalized as the actions of 1.) setting goals, 2.) identifying steps necessary to reach goals, and 3.) problem-solving barriers to goal attainment. Inherent in this definition are the key components of choice-making, decision making, problem-solving, and goal setting and attainment. Although the operationalized definition of self-determination is not explicitly prevalent in the literature, the components of choice-making, decision making, problem-solving, and goal setting and attainment have been studied.

Choice-making “refers to a process of selecting between alternatives based on individual preferences” (Wehmeyer, Agran, and Hughes, 1998, p. 14), whereas decision making skills “refer to a broader set of skills that incorporate choice-making as but one component” (Wehmeyer, Agran, and Hughes, 1998, p. 14). Decision making can be broken down into five separate steps:

1. Listing relevant action alternatives;
2. Identifying possible consequences of those actions;
3. Assessing the probability of each consequence occurring (if the action were undertaken);
4. Establishing the relative importance (value or utility) of each consequence; and
5. Integrating these values and probabilities to identify the most attractive course of action” (Beyth-Marom, Fischhoff, Jacobs, Quadrel, and Furby, 1991, p. 21).

According to Wehmeyer, Agran, and Hughes (1998), “decision making is a process of weighing the adequacy of various solutions” (p. 16), whereas a problem is a

perplexing question or issue whose solution is not readily known (Beyth-Marom, Fischhoff, Jacobs, Quadrel, & Furby, 1991; Wehmeyer, Agran, & Hughes, 1998).

Goal setting is actually a precursor to decision making. The student must first identify his or her desires for the future. This can come in the form of a statement, but must be concrete and specific. For example, “I want to be a doctor.” Decision making and choice-making follow goal setting. The student can then decide that he or she will attend college as a step towards his or her goal. The student must then determine the available options for post-secondary education and make a choice among those available options. The student may need to problem-solve if his or her entrance scores are not compatible with the school of his or her choice. Depending on the outcome of the problem-solving, other decisions and choices may need to be made. This self-determination process of goal setting, decision making, choice-making, and problem-solving is not as simplistic in reality as the example provided above. Many students with disabilities, who have been educated by a paternalistic system, must be taught these skills.

Information and Skills Designed to Enhance Self-Determination

Powers and Deshler (2002) identified three factors that enhanced self-determination. The first being “information and skills that foster a person’s capacities for decision making and self-direction” (p. 11). Information and skills includes specific training a student receives regarding “strategies for planning, achieving goals, developing partnerships with others, and self-management (p.11). There have been several models, programs and instructional strategies designed to provide

students with disabilities the information and skills necessary to enhance their self-determination. Research on these programs has overall shown a positive effect on the self-determination of individuals with disabilities.

Argan, Blanchard, and Wehmeyer (2000) studied one particular model called the self-determination learning model of instruction. In this study they used a Global Assessment Scale to measure the effects of the self-determination learning model of instruction on the self-determination skills of students with significant cognitive disabilities. A positive effect was predicted. Participants consisted of 19 students with disabilities who had received special education services. These students, 12 male and 7 female, had a variety of disabilities. These students were given a self-determination learning model of instruction in different settings where they identified target behaviors. Six teachers and eight paraprofessionals collected data on a regular basis and completed a Goal Attainment Scale for each student. Raw scores on the Goal Attainment Scale were converted to T Scores. This allowed for comparisons between goal areas across subjects. T score values of 50 were considered acceptable, meaning that the student learned the goal/skill. Standard scores of 40 or below indicated that acceptable outcomes were not achieved. Finally, scores of 60 and above indicated that student's progress exceeded expectations. Results indicated that 89% of the students achieved their personal goals at the teacher rated expected outcome levels. All but two of the participants improved their performance of target behaviors after receiving the self-determination model of instruction. Overall, the

model was found to be effective across students with a variety of disabling conditions.

Another model program called Partners in Policymaking, focus on self-determination in terms of self-advocacy. Cunconan-Lahr, and Brotherson (1996) used a survey, semi-structured interviews, and interactive focus groups to identify the advocacy roles and experiences of individuals with disabilities and parents of individuals with disabilities who participated in an the Partners in Policymaking training program. Participants consisted of sixty-four consumers and parents who had completed the Partners in Policymaking training from 1990 to 1998. The survey data were used to analyze advocacy activities. Focus group transcripts and telephone interview tapes were used to identify supports and barriers to advocacy. Major themes and issues were identified from this data. Three major themes emerged from the data: empowering own voice, networking with others, and attitudes of courage and leadership.

Educator's Capacity to Support Self-Determination

Although there are numerous -determination models, curricula, instructional strategies, and programs in existence, not all students possess the self-determination skills necessary to reach their post-secondary self education goals. Some experts in the field believe that teachers are not adequately trained to use the self-determination tools available to them, and thus not adequately prepared to teach self-determination to students. Thoma, Nathanson, Baker, and Tamura (2002) used a survey instrument to identify if teachers are aware of self-determination and are they being taught self-

determination curricula in teacher preparation programs. Participants for this study consisted of special education teachers in 5 southwestern states. Names of these teachers were obtained from the Department of Education in each state. The names were entered into Filemaker Pro and 500 teachers were randomly selected. A 46-item survey was mailed to these participants and a 46% return rate was obtained. SPSS for Windows was used to generate descriptive statistics. “Correlation analyses revealed that there were no significant differences ($p > .05$, and $p > .01$) in teacher’s reported skills in facilitating self-determination and years of teaching, in disability group taught and/or degrees earned. The results of this survey reinforced the findings of other researchers. That is, special educators have heard of self-determination as a concept and clearly believe that it is important to teach the core component skills that allow students with disabilities an opportunity to be self-determined. However, teachers are not being adequately trained.

Thoma, Baker, and Saddler (2002) hypothesized that teacher education programs do not include instruction of strategies that help support student self-determination throughout the transition from secondary school to adult life. They used a survey instrument to collect data from faculty members who teach courses on transition from school to adult life, secondary special education or other courses where information about self-determination would be included. Surveys were mailed to special education departments across the U.S. More than 100 surveys were mailed with a 41% response rate. The survey was a 20-item survey to solicit university faculty members’ perceptions and skills in preparing special educators to support or

teach various component skills of self-determination. Questions were multiple choice, and Likert scale format. A few questions were open-ended. Information from the surveys was entered into a spreadsheet and analyzed by using SPSS for Windows. Due to the low response rate only descriptive statistics were calculated. Results indicate that “few of the faculty members in this study included instruction of self-determination in their courses. However it is clear that faculty members who taught self-determination believed that it is extremely important to teach it both in its entirety and broken down into the core component skills” (Thoma, Baker, & Saddler, 2002, p. 85).

Wehmeyer, Argan and Hughes (2002) utilized a survey instrument to identify whether classroom setting or type of disability served influenced teacher’s promotion of self-determination and use of student directed strategies. Participants in this study consisted of teachers providing instruction to students with disabilities between the ages of 14 and 21, and thus eligible for transition related services. The survey was mailed to 9,762 persons identified as educators from the membership lists of The Association for Severe Handicaps (TASH) and several subdivisions of the Council for Exceptional Children. 1,219 completed surveys were received. Responses came from all 50 states and two U.S. territories. The instrument consisted of two sections: the first section gathered demographic data. The second section focused on teaching self-determination. Mean scores were calculated for questions with Likert scale responses. An analysis of variance was computed on questions with Likert scale responses. Finally, a Chi-square analysis was conducted on 4 questions with a “yes”

or “no” response. “Findings suggest that nationally, teachers working with secondary age students are generally familiar with the self-determination construct” (Wehmeyer, Argan, & Hughes, 2002, p. 63). The majority of teachers believed that self-determination instruction was important; that promoting self-determination would be helpful in preparing students for success in post-school life and implementation of student directed learning strategies was promising.

Two of the three studies discussed above used teachers as participants. The third study used higher education faculty as participants. However, there were still two important themes that emerged from these studies. First, both faculty and teachers are aware of self-determination and believe it to be an important component for transitioning students with disabilities from secondary education to post-secondary school outcomes. Second, there is a consensus among these studies that teachers are not being adequately prepared to teach self-determination to students with disabilities. This points out a large discrepancy in practice for both faculty at institutions of higher education and for teachers at the secondary school level. This gap illustrates the need for more research to inform practice. In addition, it points out the stark reality that although self-determination improves post school outcomes, teachers are not prepared to teach self-determination and therefore, not all students’ self-determination experiences are the same.

Capacity and Opportunity to Exhibit Self-Determination

Powers and Deshler (2002) theoretically propose that self-determination is enhanced through a second factor: “access to opportunities to express self-

determination” (p. 11). This means that students have opportunities to participate in a “full range of educational opportunities” (p. 11), including the opportunity to participate in social and scholastic organizations, school sponsored recreational activities, , and participation in, educational support services. Furthermore, the concept of having access to opportunities to express self-determination means that the students have choice and control over supports and resources (Powers and Deshler (2002). Having choice and control implies that students have the capacity to exercise that choice and control.

Mithaug, Campeau, and Wolman (2003) “compared prospects for self-determination of students enrolled in special and general education by asking students and teachers to report on their capacities and opportunities to self-determine in school and at home” (p. 61). The researchers tested five hypotheses using a Likert scale rating instrument called the Air Self-Determination scale. The five hypotheses were as follows:

1. Teachers rate self-determination prospects of students in general education higher than they rate self-determination prospects of students in special education.
2. Teachers and students report higher capacities to self-determine for students in general education than for students in special education.
3. Students in general education receive higher self-regulation ratings than do students in special education.
4. Teachers and students report more favorable school opportunities to self-determine for students in special education than for students in general education.
5. Teachers and students report more favorable home opportunities to self-determine for students in general education than for students in special education (p. 61).

Participants for the study were selected from 72 schools and programs in San

Jose, California, and New York, New York. 450 students participated in the study, ranging in age from 6 to 25 years.

As hypothesized, teachers rated the self-determination prospects of students without disabilities significantly higher ($p < .001$) than they rated students with disabilities. Both teachers and students rated the two groups similarly in that students without disabilities received significantly higher capacity ratings than did students with disabilities ($p < .001$). Students in general education received significantly higher self-regulation ratings than did students in special education ($p < .001$). Teachers and students reported more favorable school opportunities to self-determine for students in special education than for students in general education. Students' ratings were at $p < .05$ and teacher ratings were at $p < .15$. Finally, teachers and students reported more favorable home opportunities to self-determine for students in general education than for students in special education. These predicted differences were significant for both teacher ratings and student ratings ($p < .05$).

Powell (2003) used the same AIR Self-Determination Scale instrument to compare the self-determination prospects of community college graduates with and without disabilities. Participants for the study were selected from the Office for Students with Disabilities in a community college in a large northeastern city. Two hundred and three individuals participated in the study, 117 without disabilities and 86 with disabilities. There were no significant differences between the two groups on mean age, gender, college major, in the frequency or amount of time taken off from school, the number of previous colleges attended, whether they viewed faculty as

supportive, and whether they were ever placed on probation. The groups were different in three areas: “college graduates with disabilities were more likely to have received special education services during their elementary and secondary school years; graduates without disabilities were more likely to report that their parents expected them to attend college or that their parents were influential in making that decision; and graduates with disabilities were more likely to have graduated in 1998 than were graduates without disabilities, who were more likely to have graduated a year later in 1999” (p. 81). The research question was whether the two groups differed on indicators of self-determination. Participants were asked to rate their opportunities to self-determine at college and after college and their capacity to self-determine during those opportunities.

Results of the study indicated that there was no significant difference in the mean rating of the two groups on opportunities to self-determine. There was a significant difference in the mean rating of the two groups on the capacity to self-determine ($p < .02$) and on the prospects for self-determination ($p < .05$). These results “tend to rule out the socioeconomic explanation that group differences on self-determination are due to background characteristics unrelated to disability” (p. 85).

The results of this study emphasize that students with disabilities have equal opportunities to self-determine. However, students with disabilities rate their capacity and prospects for self-determination low as compared to the self-ratings of students without disabilities. These findings raise three questions. First, why do students with disabilities rate their capacity and prospects for self-determination

lower than students without disabilities if all other socioeconomic factors have been controlled for? Second, do students with disabilities actually have lower capacity and prospects to self-determine or is it their belief system? Third, if their capacity and prospects to self-determine were in fact lower than those of students without disabilities, then what factors would increase their capacity and prospects to self-determine?

Facilitative Support From Others

Powers and Deshler (2002) proposed that “facilitative support from others” (p. 11) enhanced the self-determination of students with disabilities. This support can come from family members, friends, mentors, and professionals. Research indicates that this facilitative support has a critical impact on the post-secondary school outcomes for students with disabilities (Morningstar, M.A.; Turnbull, A.P.; & Turnbull, H.R., 1995, p. 249).

Morningstar, Turnbull, and Turnbull (1995) conducted a qualitative study to explore students’ perspectives regarding their involvement in transition from school to adult life. The researchers used purposeful sampling to select participants for four focus groups. Homogeneous sampling was used to allow for similarity of backgrounds and geographic location. However, the groups were mixed in regards to age, knowledge base, experience with transition planning, and ethnicity. Three broad categories emerged from this study, with several themes and sub-themes. The three broad categories involved: family influence on the creation of a vision for the future, family involvement in the transition planning process, and family

involvement in facilitating self-determination. “The majority of students identified certain family members as being able to provide support during the transition process” (p.263). Interestingly, support came from not only from parents, but also from extended family members such as grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, and siblings (p. 261).

Baron (2001) conducted a qualitative study with twenty-four “women and men with different kinds of impairments, i.e. physical, learning, and mental” (p. 432). The purpose of the study was to understand the level of autonomy and self-determination that adults with disabilities exhibit in everyday life (p. 431). Results of the study revealed two distinct types of professional relationships and two distinct types of parenting relationships that either support or thwart the self-determination of the individual with a disability.

Baron (2001) labels the two professional types of relationships as “professional support” and “professional control”. Professional support is a relationship whereby the professional places

importance on supporting the disabled clients, and helping them to fulfill their different individual wishes and requirements. This can be done by way of informing the clients of their legal rights and working together with them in order to ensure that the specified right, i.e. increased self-determination, is honored (p. 435).

Baron (2001) labels the second type of professional relationship as “professional control”. In this type of relationship with the individual with a disability,

instead of seeing one's main task as supporting the disabled client in her/his everyday living and in realizing her/his own ambitions, this approach is characterized by controlling the clients or rather their services. Emphasis is not on striving to ensure autonomy in everyday life for disabled clients, but rather on ensuring that no one gets more than s/he is considered entitled to (p. 436).

According to Baron (2001), "mothers and fathers have different kinds of relationships to their disabled children and do not always have the same approach to if/how autonomy in everyday life should be made possible for their children" (p. 439). In this study she focused mainly on the mother and identified two distinctive types. One type of mother would "strive for increased autonomy in everyday living for their disabled child" (p. 440). Whereas the other type of mother would "attempt to control their disabled child by way of denying them certain things, which they wish for" (p. 440). Baron refers to this later type of mother as being in a superior position of control and having "parental power" (p. 440). Parental power conceptually is in direct contrast to self-determination in that the individual with a disability is denied opportunities to have choice and control in their lives.

These studies combined show positive and negative relationships that individuals with disabilities have with both family members and professionals. Baron's study (2001) also demonstrates that the type of relationship can either support or thwart an individual with a disability's level of autonomy and self-determination. The professional support and supporting maternal roles identified in Baron's study support Powers and Deshler's (2002) theoretical assumption that self-determination is enhanced through facilitative support from others. However, some

researchers place more emphasis on the ecological conditions rather than on the social relationships that support or enhance self-determination.

Other Factors Impacting Self-Determination

The theoretical assumptions guiding this study speak to the self-determination training that an individual may have received, the support from others within a social context, and opportunities to express self-determination. However, there is an emerging body of research which emphasizes the role of the environment on self-determination (Abery, 1993; Abery & Stancliffe, 1996; Mithaug, 1998; Stancliffe et al., 2000; Wehmeyer & Bolding, 2001). According to Mithaug (1998) environment is a major factor in the development and expression of self-determination.

According to Wehmeyer and Bolding (2001) “most of the theoretical frameworks which have been applied to understanding self-determination (as a personal construct) with individuals with disabilities place some emphasis on the role of environment as a mediating ‘other’” (p. 372). To test this theory, Wehmeyer and Bolding (2001) conducted a study on self-determination and environment. The purpose of the study was to “provide further information about the impact of the environment in which people with intellectual disabilities live and work on their self-determination while controlling for the impact of the level of intellectual disability” (p. 375). Wehmeyer and Bolding had conducted a previous study in 1999 in which they used a “matched-sample design to control for level of intelligence and factors other than environment” (p. 375). In order to control for personal characteristics, the 2001 study was a within-individual design “in which individuals with intellectual

disabilities were identified prior to a move from a more restrictive to less restrictive work or living environment, and their self-determination measured before and after that transition” (p. 375). Participants for the study consisted of 31 adults with intellectual disabilities. Participants were recruited from disability service provider agencies in the United States. Two instruments were used in this study: The ARC’s Self-Determination Scale and the Autonomous Functioning Checklist (AFC): Self-Report Version. “Paired-sample *t*-tests examining pre- and post-move differences on self-determination and autonomy for all participants indicated significant differences on both The ARC’s SDS ($p=0.017$) and the Autonomous Functioning Checklist ($p=0.041$)” (p. 378). Thus, research participants “showed gains in self-determination and autonomous functioning, and reported that they had more choice opportunities. These results are consistent with previous research and support the importance of addressing both issues of capacity and opportunity to promote enhanced self-determination” (p. 379).

Wehmeyer and Bolding’s study focused on individuals with intellectual disabilities and less restrictive living environments, meaning community based as opposed to residential. It may seem far fetched to relate this study to that of individuals for the proposed research on students with disabilities within the context of post-secondary education. However, post-secondary education is a transitional period for all individuals regardless of disability and it traditionally marks a time in one’s life when students move from an environment of less autonomy to one of more autonomy. The importance of environment on self-determination therefore should

not be overlooked. Although this proposed research study does not focus on environment as one of the theoretical assumptions guiding the research, it does place emphasis on environment by studying the theoretical assumptions within the ecological context of a post-secondary environment.

Postsecondary School Experiences and Outcomes

Self-determination is an important construct in the general population, but is especially important for students with disabilities who want to attend post-secondary education. The U.S. Department of Education Strategic Plan, 1998 – 2002, describes post-secondary education as “America’s traditional gateway to the professions, more challenging jobs, and higher wages” (p. 21). It is clear that post-secondary education enhances an individual’s chances of achieving high status, wealth, and job stability (Bidwell, 1989; Gingerich, 1996; Tinto, 1987). However, there are clear differences between the number of students with disabilities accessing post-secondary school as compared to students without disabilities (Blackorby & Wagner, 1996; Fairweather & Shaver, 1991). In addition, historically there are differences in the post-secondary education experiences of students by gender. It is “from history we gain insight, and from insight we have a *chance* at wisdom for the future” (Nidiffer, 2003).

Disability Differences

The large doors to the ivory tower were closed for many years to individuals with disabilities. Although there were no written policies that officially omitted someone with a disability, institutions of higher education were often physically inaccessible. In addition, society did not consider individuals with disabilities as

being human; therefore no systematic efforts were made to open the doors of higher education to individuals with disabilities. However, federal laws, particularly the Rehabilitation Act of 1972 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 required that institutions of higher education not discriminate against individuals with disabilities. This non-discrimination policy meant that institutions of higher education had to change their physical and programmatic structure to make them more accessible to individuals with disabilities.

Over the past two decades, the number of individuals with disabilities attending post-secondary education programs has substantially increased. According to Blackorby and Wagner (1996), 2.6% of postsecondary students reported a disability in 1978, 9.2% reported in 1994, and 19% reported in 1996. Gajar (1998) estimated that in 1998, 9% percent of first year college students possessed a disability and more than 10 percent of all college students possessed a disability. In 2003, the National Center on Disability reported that students with disabilities comprised approximately 10% of all students participating in higher education. These studies, when viewed collectively, indicate a definite trend toward more students with disabilities participating in higher education. Gajar (1998) reported a 3% increase over a 20 year period from 1978 to 1998. However, despite these advances, a lower percentage of people with disabilities attend post-secondary school, compared to individuals without disabilities. It is estimated that youth with disabilities transition to post-secondary education at only about one-fourth the rate of youth without

disabilities (Blackorby & Wagner, 1996; Fairweather & Shaver, 1991). A more recent study by Kraemer and Blalock (2001) supported previous studies indicating that only 15% of students with disabilities pursue higher education, whereas 56% of students without disabilities pursue higher education.

Gender Differences

Women on the other hand are currently showing up in institutions of higher education in large numbers. It is estimated that “of the 14.5 million students now enrolled in higher education, over eight million, or 56% are women” (Glazer-Raymo, 2003, p. 99). However, the fact that women are the majority in higher education can be misleading. The numbers do not reflect the struggles it took to change the face of higher education, nor does it reflect the stark differences in higher education experiences of women both historically and today.

Historically, higher education for women was neither accepted nor supported by society. Women were considered intellectually inferior, and expected to be pure, obedient and domesticated (Nidiffer, 2003). As opportunities for higher education did become available to women, they were “less rigorous than the curriculum offered to men and emphasized women’s likely domestic role” (Nidiffer, 2003, p. 16).

Progress was slow for many years. Finally,

women became a protected group under the law following enactment of Title IX of the Education Amendments in 1972, outlawing sex bias in all educational institutions receiving federal grants and contracts, and the extension of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Equal Pay Act of 1963 to higher education, prohibiting discrimination based on race, sex, religion, color, and national origin (Glazer-Raymo, 2003).

The experiences of women in higher education still differ than those of men. One distinct area of difference is that of self-image. “Although they may be successful in other areas of their lives, they place primary importance on their body size, weight, and overall physical appearance; if they are not thin and beautiful, then they do not believe they are acceptable” (Hensley, 2003, p. 55). This self-image is compounded by the fact that as they are struggling to establish their identity, they are also “striving to individuate from parents and acquire autonomy” (Hensley, 2003, p. 56; Chickering & Reisser, 1993). “This process is not as complex for men because they are socialized from an early age to be independent and autonomous. Girls, however, receive strong messages regarding the importance of pleasing others, often at the expense of self. In the college setting, women may be confused when asked to be both independent and dependent on others” (Hensley, 2003). Poor self image and lack of independence or autonomy make it difficult for students to be fully self-determined. Poor self image may result in students failing to set goals or to set goals below their capabilities. Furthermore, poor self image may result in students not being able to problem-solve barriers to their goals. Likewise, lack of autonomy may impact full actualization of SD in that students may not be given ample opportunities to express their self-determination.

Violence is another difference in experiences by women as opposed to men, specifically within the context of post-secondary education. “In 1993, for instance, students and faculty on American college campuses were victims of 1,353 robberies,

3,224 aggravated assaults, 7,350 motor vehicle thefts, 21,478 burglaries, 466 rapes, and 17 murders. This violence was gendered, much of it directed toward women and sexual minorities” (Pinar, 2003, p. 78). These statistics on violence have a direct impact on decisions that women must make as they pursue post-secondary education. For example, decisions must be made regarding, where to live, what time of day to take classes, what transportation to take, etc. Although all students must make these same decisions, the decisions that women make must be filtered through an understanding of the realities of violence against women.

Gender differences continue to exist in higher education today. Professionals must conduct research and gain a more firm understanding of these differences if we are to make recommendations for change. According to Ropers-Huilman (2003) “women are situated in a wide variety of ways, and there is no monolithic or static understanding of gender in academic settings” (p. 4). Therefore, professionals should actively pursue opportunities to contribute to a broader understanding of gender in post-secondary education. Knowledge gained from research on gender within the context of higher education can form the basis for research within other contexts.

The Intersect of Gender and Disability

In addition to the known differences in experiences between men and women in general, there are gender differences in the experiences of individuals with disabilities (NICHCY News Digest, 1990). According to Barron, (2001) “disabled women are at special risk in a number of areas such as being subjected to different kinds of abuse and violence” (p. 434). Separately, both females and individuals with

disabilities are often over protected and their abilities minimized as compared to males and as compared to individuals without disabilities. It is therefore assumed that this paternalistic attitude is even more pronounced for females with a disability. If true, this paternalistic attitude can thwart the self-determination of females with disabilities. “The way we understand and construct gender is thus relevant to consider when striving to understand the mechanisms behind the consequences of any kinds of societal phenomena” (Barron, 2001, p. 443). Therefore the gender differences in self-determination of individuals with disabilities will be a factor to be analyzed in this study.

Literature Summary

The literature indicates that self-determination enhances a student’s post school outcomes, and that self-determination is enhanced through information and skills designed to enhance self-determination, access to opportunities to express self-determination, and facilitative support from others. However, not all students with disabilities are receiving self-determination training, partly due to educator’s incapacity to teach self-determination training. Several promising practices including models, programs and instructional strategies have been developed to enhance the self-determination of students with disabilities, and research on these practices have shown positive results. However, professionals in the disability field do not know how students utilize self-determination, particularly within the context of higher education. In addition, professionals do not know the gendered self-determination differences of students with disabilities within the context of higher education.

Therefore, this study will examine how students with disabilities utilize self-determination in the pursuit of, and participation in, post-secondary education. Chapter three will outline the methodological design that will best answer the research questions.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This research study proposed to examine how students with disabilities use self-determination skills in their pursuit of, and participation in, post-secondary education. To accomplish this task, qualitative research methods were employed. This chapter provides a rationale for the use of qualitative research methods, specifically multiple case studies. Furthermore, this chapter elaborates on the specific methodological tenets of the study, including sample information, data collection procedures, the template used for data analysis, and the plan developed for establishing trustworthiness.

Qualitative Research Design

There are three main reasons for employing a qualitative research design for this study. First, qualitative research is “an inquiry approach useful for exploring and understanding a central phenomenon” (Creswell, 2002, p. 648). The central phenomenon studied here is the phenomenon of self-determination. According to Creswell (2002), “to learn about this phenomenon, the inquirer asks participants broad, general questions, collects the detailed views of participants in the form of words or images, and analyzes the information for description and themes” (p. 648).

A second reason for using a qualitative research design is to gather information-rich data from participants (Patton, 2002). According to Patton (2002), “qualitative methods permit the evaluator to study selected issues in depth and detail” (p. 13). I sought to understand how students with disabilities were utilizing self-

determination. Since there were no studies on how students with disabilities were utilizing self-determination in the pursuit of, and participation in, post-secondary education, this information was best be obtained through qualitative methods. The qualitative information obtained in this study can then form the basis for further quantitative and qualitative research.

The final and most compelling reason qualitative research methods were used in this study was to give a voice to individuals with disabilities. For hundreds of years, the value of individuals with disabilities was discounted by society. In some countries, individuals with disabilities were killed, in others they were locked away in institutions so that they would not have to be seen (Snow, 2001). Society's view of individuals with disabilities evolved over time from one where they were hidden away, to one where they were put on display, or considered objects to be pitied and taken care of, as eternal children. Even today, individuals with disabilities are "still looked upon as inferior and less productive members of society" (Wappett, 2002, p. 119).

Federal laws over the past 30 years have facilitated great strides in how society views this historically suppressed population. More recent federal laws have given birth to a disability rights movement. People with disabilities across the country have begun to self-advocate for their rights, resulting in the emergence of a mantra, "nothing about us, without us" (Patton, 2002, p. 337). This mantra clearly emphasizes an individual's right to be included in decisions that impact his or her life. Therefore, recognizing value for all individuals, and respecting the present disability

culture, this research used qualitative methods that allowed individuals with a disability to have a voice in the process. Since I wanted to hear multiple voices, the methodology is a multiple case study design.

Multiple Case Study

Robert Yin (2002) states that “case studies are the preferred strategy when how and why questions are being posed, when the investigator has little control over events, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context” (p. 1). The study to discover how students with disabilities were utilizing self-determination skills in their pursuit of, and participation in, post-secondary education, met all three criteria as set forth by Yin. Students were asked questions regarding “how” they made decisions regarding post-secondary education, thus meeting the first of Yin’s three criteria. Second, since participants for this study were already enrolled in higher education, the decision regarding the pursuit of and the participation in post-secondary education had already been made. Therefore, there was no control by the researcher in any events related to their decision-making. Third, self-determination is a contemporary phenomenon that deals with real-life situations, thus meeting Yin’s third criteria. According to Yin (2002), the use of a case study strategy “allows the investigation to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real life events” (p. 3). It was the real life utilization of self-determination that the study sought to discover.

In this study the student is the unit of analysis and, therefore, each student’s situation was considered a case in and of itself. Multiple students were studied, and

specific areas embedded within each student's case were also studied. This multiple case study design with embedded units of analysis is defined by Yin (2002) as a Type 4 case study. The embedded areas of analysis were derived from the theoretical assumptions which guided this study: information and skills, opportunities to express self-determination, and facilitative support from others. These embedded areas, when analyzed, aided in understanding their respective role in the larger phenomenon of self-determination.

How students with disabilities utilize self-determination can be different for each individual. For example, it was anticipated that some students may have made the decision to attend higher education totally independent of any external sources; others may have been influenced by peers; still others may have felt an obligation or pressure from parents or other family members. In addition, some students may have been supported by availability of funding through the vocational rehabilitation process, whereas others may not have. Therefore, it was not anticipated that each student's case would look exactly the same. Some questions that were anticipated to elicit varied responses were: How did students decide what type of post-secondary education they would pursue? How did students decide upon a specific institution? How did students select a major and what courses they would take? How did students make decisions regarding whether or not to utilize accommodations and what accommodations to use? How did students decide whether or not to participate in extra curricular activities and if so, which ones? And what was the role of the educational facility in the decision making process?

Within each of these decisions were further areas that needed understanding. Who else was involved in the decision making process? How were steps necessary to reach goals identified? What barriers were identified along the way? How were those barriers addressed? And, how did the individual with a disability view his or her ability to handle the barriers? In addition to understanding these factors that are theorized to enhance self-determination, I also sought to understand if there were gender similarities and/or differences in the utilization of self-determination within the context of post-secondary education.

Research Questions

Chapter 1 introduced the purpose of this research study being to understand how students with disabilities utilize self-determination in the pursuit of, and participation in, post-secondary education. Powers and Deshler (2002) offered the theoretical assumptions that self-determination is enhanced through:

1. Information and skills that foster a person's capacities for decision making and self direction (e.g. strategies for planning, achieving goals, developing partnerships with others, and self-management);
2. Access to opportunities to express self-determination (e.g. participation in a full range of educational opportunities, having control over supports and resources);
3. Facilitative support from others (e.g. family, friends, professionals, and mentors) (p. 11).

The theoretical assumptions laid the foundation for the research questions:

1. How has self-determination training influenced students' post-secondary education goals?
2. What opportunities have students pursued to express their self-determination?
3. How have others supported students in their self-determination?
4. What are the similarities and differences in the utilization of self-determination in post-secondary education between men and women?

Defining the Case

This study identifies a case as a college student with a disability. Thus, the individual is the unit of analysis. It was assumed that students with disabilities were more likely to possess self-determination if they had participated in a self-determination program. Therefore participants for this study were recruited from those students with disabilities who participated in a self-determination program called the Louisiana Youth Leadership Forum.

The Louisiana Youth Leadership Forum (LYLF) is a self-determination training program in the state of Louisiana that began in 1999. Since the majority of the sample for this study was drawn from this program, it is important to understand the fundamental aspects of this program and how they relate to enhancing the self-determination of individuals with disabilities. The purpose of the youth leadership forum is to teach self-determination skills to students with disabilities in an optimal environment. The LYLF seeks to advance the leadership skills of students with disabilities so that they can reach their personal, educational, and vocational goals.

In order to have participated in the program, students must have a disability and must have been in their last two years of high school. They must have possessed leadership skills or potential, and must have participated in an interview as part of the selection process.

Students who participate in the LYLF are called student delegates. If selected to participate in the forum, the student delegates spend 4 nights and 5 days on a college campus. During that time, they participate in a structured program based on a self-determination model.

There are several fundamental components to the LYLF. First of all, the LYLF is held on a college campus in order to expose students with disabilities to a post-secondary environment. Second, the majority of the volunteers are individuals with disabilities who function as role models to the student delegates. Guest speakers are all successful individuals with disabilities who also function as role models to the student delegates. These guest speakers provide students with a wide range of information ranging from disability history to self-advocacy skills.

During the forum students spend time in small group discussions where they use a workbook as a guide in completing a structured self-determination curriculum. One of the main outcomes of these exercises and the forum is the completion of a Personal Leadership Plan. This Personal Leadership Plan functions as a tool for delegates to take back to their hometown and guide their future leadership activities.

Initially there were no known barriers to this study. I had access to all files from the Louisiana Youth Leadership Forum, including contact information for past

participants. In addition, I had met all past participants and, therefore, participants should have felt comfortable in proceeding with an interview. I anticipated that since I functioned in a supervisory role during the LYLF, students might have felt obligated to participate, which would have impacted the data I received. In addition, students may have felt a need to provide an answer that they thought I wanted to hear as opposed to what they really thought or felt.

On the contrary, I had difficulty in securing the necessary participants solely from the LYLF. Some students had dropped out of school, others had moved and left no forwarding address, and others were too busy with school and work to participate in the research. Still others would not return phone calls or requests via email. I had more difficulty with securing male participants than female participants. Therefore, the methodology for selecting participants had to be expanded. Chain sampling was used to identify other students as research subjects. Statewide disability organizations, including Families Helping Families, the Developmental Disabilities Council, the Governor's Office of Disability Affairs, and the Human Development Center were contacted and asked to identify students who met the following criteria: a person with a disability who is currently enrolled in some form of higher education and possesses self-determination skills. Higher education was defined as any form of formal education past secondary school including vocational technical schools, community colleges, and universities. Self-determination was operationally defined as setting goals, identifying steps necessary to reach the goal, and problem-solving barriers along the way.

The results of this research are beneficial to educators, policy makers, self-determination researchers, students with disabilities, and family members of individuals with disabilities. Educators can use the results of this study to develop or enhance how they currently provide self-determination training. The results of this study will help policy makers understand the long term effects of self-determination training so that they can make informed decisions regarding self-determination programs and make funding decisions. Students with disabilities can learn how other students with disabilities utilize self-determination to ascertain whether they are interested in participating in self-determination training. Family members can learn how students with disabilities utilize self-determination and thus influence the level of support they provide to their family member with a disability. Finally, researchers can use the findings as a base of knowledge to fuel further research. For example if the results of the study show that extended family members play an important role in supporting the self-determination of students with disabilities, then this would be an area needing further research.

Sample Information

Multiple sampling methods were employed in this study. The first sampling approach for this study was purposeful sampling (Creswell, 2002; Patton, 2002) whereby individuals who could provide information rich data regarding the central phenomenon of self-determination were intentionally selected for participation in this study. The LYLF was identified as a source for obtaining rich data regarding self-determination.

There were two types of participants in this study. The primary participants were individuals with disabilities who possess self-determination. The second type of participant was a parent, professional, or other individual who was familiar with the student's self-determination skills in terms of post-secondary education. Different sampling strategies were employed depending on the type of participant.

Students

This study is concerned with understanding the self-determination skills of students with disabilities within the context of postsecondary education. Therefore, homogeneous sampling was used to identify the student participants. According to Creswell (2002), homogeneous sampling is used when individuals "all possess a similar trait or characteristic" (p. 196). The defining characteristics for this sample were individuals with disabilities who exhibit self-determination and are currently enrolled in post-secondary education. Students were not be excluded from this study if they dropped out of post-secondary education and then later resumed their education. However, since a major component of self-determination is problem-solving barriers to one's goals, students who dropped out of post-secondary education and remained out of school would not have been able to provide the best data for this study and thus were excluded from the study. Therefore, only students who were currently enrolled in post-secondary education, or those students who had recently completed their post-secondary education, were included in the sample. In addition, the significance of disability for several participants limited them from participating in post-secondary education on a full-time basis. In order to be cognizant of the

impact a disability has on a student's educational goals, both part time and full time students were included in this study.

In addition to the homogeneous sampling, the sample was stratified by gender. Once individuals were contacted and informed that they were selected to participate in the study, an interview date, time, and location was determined. Information relative to the interview was documented on an Interview Scheduling Form (Appendix D). This form contained the individual's name, address, phone number, email address, interview day, interview time, and interview location. The form classified the individuals by gender so that as interviews were confirmed, individuals were appropriately classified into the two comparison groups.

Parent, Professional, or Other Individual

This study also included interviews with a parent, professional, or other individual who was familiar with the student's self-determination within the context of post-secondary education. In order to identify these participants, chain sampling was used. According to Patton (2002) chain sampling is an "approach for locating information-rich key informants" (p. 237). In conducting chain sampling, the student participant was asked to identify a parent, professional, or other individual who has the most knowledge of his/her post-secondary education goals. Patton (2002) suggests to begin by "asking well-situated people: 'Who knows a lot about _____?'" (p. 237). Therefore, the student was asked: Which parent, professional, or other individual knows the most about your educational goals, decisions you have made, and how you have resolved problems related to the pursuit of your post-secondary

educational goals. This specific question helped to identify the person most knowledgeable about the student's experiences in post-secondary education. Most participants choose a parent for me to speak with. One individual choose a grandparent, and two participants choose for me to speak with professionals that they had worked with while in high schools.

For the purpose of this study, a professional participant is defined as any disability related professional who has assisted the student in his/her transition from secondary education to post-secondary education. This can include a secondary education special education teacher or a transition coordinator, a service provider such as a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor, or a college/university official such as a disability services coordinator. Many professional individuals are bound by confidentiality laws which prohibit the professional from releasing information about the student without the student's written consent. Therefore, the students were asked to sign a "release form" which allowed the professional to provide information about the student to the researcher (Appendix E).

The student was also asked to sign a consent form allowing the parent, professional, or other individual to discuss information about the student's pursuit of, and participation in, post-secondary education (Appendix D). All students provided appropriate consent for the interview. Furthermore, all parents, professionals, and other individuals identified by the students, did agree to participate in the study.

Data Collection

Data collection consisted of several steps. First, a list of all past participants of the Louisiana Youth Leadership Forum was obtained. Second, attempts were made to contact all 96 participants to determine whether or not they were currently participating in post-secondary education and whether or not they were interested in participating in the research study. The detailed process used for identifying these individuals is outlined below.

Sample Selection

Attempts were made, via phone, to contact all 96 past participants of the Louisiana Youth Leadership Forum. The purpose of my contact was to determine which individuals were currently participating in post-secondary education and whether or not they were interested in participating in a research study. Of the 51 individuals that I was able to make direct contact with, 21 were not currently participating in school and 7 were not interested in participating in the study. Twenty-three (23) individuals indicated that they were enrolled in post-secondary education and would be interested in participating in the study. However, when it was time to schedule the actual interview, only seven individuals were actually agreeable and/or available to participate in the research study.

In addition to having a limited number of participants (four females and four males) all female participants were Caucasian. Therefore the selection procedures were reevaluated both for consideration of expansion of the pool of possible participants and for the issue of diversity regarding race. Although this study did not

set out to focus on any issues by race, I felt that having an African American perspective would contribute to this study. Therefore, I contacted the Alumni Coordinator for the Louisiana Youth Leadership Forum, Danielle Franklin. I asked Ms. Franklin if she could identify 3 or 4 African American females who previously participated in the LYLF and were currently enrolled in institutions of higher education. Ms. Franklin did provide 3 names of individuals meeting the criteria. Those individuals were contacted to determine their interest in participating in the study. In addition, I sought other sources for participants. I contacted several statewide disability organizations to recruit students with disabilities who were currently participating in postsecondary education and possessed self-determination skills.

Next, selected individuals were contacted and an interview date, time, and location were arranged. Whenever possible, the interviews will be arranged in the individual's home to make it convenient and comfortable for the individual. In situations where the individual did not want to meet in their home, arrangements were made to interview at an alternate location of the individual's choice. Many students choose to meet in their dorm room. A few students choose to meet at their home. Many parents also choose to meet in a dorm room, and one parent wanted to meet in her office. All professional participants choose to meet in their respective offices. In all situations, efforts were made to conduct the interview in a quiet atmosphere, ensuring that other potential participants were not privy to the conversation and thus not influenced in any way.

All participants for this study were asked to sign an interview consent form. (Appendix A) This interview consent form provided the participants with information regarding the research purpose and methods. Furthermore, the interview consent form also informed individuals that their participation in the research study was entirely voluntary and that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time.

Theoretical Assumptions Guiding Data Collection

Yin (2002) suggests that data collection be guided by the development of a theoretical proposition. “Only if you are forced to state some propositions will you move in the right direction” (Yin, 2002, p. 21). Therefore, knowing what is theoretically proposed in regards to self-determination will help determine exactly what aspects of self-determination should be studied.

The theoretical assumptions in this study are that self-determination is enhanced through:

1. Information and skills that foster a person’s capacities for decision making and self-direction (e.g., strategies for planning, achieving goals, developing partnerships with others, and self-management);
2. Access to opportunities to express self-determination (e.g., participation in a full range of educational opportunities, having control over supports and resources);
3. Facilitative support from others (e.g., family, friends, professionals, and mentors) (Powers & Deshler, 2002, p.11).

These theoretical assumptions formed the base from which all interview questions were derived. Semi-structured interviews were conducted using an interview protocol form (Appendix B). I asked main questions, probing questions and follow-

up questions designed to elicit rich information that would answer the research questions (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). For example, I asked, “how did you decide whether or not to attend higher education?” as a main question. A probing question was, “as you were making this decision, who did you talk to about your decision?” Follow up questions were determined based upon what information appeared to be missing.

Interview Protocol Form

Several existing instruments were reviewed to determine the feasibility in using them in this study. The instruments reviewed were the ARC’s Self-Determination Scale (Wehmeyer & Kelchner, 1995), the American Institutes for Research (AIR) Self-Determination Scales (Wolman, Campeau, & DuBois, 1994), the National Consumer Survey (NADDC, 1988), and The Self-Determination Assessment Battery (Field, Hoffman, & Sawilowsky, 1994). These scales were not deemed appropriate for use in this study because they either were not normed for the age group of this study, they were created for use with a specific self-determination training program, they were not appropriate for obtaining the perspectives of the students, or they were poor in their reliability and validity.

Therefore, the previously stated theoretical assumptions were used as a guide in the development of the interview questions. This is important because the theoretical assumptions formed the basis for the development of the research questions, and the interview questions relate back to the research questions. For example, on the interview protocol form (Appendix B) questions 1, 2, and 3 were for

demographic and identifying purposes, questions 4, 5, and 6 were designed to answer research questions two and three. Questions 8 and 9 were designed to answer research question number three. The fourth research question was designed to be answered by using all interview data and comparing and contrasting the data of female participants to those of male participants.

Pilot Interview

A pilot interview was conducted on August 11, 2003. The purpose of the pilot interview was to determine if the interview questions were appropriate and whether or not they yielded the desired data. A revised copy of the interview protocol is located in Appendix B.

The participant for the interview was Ann (pseudonym). Ann is a 40 year old white individual with a severe disability resulting in numerous functional limitations. She is only 4 feet tall, has scoliosis, cardio-pulmonary obstruction, webbed arms, and webbed digits. The combination of her multiple disabilities results in limited mobility of her upper and lower extremities. She is unable to walk long distances due to her limited lung capacity. In addition, she is on supplemental oxygen 24 hours a day. This oxygen is provided by an oxygen tank on a cart that she pulls around with her.

I met with Ann on August 11, 2003 in her office, located in Louisiana. We met beginning at 10:47 and the interview concluded at 11:18. The initial step of the interview process was reviewing the interview consent form. Ann agreed to participate in the pilot study and signed a copy of the consent form. A hard copy of

the consent form was given to Ann for her records. The interview was audio taped and some notes were taken during the interview.

There were several benefits and/or lessons learned as a result of the pilot interview. First of all, the pilot interview gave me an opportunity to practice conducting an interview, thus reducing anxiety for future interviews. Second, when transcribing the pilot interview tape I realized that I did not know how to spell some of the medical terms that were mentioned in the interview. Therefore, I planned to be more cognizant during the research interviews of terms that I was not familiar with and obtain clarification during the interview. Most importantly, as a result of the interview, I was able to detect some inappropriateness to some of the interview questions and therefore several modifications were made to the interview protocol. First, the disability question (number 2) was modified to solicit not only the kind of disability the individual has but also to have the individual describe their disability and functional limitations. This information does not answer any specific research question, but helps put the other data within a disability context. Second, probing questions were included under each main question. Finally, the question regarding who else was involved in the decision making process was deleted and included as probing question under several of the main questions. The reason for this change was that students may have included different individuals in different post-secondary education decisions, thus the necessity of a probe for each type of decision.

Interviews

Interviews ranged in length of time from 35 minutes to 1 hour and 55 minutes. Individuals with more severe disabilities, such as Cerebral Palsy, and individuals with speech impediments took longer to respond to interview questions. All interviews were audio taped and transcribed.

The names of individuals were kept confidential. A coding system was used to identify each student by a fictitious name. A record was kept to indicate which name was assigned to which student. Therefore, although names appear in the results of the study, the names do not disclose the true identify of the individual.

After the student had been interviewed, students were asked to identify a parent, professional, or other person of knowledge who could answer similar questions about the student's pursuit of, and participation in, post-secondary education. The same procedures for obtaining consent were used with the parents, professionals, and other individuals, whereby the interviewee signed an interview consent form prior to the interview being conducted. Interviews were taped and all information was kept confidential.

Data Analysis

The data from this study were analyzed using the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This method of analysis "combines inductive category coding with a simultaneous comparison of all social incidents observed. As social phenomena are recorded and classified, they are also compared across the categories" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 335).

There are two phases of data analysis using the constant comparative method. The first phase, unitizing involves “breaking the text into units of information that will serve as the basis for defining categories” (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998, p. 123). This involves dividing the interview data into the simplest units of information possible. Unitizing is done until all the data are broken into units of information. Then each unit of information is coded in a meaningful way (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The second phase of analysis is called categorizing. Categorizing involves “bringing together into provisional categories those units that relate to the same content” (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998, p. 123). The categories are then defined inclusive enough to include everything in that group.

The original units of information were re-evaluated, and category topics were reviewed for overlap. Each category was checked to ensure that it was internally homogeneous, externally heterogeneous and mutually exclusive; and the categories were checked to determine if relationships existed among categories. Unitizing and categorizing continued until the sources were exhausted, the categories were saturated, regularities emerged, or over-extension occurred (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

Through the constant comparative analysis process, rich explanations for the complex phenomenon of self-determination were identified. According to Yin, (2002), “the strength of the case study strategy is in having developed rich explanation for the complex pattern of outcomes and in comparing the explanation with the outcomes” (p. 115). Furthermore, the constant comparison data analysis method allowed the researcher to discover themes beginning with the initial

interviews, “undergoing continuous refinement throughout the data collection and analysis process, and continuously feeding back into the process of category coding” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 335).

Four separate analyses of the data were conducted in this study, each using all data sources: students, parents, professionals, and other individuals identified by the student. First, each student’s case was descriptively analyzed and internally analyzed for themes in order to gain an understanding of the individual case. Second, analysis using all data sources was conducted across all cases to allow for possible themes to emerge from the data. Third, analysis was conducted across cases using the theoretical assumptions as a template. This third analysis helped reveal whether or not data exists to support the theoretical assumptions; and data that did not fit the theoretical assumptions was also analyzed. Finally, comparative case study analysis of the differences and commonalties between males and females was conducted. During this phase of analysis, a multiple case study contrast table was created making it easier to see the similarities and differences. Understanding these differences and commonalties is important because they evidence how similarly or differently males and females with disabilities utilize self-determination in the pursuit of, and participation in, post-secondary education.

The goal of this researcher was to conduct quality research. Yin (2002) identifies four principles of quality research that “underlie all good social science” (p. 123). “First, the analysis should show that it relied on all relevant evidence” (p. 123). Second, “the analysis should include all major rival interpretations” (p. 123). Third,

the “analysis should address the most significant aspect of the case study” (p. 123). Yin (2002) states, “why go to the effort of doing a case study unless you can address the largest issue?” (p. 124). Finally, Yin (2002) states that “prior, expert knowledge is essential to developing a meaningful case study” (p. 124). Therefore, during the data analysis phase of this research, attempts were made to apply all four of the principles in order to enhance the quality of the study.

Establishing Trustworthiness

The quality of qualitative research is heavily dependent upon the skill, competence and sensitivity of the researcher (Patton, 2002). “Generating useful qualitative findings through observation, interviewing, and content analysis requires discipline, knowledge, training, practices, creativity, and hard work” (Patton, 1990, p. 11). Most importantly, the researcher must employ methods to ensure the dependability, credibility, and validity of the research.

Establishing Dependability

Dependability is similar to the concept of reliability, meaning that the results of the study can be relied upon to be accurate and consistent. According to Yin (2002), “if a later investigator followed exactly the same procedures as described by an earlier investigator and conducted the same case study all over again, the later investigator should arrive at the same findings and conclusions” (p. 36). Therefore, Yin (2002) recommends that the researcher “make as many steps as operational as possible and to conduct research as if someone were always looking over your shoulder” (p. 37). To ensure the dependability of this study, the methodology was

outlined very specifically ahead of time. This outline included the selection of participants, detailed data collection procedures including an interview protocol, and a detailed method for data analysis. In addition, all interviews were audio taped, researcher actions were recorded, and changes in procedures were documented. This detailed methodology allows an external auditor to repeat the procedures of this study, thus enhancing the likelihood of arriving at the same findings and conclusion.

Establishing Credibility

According to Patton (1990), “any credible research strategy requires that the investigator adopt a stance of neutrality with regard to this phenomenon. This simply means that the investigator does not set out to prove a particular perspective or manipulate the data to arrive at predisposed truths” (p. 55). Whereas Creswell (2002) emphasizes the validation of the findings, meaning, “the researcher determines the accuracy or credibility of the findings” (p. 280). Several methods were used to produce credible findings, including peer debriefing/auditing, triangulation, and member checking.

Peer Debriefing/Auditing

Peer debriefing is a “process that contributes to the credibility of an inquiry by exposing the research to searching questions from the peer aimed at probing biases and clarifying interpretations” (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998, p. 91). Peer debriefing is a “process of exposing oneself to a disinterested peer for the purpose of exploring aspects of the inquiry that might otherwise remain only implicit within the inquirer’s mind” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 308). Peer debriefing is similar to what Creswell

(2002) refers to as auditing. “Researchers may want to ask a person outside the project to conduct a thorough review of the study and report back, in writing, the strengths and weaknesses of the project” (p. 280). Therefore, I used an outside source that is familiar with qualitative case study design to objectively evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the research study. In addition to analyzing the research design, this source was asked to review the interview transcripts and drafts of the data analysis to ensure that accurate information was reported. This process of using an outside source for evaluating the research is one form of enhancing the credibility of the study.

I have several biases in regards to the self-determination training program from which the majority of the sample was derived; and in regards to the abilities of students with disabilities. I was involved in the development of the Louisiana Youth Leadership Forum and have participated as a collaborator for the past six years. Therefore, I believe that the Louisiana Youth Leadership Forum is a good program that does enhance a student’s self-determination. In addition, I have worked in the disability field for the past 17 years, have a strong belief in the abilities of individuals with disabilities, and believe that self-determination enhances post school outcomes for students with disabilities. Therefore, in order to control for these biases and thus increase the credibility of the study, the peer reviewer was asked to review the audio tape of the first interview to determine if my biases were evident in the interview process. The peer reviewer indicated no biases were present in the initial interview.

Member Checking

Member checking is the second method used to build credibility in this study. Member checking “involves asking members of the social scene to check the analytic categories, conclusion, and interpretations of the investigators” (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1996, p. 92). “Member checking is a process where the researcher asks one or more participants in the study to check the accuracy of the account” (Creswell, 2002, p. 280). After the data had been gathered and analyzed, a copy of each student’s transcripts and the analysis was provided to the students and other participants via email. In addition, clarification questions were emailed to the participants. According to Creswell (2002) in member checking, “participants are asked about many aspects of the study, such as whether the description is complete and realistic, if the themes are accurate to include, and if the interpretations are fair and representative of those that can be made” (Creswell, 2002, p. 280). Additionally, this process may also cause the participants to recall new facts or enhance existing facts (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996). Based on member feedback, themes and interpretations were slightly modified.

Triangulation

Triangulation is the third method that will be employed in this research in order to build the credibility of the study. Triangulation is “the process of corroborating evidence from different individuals, types of data, or methods of data collection in descriptions and themes in qualitative research” (Creswell, 2002, p. 651). “This ensures that the study will be accurate because the information is not

drawn from a single source, individual, or process of data collection” (Creswell, 2002, p. 280). Interviews were conducted with students, a parent, professional, or other person of knowledge. For purposes of this study, a person of knowledge is defined as an individual who is identified by the individual with a disability as having knowledge of the student’s life, including goals, decisions, and problems. This individual may be a family member, friend, or confidant. The professional is defined as any disability related professional who has assisted the student in his/her transition from secondary education to post-secondary education. This can include a secondary education special education teacher or a transition coordinator, a service provider such as a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor, or a college/university official such as a disability services coordinator

Transferability

External validity research “deals with the problem of knowing whether a study’s findings are generalizable beyond the immediate case study” (Yin, 2002, p. 35). Statistical generalization to a larger population cannot be done with case studies; however generalizing the results of a case study to a theoretical proposition is appropriate (Yin, 2002). Therefore, the results of this study will not be generalized to a larger population. Instead, the results of this study will be used to gain a rich understanding of how these particular participants utilize self-determination in the pursuit of, and participation in, post-secondary education, and how that utilization relates to the theoretical assumptions stated previously. The use of multiple case

studies is replication logic in research design and further enhances the generalizability of a case study research (Yin, 2002).

In qualitative methodology, the concept of transferability is more applicable than that of generalization (Guba & Lincoln, 1981; Patton, 2002), and thus is important to elaborate on.

The degree of transferability is a direct function of the similarity between the two contexts, what we shall call 'fittingness.' Fittingness is defined as degree of congruence between sending and receiving contexts. If context A and context B are "sufficiently" congruent, then working hypotheses from the sending originating context may be applicable in the receiving context (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 124).

So, although generalizing the results of this research to a larger population is not appropriate, it is appropriate to both generalize the results to the theoretical assumptions and to assume that the results of this study are transferable to a context congruent to the context of this study. The context for this study was students with disabilities who have participated in the Louisiana Youth Leadership Forum and are currently participating in post-secondary education.

Ethical Issues

There are four common types of ethical standards, relational, utilitarian, ecological and deontological. Of these ethical standards, deontological ethics will be used as the guiding practice for this research study. Deontological ethics judge the morality of decisions by referring to absolute values such as honesty, justice, fairness, and respect for others (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996). I have respect for all individuals, including individuals with disabilities. Therefore, interviews were conducted with

honesty, justice, and fairness. I tried to be sensitive to the time it took for some individuals to respond to interview questions. In addition, I attempted to include the individual's voice in the final research report, by using the original data whenever possible. Finally, I respected each the time and effort each individual contributed to this study, therefore I tried to be as flexible as possible in scheduling interviews.

The other three types of ethical standards would not be appropriate for this study. Relational ethics requires that a researcher be "a fully engaged member of the participants' community" (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996, p. 556). Although I was immersed in the interviews, I was not a member of the participants' community. Another ethical standard, which would not be deemed appropriate for this study, is ecological ethics, which is based on "participants' culture and the larger social systems of which they are part" (Gall, et. al., p. 556). This ethical standard is not appropriate because ethnography is not the research methodology being employed in this study. Finally, utilitarian ethical standards allow the researcher to justify deception "if it could be demonstrated that it did not harm the participants" (Gall, et. al., p. 556). This study did not employ any tactics that were designed to be deceptive to the participants. In contrast, this study attempted to be open and forthright with all participants by explaining the research in detail and obtaining consent prior to data collection. In addition, this study proposed that participants would receive benefit from participation in this study.

Participant Benefits

Through in depth interviews, participants were able to think about and voice how they made decisions regarding the pursuit of, and participation in, post-secondary education. Their communications helped them gain a greater understanding and appreciation of their skills. This understanding may help students be more in tuned to their self-determination skills and thus have an impact on their future utilization of self-determination.

Conclusion

As stated in the introduction, this study proposed to discover how students with disabilities utilize self-determination in the pursuit of, and participation in, post-secondary education. The research questions focused on how students are making decisions, identifying steps necessary to reach their goals, and addressing barriers to their goals. Qualitative research methods were utilized for this study, specifically multiple case studies with embedded units of analysis. The embedded units of analysis included information and skills designed to enhance self-determination, access to opportunities to exhibit self-determination, and facilitative support from others. In this study, methods were employed to establish trustworthiness, taking into consideration credibility, dependability, and validity. Results were analyzed using the constant comparative method.

CHAPTER 4

CASE DESCRIPTIONS AND INTERNAL THEMES

This purpose of the study was to explore the self-determination of students with disabilities within the context of post-secondary education. This chapter provides a description of each case. Furthermore, this chapter discusses the themes that have emerged within each case.

Janice

Janice was interviewed on November 20, 2003 in her home, located in an urban area of Louisiana. Janice is an 18 year old Caucasian female who has a significant visual impairment. She has some light perception but does not see colors and is unable to see any objects. She needs assistance picking out clothing that matches, shopping, cooking, and orienting herself to unfamiliar buildings and places.

Janice is a very attractive individual with short black hair. She was interviewed in the kitchen of her home, which was very neat and organized; a functional and safety essential for individuals with visual impairments. During the interview Janice rocked back and forth in her chair.

Janice attended a private high school that was located on a small campus. Janice uses a white cane for mobility. Janice was able to easily navigate her educational surroundings while in high school due to the fact that there were a limited number of buildings and they were spaced relatively close together. While in high school, Janice used some disability related accommodations, including Braille, a talking alarm clock, a speaking phone, and her white cane for mobility.

Janice is currently enrolled in her first semester at a community college and majoring in music therapy. She is taking some basic courses and plans to transfer to a larger university in a few years. Janice has a beautiful voice and participates in several extracurricular activities including a choir and a leadership organization for her community college.

When asked “who knows the most about your pursuit of post-secondary education,” Janice named her high school counselor, Dolly. Dolly had been Janice’s high school counselor for four years and seemed to know Janice well. She described Janice as being a very intelligent individual and “very determined to do anything she wants to do.” Dolly was instrumental in assisting Janice with reaching her post-secondary educational goals.

There were two internal themes that emerged in Janice’s case: support from others and use of accommodations. In regards to support from others, Janice received support from multiple sources. Her parents provided assistance and support in Janice’s transition from secondary education to post-secondary education. They worked with Janice in ensuring that the paperwork was submitted to the higher education institutions. They continue to provide support on a regular basis by scanning Janice’s textbooks for her so that she can have access to the text information. In addition to parental support, Janice received support from her high school counselor who went to the extent of filing appeals for Janice when she was not admitted to her institution of choice, and by introducing her to a counselor with a similar disability. Janice also received vocational guidance from the counselor with a

visual disability and also from a music professor at the institution she was hoping to attend.

The second theme that was prevalent for Janice was use of accommodations in her pursuit of and participation in postsecondary education. Janice needed and utilized accommodations all throughout high school. Those accommodations consisted of the use of a white cane for assistance with mobility, orientation to new surroundings, and course materials in either Braille or audio format. When it was time for Janice to attend postsecondary education, she was not able to fill out the application materials because she could not read them. When she entered a local community college, she used assistance from other for orientation to the college campus. This assistance helped Janice learn how many steps to take and where to turn to get from one class to the next. During class Janice utilizes the accommodations of Braille materials when available, books on tape, notetakers, alternative test formats, and hard copy materials scanned.

Beth

Beth is a 22 year old Caucasian female who resides in southern Louisiana. She has dyslexia and claims that she is a “slow learner.” Regarding her limitations as a result of her disability, Beth says that it takes her longer to accomplish things. “You know, I just have to work harder at what I want to accomplish.”

Beth was interviewed in October of 2003 in the living room of her grandmother’s home. She is a heavy set young woman who was dressed nicely for the interview; wearing a dress and having her hair pulled back with small clips. She

indicated that she “was nervous” at the beginning of the interview, however, she did not exhibit any signs of nervousness once the interview began.

At the time of the interview, Beth is in her third year at a local community college. She is working on an associate’s degree in general education and simultaneously pursuing an eighteen hour concentration in early childhood education. While in school, she has been active in several organizations including the Student Government Association, serving as a freshman representative. She has also served as Ambassador for her school. Beth has a goal of finishing school and eventually working with children, possibly in the special education system.

Beth indicated that her grandmother, Ms. Marie, was the person who knows the most about her pursuit of, and participation in, higher education. Beth has lived with her grandmother for several years and her grandmother has played a major role in her education. Ms. Marie indicated that she has encouraged Beth to go to school, and she let Beth know that she would cover any school expenses that she was not able to pay for. She stated, “I’ve encouraged her all along to the fact of her learning disability, and to not use it as a cop out.”

There were two internal themes that emerged from Beth’s case: “stickability,” and “support from others.” When speaking about “stickability,” Beth says, “there are days you have to go because if you miss a day of that class it’s like missing two days....You have to recognize what’s more important for you to blow off class or for you to go to class. It’s so much easier to go and listen to your teacher as opposed to having to make up two days work by missing the class. That’s really it.” Beth’s

“stickability” is evidenced by her persistence to remain in higher education despite the difficulties she has experienced as a result of her disability.

The second theme that has emerged from Beth’s case is the overwhelming support she has received from others. Her grandmother allows Beth to live with her and has offered to pay for all school related expenses. She has also helped Beth handle the paperwork necessary to enroll in school. She has encouraged Beth along the way and has even helped her find information for projects. Other family members have also been supportive including an aunt and uncle. “They talked to her, encouraged her to stay in school.” Another uncle helps Beth “keep her car going.” Her mother “pays her insurance,” and wants her to stay in school. “Most of the family has let her know that they are proud of her. They all gave her money when she graduated from high school. They gave her more money than they would have....for her education.”

Callie

Callie is a 20 year old Caucasian from south Louisiana. When Callie was fifteen years old, she was attacked by an intruder in her home. She sustained a serious traumatic brain injury and was not expected to live. Callie did survive, but remained in a coma for months. After coming out of the coma, Callie had to undergo years of rehabilitation to try and regain the use of her extremities. She has a permanent disability of hemiplegia, with very limited use of her left arm and leg. She has difficulty with walking and any activity that requires the use of two hands. She also experiences constant fatigue.

Callie was interviewed in January of 2004 in her college dorm room. She is a thin individual with straight brown hair and glasses. She was dressed casually in jeans and a t-shirt. Her voice was upbeat and peppy.

Callie is currently attending college as a second semester freshman. She is majoring in Computer Science. She is affiliated with a student organized group created for students who don't drink, don't smoke, and don't do drugs. They "hang out like every weekend and sometimes each lunch together during weekdays. And we just do fun activities that don't involve going to bars or smoking." Callie is also involved in an Asian student organization and a university community action program where members "go out in the real world and try to make changes and differences."

Callie suggested that I speak with her step-mother, Ms. Waters, to learn more about her pursuit of, and participation in, post-secondary education. Her step-mother has been very supportive of Callie's pursuit of higher education and has helped her handle the paperwork necessary to enroll in school. Ms. Waters described Callie as being very disciplined and organized. Furthermore, she indicates that Callie "has always been a high achiever."

There were three themes that emerged from Callie's case: "persistence," "family member working in higher education," and "network of support." In regards to persistence, Callie has doggedly pursued furthering her education despite insurmountable odds. After the attack, which left her with a disability, Callie had to relearn how to walk and talk, and had to relearn skills related to daily living. In relation to school work, Callie had to repeat a grade in high school, since she had

missed most of the school year. In addition, when she did return to school, she reported that school work that once came so easy to her, took her twice as long to master. Regardless of these barriers, Callie was determined to finish her high school education and pursue higher education. She faced many logistical problems in pursuing higher education, such as transportation since she could not drive, however Callie found ways to address these problem areas so that she could reach her higher education goals. She stated “I’m very stubborn. I don’t give up easily....Like if you have a goal, you stick to it. You don’t just give up because something gets in your way. You’re going to do everything you can to overcome the obstacle in order to meet your goal.”

Another theme that emerged from Callie’s case was that she had a family member working in an institution of higher education. This individual was her step-mother who functioned as a role model, but also as a resource regarding pursuing and persisting in higher education. Callie choose to attend the institution where her step-mother works partly because she was familiar with the institution. Callie had visited her step-mother there on numerous occasions. Callie shared her thoughts on the institution. She stated:

I always followed [my stepmother] to school like the little sick kid or the puppy dog. I had homework to do after school, so I always came to school and visited with her. And I just thought it was the greatest place

The final theme that emerged from Callie’s case is the theme of “network of support.” Callie has had numerous people assisting her and supporting her to reach her higher education goals. Her stepmother has been the most prominent supporter,

however she has received support from other family members, friends, and professionals. Callie stated:

When I did have bad days and I had to tell myself, “No, you can’t give up.” I also had all kinds of people surrounding me telling me, “You’re too good for this, Callie. You can do it.” Like my stepmother, my friend Crystal, and my therapist, everybody supported me and I think that that support that I’ve had throughout my life has really helped to get me to where I am today. [I know] that even if I fall, not only will I pick myself up, but other people will help me.

Landa

Landa is a 21 year old Caucasian female from northern Louisiana. She describes herself as having learning disabilities, including a diagnosis of Dyslexia and Attention Deficit Disorder. In addition, she has some speech difficulty.

Landa was interviewed in July of 2004 in a college dorm room. She was casually dressed for the interview, wearing shorts, flip flops, and a tank top. Landa wore heavy makeup, wore her hair pulled back in a tight pony tail, and had long fake fingernails painted with intricate designs.

Landa is a junior at a Louisiana college, majoring in social work with a minor in criminal justice. She is currently not participating in any school organizations, but has plans to “go into a sorority.” Despite her lack of involvement in school related activities, Landa has been involved in mission work since she was seven years old. She “has been very involved in church, church mission work, and the church youth group” while in college. Her goal is to eventually work with abused children.

I interviewed Landa’s mother, Mrs. Kleaver, who has been “a very pro-active part in making sure that her (Landa’s) education was lined out the very best it could,

even at times when the system...put unnecessary and possibly harmful barriers in her life. Landa says that her “parents helped me by letting me do what I wanted to do. They never ever discouraged me. They always told me your best is the best you can do. Just go do your best.”

There were three themes that emerged from Landa’s case: “support from others,” “family member working in higher education,” and “persistence.” In regards to “support from others,” Landa received major support primarily from her mother. Landa relied on her mother for guidance in decision making, for financial support, and encouragement. Landa also received support from disability professionals at her institution of higher education, academic advisors, her grandmother, her roommate, and her boyfriend. Landa expressed her thoughts on support she received from others. She stated:

Just in little ways they have always been proud of me, especially my grandmother. Now she is deceased, but she has always been overjoyed about the accomplishments that I do, and she would always reward me. They are just all really supportive.

Landa received a lot of support from her mother, but what also emerged as a theme was the fact that Landa had a family member working in an institution of higher education. Landa choose to attend the same institution where her mother was employed as a professor. Landa’s mother was familiar with the operations of the institution, and knew a lot about different classes. She was able to advise Landa regarding what classes to take, what professors would be best, and where to go for additional assistance.

Another theme that emerged in Landa's case was persistence. Landa pursued her goal of higher education despite many setbacks. Due to Landa's difficulty in reading, spelling, and writing, she has had to work harder than students without disabilities to get decent grades. She has had difficulty with certain courses and as a result has had to change her major. She shared her experience:

Well, at first I was majoring in veterinary because I always loved animals. Well, me and biology sort of didn't kind of click. And me and Medical Terminology didn't click at all, so I was like, "well, if I can't pass Biology, I guess God's trying to tell me it's not the field I should be in." And then I tried Computer Information Systems, but it didn't click at all...Then I started thinking, I have been doing mission work since I was seven. I have been caring, mainly for others and myself, my whole life. And so I thought I have always had a little interest in abused kids and what happens and I really would like to know the history. And what goes on behind the scenes and all that kind of stuff. So I talked to my mom about Social Work and she said, "Yeah, I think you should do it. I think that is where you need to be. It fits in with your mission work and it fits in with all you have been doing."

Despite failing classes, changing majors, and having to study longer to make passing grades, Landa has persisted in her pursuit of higher education.

Elaine

Elaine is a 21 year old Caucasian female from southern Louisiana. She has a learning disability, including a diagnosis of dyslexia, dysgraphia, and dysphasia. As a result of her combined disabilities, Elaine says she "reads between a first and second grade level. Elaine elaborates, "I read slower than thirty words per minute. I really have bad handwriting. I transpose letters and numbers. I have difficulty calling to mind what I want to say. And when I say what I want to say, it doesn't always come out the way it was intended to come out. So I say um a lot or I have long pauses

when I am speaking and I change what I say in the middle of sentences and then I go back and repeat things.”

Elaine was interviewed in a college dorm room in July of 2004. She was casually dressed for the interview, wearing shorts and a t-shirt. She is a fast talker and has a very upbeat voice.

Elaine is currently attending a state college and is in her junior year. She is majoring in Communications Disorders, speech pathology and audiology, with a minor in psychology. Elaine states that she tries to keep her extracurricular activities to a minimum, but she is currently participating in two honor sororities. Her goal for the future is to become a speech pathologist.

I interviewed Elaine’s mother, Mrs. Thomas. Mrs. Thomas has been a driving force in her daughter’s education since elementary school and still plays an active role in her daughter’s education. “We do everything possible to make it easier to help her disability. We do all of the scanning of all of the books for her. Her dad and I go to the apartment and spend days scanning. She takes notes, sends them home. I type them up and send them back to her on the computer by email. She sends them to me through email and I send them back to her. We do this on a daily basis during school. In addition Mrs. Thomas drives to her daughter’s college whenever Elaine is “either riled up or discouraged. We boost her up.”

There were three themes that emerged from Elaine’s case: “extensive support from others,” “persistence,” and “use of accommodations.” In regards to family support, Elaine has received extensive support from her family and others throughout

her education. She continues to receive extensive support as she pursues her postsecondary education goals. Elaine's mother discussed the daily support she gives to Elaine:

We do everything possible to make it easier to help her disability. We do all of the scanning of all of the books for her. Her dad and I go to the apartment and spend days scanning. Elaine takes notes and sends them home. I type them up and send them back to her on the computer by email....We do this on a daily basis during school.

In addition to the support Elaine has received from her parents, she also has received support from a family friend, her school counselor in high school, resource teachers in high school, and a professor at her institution of higher education.

Another theme that emerged from Elaine's case was her persistence in trying to reach her postsecondary education goals, despite the amount of effort she has to expend. Elaine relayed a situation in which a professor questioned Elaine's need for an accommodation. Elaine elaborated on her school efforts:

I had a professor that said, "Well you don't need that [accommodation]." It was about reading my test out loud. I was like, "yes I do." And he said, "Why?" I said, "because I can't read." He goes, "well how do you do so well in my class if you can't read?" I was like, "because I have a computer that reads to me at home. I have the textbooks and I scan each one of the pages [into the computer] and I read all of your assignments twice. And if I don't understand it, I highlight the parts I don't understand. And I go back over them before you even lecture on them. And then when you lecture on them, I get your notes and I take my own notes. I get two other people to take notes for me and then I get my mom to compile all of the notes. And then I get my computer to read them back to me. That is how I do so well in your class. It has nothing to do with the fact that I can read or not."

Another theme that emerged from Elaine's case was her extensive use of accommodations. Elaine uses formal accommodations provided by her institution of

higher education and informal accommodations that she imposes herself. The formal accommodations consist of notetakers, extended time on tests, alternate test location, and a reader for tests. Informal accommodations include the use of a screen reader on her computer, having her parents read her texts to her if her computer is not working, having her parents type class notes, and strategic scheduling of classes to allow time to study in between.

Allison

Allison is a 20 year old Caucasian female and lives in Louisiana. She has Spastic Cerebral Palsy and as a result she has difficulty walking. She also has difficulty with both gross and fine motor skills in both her upper and lower extremities. Allison uses a motorized wheelchair for long distances but walks short distances with the use of crutches.

Allison is currently attending a Research I institution and is classified as a junior. Her major is Psychology. Allison has had much difficulty getting her disability related needs met in her institution of higher education, but she decides which battles she wants to fight and which battles are not worth it. In the battles she has chosen to fight, she has been persistent in her efforts to seek resolution.

Allison selected her mother as the person who could provide additional information regarding her pursuit of, and participation in, post-secondary education. Her mother, Maria, validates Allison's pursuit of higher education and states that Allison is "very self-motivated." In referring to Alice's success in school, Maria describes Allison as "the push behind it all."

There were three themes that emerged from Allison's case: "support from others," "problem-solving," and "use of accommodations." Allison's support came from multiple sources including her parents, a friend, staff from disability services in her institution of higher education, and a counselor. The support she received included encouragement, financial assistance, assistance with orientation on her campus, and provision of information and referral.

A second theme that emerged from Allison's case was the theme of problem-solving. Allison provided numerous examples of disability related problems she has had to resolve since she decided to pursue postsecondary education. Her first two encounters with problem-solving occurred before the semester even started. First, she was assigned to a dorm that was not physically accessible for persons with disabilities. Second, Allison had to orient herself to the university campus and learn how to get to her classrooms from her dorm. Although this sounds simplistic enough, the university she attends has curb cuts on one end of the sidewalk but not on the opposite end. Therefore, Allison would be able to get on the sidewalk but have to turn around and find another accessible route. In addition, Allison has had problems with attitudes of faculty and staff. Allison shared a specific encounter with one professor regarding accommodations:

I have a professor who comments on my handwriting all the time. I can't help my handwriting, it is part of CP there is nothing that I can do about the fact that I look like I still write like a kindergartner. But he says, "If I can't read it, then it is wrong." And he said "you can have a scribe but that means you have to spell everything to them." Do you know how hard that is? I usually don't realize it is spelled right until I write it. Some accommodations are reasonable, but they just take forever. I've never used a scribe before, so I

wouldn't know how that works and I definitely wouldn't want to find out how that works on a test. You know, cuz if they screw up...I would much rather write it and know that what I wrote it.

Allison has also had problems receiving the accommodations she needed. She explained what happened when she tried to arrange for an accommodation in Math. She stated:

Math is probably my worst subject and I had to fight for a calculator. I basically said I want it. I can't do three digit division at all. I can't count change back...so I didn't know what I was going to do. So it was going to take me three times as long or get a calculator

Use of accommodations was the third theme that emerged in Allison's case.

Allison has had to develop some of the accommodations on her own, such as her orientation to the campus, but she has also received formal accommodations from the university. Her formal accommodations included extended time, no scantrons, notetakers, and use of computer.

Kendra

Kendra is a 19 year old African American woman from central Louisiana. Kendra was born without a disability and never thought that she would become a person with a disability. However, one day when Kendra was a sophomore in high school, she suddenly lost her vision. She went to a local doctor who sent her to a physician in Houston for testing, where she was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis. As a result of her disability, Kendra has difficulty standing, walking, and has problems with her balance. She has limited vision and is unable to read small print. The combination of her visual and mobility impairments prohibit her from driving a

motor vehicle. Kendra uses a wheelchair for mobility, but is able to walk short distances.

Kendra was interviewed in November of 2004 in the den of her home. She is a heavysset woman who was dressed comfortably in a short skirt and camisole top. She was soft spoken and polite; often using the phrase “yes mamm,” or “no mamm,” in response to questions.

Kendra is a first semester freshman attending a local college. She is majoring in Sociology with an ultimate goal of becoming a social worker. Kendra has decided to not participate in any extra curricular activities until she has a chance to “see how college life is.”

Kendra’s mother, Mrs. Janet Davenport, is the person that Kendra thinks knows the most about Kendra’s pursuit of, and participation in, post-secondary education. Mrs. Davenport has played a both inactive and active role in Kendra’s education. She has supported Kendra’s decision to attend college, but beyond that, she helped Kendra get acclimated to the school’s physical environment through orientation and mobility training. Mrs. Davenport also cleans Kendra’s apartment on a weekly basis, takes her grocery shopping and clothes shopping, and brings her cooked food on a regular basis. Mrs. Davenport states that Kendra is successful in school “because she (Kendra) is a determined person. No matter of her condition, she would be a person that would be determined.”

There were three themes that emerged from Kendra’s case: “support from others,” “sticking with it no matter what,” and “use of accommodations.” In regards

to support from others, Kendra received extensive support from her family in her pursuit of and her participation in postsecondary education. Prior to enrolling in higher education Kendra received encouragement from her parents and her brother. Once enrolled at the university, Kendra's parents provided assistance with orientation and mobility on campus and they provided transportation to and from the university. Since Kendra's vision loss limits her independent living skills, Kendra's parents clean Kendra's on-campus apartment, cook for her, and assist her with shopping on a weekly basis. Kendra has also received support from her high school vision teacher, staff from the disability services office at her institution of higher education, and from academic counselors on campus,

Another theme that emerged in Kendra's case was the attitude of sticking with it no matter what. Kendra reported that she has had several setbacks during her pursuit of and participation in higher education. She described one such setback. She stated:

We have an attendance policy now at my university and I got really down with my Multiple Sclerosis and I missed a lot of days and I got kicked out of my English class because I missed so many days because I didn't have a doctor's excuse. I didn't go to the doctor [because] I knew what was wrong. But [the professor] said it was inexcusable and I got kicked out. So I went back [to class] anyway, because that is kind of not right to get kicked out like that without telling exactly why. [Eventually] they told me I could go back and participate in class but I wouldn't get a grade.

Kendra decided to attend the class and complete all the required assignments, despite the fact that she would not receive a grade. She plans to take the class again next semester.

A final theme that emerged in Kendra's case was the use of accommodations. Some of the accommodations were formally arranged through the university such as notetakers to take notes for her in class, extended time, alternative testing location, and enlarged tests. In addition, Kendra has arranged for other accommodations herself, such as a Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) to magnify school materials, and orientation on campus because she is unable to read the names of buildings or see the room numbers on classroom doors.

Molly

Molly is a 33 year old African American female who resides in southern Louisiana. Molly was born with a disability diagnosed as Cerebral Palsy. Cerebral Palsy can range drastically in severity. For Molly, her Cerebral Palsy has diminished the use of her legs. Therefore, "walking is limited" and Molly typically uses a wheelchair or a scooter for mobility. On occasion, Molly will use a quad cane for walking

Molly was interviewed in November of 2004 in her office. She was dressed professionally and had her hair curled in ringlets. She was very friendly, but soft spoken at the same time. She seemed at ease during the interview, often smiling and laughing at times.

Molly is currently attending an out of state college through their distance learning program. She is in her third semester and majoring in psychology. Although she is not affiliated with any extracurricular school related activities, she has a busy schedule. In addition to attending school, she works full time and is a board member

of a statewide disability planning group, appointed by the Governor. She also is on a state level advisory board related to disability issues.

Molly suggested that I interview her mother, Mrs. Amy Barrilleaux, for information related to her pursuit of, and participation in, post-secondary education. Mrs. Barrilleaux has been a major support person in Molly's life. Ms. Barrilleaux stated, "I wanted her to be self-sufficient. I taught her to be self-sufficient. And then teaching her to be self-sufficient she was able to make up her mind, decide what things she wanted to do, where she wanted to go, how she wanted to do it.....I've always instilled in her, too, that there's nothing she couldn't do. And that she shouldn't let nobody stop her from doing what she wants to do or anybody telling her she can't do it because, simply because she, she has a disability."

There were two themes that emerged from Molly's case: "support from others," and "role models." Molly has received support from a variety of sources including her family. In regards to family support, Molly made several references to the fact that her family provided encouragement for her to pursue higher education. Molly also consulted with her mother when making decisions regarding school.

Molly explained:

I basically talked to my mom. My mom was the main person I talked to. I really wanted to know from her that I would have the support. I just knew to run it past my mom.

Molly claimed, "My family basically supports everything that I do." However, in addition to her family support, Molly also has received support from co-workers and academic advisors at her institution of higher education.

Another theme that emerged from Molly's case was that she had several role models in her life including her mother and her grandmother. They both influenced Molly in regards to her attitude in life and her decision to pursue postsecondary education. Molly's mother was the first in her family to obtain a college degree. Molly elaborated on her mother as a role model:

My mom is a role model because she is a hard worker. She kind of sort of keeps me grounded and then I think...my spiritual growth is because of her. She always keeps me humble. She always tells me, "Remember where you came from, what you are doing, and where you were. You still have other places to go and things to do, and if you remain humble and stay grounded then it will be O.K."

James

James is a twenty year old American Indian male from a rural part of Louisiana. James has a learning disability with Attention Deficit Disorder. James also has neurological damage of unknown origin and he is blind in one eye, due to a detached retina. In addition, James is on medication for a seizure disorder, Epilepsy. According to James's father, James will "just blank out...he may do that [for] fifteen or twenty seconds, but when he comes back, he comes back right where he left off."

James was a very polite individual during the interview, using terms such as "please," "thank you," "yes, ma'mm," and "no, ma'mm." His dress for the interview was very typical of rural Louisiana: jeans, western shirt, cowboy boots, cowboy hat, and large silver belt buckle. James wore glasses and spoke with a southern drawl.

James currently attends a four year institution. He is classified as a sophomore and is majoring in electronic engineering technology. He is a member of

the Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA), the Baptist Collegiate Ministry, and the Institute for Electrical and Electronic Engineers.

James suggested that I speak with his father to find out about his pursuit of, and participation in, post-secondary education. James's father, Jim, has been a major supporter of James's post-secondary education efforts, and has been stressing the need for James to go to college since he was in kindergarten. Although Jim states that they have been supportive to all five of their children, they have given extra effort and support to James due to his disability.

There were two internal themes that emerged from James's case: "family support," and "use of accommodations." In regards to family support, James received extensive support from his family throughout his secondary education, and during his pursuit and participation in postsecondary education. Although all of James's immediate family was supportive of his pursuit of higher education, it was evident that James's father was the most instrumental. James's father guided James in his decision making regarding what institution of higher education to attend and in selecting a major. James's father exposed James to the different higher education options by taking James to college fairs and to tours of different campuses. James elaborated on his father's assistance:

Well, me and daddy, we took time out of school, my senior year I think it was. We went around to different colleges visiting. We went up to Tech, because I was looking into forestry at that time and possibly electronics. Then we went to Northwestern and they explained their program more in depth to me.

When it was time to actually register for school, James's father physically went with James to complete the paperwork. James elaborated:

I actually took daddy with me to make sure that I actually did everything, where no one would give me trouble registering. Because I found out that if you have a parent with you, they are less likely to give you flack.

A second theme that emerged from James's case was his use of accommodations. James has had accommodations arranged through the disability services office, including large print tests and materials, alternate testing location, and notetaker services. In addition, James tapes his class lectures, occasionally receives notes from professors, and takes advantage of faculty office hours to seek clarification on things he did not understand in class.

Daniel

Daniel is a 19 year old Caucasian male from central Louisiana. His physical disability is called arthrogryposis. In layman's terms it is a lack of muscles and joints. Daniel is missing muscles and joints in both arms and legs. As a result, he has difficulty walking and uses a wheelchair for most of his mobility. In addition, he is unable to bend his arms. "What it basically does is just makes simple everyday functions like eating, feeding myself, dressing myself, impossible. I have to have assistance with all of those activities....anything involving arms and everyday functions of life."

Daniel was interviewed in July of 2004 in a college dorm room. He was dressed comfortably for the interview in a t-shirt and shorts. He had braces on his

arms and legs and sat in his wheelchair. Daniel's speech was slow and purposeful. He seemed to choose his words carefully.

Daniel is currently a sophomore attending a state university. His major is computer information systems. Daniel would like to eventually obtain a doctorate degree and enter the Information Technology consulting field, or possibly teach at a university. Daniel is very active on his university campus. He is Student Government Association (SGA) cabinet member, maintains the SGA website, and serves as the SGA director of technology. In addition, Daniel is the Computer Information Systems representative for the Business Student Association, which is the governing body for the College of Administration and Business. Finally, he is a member of the university chorus group, a position he had to audition for.

Daniel asked that I interview his case manager support coordinator, Elvis. Elvis has been Daniel's case manager for several years and has guided Daniel in the process of transitioning from high school to post-secondary education. Elvis describes Daniel as "having a high I.Q." Furthermore, Elvis states that "he (Daniel) knew he was going to get an education way before I came into the picture." He states that Daniel has adjusted well to university life. "He's able to fit in surprisingly. He seems comfortable in whatever environment he goes into and he's got that determination to succeed."

There were three themes that emerged from Daniel's case: "problem-solving," "support from others," and "use of accommodations." Daniel began problem-solving before he was even officially enrolled in his institution of higher

education. He needed to find accessible housing and the available on-campus housing did not meet his accessibility needs. He was able to locate an accessible apartment close to the campus. Daniel reported that he has also had problems with accessible parking and accessible campus buildings. He shared an example:

Well, there was a building on campus that got renovated. It was an extension of the student center. And they spent I don't know how many millions of dollars on this building and they neglected to think about putting in an automatic door opener. So we couldn't independently enjoy this new wonderful building with a coffeehouse, and computers, and places to eat. We couldn't do that without having someone being nice enough to be there when we roll up and open the door for us. I sat outside of that building for ten, fifteen minutes this spring, waiting for someone to open the door so I could go in.

In order to address the problem Daniel, along with other students with disabilities, went to speak with the university administration. When the administrators failed to take action, the students formed an organization for students with disabilities and were able to get the student newspaper to write an article about their organization and the problems they were trying to address. Daniel relayed how the problem eventually was solved:

We actually got the school newspaper to do a story about our organization and the Student Government Association (SGA) heard about it...They stepped forward and they said, "We are sorry about that. We didn't know that there was a problem here. We will pay for the door out of our special project funds."

Another theme that emerged from Daniel's case was support from others.

Daniel has received support from a variety of sources including his grandparents, an aunt, his mother, staff from disability services in his institution of higher education, teachers from his high school, and his case manager. The type of support he received

included financial assistance, information and referral, encouragement, and guidance with decision making and problem-solving. When asked about support from others,

Daniel shared the following:

Everybody in my family [is supportive of me], especially my grandparents. I have lived with them ever since I came home from the hospital. So they just all really encouraged me....I was fortunate to go to a high school where all of the teachers cared about the students and wanted to see them do well. They all really encouraged me and said, "You can do this, go for it." That's something that really helped out. Everywhere I went, really, everybody was encouraging [me].

A final theme that emerged from Daniel's case was the use of accommodations. Daniel uses notetakers and scribes for tests which are arranged through the disability services office at his institution of higher education. In addition, Daniel uses a wheelchair for mobility and a personal care attendant (PCA). The PCA goes to classes with Daniel and assists him school related activities such as taking his books out of his backpack. In addition, she also assists him with daily living skills while on campus, such as eating and toileting.

Bart

Bart is a 26 year old Caucasian male, who resides in southern Louisiana. Bart is quadriplegic as a result of a car accident when he was 15 years old. Bart uses a motorized wheelchair for mobility, which he controls by puffing into a small tube. The extent of Bart's disability is such that he needs Personal Care Attendants (PCAs) for all self-care functions, such as eating, bathing, and dressing.

Bart was interviewed in December of 2004 in the kitchen of his home. He was dressed casually, wearing jeans and a t-shirt. His speech was choppy due to his disability, and he gave very short responses.

Bart has completed a one year computer program affiliated with a state university. More recently, he completed a draftsman design program at a local technical college. During his schooling, he did not participate in any extracurricular activities, but did complete an internship with a local business. His goal is to obtain employment in the computer field.

Bart suggested that I speak with his mother, Ms. Carter, in order to learn more about his pursuit of, and participation in, post-secondary education. Ms. Carter has been one of the main supporters of Bart and his pursuit of higher education. Regarding Bart's success in school, Ms. Carter states, "I think Bart just has the determination and the will to achieve. He just wants to prove it to himself. He's just real punctual. I think he would make a great employee for somebody, too."

There were three themes that emerged from Bart's case: "support from others," "use of accommodations," and "persistence." In regards to support from others, Bart reported that his parents were always encouraging him to "keep going." His parents also encouraged Bart to take advantage of the resources that were available to him, such as financial assistance through Louisiana Rehabilitation Services. In addition to the support he received from his parents, Bart also received support from his sisters, his vocational rehabilitation counselor, and his case manager.

Another theme that emerged in Bart's case was use of accommodations. In one higher education program he was participating in, he had to have a special desk arranged for him. He has also received the accommodation of extended time, and alternative test location. He received a computer from vocational rehabilitation to type his class notes and complete assignments. In addition he uses a wheelchair for mobility and a modified van for transportation.

A final theme that emerged in Bart's case was persistence. Bart has pursued his postsecondary goals despite barriers that he has run into. For example, Bart originally wanted to attend a special computer program offered at a state university. He was not admitted to the program and decided to attend a local technical college instead. After he attended the technical college for two years, he applied again to the university program and was admitted. After completing the university program, Bart went back to the technical school to finish his associate degree. At the time of the interview, Bart had completed his coursework and was waiting for graduation day.

Russell

Russell is a 24 year old Caucasian male who resides in southeastern Louisiana. Russell was born with a disease called Degenerative Myopia. "It's a degenerative retinal condition that continually stretches the retina until it snaps." This disease can progress until the point of complete blindness. At the present time his "progression has been stopped due to the use of contacts" that he has been wearing since the second grade. Russell has limited vision now and his vision deteriorates over the course of the day and when he gets tired, making studying for long periods

very difficult. In addition, Russell does not have any peripheral vision, and is not able to drive.

Russell was interviewed in January of 2005 in a small empty classroom located on the campus of his university. He presented to the interview in casual dress, with no noticeable signs of a disability, such as a white cane or glasses. Russell was very thoughtful and deliberate in his answers, pausing at times to reflect on the question before he responded.

Russell has completed an undergraduate degree from a university located outside of Louisiana. He is currently a graduate student at a university located in Louisiana, with a major of applied statistics. He is currently not involved in any extra curricular activities, but has engaged in ballroom dancing, participation in academic societies, and organizations related to his major. His goal is to pursue his Ph.D. in either statistics or environmental ecology.

Russell indicated that his mother, Dr. Morgan, knew the most about his pursuit of, and participation in, post-secondary education. Dr. Morgan has served as a role model for Russell, has helped him resolve problems with his interactions in higher education, and has given him “the realization that a disability is not a shameful thing even though people might treat it that way.” Dr. Morgan describes herself as being Russell’s “fallback person.” For example, “if Russell got lost on campus, there wasn’t anyone that he could just call. Because most people will still, if you say, “where’s this,” [they say] “oh, it’s over there.” Well he would say, “I don’t know where over there is,” because he couldn’t see where they were pointing. Dr. Morgan

describes Russell as being “born with extreme motivation.” However, she states that “we have always told him from day one, when he started school and was dealing with issues, that we were his first line of defense. That we would always be there, and he, I guess, he always knew that [was] true.”

There were five themes that emerged from Russell’s case: “family member working in higher education,” “family support,” “role models,” “use of accommodations,” and “problem-solving.” In regards to having a family member working in higher education, Russell indicated that his mother was first a professor at a university in another state, and his father was working there as well. Russell choose to pursue his undergraduate degree at the same university where his parents worked. Russell’s family later moved to Louisiana so that his mother could accept a position at a university in Louisiana. Russell choose to pursue his graduate degree at the same university where his mother was employed. As a young child Russell remembered going to the campus when his mother had to work, so he was exposed to a university environment from a young age. Russell’s mother elaborate:

When Russell was young, I was just finishing my master’s at Washington State University, so he was constantly on campus. I was a teacher’s assistant. So if he was sick or if he broke his glasses, he would come everywhere with me. He would sit in the back of the class and play with his little trucks and all that kind of stuff. Russell was never not on a university campus ever in his whole growing up years except maybe from zero to maybe three. But all of the rest of the times [he was on campus]. All of his friends were sons and daughters of graduate students actually, so he has always had that exposure. The second theme that emerged from Russell’s case was family support.

The second theme that emerged in Russell’s case was family support. Russell

received encouragement from both immediate and extended family members. Russell stated:

Family support; that is one of the biggest things that helped me to where I [am], is that I had that family support system.

In addition to encouragement, Russell's mother assisted him with transportation, information and referral, decision making, and problem-solving. She has also assisted him with accommodations such as enlarging his textbooks, and assisting him with orientation to campus.

The third theme that emerged from Russell's case was that he had numerous role models in terms of pursuing higher education, and more specifically pursuing a graduate degree. Russell reported that his mother has a Doctorate of Philosophy and his father has a master's degree. Russell elaborated on his family's postsecondary education history:

I am, on my mother's side, an eighth generation college student. I grew up in a culture that it was pretty much indoctrinated in me that I would eventually go to college.

The fourth theme that emerged from Russell's case was the use of accommodations. Some accommodations were arranged formally through the university's Office of Disability Services. Those accommodations included: notetakers, large print materials, extended time on tests, and no scantrons. In addition, Russell has had to arrange for other accommodations on his own. Those accommodations include transportation to campus since he is unable to drive, large print textbooks, and use of a computer lab with accessible computers. In addition,

since Russell is not able to see the blackboard or the projection from an overhead projector, he tries to obtain notes from the professors and hard copies of overhead transparencies prior to the class so that he can follow along.

The final theme that emerged from Russell's case is problem-solving. Russell has had to resolve numerous problems while enrolled in higher education. As Russell took higher level classes he found it harder to find large print textbooks. Therefore he had to have regular print text books enlarged. Russell has also had problems with notetakers. Russell elaborated:

The notetaker system [at this university] is pretty much non-existent....My mom has tried to get the same type of notetaker system [as my other university] where they brought in studios notetakers. They were actually on salary with the university...and were brought in to take notes in classes that fit into their schedules....It was pretty much required and accepted...to find people with experience that have taken the class, or were notetaking previously, and did well in it. And they went through a training program for notetaking. That doesn't exist here [at this university] and it is unfortunate.

Ben

Ben is a 20 year old Caucasian male who resides in northern Louisiana. He was born with a condition called Spinal Bifida. As a result of his disability, he is unable to use his lower extremities. He uses a wheelchair for mobility.

Ben was interviewed in December of 2004 in the kitchen of his home. He was dressed casually for the interview, wearing shorts, a t-shirt, and no shoes. Ben sat in his wheelchair for the interview and it was noticeable that one of his feet was injured, as it was red and swollen. Ben has a very muscular upper body, short cut hair, and a deep voice.

Ben is currently on medical leave from the university he attends. He is classified as a freshman and is majoring in general studies. He is not currently affiliated with any student organizations. His goal is to compete professionally in wheelchair sports.

Ben suggested that I speak to his parents, Mr. and Mrs. Bonnett to learn more about his pursuit of, and participation in, post-secondary education. His parents indicated that they have “backed him in whatever he wants to do.” When speaking of Ben’s future, Mr. Bonnett says “I would be satisfied for him to do anything. Whether it’s through a college degree or any other kind of program, you know. I’m not a really demanding kind of guy. He can watch the Wal-Mart parking lot at night for all I care, you know, as long as he has something that he’s happy with that makes him happy and he feels like it’s something he wants to do, then I’m happy for him too.”

There were two themes that emerged from Ben’s case: “nonchalant attitude,” and “lack of use of resources and accommodations.” In regards to his nonchalant attitude, Ben was very non-committal when asked about his postsecondary education goals. He was on leave from school due to a medical complication related to his disability. When asked when he planned to return to school, he responded, “probably next semester, I’m not really sure on that.” When asked about his major, he replied, “I’m in general studies right now.” And when asked what field he might pursue, he replied, “I kind of have an idea. I’m just going to wait right now....I’m not 100% sure.”

The second theme that emerged from Ben's case was a lack of use of accommodations. Although Ben uses a wheelchair for mobility, he does not use any other formal or informal accommodations at school. He indicated that because of his wheelchair he does not fit into any of the desks at his university, however he has not requested an accessible desk. When asked about services offered through the Disability Services Office at his university, he replied, "Since I've never gone through with them and I've never really dealt with them, I'm not sure."

Chris

Chris is a 20 year old African American male who resides in northern Louisiana. Chris has Spinal Bifida and uses a wheel chair for mobility. He has good upper body strength, but his lower extremities are non-functional and disproportionate to the rest of his body. Chris needs assistance with activities that require reaching.

Chris was interviewed in July of 2004 in a college dorm room. He was dressed in pajama like clothes. His speech was difficult to understand at times and he provided very brief answers to the questions. Due to the difficulty in understanding his speech, it was necessary to ask him to repeat several answers.

Chris has recently completed his first year of a four year university affiliated program. His major is computer science. He is not affiliated with any school related organizations, but he does participate in weight lifting classes as a recreational sport. His goal for the future is to obtain employment in a computer repair business.

Chris recommended his parents, Mr. and Mrs. Spencer, as the people who know the most about his pursuit of, and participation in, post-secondary education. Mrs. Spencer indicated that she “supported him in whatever he wanted.” In addition, she stated that she “always tried to talk to him and tell him that he needs to be independent. And he says when he gets out of school he wants to get his own place. And I tried to tell him, yeah, you can do it.” In regards to Chris’s determination, Mrs. Spencer said, “that’s just the way he is.” Mr. Spencer added, “Whatever he wants, he go after it.”

There were three themes that emerged from Chris’s case: “support from others,” and “use of accommodations.” In regards to support from others, Chris has received support from multiple sources, including his parents, disability professionals, classmates, and faculty members. His parents provide transportation on a daily basis. He has received information and referral from disability professionals, and he receives guidance on decision making and problem-solving from friends and faculty members.

The second theme that emerged from Chris’s case was the use of accommodations. Chris receives academic accommodations from his school including extended time on tests, and alternative test location. In addition, he uses a wheelchair for mobility on campus and takes advantage of using the library for extra study time.

Matt

Matt is a 19 year old Caucasian male from south Louisiana. He has a diagnosis of Dyslexia, resulting in difficulty in reading and writing. In addition, he has a heart murmur, only one functional kidney, and his hands are slightly deformed. As a result of his physical disabilities, he is not supposed to engage in contact sports.

Matt was interviewed in December of 2004 in a conference room of the office where he works part time. He was dressed casually for the interview, wearing jeans, a shirt and a lightweight navy jacket. Matt had a delayed response to questions and answered in short responses.

Matt is currently a sophomore at a university in Louisiana. He is majoring in Electrical Engineering. He is not currently affiliated with any student organizations, but has a student job with a department on campus. His plans for the future are unknown.

Matt suggested that I speak with his mother, Mrs. Sims, regarding his pursuit of, and participation in, higher education. Mrs. Sims has a long history of supporting Matt in regards to his education. She reported that she “stayed on top of him with schoolwork in elementary school and when he had difficulty in the Catholic school, I was the one that kind of had to fight for him.” In addition, she was instrumental in making sure that Matt was exposed to his higher education options by bringing him to various college fairs. Mrs. Sims describes Matt as being quiet and shy. He’s “good hearted. The music teacher described him I think really well. He’s very quiet, but comes in, he does his job and he’s there when you need him.”

There were four themes that emerged from Matt's case: "family member working in higher education," "support from others," "persistence," and "use of accommodations." In regards to a family member working in higher education, Matt reported that his father has been teaching at a community college for many years. Matt reported that because his father works in a community college his father is able to advise him as he pursues his postsecondary education goals. Matt stated, "Like he knows what's going on in colleges now because he works for a community college."

The second theme that emerged in Matt's case was support from others. Matt has received support from his parents and a sibling. His parents have given him guidance in decision making, information and referral regarding disability services, and expose to postsecondary options by bringing him to a college fair. In addition, he has received advice from faculty members, advisors, and teachers from his high school.

The third theme that emerged from Matt's case was persistence. Despite some barriers Matt has encountered, he has continued to pursue his post-secondary education goals. Matt shared a problem he encountered. He stated:

I was in a class in which the teachers was giving the tests back later and later and I was not doing that well in the course. Everyone else was getting the tests back on time but because I had to take the tests at a different location and all and apparently he kept forgetting to grade it....another problem was his voice was very low...I was sitting in front of the class and I still had trouble hearing him.

Matt wound up retaking the class with a different teacher. Furthermore, Matt has had to retake several classes, indicating that the barrier is the attitude of professors who

are unwilling to cooperate with providing the accommodations he needs to be successful.

The fourth theme that emerged from Matt's case was the use of accommodations. He received all of his accommodations formally through the Disability Services Office at his institution of higher education. The accommodations he received included alternative test location, use of a computer for papers and long essay questions, extended time on tests, and textbooks on tape.

Summary

A total of 15 students were interviewed statewide; there were eight females and seven males. There were 11 Caucasian (white) students, three African American (black) students, and one Native American. The students ranged in age from 18 to 33. Of the fifteen students, six students possessed a physical disability, four possessed a learning disability, two possessed a sensory disability (visual), and three possessed multiple disabilities consisting of traumatic brain injury, physical disability, sensory – visual disability, sensory – hearing disability, and learning disability. Viewed in other terms, the total group possessed disabilities in the areas of traumatic brain injury, sensory visual, sensory hearing, learning, and physical. Regarding type of institution the students were attending, two students were enrolled in a community college, one student was enrolled in a vocational technical school, eleven students were enrolled in a university, and one student was enrolled in a university affiliated program. Table 1 provides a visual demographic summary of the participants.

Table 1 Demographic Summary

	Name	Age	Gender	Race	Disability	Type of Institution
1	Janice	18	F	W	Sensory – Visual	Community College
2	Beth	22	F	W	Learning	Community College
3	Callie	20	F	W	Multiple: TBI, physical, sensory - visual	University
4	Landa	21	F	W	Learning	University
5	Elaine	21	F	W	Learning	University
6	Allison	20	F	W	Physical	University
7	Kendra	19	F	B	Physical	University
8	Molly	33	F	B	Physical	University – distance learning
9	James	20	M	NA	Multiple: Sensory – hearing and visual, Learning	University
10	Daniel	19	M	W	Physical	University
11	Bart	26	M	W	Physical	Vo-tech and university affiliated program

(table cont'd)

12	Russell	24	M	W	Sensory – visual	University; Graduate school
13	Ben		M	W	Physical	University
14	Chris	20	M	B	Multiple: Physical, Learning	University affiliated program
15	Matt	19	M	W	Learning	University

This chapter introduced the participants who shared their experiences in post-secondary education. The information used to develop this introduction resulted from the compilation of the data collected from the students and either a parent, professional, or other individual who was knowledgeable about the student’s pursuit of, and participation in, post-secondary education. The data was collected through in-depth interviews. The case descriptions were presented in narrative form to provide the reader with an opportunity to more fully understand the participants as individuals. A demographic profile of the participants is displayed in table 1.

The case descriptions show a broad spectrum of characteristics for these participants. The interviews began with participants describing their disability and their corresponding functional limitations. These disabilities and limitations covered a broad range from cognitive impairments, to physical impairments, to sensory impairments, however they were all severe in terms of their impact on the individual’s life. In establishing a rapport with the participants, I was able to obtain rich explanations of their post-secondary education experiences. While their age,

gender, race, disability, and type of institution they attended may have varied, there were common themes that many of them shared in terms of their pursuit of, and participation in, post-secondary education. The themes of support from others, problem-solving, and use of accommodations were most prevalent. These themes, along with others, will be discussed more thoroughly in Chapters 5 and 6. Chapter 5 will present themes in relation to the theoretical assumptions guiding the study, whereas Chapter 6 will present other themes that emerged from the data.

CHAPTER 5

THEORETICAL ASSUMPTIONS

This chapter presents the findings in relation to the theoretical assumptions that guided the study. The findings emerged from the participants who were exhibiting self-determination in their pursuit of, and participation in, post-secondary education. The major findings emerged from in-depth interviews with both students (participants) and their corresponding parent or a professional who was familiar with each student's pursuit of, and participation in, post-secondary education. The findings are presented as themes supported by the voices of the participants, and in some cases by their corresponding parent or professional. The theoretical assumptions that guided this study are that self-determination is enhanced through:

1. Information and skills that foster a person's capacities for decision making and self direction (e.g. strategies for planning, achieving goals, developing partnerships with others, and self-management);
2. Access to opportunities to express self-determination (e.g. participation in a full range of educational opportunities, having control over supports and resources);
3. Facilitative support from others (e.g. family, friends, professionals, and mentors) (Powers & Deshler, 2002, p. 11).

Theoretical Assumption #1

Self-determination is enhanced by “information and skills that foster a person's capacities for decision making and self direction (e.g. strategies for planning, achieving goals, developing partnerships with others, and self-management)” (Powers & Deshler, 2002, p. 11).

Self-determination is operationalized as setting goals, identifying steps necessary to reach goals, and problem-solving barriers along the way. Therefore, participants for this study were asked, “How did you learn to set goals, identify steps necessary to reach your goals, and problem-solve barriers along the way?” The responses varied greatly. Some participants indicated that they learned from multiple sources, other gave credit to their parents, while others stated that they learned these skills from life’s experiences. A few students reported that they had participated in a program designed to enhance their ability to set goals, identify steps to their goal, and problem-solve barriers along the way.

Chris and Kendra both gave credit for their skill development to the Louisiana Youth Leadership Form (LYLF), a program for students with disabilities designed to build a student’s leadership skills. Kendra shared what she learned from the LYLF:

Pretty much that I have to speak for myself...I knew I could do anything myself, but not since I went there and had experience on my own, I’m starting to do things myself and more determined to get it done.

Daniel stated that he learned some about setting goals in high school and then also at the LYLF:

[I received] general things that you received while you were in high school, like setting your goals for college and all of that. That’s really the only real training I received, and here at the LFLY when I was a delegate.

James indicated that he learned a lot from the LYLF, but also from his participation in Louisiana Boys State and the Fellowship of Christian Athletes Council.

Janice indicated that she learned about goal setting, identifying steps towards a goal, and problem-solving from multiple sources. She stated:

Certainly LYLF has helped with that a lot, not just as being a...delegate, but also going back as a staff member. Also Camp Independence, which was a council with students with visual impairments at the Louisiana School for the Visually Impaired in Baton Rouge [helped me]. I've done that. I did that several years and that helped me with...gaining my independence. Also I'm taking this course currently. It's a college success course which is required for all freshmen to take. It helps you, not only with study habits and things like that for school, but also [with] how to set goals and what steps to take to get to those goals, how to write a plan, you know like, for your future. [It teaches you] all of those kinds of things and also how to better your skills at decision making and problem-solving.

Janice elaborated on how the trainings have helped her in her pursuit of, and participation in, higher education. She stated:

I find that they have given me inspiration...you know, to strive to work harder. Like when I might have a low self-esteem or something, I might think about something I have learned from one of the speakers at LYLF. [I will] think of something that they said or they might have given helpful advice or something that they have given us. And [I] just think, you know, and since I am a person with a disability and that person that was speaking to us had a disability, they kind of encouraged me to become a better person, you know, as an adult and as a student, kind of all around.

Russell indicated that the vocational rehabilitation agency in another state helped him focus on setting goals. Russell stated:

The person that I worked with in vocational rehab was very good. He had a vision [different] from what...mine actually was and he really emphasized the importance of helping others help you.

Bart also received some training from the state vocational rehabilitation agency. He indicated that they sent him through a two day course, where he experienced different options on how to find a job.

Allison indicated that she learned to set goals on her own. She elaborated:

I've always been a goal oriented person; I'm a very A-type personality, [I'm]...obsessive compulsive about setting goals. I'm not one who can skip over one goal and go directly to the next. You gotta meet one goal at a time. And also understand it really wasn't expected for me to graduate from high school and get a diploma. It is not expected for disabled people to go to college, it's still not. But when I get that diploma I can say "I did it, and no one else did it for me." I had kids at school way back when that used to say "yeah, but your mom helped you out in private,"...but I did it. I'm the one who made the grade. I'm the one who came up with the ideas. Now whoever helped me along the way, yeah they get a party, but I still get the name on the diploma.

Participants in this study learned how to set goals, identify steps to their goals, and problem-solve barriers from a variety of sources. Some participants learned informally through their parents or from experiences in life. Others learned from special programs designed to teach self-determination, such as the Louisiana Youth Leadership Forum, Louisiana Boys State, or the Fellowship of Christian Athletes. Whereas, other participants learned self-determination skills simultaneously while receiving services from a disability agency, such as Louisiana Rehabilitation Services.

Theoretical Assumption #2

Self-determination is enhanced by "access to opportunities to express self-determination (e.g. participation in a full range of educational opportunities, having control over supports and resources)" (Powers & Deshler, 2002, p. 11).

Participants were asked about some of the decisions they have had to make in their pursuit of, and participation in, post-secondary education. In addition, they were asked to share information regarding the extra curricular activities they were engaged

in. The types of decisions were extensive, including: (1) to go to school, (2) where to go, (3) what classes to take, (4) selecting a major, (5) how many hours to take, (6) time management, (7) whether or not to participate in extra curricular activities, (8) arranging accommodations, (9) where to live, and (10) whether or not to change majors. Many of these decisions were impacted by the student's functional limitations as a result of their disability.

To Go to School

All of the participants for this study had to set the goal of obtaining a post-secondary education. Some students expressed that they always knew that they would attend some form of higher education and that it was just a matter of deciding where to go. Other students, such as Beth, indicated that they didn't decide until after they graduated from high school. Beth elaborated:

It was actually after I graduated high school. During that summer I had so many choices of what to do: like I could go live with my mom in [one city], I could live with my grandma here in [this city], or I could live with my aunt and uncle in [another city]. And what I really wanted to do was go to college because I figured, okay, I graduated high school, what's next? And I thought college was the next thing for me because I really wasn't ready to go into the work force. So that's basically why I decided...I passed high school but I didn't really have anything to get me started in the work force.

Janice didn't decide to attend postsecondary education until near the end of her junior year. She explained:

It was the end of my junior [year] and the beginning of my senior year of high school. I figured that I was going to go to college. It took me quite a while to figure out exactly where [I wanted to go]. I had several universities or colleges in mind, and [I] filled out applications for those colleges. The hard part was finding colleges that offered my major...[The university I choose] happened to be the only one in Louisiana [that offered my major]. I was not very

comfortable, and I am still not really, with the fact of going out of state for school, at least for now. And so I applied [to the university], and I really was excited about going there. I even auditioned for a music scholarship, and I did not get accepted. I got accepted as far as with the music department, but not academically. And so I asked—I inquired about where I could go before hand so that I could transfer. I asked about [another university close by]. And the dean of the college of music said, recommended rather, that I start off at [the community college] because they work in conjunction with [the community college].

Molly made the decision to attend post-secondary education twice. The first time was immediately after she graduated from high school:

Well, I graduated from high school in 1990. At the time I thought I was going to go into computers and I did that for one year at [a local] community college. I had to leave college in '91 and have surgery on my right foot...After leaving for medical reasons, I never went back

Molly worked in the social service field as a receptionist for eight years. One of the reasons she continued to work was because she could get medical insurance. Her work experience actually influenced her decision to go back to school. Once she decided to go back, she went back on a part time basis so that she could continue to work and receive medical benefits.

Several other students expressed that they always knew they would go on to post-secondary education. Higher education was either overtly expected of them by their parents, or was something that was covertly understood. For some participants they indicated that going to college was something they always wanted to do. Callie, Daniel, and Elaine indicated that their families expected them to pursue higher education. Callie indicated that she was expected to go to college, but that she has always wanted to go. She elaborated:

Well, ever since I was young...education...was always something you were supposed to strive for. So I've always wanted to go to college and get a higher education....It was always assumed that you knew that you were [going to college]... I always knew that I wanted to...do the best that I could in school.

Daniel shared a similar experience:

It's really something that I have always wanted to do. Ever since I was real young my family has always encouraged me to get a college education. It's just something ever since I was real young...my major was probably different then; I wanted to be a doctor or lawyer, like little kids do....As long as I can remember I have always known that I was going to go to college.

Elaine indicated that her parents held similar expectations. She shared the following:

There was no real decision to go to college. It was just kind of expected that you go on to some sort of schooling...My parents, since I was doing so well in school, just automatically expected me to go to college....I graduated fifth in my class, so it was obvious that I have the mental capabilities to be accepted into school...and do fairly well and not flunk out.

Kendra and Landa reported that they made the decision to pursue a college education. Kendra stated that she thought a college degree was important in obtaining future employment, especially in light of the fact that she had a disability.

She shared her thoughts:

I figured with a disability I had to go to college so I could get me a career, so I could find me a job [and try] to survive like that when I get older. So, I decided to go to college and [the university] is right there in my home town.

Landa decided that a college degree would also be important for obtaining employment. She also thought a degree would help her make a difference in this world. Landa elaborated:

My decision to go to college was that basically nowadays you need a college degree to basically do anything. I want to make a difference in this world. I want to make this world a better place. And the only way I can get into any of

those jobs where you can make a better place in this world is by going to college. I like to learn new things. I like to try new things.

All of the participants for this study made the decision to attend some form of higher education. Some students made the decision shortly before or after their high school graduation, and their decision was made in part because they knew they needed additional education to enter the workforce. Other students reported that they pursued post-secondary education because it was either explicitly expected of them, or that it was understood by them that they were expected to go.

Where to Go

The decision to attend post-secondary education was a relatively easy decision for these participants. However, the decision regarding where to attend school was more complicated for some participants, for several reasons. First, some participants had differing opinions from their parents regarding which higher education institution would be most appropriate. Second, accessibility to some institutions limited students' choices. Third, students had to consider which institutions would lead them to their vocational goal.

Several students choose to attend the institution of higher education that was in close proximity to where they lived. Ben and Beth both decided that an institution close to home would be easier to attend than an institution out of town. Ben stated:

It's five minutes from my house, you know, and I really didn't want to go out of town to go to college because, you know, I didn't want to be in not familiar territory and being handicapped and all. It was just... easier.

Beth shared her similar thoughts, which were also influenced by finances:

Well, after I graduated high school, I knew that I had to go to college 'cause I really didn't have any plans of where to go from there. So I figured college would be the best bet. And the way I came down to the ...community college is because my family, we don't have that much money, you know. So I knew I didn't have any money and since I lived with my grandma she was able to apply for a grant and stuff like that, so I could go to [the]...community college. And also since it's only ten minutes away, it's so much closer than going [any of the other schools around here.]

Three students choose to attend an institution where a parent of theirs was employed. Landa and Callie both received tuition assistance since they had a parent working in the university. The tuition assistance influenced their decision regarding where to go to school. Callie shared her thoughts:

Well, my stepmother works here at [at this university]. So I get free tuition. So, I, I kind of, you know, always followed her to school like the little sick kid or the puppy dog. I had homework to do after school. So I always came to Loyola and visited with her, and I just thought it was the greatest place. [My stepmother] also wanted me to come here and get the free tuition part...Everybody kind of knew that I was coming here. I talked to my friend...who goes to Tulane University, and he wanted me to go there because it has a better reputation and the educational standards are higher or something. But I told them that I really wanted to go here. So even though he tried to talk me into Tulane, I was like, "nope."

Russell also has a parent working in an institution of higher education. He choose to attend the same university for convenience reasons. He was unable to drive as a result of his visual impairment. His mother provided transportation back and forth to the university. Russell stated:

Well, that was, the reason that I went to [the first university] and the reason that I came to [this university] was that was where my family was. And family support, that's one of the biggest things that helped get me to where I [am], is that I had that family support system.

Molly made the decision regarding where to go by considering her interests,

in combination with an understanding of the functional limitations of her disability.

She was unable to drive and knew that transportation would be problematic.

Therefore, decided to pursue her postsecondary education goals through distance education. She stated:

I thought I [wanted] to be a social worker...and that didn't happen because every college and institution I looked into [didn't have]...the curriculum I wanted and it didn't really meet what I needed. What I mean by that is that I needed transportation. Going to an institution locally would not have afforded me that opportunity because I didn't have the proper transportation to do so.

Elaine also choose where to go based on a combination of considering her disability and her vocational interests. She shared the following:

I researched all of the colleges but [the one I picked] has the only dyslexic-based program in the state. I had problems...I wanted to go to a school that was in state. It was the only one that had that sort of program that they specialized in the disabilities that I had. And I had a full paid scholarship there, so obviously why not take advantage of the scholarship...But I [also] wanted to be independent, and I knew that if I stayed at home...my mom would continue to try to help me. And I wanted to become an independent individual so I wanted to move out. ...But I've known from an early age that I either wanted to go to [this university] or I wanted to go to the College of the Ozarks. And the reason I didn't go to College of the Ozarks is one they don't offer communications disorders and I knew that's what I wanted to do. And two, it was too far from home and if I needed mom and dad to show up, that's a long drive and they wouldn't be there for another day, but if I went to [this university], it's just two hours away and they could just drive right over.

Allison stated that although it was expected she go to college, her parents had different expectations regarding where she would go. She decided to choose that institution that she felt was more progressive in terms of accommodating students with disabilities. She stated:

It wasn't a question because both my parents didn't go to college and it has never been an option for any of their kids. I'm from 5 – 10 minutes from [one

university] and my parents wanted me to go there. They have two ramps in the whole school. I felt that I definitely don't want to have to fight for a necessity at whatever school I go to...Finally [my parents] said, "if you can get it fully funded, you can go [where you want]."

Participants for this study revealed various reasons for how they decided which institution of higher education to attend. Some participants attended a particular institution because they had a family member working there. Other participants choose their higher education institution because the institution offered financial assistance or their chosen field of study. Finally, other students choose their higher education institution for convenience reasons, either it was located close to where they live, or they knew that it would meet their accessibility needs.

What Classes to Take

Deciding what classes to take is something that every higher education student must do. Many students decide what classes to take by considering what time of day the class is offered, whether or not it is related to their major, and whether or not they have an interest in the class. However, students with disabilities must consider other factors as well, such as whether or not the class is located in an accessible building, whether they physically have time to get from one class to another, whether or not the professor is known to be accommodating to students with disabilities, and whether or not they have the ability to succeed in the class. Students discussed their concerns regarding deciding which classes to take. Allison's decisions regarding classes were influenced by her disability. She shared the following:

You try not to move classes as much as possible. I don't like filling out paperwork to move classes so I just try not to schedule classes in that

building. But if you need the time versus the building you need to debate which way you want to go....I think state law only requires 20 -30 % of historical buildings to be handicapped accessible, and half the buildings on this campus are historical buildings and so handicapped accessible doesn't mean put an elevator, it means put a ramp on the first floor. A lot of the buildings in the quad have a ramp on the first floor and you may have an elevator that works and it might not be big enough but it is still an elevator and they call that handicapped accessible. So you have to play the lesser of two evils game. [The A building]...is probably the worst building on this campus and when they blow it up in five years I will be there, because it has an elevator that gets stuck all the time. And you get consideration for absences but you still miss that entire class. Not because you didn't want to go...but because you can't get there....Or you can't get down. I've not gotten stuck going to a class, I have gotten stuck coming from a class. Or ramps are too steep, so [if] you try to go up them in a manual wheelchair you are going to flip. Or things are too spread out. I usually don't have that problem because I have an electric chair. I try to avoid wheelchair lifts if at all possible....I'm getting to the point that I don't have a choice [regarding what classes I take]. I've got to take [certain classes]. So, I have to [have my classes]...move[d]. Last semester was the first time I've had to move classes....Whatever the time is I will take [the class];...just give me an [accessible] building.

Landa and Matt reported that they try and schedule classes with professor they know will be accommodating in regards to their disability, whereas, Callie schedules classes taking into consideration her functional limitations as a result of her disability. She has limited mobility, had difficulty walking, and tires easily. She schedules her classes with plenty of time between each one. She stated:

I schedule my classes based on, like knowing, how far I have to go or how quick I have to go.

Ben has difficulty with Math. Therefore, he tries to take classes he enjoys and avoid classes that are difficult. He stated:

Well, there's always a decision of what classes to take. Even [that] is a big decision. I mean even though you're in general studies you have a list of many classes that you can take. With me liking history and science, you

know, kind of weighing on that decision, you know...I choose to take more of those of classes and kind of stay away from the math classes.

Beth tries to balance her classes each semester between ones that are required for her degree and ones she is interested in. She elaborated:

You got to choose which classes are most important for you. Where are you going and what you are trying to accomplish? Because it doesn't really make a lot of sense to take a lot of classes that you really aren't going to use. But also on the other side, it's important for you to take one class that's fine. Like I am taking an acting class and I guess that's just my one class that's my leisure time. But all my other three classes, those are classes that I have to take in order for me to accomplish what I am going for.

Elaine also tries to take a mixture of classes she likes and required classes. She stated:

There's already a list of classes that you have to take in college, but you have certain classes that are kind of lagniappe classes that you can choose from a list. And I found whatever ones were more my interest, but I could have taken lower level classes because I tested out of some of the classes.

Participants for this study had to make decisions regarding what classes to take. Although all students, regardless of disability, must make decisions regarding classes; some students with disabilities must take some disability related factors into consideration. Those factors include consideration for their ability to master the course material, their ability to physically get to the class, and the professor's willingness to accommodate students with disabilities.

Selecting a Major

In addition to deciding what classes to take, all students must choose a major course of study. Several participants for this study were influenced by exposure to specific programs or classes related to their major, prior to enrolling in higher education. Other students received guidance from their parents. Still, others had

some uncertainty and eventually switched majors several times. Callie participated in a summer program at a local university, which influenced her choice of a major. She elaborated:

Well, actually, it's kind of weird. I don't really like anything. Normally people choose their major based on what they're interested in or they like. And I'm not really interested in anything or like anything, [it is] just kind of sad,...but the summer between my junior and senior year in high school, I took a class at [a local university] in order to get rid of a credit that I needed for high school. And I just happened to take Introduction to the Internet, which [my stepmother] signed me up for. It's a computer class, a computer science class, and I loved it. I thought it was easy. I thought it was my thing. So that's how I decided to major in computer science through just that class.

Daniel also participated in a university program that influences his choice of major.

He stated:

It was Enabling Success...that helped [me decide my major], but I always worked on the computer. I have been on the computer since I was six years old. I have always loved computers and it's just something I always knew I wanted to work with computers. It was either that or computer science. And in the CIS field it is a wider range of opportunities, wider range of careers that you can go into. If you go into computer science, you are just stuck being a programmer. And I didn't know if I wanted to do that for the rest of my life. This way I can program or I can be a website designer or I can be a network administrator or I can do the IT consulting.

Elaine indicated that her selection of major was influenced by her disability.

As a young child she was exposed to numerous medical and health related professions, including speech pathologists. This exposure had an impact on her. She elaborated:

I was under speech pathologists from an early age because of my dysphasia and I always kind of idolized them because they were really motivating people who were nice and kind and never put people down. I like those kind of positive people. And I like to surround myself with positive people.

Landa experimented with several majors, but ruled them out because she had difficulty passing the required courses. She finally focused on an area where she felt she had related experience. She explained:

Well at first, I was majoring in veterinary because I always loved animals. Well, me and biology sort of didn't kind of click. And me and medical terminology didn't click at all, so I was like, well if I can't pass biology, I guess God's trying to tell me it's not the field I should be in. And then I tried Computer Information Systems, but it didn't click at all....That didn't click. It clicked with my boyfriend, he was in the same class, but it didn't click with me. Then I started thinking, I have been doing mission work since I was seven. I have been caring-- mainly for others and for myself my whole life. And so I thought and I have always had a little interest in abused kids and what happens and I really would like to know the history, and what goes on behind the scenes and all that kind of stuff. So I talked to my mom about social work and she said, "yeah, I think you should do it. I think that's where you need to be. It fits in with your mission work and it fits in with all you have been doing." And I already have a little taste of it because I have been adopted. And it's my minor and I have always had a little bit of interest of what my dad does for a living. So I think I want to try that out.

James also ruled out some majors because of his disability. However he finally focused on a major that he was interested in and one that he had the abilities to succeed in. James elaborated:

Electronics is always something I have been fascinated in and daddy's like, "when you are deciding a degree, you should pick something that you like to do and you enjoy doing for the rest of your life so that you won't be bored." I was like, "I would like to go into law enforcement, but I can't because of my eye." He was like, "yeah, I know that. That's one of the reasons why we are having this talk, so I can help you make up your mind a little sooner so that you can pick a university to go to." He's like, "you ever thought about going into electronics, because forestry's not going to have a good future down the road as electronics, because the world's building on electronics right now." And I got to thinking about that and that's what I finally decided.

Chris and Beth both decided on a major based upon pure interest. Chris

claimed that he was always interested in computers. Beth stated:

I've always liked children. And I don't know exactly what I want to do with them. I am thinking of going towards special [education]. But I decided to take the early childhood classes because anyone, no matter what I've always been told, no matter you do with children, the early childhood education you need to know the basics fundamentals. You know how the child develops and all that.

Participants for this study made decisions regarding their major based on interest, parental influence, or as a result of experiences participating in a related class or program. Several students had difficulty sticking with a major and switched majors several times. One participant was unsure of what to major in and therefore decided to remain in general studies. In a few situations the selection of a major was influenced in some way by the individual's disability.

How Many Class Hours to Take

Participants were asked what kinds of decisions they had to make while in higher education. Several participants responded that they had to decide how many hours to take. Each institution has an average number of hours that constitute full time, however for some of the participants of this study, their disability impacted the number of hours they could take. For example, Ben had an exacerbation of his medical condition that eventually required hospitalization. When he tried to register late he was limited in the number of available required classes he could take. Ben explained:

Last semester when I started having medical problems [I]...went down to eight hours, I think, seven or eight hours. Of course that was the last semester that it went down....Actually I didn't know if I would be able to go last semester either because of my health problems and being in the hospital and

everything. So actually what I did is, I tried to register too late and many of the classes were already full so that was the max I could get out of that. And that's why I went only part time that semester. But all the other ones, it's been twelve hours full time.

Callie tries to limit the number of classes she takes to four. "Well a lot of people, if they want to graduate on time, they take five or six." However, Callie gets fatigued easily and taking four classes is the maximum amount she can handle.

Russell also limits the number of hours he takes. As a result of his visual disability, it takes him longer to study, than other students. Russell elaborated on how the extra time it takes him to study impacted his college experience:

One of the decisions I mentioned was deciding to take it slow when I first started and you know, only sign up for a limited number of hours which made my undergraduate experience a very long one....My vision had some impact in this because once I started taking full time loads, it really became, you know, it really became hard for me to participate in any extracurricular activities because I didn't have time because I was always...studying.

Elaine learned the hard way that the number of hours a student takes is a serious decision. She shared her experience:

[I] try to keep my hours down to at least eighteen, between eighteen and twenty hours...There's a reason why they don't want you to exceed that amount and make...I learned...my advisors in the dyslexic center told me that I should schedule an hour between classes because that gives me time to look over notes before class. If I need to take a test in the next class or it gives me time to just cool down and let my brain rest for an hour and maybe get a snack or go do something else. Not jump from class to class....Look at your interests and don't schedule classes that you are going to hate all of your classes this semester because then that's going to make you want to quit. Look at the classes and then say okay well if I like computer science maybe I should take another computer science class. And [if] I have this English class, but I hate English, so why don't I put my computer science and my English class on the same day. Then I will have a class I like and a class I don't necessarily want to go to. And always put the class that you don't want to go to first. Or if you have three classes [then]...you take a class that you want to go to first thing in

the morning, because you are not going to want to get up and go to a class that you don't want to go to. And then you go to a class that you don't necessarily like, but you have a class that you look forward to at the end of the day. So you don't want to go, oh look, I don't want to go to this class today, I'm going home because then you miss two classes instead of just one.

Once a major is selected, students must decide how many course hours to take per semester. A few students indicated that the number of hours they took was directly impacted by functional limitations as a result of their disability. These students have had to adjust the number of hours they took as a result of exacerbations of their medical health, their disability related functional limitations, and learning what works best for them.

Extracurricular Actives

When participants were asked "what kinds of decisions have you had to make since being enrolled in higher education?," one of the responses received was whether or not to participate in extra curricular activities." Other participants elaborated on their extra curricular involvement when prompted by a follow up question, "what extra curricular activities are you currently engaged in?" Beth indicated that she has participated in a variety of extra curricular activities. She elaborated on the enjoyment she received from participating in extra curricular activities:

I was on the SGA committee my first semester. That was really fun. I was just a representative like a freshman representative. It wasn't a problem because I like volunteering. And also if you get involved in an organization or a group or something like that on campus, you have more of a reason to go [to school]...Last semester I was in SGA, we did a Christmas float for the [city] Christmas parade and I had so much fun, because I got to work with other people and got to ride on the float. We also have to make decisions. Like what can better help the students and it was interesting because I was new and I didn't really know what I was into. But there's so much stuff that we need as

students, not just better parking spaces, but also opportunities to do stuff. One thing...that we raised was for a student union....Somewhere so that all of us go to if it's raining, we can go, we can sit, we can have snacks, we can watch television. And that really makes us want to go to college because we have some place we can go between breaks and just blow off steam. And not have to hold it all in until our next class....Another thing I am involved in right now—well my past semesters I was in the ambassadors and it was like they started off small like a tutoring group, or a mentoring thing. Like we would sign up and you would be paired with either teachers or paired with upper classman and we would just go to them and talk to them about our problems, talk to them about difficulties that we are having at school. And they would give us information from their past experience or information to help us get through it.

Callie is also involved in several organizations. She elaborated:

My favorite and most common one is called OASIS, like the band and the little spotted out in the ocean. It's a group for kids who don't drink, don't do drugs and don't smoke. And it's OASIS because there's so few of us....That's really fun because we hang out like every weekend and sometimes we eat lunch together during weekdays. And we just do fun activities that don't involve going to bars or smoking....I'm in an...Asian Student Organization. And I'm also in a...University Community Action Program....I like [the Asian Student Organization] because I love the Asian culture and Asian food. I'm all about the food. [I like the Community Action Program] because they help out around [the city]; they try to make it better for the community. They're not just, you know, stuck at [the campus]. They go out in the real world and try to make changes and differences. So, I felt like that was kind of like what the Louisiana Youth Leadership Forum had prepared me to do was to join [the Community Action Program].

Daniel has also participated in several organizations on his university campus. In addition, he has worked with other students to create a new organization designed to advocate for the needs of students with disabilities. Daniel shared his experiences:

I am in SGA, Student Government Association. I am actually a cabinet member now. I am the director of technology. So I am actually in charge of maintaining the SGA website. That's something that I have been doing since April. And I really enjoy doing that. I am actually in the process now of completely redesigning it, redesigning the website. Other than that, I am the CIS representative for the Business Student Association, which is the

governing body for the college of administration and business. And then -- I also this fall plan to join AITP, which is the Association of Information Technology Professionals, which is actually for my field. I am also a member of the Louisiana Tech Chamber Singers. I was actually on student council my entire high school career. It was just something I always loved doing, so I just carried it over into college. The business student association, that was really just an on the fly thing. I went in the dean's office and they are like you want to be on the business student association next year. And I was like sure why not. AITP that's going to be more of a networking thing. Talking to professionals in the field and seeing what's going on in the field. And just kind of staying up on current events. It's the stuff that will help me when I get out into the real world and into the job setting.

Elaine participates in extra curricular activities, but tries to keep those activities focused on academics. In addition, she limits the amount of time she spends on extra curricular activities. She elaborated:

I try to keep my extracurricular activities to a minimum, but I am in two honors societies, they are both sororities. They are honor sororities, Phi Sigma Delta and Delta Delta Phi. Since they are honor societies, one of them is a freshman honor societies and one is a sophomore honor society. And they invited me to participate. And I looked at how much time is this going to take away from my schooling? Because that is the most important thing to me is my schooling. So is this going to take a lot of time and push my studying down and make me go to bed later and maybe not do as well. Or is this something I can do and still be able to study just as much, it kind of gives me a break? And both societies I discovered we only did a couple of fund-raisers and we just did a couple...we only have like four meetings in a semester, instead of having one every week. I looked at what are the good points and what are the bad points of joining this. I am also in the literary society because I love to read....And the English society, I am pretty good in English. I write pretty well. I love literature. So I decided that was a good society to join in on. Their meetings are like once a week but I buddied up with a friend who also has some learning problems and we alternate on which meeting we go to. And we get the information from the other person so that we are up to date with it, but we are not forced to go to every meeting all of the time. And we don't participate in all of the activities.

James shared Elaine's view of maintaining a balance between academic work and extra curricular activities. He also has joined an organization related to his major. He stated:

You have to make the decision whether you are going to study or go out and party. I mostly study, due to my learning disability, I study a lot more than everyone else and if you are going to join any extra curricular activities with other adults your age, which I have. I have joined the FCA, which is the Fellowship of Christian Athletes on the college level. And I recently joined the Baptist Collegiate Ministry. I was baptized last April. I went on a mission trip with them to Mexico, teaching English as a second language. That was an experience....I joined a new organization called the Institute of Electrical and Electronic Engineers. It's an organization that goes along with our degree program. It's voluntary to join and stuff. And we are working on a new project, which is the Hydrogen Fuel Cell Project. A lot of us were interested in it, but we just had to find the time to do it. That's our main problem right now is everyone trying to get together to work on the project.

Some students indicated that they tried to limit their extra curricular activities so that they could focus on their academic responsibilities. However, a few of these students indicated an interest in participating in extra curricular activities in the future. Kendra stated:

I think eventually I'm gonna get into it. But at this point I wanted to see how college life was first and see how everything, structure, the academics, I'm gonna think of something.

Landa shared similar thoughts. She stated:

I am going to try this year to go into a sorority....I am going to try to go through rush. But I mostly concentrate on my studies because I find that if I do way too much then my grades are going to fall even more. So I know what my limit is and the fact that school is the main priority here. And that too much other stuff gets in the way.

Molly stated that because she is working full time, her schedule did not allow

time for school based extra curricular activities. However, Molly is actively involved as a Governor appointed member of a statewide disability board. She is also on a statewide advisory board for a health insurance program for people with disabilities, designed so that people with disabilities can keep go to work and keep their Social Security health related benefits.

Many of the participants in this study were engaged in one or more extra curricular activities. Some students joined organizations that were either related to their major or academically based. Several students joined organizations so that they could be more involved with college life and have social opportunities. There were a few students who did not participate in extra curricular activities at this time, but expressed an interest in participating in activities in the future. Many students expressed a concern about having time for studying and for extra activities.

Time Management

Time management is another issue common to all students enrolled in postsecondary education. Students must decide how to spend their free time taking into consideration the need to study and time obligations for participating in extra curricular activities. Several students in this study indicated that they needed to decide how to spend their time. Callie reported that her disability was a factor in her time management decisions. She stated:

Well, I definitely had to decide on how many groups I could join. Because of my disability, I'm constantly fatigued and I'm always tired. So, it's like, I guess when you wake up in the morning before you have your coffee, that's how I feel all the time, even when I drink coffee. So I had to decide how much I could handle, how many classes I could take and still be able, you

know, to study real hard and have a high GPA, and how many organizations and how often they meet each week.

James also considers his disability when making decisions regarding time

management. He indicated that he must spend more time studying. He stated:

You have to make the decision whether you are going to study or go out and party. I mostly study, due to my learning disability, I study a lot more than everyone else.

Landa and Beth both reported that they had to adjust their decisions regarding time management. Landa explained this nicely:

Well some things are trial and error. Some things I have learned because I made a mistake. My partying went a little too far. Well, it didn't go too far but my grades faltered and I still trying harder this year, I think I am going to not party so much and completely stay focused to my studies. I guess part of it was truthfully I was looking for guys because, I don't know, I always like to have a guy around as a boyfriend. And I am very social so I try to get myself involved as much as possible. But that kept me away from paying attention to what it was that I was really supposed to be doing. Not so much that I dropped out of school or I really got my grade point average real low but it did falter.

Beth wasn't partying, but decided to get a job. She explained what happened:

When I started work, ...I realized I would throw all of my energy into work not even school. And [then] I decided [school is] more important....I still needed to make a little bit of money, you know, gas money for my car, [or if] I need this or I need that. You have to make other decisions also about what to do on a Friday night. Should you really go out to the movies or should you study for the test you have on Monday.

Several students in this study indicated that they had to make a decision regarding how they would spend their time. These students considered their disability as a factor that needed to be taken into consideration. Other students had to adjust their time management decisions based on how their time management impacted their school work.

Other Decisions

There were several other decisions that students in this study indicated that they made in their pursuit of and participation in higher education. Allison and Daniel both use a wheelchair for mobility. They reported that they needed accessible housing and had to decide where to live that would be most conducive to them getting back and forth to class. Kendra, Chris, Callie, and Molly are their disabilities, therefore they needed to live at home and arrange for transportation, take distance education courses, or live on campus. Kendra stated:

Since I don't drive, it's kind of hard for me to get some classes back to back, I got a big gap, so since the apartment is right there, I just go to class and sometimes I can just go to my apartment, so I just stay there during the week and on weekends I come home.

Another decision reported by one student was whether or not to change majors. Russell elaborated on his decision:

I suffered when I was in oceanography here at [this university]...the oceanography department here is geared heavily toward biology and I don't really have any biology on my background. I didn't even take it in high school. And there was some personality clashes between my major professor and myself....I was shopping for something that I could do at [this university]. It would be a benefit for me in a future career because I knew that I would, you know, I always knew that I wanted to do something in science...so I was looking for something that would help me in that aspect. And, you know, I had, because there's professors who's a dual appointment between criminal statistic and oceanography and the committee requirements and the oceanography, he was actually a member of that committee before the switch. I spoke to him about it and he had me take the course last summer. [It was] a distance course class. And then he recommended after successfully completing that, that I speak with the department head if he had an assistantship available.

Other students did indicated that they changed majors, but did not explicitly state that it was a decision they had to make.

Participants in this study made numerous decisions in their pursuit of and participation in postsecondary education. The types of decisions included: (1) to go to school, (2) where to go, (3) what classes to take, (4) selecting a major, (5) how many hours to take, (6) time management, (7) whether or not to participate in extra curricular activities, (8) arranging accommodations, (9) where to live, and (10) whether or not to change majors. Many of these decisions were impacted by the student's functional limitations as a result of their disability.

Theoretical Assumption #3

Self-determination is enhanced by “facilitative support from others (e.g. family, friends, professionals, and mentors)” (Powers & Deshler, 2002, p. 11).

Participants shared specific examples of how others have supported them in their pursuit of, and participation in, post-secondary education. The type of support includes: encouragement, assistance locating resources, assistance with decision making, transportation, assistance with problem-solving, assistance with accommodations, and financial assistance. The support was provided by parents, other family members, high school staff, higher education staff, disability services offices, friends/peers, and disability professionals.

Parents

The majority of the participants shared examples of how their parents supported them in their pursuit and participation in, post-secondary education. Some

parents played a simple role of providing encouragement and guidance, whereas others were more intricately involved in the day to day experiences of the student. Chris indicated that he had support from multiple sources, but his parents were a daily support for him: “They made sure I had transportation to get to and from...my house and to school and back home.” Similarly, Daniel also had support from a parent, his mother. “She really helped in that transition from high school to college. She really helped.”

Allison had support from her parents in multiple ways. They assisted in making calls to different schools and collecting information for her. In addition, they helped her physically acclimate to her campus. Due to Allison’s use of a wheelchair for mobility, she needed assistance with learning the college campus, specifically in finding curb cuts and accessible entrances to buildings. In regards to learning the campus she stated, “my parents walked the campus with me.” Allison also indicated that she consulted with her parents when trying to decide what to major in:

My parents play a huge role because we are trying to decide whether I stay here or go to New Orleans...My parents never had the mentality that I mentioned before of when you figure out that you have a disability you all of sudden you say ‘I just hope she makes it out of here.’ When I first got picked on at school, I told my mom about it, she said this may sound kind of mean but it got me thorough, ‘[my mom said,] grow up, suck it up, cuz this is how the rest of your life is going to be and there is nothing we can do about it.’ She said, ‘believe me, if there was something I could do about it, I would. But you are going to have to learn.’ She was very supportive but she was also very realistic and realizing that independence would probably be the best thing.

Bart indicated that his parents were there to push him to reach his goals. He stated, [they were] “pushing me...like encouraging me, Telling me I need to get out

and do something.” Bart described his family support as follows: “you get encouragement from home...to keep you going.”

Ben described his parents as being most important in helping him pursue and participate in college. In regards to how they have supported him, Ben states:

Just helping me any way they can, you know. ‘If we need to get tutoring lessons or whatever, we will do whatever we can to help you.’ And, anything that I need, it was like they were there.

Elaine’s parents supported her in several ways. They helped her research information on the higher education institutions she was considering attending.

Elaine shared her thoughts on her parent’s support:

They were kind of like ‘whatever you want to do we will support you. It doesn’t matter what you do, we will love you no matter what you choose.

Elaine indicated that her parents would assist her in problem-solving and that she would seek out their advice before seeking the advice of others. She stated, “We would talk about it and I’d ask them what they thought...[I asked them] how I should go about fixing whatever the problem happened to be.” She added:

My parents, they never let me look down. They never let me use my disability as a crutch. It was always, “you are going to do it.” It’s almost an expectation. We are going to set the bar high and you are going to do these things. One of my mother’s favorite things is, “sometimes people have to do things that they don’t necessarily won’t to do, for the better good of themselves and for others.” And that is very true.

James states that his father was instrumental in his pursuit of higher education.

His father discussed higher education with him and helped him research his options:

Yes, me and daddy discussed it a great deal at one time....Well, me and daddy, we took time out of school, my senior year I think it was, and we went around to different colleges visiting. We went up to Tech, because I was

looking into forestry at that time and possible electronics. Then we went to Northwestern and they explained their program more in depth to me. And they seemed more interested and plus I was able to get a scholarship from them.

Janice, indicated her mother played a role in connecting her to necessary resources on the college campus:

Like before I graduated high school, my mom had called the main number at Delgado. She had gotten through [and]...asked who she can call to get information on disability services. And she did talk with my current advisor, who is a coordinator for disability services, and inquired about what accommodations they provided and what kinds of things that would be provided. Such as, how would ...tests be administered? Would tape recorders be allowed in class?

Janice described her family's support:

They have definitely supported me all the way through. They have helped me, certainly helped me to apply, as far as filling out applications. Even though most of them are pretty standard, but as far as filling them out, my mom had definitely helped me with that. And they've helped me to kind of get me to be enthusiastic about starting college. Giving me the kind of the ups and downs, more positive than negative points though.

Landa discussed her decision to go to college with her parents, mainly because she was concerned about finances and housing. Landa stated:

I didn't have a job. I couldn't pay for it myself. And so we talked about it and it really was nothing bad. They encouraged me to go, so I went."

Landa's parents have also supported her in her participation in higher education.

Landa's mother, who is a professor on campus, has assisted Landa with deciding what classes to take. Landa elaborated:

My mom also helps me find out which teachers I should take and what is the most easiest. So me and mom work together and some of the classes I choose myself....My parents helped me by letting me do what I wanted to do. They never ever discouraged me. They always told me, "your best is the best you

can do; just go do your best.” If I make a C, they are perfectly happy. If I make a B, they are even more happy. Now if I make a D or an F, [then] they...talk to me about it. But most of the time I do my best.

Matt also discussed going to college with his parents. In addition, he consulted with them when choosing a major and deciding which electives to take. They gave him guidance in those decisions. Matt also talks to his parents when he has a problem related to higher education, and they usually tell him who else he needs to speak with in order to get the problem resolved. In regards to his parent’s support, Matt stated:

They brought me to the college fairs and all. They tell me what colleges, my dad, he sees all the, like he knows what’s going on in colleges now because he works for a community college.

Molly’s mother is the main person she receives support from. Molly stated:

I basically talked to my mom...My mom was the main person that I talked to. I really, you know, wanted to know from her that I would have the support, not that I wouldn’t, I just knew to run it past my mom, so to speak.

Russell has also talked with his mother about his decision to go to college:

Well, it was talked about. You know, mostly in terms of family support and also financial condition, particularly at the time I was getting into [the first university]. My family didn’t have a lot of money. So sending me out of state wasn’t really that big of an option. And the other thing is that’s when we found out [there’s] not a lot of...scholarship money available for, you know people with my level of condition.

Russell’s mother also helped him problem-solve getting into the university.

He had been home schooled and the university had a basic requirement of a high school diploma; however, there was an exception allowed. “My mom did know

about the rule.” She was working at the university at the time. Once enrolled, his mother helped him resolve problems related to his disability.

Callie shared that her parents were both supportive of her in the process of pursuing higher education and assisted her in locating resources on campus:

[My stepmother], she was very supportive and she still is on getting me through college and definitely my father too. He helps out any way he can....Well, um, [my stepmother] introduced me to the special education head person [at my university], [who] is in charge of the resource center and she talked to me and with her help and [my stepmother's] help, I decided what my load would be.

Callie reflects on family support and a family's role in students with disabilities reaching their post-secondary education goals:

I think for some of those students who were born with their disabilities maybe they don't set their goals as high because society or their friends or even their family have told them that they can't do it. Like there was one specific girl at the Louisiana Youth Leadership Forum who said she couldn't go to college because she didn't want to. And her parents treated her like an invalid. They carried her up the stairs, carried her down the stairs. They didn't really see the chair--what she could achieve and didn't, you know, just feared that she couldn't do it. So they didn't push her....Besides myself, when I did have the bad days and I had to tell myself, no you can't give up, I also had all kinds of people surrounding me telling me, you're too good for this, Callie. You can do it. Like my stepmother, my friend Crystal, and my therapist. Everybody supported me and I think that that support that I've had throughout my life has really helped to get me where I am today. And that even if I fall, not only will I pick myself up, but other people will help me.

All of the student participants in this study received some kind of support from parents. The level of support from parents ranged drastically from only the provision of encouragement to financial support and direct assistance. The kinds of support provided by parents included: provision of transportation, transition

assistance, contacting post-secondary schools and collecting information, providing orientation and mobility assistance on campus, assisting with decisions (to go to school, where to go, what classes to take, what to major in), assistance with problem-solving, assistance with gathering and completing application materials, bringing students to colleges campuses and fairs, and assistance locating disability and other resources.

Other Family Members

Several participants expressed that they have received support from other family members, including grandparents, aunts, uncles, and siblings. The support they received included: encouragement, assistance locating resources, assistance with decision making, transportation, assistance with problem-solving, assistance with accommodations, and financial assistance. In some situations, extended family members took on supportive roles that would typically be a function of a parent. Beth is one example. She indicated that her whole family has been supportive, including “my mom and daddy and sister, [and]other people that I know.” However, Beth’s grandmother has been the most supportive. Her grandmother followed up on getting the necessary paperwork from her high school. In addition, her grandmother lets Beth live with her. Her grandmother even helped her decide to go to college. Beth stated:

[I was] having a hard time trying to figure out what I wanted to do. And [my grandmother] said, ‘why don’t you just live with me and go to [the] Community College.’ And she’s the main person I talked to. My counselors, they suggested it and stuff, but grandma really said, ‘well, why don’t you go and you can make it somehow and you can look for grants and apply for all

kinds of stuff.'...She talked to my whole family, my mom, my aunts and uncles...she told them how I really wanted to go to college.

Beth also spoke about how additional family members supported her goal to attend college:

The whole problem [was] money, so when I had my graduation party my aunts and uncles they all put in money for me, for my first semester of college. Because I wasn't going to be working that much so I didn't have any money to pay for it, you know, if I had to go to the doctor for something or if I had to eat some lunch or, you know, something like that.

Daniel also stated that he received major support from a grandparent and an aunt. They both talked with Daniel about his decision to attend college. Daniel stated:

Really, I talked to my family a lot about it. They were a big influence....My grandmother. I talked to her about it. My aunt went to school with me, she was my personal aide. I would talk to her about it.

Daniel's aunt and grandmother also assisted him in problem-solving. They went with Daniel when he went to the Office of Disability Services to resolve a housing problem. Daniel elaborated on his family's support:

I was always encouraged to set goals and to be whatever I wanted to be. And to do whatever I wanted to do...Everybody in my family [was supportive], especially my grandparents since I have lived with them ever since [birth when] I came home from the hospital. So they just all really encouraged me, so from that encouragement I just started formulating ideas of what I wanted to do. And once I figured out what I wanted to do, I just made the connection that I need to do this, this, and this. And of course you have help from your family. I had help from my family. They would tell me well, you know, if you want to do this, you need to do this, this, and this. They were really a big part in that. And really when I talk about family, I have a really close family. So it includes extended family too. My mother really helped that a lot. She was kind of distant when I was younger. She has gotten a lot closer since I have gotten older, especially in the last couple of years in the transition from high school to college.

Ben stated that he consulted with an uncle when deciding what major to select. Ben stated:

[I] talked to family members, you know. I've got an uncle that lives in Huntsville and he was really helpful in helping me to decide, telling me what direction I needed to go. And since he graduated from college, so he was kind of helping me kind of decide what I would want to do. He had changed majors himself so he was trying to tell me what to expect with this major and this one and he basically was the main one that I talked to.

James stated that he receives support from "both of my parents and my family, [including] my brothers, sisters, my grandparents, and my uncles." James stated, "they would all like to see me succeed with my learning disability." James elaborated on how his family has been supportive:

Just in little ways they have always been proud of me. Especially my grandmother, now she is deceased, but she has always been overjoyed about the accomplishments that I do and she always rewarded me....They are just all really supportive....My family basically supports everything that I do....Actually before I started really thinking about going back, my mom kind of put it on the table or planted the seed for me to consider. She said, 'you have the means and the capability and now that you're doing what you're doing now is the time for you to go back because now you're connected in certain ways that nobody else is connected, you know, because the job you're in, the people you're surrounded by and you build a certain respect in this community so you can basically go to anybody and get anything you need. So, work your connections...use what you know...and just go on and do it.' She said, 'now is the time to do it.' So the minute she said that, that was when I applied. Before then I second guessed myself for three months or so.

Russell revealed that he consults with his family when making decisions regarding school, including decisions about switching majors. Russell stated:

My grandparents on my mom's side...have college degrees. Everybody was for making a switch mostly because...there was so much biology required in oceanography that it was kind of questioning as to whether or not [I would have] successfully completed [it], and the reason...had to do with some of the

disability because in order for me to successfully complete it, I would have had to go back and study so much biology in such a short time that it really...would have been pretty doubtful.

Participants for this study received support from other family members in their pursuit of and participation in post-secondary education. This support was mostly in the form of encouragement and assistance with decision making. However, in some situations extended family also provided financial assistance. Table 2 outlines the level of support participants received from parents and other family members.

Table 2 Level of Family Support

	Name	Age	Disability	Level of Support
1	Janice	18	Sensory – Visual	3
2	Beth	22	Learning	1
3	Callie	20	Multiple: TBI, physical, sensory -visual	2
4	Landa	21	Learning	2
5	Elaine	21	Learning	3
6	Allison	20	Physical	1
7	Kendra	19	Physical	3
8	Molly	33	Physical	1
9	James	20	Multiple: Sensory – hearing and visual, Learning	2

(table cont'd)

10	Daniel	19	Physical	3
11	Bart	26	Physical	3
12	Russell	24	Sensory – visual	3
13	Ben		Physical	1
14	Chris	20	Multiple: Physical, Learning	3
15	Matt	19	Learning	1

Note: 1 = minimal support – support from family primarily at the time of transition (i.e., encouragement, initial information and referral); 2 = moderate support – support from family is ongoing after student is enrolled in school (i.e., financial assistance, problem solving, some assistance with securing accommodations, in addition to encouragement and information and referral); 3 = intensive support – support from family is provided on a weekly or even daily basis (i.e., transportation to and from school, regular assistance with accommodations, regular assistance with problem solving)

Friends/Peers

Friends and peers have also played a supportive role in participants' pursuit of, and participation in, higher education. Support from friends and peers has been in the form of encouragement to pursue higher education, advice regarding what classes to take, advice regarding time management, and physical assistance with carrying books. This support has come from roommates, classmates, friends, notetakers, and fellow students. Janice stated that when she has a school related decision to make she often will consult with her peers (notetakers) at school because they are with her on a regular basis so she feels comfortable talking with them.

Beth stated that she sometimes talks to other students when making decisions related to higher education. Beth elaborated:

Because if it's someone who has had a class before you had it, you can get a lot of knowledge from that person. You can decide, okay, if the teacher teaches like this, what works best. Maybe I should study this way or if the person says that they need a binder because they give you so much work, I should get a binder.

Allison indicated that a friend she met at the Louisiana Youth Leadership Forum encouraged her to pursue higher education. Regarding the role that her friend played, Allison stated:

I think I met him in 2000. I met him through LYLFF and he taught me how to pop wheelies. That is originally how we met is when I flipped over...I had originally excluded [this university] altogether because I was not sure how I was going to do it and I had never done anything out on a limb. And so, he [said,]...“I have an aunt who has worked here for thirty years in admissions and we are going to three way us.” So one night, [in] a three hour conversation [with him]... paying the bill, he three wayed us and I got to talking and then he is like, “I know who you need to talk to is disability services.” That is how I find out. [This university] did not directly come out and say, “ok we will tell you before you apply.” I found out through a third party. And once I found out every thing they could offer me it made it easier. And then every time we talked he would bring up “are you going?” “Sure Oscar.” So, once he kinda got the inside edge and told me what they had, it helped me out a little bit better.... So, that's how he played an interesting part.... “To accept people, more than anything else; to accept people.” And Oscar taught me that. He taught me that I can do anything.

Ben states that he gets unsolicited support from peers at the university he attends. Ben elaborated:

Well, I thought that...I [was] a pretty independent kind of guy....I had my... upper body strength, you know and I knew that I could do it basically. I had my doubts but I was like, you know [this university] is a fairly smaller campus and it's easier to get around. And even if a person doesn't have full use of their arms or whatever, the students are very nice. I mean they can help you, the classmates, I mean I've had people offer me if I needed help with the elevator, holding it open or just carrying my bags to the next class, which I put on the back of my chair so you know I didn't need them....they just come up to you and offer. I mean a lot of them more than others, but you know, a lot of them try to make you feel like you're no different.

Elaine also received support from a friend, who helped her decide to go to college. Elaine stated:

[She] is my mentor totally. She's the best thing that ever happened to me. She's a family friend and she's great. She kept pushing that I needed to look into other colleges to make sure that that was where I wanted to go.

Landa receives support from her roommate. Landa stated:

My roommate, Allison,...has a good GPA. She's in the middle of 3.0 and 4.0. She told me, "Landa, you really don't need to be going out so much, you really need to study." I told her actually to tell me to study. My boyfriend helps me. I was also doing some other things that I shouldn't have been doing...he told me "Landa if you keep on going on this route it's not the best. You need to stop. You are going to get yourself in trouble." With his help and Allison's help and my family's help that's how I came to that decision that I really need to buckle down and I really need to start studying.

Several participants received support from friends or peers. In some situations the support was solicited from friends and peers because they were an easily accessible source of support (i.e. roommates, notetakers, classmates) who were around the student on a regular basis. Other times the support was unsolicited, such as peers offering to assist students with carrying books. Participants in this study expressed gratitude for the support they received from friends and peers.

High School Staff

Many participants expressed examples of support they received from high school staff. The types of support they received included: encouragement to pursue post-secondary education, advice on preparing for college, assistance with accommodations for pre-entrance testing, securing information regarding higher education options, advice regarding what courses to take in college, writing letters of

recommendations and letters of appeal, and providing information regarding accessing disability services, This support came from teachers and school counselors.

Callie stated that the counselors at her high school were supportive in preparing her for post-secondary education. Callie elaborated:

The counselors at my high school, the college counselors, they are very helpful in deadlines and how to get me through college and what classes I need to get through in order to get to college.

Allison also indicated that she had a high school counselor who was supportive of her in her pursuit of higher education. Allison shared her connection with her high school counselor:

I had a counselor whose son had spinal bifida, and this [was] the first time I ever had somebody who understood. She got started with the “you need to be more assertive,” and then she reversed it. She was afraid that I would get there and that my heart would be broken. She didn’t have to teach me how to set goals. I knew that and I knew exactly where I wanted to go. But she had to kind of say that ‘you can help other people along the way.’

Teachers in high school helped support Ben by providing information. Ben elaborated by saying:

A lot of them were very helpful in telling me what to expect and I would ask questions....They helped me decide....They were like “don’t rush into anything too fast, you know, take your time in thinking what you want to do because it’s going to be your life for the rest of your life, so you need to kind of weigh your options.”...Faculty teachers from my high school help[ed] me, [by telling me] what to expect and what classes to take and stuff like that. They were telling me “if you like history, you want to kind of lean on that.” They were like “you don’t really want to take too many classes your first semester and kind of get used to it and all of that.”

Chris also received assistance from his high school teacher. His teacher contacted the university on behalf of Chris. In reference to his high school teacher, Chris stated, “he called and talked to [the school].”

Daniel indicated that the school counselors at his school were helpful. Daniel reflects on their assistance:

I was fortunate enough to have really wonderful school counselors. And they got information for me and just helped me out a lot in that...I was fortunate to go to a high school where all of the teachers cared about the students and wanted to see them do well. They all really encouraged me and said, “you can do this, go for it.” That’s something that really helped out. Everywhere I went really, everybody was encouraging.

Elaine also had positive support from school counselors and resource teachers.

Elaine stated:

In elementary school, in middle school, and high school, I had really great teachers. I had very supportive people surrounding me, always saying, “good job, you did well. You see you didn’t [do] as well here, we are going to work on that.” It [was] never “you didn’t well, you are no good,” stuff.

Janice also received support from her high school school counselor, who referred her to a counselor with a disability in order to learn more about vocations for individuals with visual impairments. Regarding the school counselor’s role in Janice going to college, Janice said:

She did everything to try to get me into [the university]. Everything! I mean she was calling the disability office, she was calling the admissions office,...and she...wrote a letter, recommendation. She just kept calling, making a lot of phone calls to try to get me, to get in. And then I even--when I found out that I wasn’t going to get accepted into [the university] I even did an appeal process, and she wrote this big letter...and I even wrote a personal letter. I mean we did everything in our power to try to get me to get in.

Kendra's support came from her high school vision teacher. Kendra stated:

The counselors pretty much helped me figure out what classes to take and my vision teacher from high school she still helps me. She helped me figure out which classes to take too....[My vision teacher] helped me get the equipment I needed. When I was in high school, they enlarge everything and...she pretty much set up all the equipment and showed me how to do things because my vision [loss] was new, so she showed me the equipment and everything.

Matt also had teachers from high school who supported him. He talked to his teachers about his decision to attend higher education. In addition, it was a high school teacher who gave him information regarding accessing disability services in his institution of higher education. Matt elaborated on his high school teachers' support:

They were like trying, basically...to get everyone to go to college....my high school, the teachers were, they have like a resource program for people that do have disabilities and they would help us try and make sure that we could get into a college and all....and they [helped] ...me where I could get extra time on the ACT.

High school teachers and counselors played a supportive role in assisting students in their pursuit of and participation in post-secondary education. They supported students mostly through the provision of information and referral, and encouragement. However, some teachers and counselors were more intimately involved with participants in this study by contacting post-secondary institutions on behalf of students and writing letters of recommendation and letters of appeal.

Higher Education Faculty and Staff

Participants revealed that they also received support from higher education faculty and staff in their respective institutions of higher education. This support has

been in the form of guidance regarding specific course work, advice regarding course selection, time management, organizational skills, resource information, advice on acclimating to a college environment, assistance with problem-solving, assistance with accommodations, assistance and advice regarding dropping courses and changing majors. Higher education faculty have also provided guidance to students in regards to deciding which institution of higher education to attend. This support has come from faculty members, academic advisors, program staff, and disability services staff. Beth expressed support she received from staff at her community college. She stated:

The ambassadors, they have a meeting on Friday but I work on Fridays. So I went talk to Mrs. Lisa, the lady who is the head of ambassadors, and I told her my problem. And she was more than willing to work with me and meet with me one on one. That way she could train me and go through all that stuff.

Beth has also received support from faculty in an academic class that she took her first semester of college. Beth shared the following:

At the beginning of your first semester in college, they have academic seminar. And that's the first semester that's just an extra class you take and they go over everything: what's on campus, what's there to help you. It goes through the rules of the campus, and it goes through teachers. They have speakers who are teachers on that campus. Like we had one teacher who came and taught us how to take notes. I guess it just depends on what college[you go to and] how they do their academic seminar. But for us, they told us how to take notes, how to better study, how to participate and stuff, how to basically function in college life. That's how you get to know how most of the stuff is available because they go through it and they say, "this is what we have to offer to you."

Beth has received support from higher education faculty in the form of ideas for organizing. Beth reported:

Mostly where I got that idea from was my English teacher. We had papers due like every two weeks. And during those two weeks she would say “okay, today we are going to write our thesis and tomorrow we are going make a body paragraph.” So I was like, “okay, what can I do to keep things together? To get it ready for the big day?”

Beth often talks to her higher education teachers or her school counselor when deciding which classes to take. She elaborated:

[I talk to] the counselor or other teachers because they have already been here. The counselors there, they know so much stuff about the classes and about what types and where. The teachers also they know what classes to take because they also were in college.

Bart has consulted with teachers at his institution of higher education regarding what classes to take. He stated, “I asked the teacher what would be the best place, what class to take first and they told me.”

Chris received even more support from a teacher at his institution of higher education. Chris reported that his teacher actually decided for him which classes he should take. Furthermore, his teacher also arranged for all of his disability related accommodations.

Daniel has received problem-solving support from the Disability Services Office at the university he attends. Daniel shared a specific experience regarding the problem of finding accessible housing:

I went up to the office of disability services at the university and I talked with Ms. Crawford up there. She’s great. She’s the office coordinator now. And Mr. Fowler was the coordinator, but he’s not there anymore. But I talked to them and there was really nothing to really do about the on-campus housing. That’s weird that’s all that they have right now. And the other dorms are like across the street from where the classrooms are. So they were really good in helping find off-campus housing. They really helped with that. They are really great in finding a solution for the problem whether it be on or off

campus... We went up there and talked to them. And they called around different places and we just got out the phone book and we just called around and started going around to places.

Daniel also stated that the staff in the Disability Services Office also assisted him with accommodations. He shared his view on the support he received from the Disability Services Office:

The Office of Disability Services, they have these certain services set up. They will provide the note taker if you need one. They will provide a scribe. They have a testing center over in the office [in case]...you need [a] distraction reduced environment... With my scribe I have to dictate my answers, so I can't exactly be in the classroom, you know and say the answers to questions. People in the office are really great about providing the accommodations that are needed.

Daniel also received support from university staff while he was still in high school. He participated in a university program where staff of the program were instrumental in his decision to attend that particular university. Daniel stated:

I was a part of the Enabling Success program. Just going up there and talking to different people, like Matt Smith and just the other people that were affiliated with [the university] and worked with the program. Talking to them about it, they really played a major part in my decision to go.

Elaine has also received support from the Disability Services Office. She stated that she goes to them when she needs to resolve problems. Elaine shared an example of support she received regarding working with her professors:

I would go to the dyslexic center and disability services, and ask them if they had any [advice] because they knew all of the professors. [I asked] ...if there were any perks to this professor that maybe I didn't know about. [A] kind of back doors [approach] to take to get around...to the professors to make them feel maybe overpower[ed]. Or if [the problem] was a shy professor, [then] maybe it wasn't that he was trying to be rude by not wanting to speak to me, maybe it was just he was very shy outside of the classroom. Or like one of my professors refused to sign my modification sheet and that kind of made me

panic all of the sudden, because it was like what is this person not going to give me my modification. I talked to them and they were like, “there is not a whole lot that you can do. But talk to the dyslexic center maybe they will know.” So I talked to the dyslexic center and they were like, “don’t worry about him. He’s going to give you all of your modifications. He just doesn’t want the legal ramifications if he does sign the paper. And he’s scared that since he’s a psychologist he’s not positive that you may have what you say you do, because it’s some else’s work. And unless he would do it himself he’s kind of leery of others, who might have diagnosed you, so just show him who you are and these are your problems. And show him how you are working through them and everything will be fine.”

Elaine has also relied on support from several advisors at her institution of higher education in regards to which classes to take. Elaine elaborated:

There’s already a list of classes that you have to take in college, but you have certain classes that are kind of lagniappe classes that you can choose from a list. And I found whatever ones were more my interest, but I could have taken lower level classes because I tested out of some of the classes...I went [to] sit with my advisor...through the dyslexic center and through scheduling. We each have an advisor who tells you this is what I think you should take to get finished. At first I didn’t listen to my advisor my first semester, I took twenty-two hours, but I still made my A’s, but it was really hard and I probably should have listened to them. But I [was] thinking high schoolwise, “well I am only taking these eight classes and one of them is only an hour long, [so] I am only taking seven classes really.” I take seven classes now. College classes, I didn’t realize, are not the same as high school classes in the amount of workload you have. Instead of taking a week to do something, it takes you two hours and then they move. You may have a test in three weeks from now and you may have covered twenty-two chapters instead of like four. I didn’t listen to the advisors, but I learned really quickly that they have been doing this for awhile.

James believed that the Disability Services Office has been supportive of his participation in higher education by providing assistance with accommodations, and helping to solve disability related problems. Regarding the staff of the Disability Services Office, James stated:

The guy is very helpful in some areas. Like when I took chemistry, I am used to taking the test over in a disability area in the room where it's quiet. And the professors want me to take it over there in [a] room where he could keep an eye on me....I was very uncomfortable with that, because he kept coming in there and interrupting me asking me how much more time I had. I had to audit that class because I wasn't doing good on the test, and I talked to the disability director and he said, "well it's up to the professor where you take the test." And I was like "no, it's up to you. You have the right to say, 'no' [James is] taking it over here."

Janice received advice from the dean of the music school at [a local university]. The dean advised Janice on how to take classes at a local community college that will help her transfer to the university at a later date. In addition, Janice received advice from notetakers and her advisor at the community college she is currently attending. Janice has sought advice from advisors regarding participation in organizations on campus. Janice explained:

There is a lady in the admissions office that is the head of the organization. I did talk with her about [joining]...like with what we were required to do, what kinds of things. And I did...[tell]... her that I did have a disability, a visual impairment, and that I was not quite as comfortable with leading a campus tour as I was with giving a presentation. And she did tell me that not to let my disability stop me from joining the organization and that we would work around the campus tour. She would give me other things to do besides the campus tour....I... talk with my advisor...about a lot of things as far as classes and school and everything. She did say that she thought that that would be a suitable organization for me. In fact I even went to her office and showed her the list, and she made calls and, you know, left messages for several people with different organizations. There was no organization that really pertained to my major. [That] was what I was looking for....They didn't seem to have any that pertained to my major. So [she] and I kind of spent some time looking for different ones, and she figured [which one]...was the best one for me....

Kendra has received support from advisors at her institution of higher education in regards to what classes to take. Landa also uses advisors to help her decide what classes to take. Landa stated:

They appoint you an advisor at school and I go to my advisor to make sure that what I am taking, that I can take it. Yeah, like Dr. Weyman, when I was in veterinary, she was a teacher. She taught it and she was a veterinarian. So she was the administrator for all the people that went in the veterinary classes. So I go to them to make sure that what I am taking I should be taking now.

Matt also uses academic advisors to help him decide whether or not to drop a class and also to help him decide what classes to take. However he indicated that meeting with an advisor was required at his institution. Matt shared the following:

In electrical engineering, [you] have to go see an advisor no matter what, and be advised. And they have flow charts and all which they [use]. Some people find these things very difficult to read.

Molly expressed her experiences with advisors:

I usually get input from my advisors there at the school because we have to stay in close contact with the professors, my advisor, [and] the financial aid office. We have strict guidelines and as I said, “[my schedule is] basically the same.” But I generally just tell her what I’m taking for the semester. [I ask,] “what do you think? Is this a good one now or later, or is there something that I need to take before these classes?” That’s just for me to stay on track so I won’t miss anything as far as a subject is concerned, you know. I don’t want to do one before the other, I should have had, you know, math before English or let me take the math before I take the English, so that’s basically her input, but I just point out that I’m not gone wrong. I’ve been fortunate with that, you know.

Russell shared that he relied on the advice of a faculty member when trying to decide whether or not he should switch majors. Russell made the following comment:

I was shopping for something that I could do at [this university, that] would be a benefit for me in a future career because I always knew that I wanted to do something in science....I...had...[a] professor who [was] a dual appointment between criminal statistic and oceanography...I spoke to him about it and he had me take the course last summer over a distance course. And then he recommended after successfully completing that, that I speak with the department head [to see] if he had an assistantship available.

Participants provided many examples of support they received from higher education faculty and staff. The support was mainly in the form of information and guidance regarding classes to take, preparing assignments, and acclimating to a higher education environment. However, several students received problem-solving assistance from higher education staff regarding disability related accommodations.

Disability Professionals

Participants have also received support from disability professionals. This support has been in the form of encouragement to pursue higher education, financial assistance, guidance in deciding which institution to attend, vocational guidance, and functioning as a liaison between the student and the institution, This support has come from professionals at the state vocational rehabilitation agency, case managers, community based licensed professional counselors, and from professionals working for family run statewide disability advocacy organizations.

Bart said that the “counselor out there at the rehab place...made calls and stuff,...and helped me out too,” whereas Chris received assistance from a statewide family run disability advocacy organization called Families Helping Families. Families Helping Families helped Chris in his decision to go to college.

Daniel also received support from a disability professional, his case manager, as he made the transition from high school to college. He shared his view of the support he received from his case manager:

Since I have been on the waiver, my case manager,...has been a tremendous help. He has really encouraged me. He has helped me find solutions to any definitive problems I needed. There's has been a couple of problems that when I did run into the problems up at [the university], I would call [my case manager] and say, "I have this problem, give me the legal jargon, [because] I am writing a letter to somebody." He's really helpful in doing that. He is really willing to step up and go to bat when there is something going on or when there is a problem that needs to be addressed and nobody wants to step up and take the reins. He'll do that and I like doing that too but it's always good having some help.

Janice has a visual disability. With assistance from her high school counselor, Janice was able to meet with a community based counselor who happens to also be a person with a visual impairment. The community based counselor gave Janice advice regarding vocational options for individuals with visual impairments. Regarding the community counselor, Janice said:

Actually the person who inspired me to get into music therapy, was a counselor who also has a visual impairment. She has her own private practice and I went to meet with her. She was an acquaintance of a school counselor that worked at my high school. And the school counselor from my high school brought me over to her work. We met and had lunch. And I told her that I was interested in being a counselor and before I met with her my school counselor had spoke with her and told her that I had musical talent. And she told me, "well you know there is a career that is called music therapy"...I got excited because I had never heard of a career with that title before. And my parents and I started doing research and looked up information about it on the Internet and requirements, educational requirements, job description, all that kind of stuff. And so I really looked forward to that. That's when I really got interested in finding different colleges, because I needed to see which colleges offered that career.

Janice has also received some support from her disability services advisor at the community college she attended. Janice stated:

[My disability services advisor is]...just the one that's kind of just said, "well you need to do this" or "this is the person you need to call." ...If it's concerning a certain professor or like [for] instance the math class, she kind of talked with the professors for me. I guess [be]cause she figures that she can do more about it than I can, as far as getting the point across to the professor. Also...she [has] helped me as far as scheduling my classes and everything with that too.

Almost all of the participants in this study received support in their pursuit of and participation in higher education. The support came from parents, other family members, high school staff, higher education staff, disability services offices, friends/peers, and disability professionals. Furthermore, these participants received support simultaneously from multiple sources and can best be described as a network of support. The type of support they received included encouragement, assistance locating resources, assistance with decision making, transportation, assistance with problem-solving, assistance with accommodations, and financial assistance.

Others

Support has come from other sources than just family and professionals. Chris stated that his church was supportive of his pursuit of, and participation in, higher education. Whereas, Beth stated that she consults with co-workers in regards to her major. She offered these thoughts:

It...helps if you are talking to other people who are in the profession that you want to go into. Like I work at a daycare center and sometimes I talk to my director. And I am like what classes did you take when you were at school. Just talk to people that, you know, that are on the same route that you are in because they can give you information about it.

Negative Support

Although participants mostly expressed examples of positive support, some participants did share experiences that were negative. These negative experiences were in the form of others not believing that that the student with a disability had the ability to succeed in higher education, and unwillingness to provide the services and accommodations necessary for the student to be successful in higher education. The negative support came from staff of disability services offices, high school teachers, university administrators, a stepmother, and doctors.

Kendra has received a lack of support from the staff at the Disability Services Office at her institution of higher education. Kendra elaborates:

We had to go talk to the guy from the students for disabilities, had to talk to him, and he told me everything that was available....He said in my case, the only thing that was available was notetakers and tutoring. And I [told] him, I said well, tutoring [is] not going to help because that's in another building and I don't have any equipment set up in that building. So he said, "well a notetaker will be good," and I said "okay, I'll just take the notetakers then."

Allison indicated that she has run into negative people in the past. She stated, "I had people who wondered how I could do it." Whereas, Beth has had negative support from a family member. She revealed:

I have a step mom and she kind of judges me because it took me two years just to get over my math, ...that prerequisite math and stuff just so I could get to college algebra. She was very critical of that...The way I handle my step mom is that I just realize that she quit college. She dropped out of it so maybe she's judging me based on what she did. Or I just realize that she makes such a big deal about me taking so long to get through college. They are so old. It's not my problem, it doesn't bother me. And if it bothers someone else that's their problem because I am okay with it. And I shouldn't be worried about what other people think, because if I am okay with where I am going and I am happy with it then I shouldn't be worried about what other people think.

Daniel counts the negative support he initially received from the administration at his institution of higher education in regards to resolving accessibility problems. Daniel elaborated:

...you count the problems that I had actually at the university with the accessibility issues, and the administration not wanting to do anything about it. That's the only barrier that we had.

Elaine indicated that she received some negative support from a teacher in high school. Elaine stated:

I had a history teacher. I am not sure if she said this and she knew I was standing by the door, or she said this to the other person and she didn't realize I was standing by the door, but she said, 'oh she won't do well in my class. This is a hard class. I have... normal people who fail my class on a [regular] basis. I only give two or three A's on every test and I make it that way to challenge [the students]. She probably won't be able to handle it, you may want to put her in the other class.' If there is one thing that drives me crazy, it's people who don't think I can do it. And that makes me more motivated to show them [that] I can do this. You see, eat your words.... I also had an English teacher my freshman year of high school who said, 'she'll never be able to do this. I used to teach honors, but now we don't offer honors. She has a disability. They don't normally put people with disabilities in my class. I am a high level teacher.' I informed her the first day I was put in her honors class....I showed her through my hard work and my dedication that I could do it and [that] I was a good student. By midterm she came up to me and said, 'I am sorry I said that, do you think you could tutor this other person?'

James has also had negative support from teachers and counselors at his high school. James shared this experience:

The teachers at my old high school...they thought that I couldn't do it since I had a learning disability. There [are] some of them that I think that they knew it down inside that I could do it, but they didn't want to see me pursue it.... But it hurt me on the end because by the end of my sophomore year, I was valedictorian and there were some kids in there that said, "that guy with a learning disability, we don't want him as a speaker." So they went to the counselor and the counselor changed a couple of people's grades [and they]

were bumped up ahead of me. I didn't know it until I came back after summer. Then I couldn't do nothing because they had gotten rid of all of the proof. I found out through my best friend that our valedictorian failed history in the ninth grade. I was like, wait a second. I got A's, B's, and C's. He failed history, and I am number three right now and he's number one? How's that possible? He was like, 'I don't know man.' But other kids from other schools had told me my eleventh grade year they...heard [I was] going to be valedictorian. And that's my rivalry school where I was taking driver's ed....So I figured what they were going to do was try to take it away from me, but there was nothing I could I do. Everywhere me and daddy went to talk to lawyers and stuff, they was like, 'school board case we don't want it. We don't want to get involved in politics and stuff.' ...I graduated third in my class...but I got the salutatorian scholarship from [the university], which shocked everybody at the time. The lady that presented it got up and said I am here to present the salutation scholarship from [the university]. And they knew that the valedictorian and the salutatorian was going to a different college. So everyone's like who is this for. So when she called my name it just got quiet. So there's people that knew it and I was told the day after that, that that was the shortest graduation that they had been to. Well, I was like that's why because they knew that they cheated me out of my position of valedictorian and they didn't want to put up with me no longer than they had to.

Landa indicated that doctors have been negative to her in the past. She shared her experience:

First it was doctors told my parents I wouldn't make it through middle school much less high school or college...I just proved them wrong.

Support can be either positive or negative. Although most individuals received positive support, some participants in this study received negative support from others. This negative support came in the form of negative attitudes, disbelief in the student's abilities to succeed in higher education, and unwillingness to provide the accommodations necessary for the student to succeed in higher education. This negative support came from the Disability Services Office at their respective

institution of higher education, step parents, high school teachers, faculty, and doctors.

Summary

Presented in this chapter are the findings from this study in relation to the theoretical assumptions that guided this study. The data for this study were gathered through in-depth interviews with students with disabilities and their parent, professional, or other individual who was familiar with the student's pursuit of, and participation in, post-secondary education, in order to explore how self-determination was exhibited by students with disabilities within the context of higher education. The themes that emerged from the data were derived from the actual post-secondary education experiences of students with disabilities and shared through their own voice. These themes provide a richer understanding of how self-determination is exhibited for this group of students. The next chapter provides a discussion of the other themes that emerged from the data.

CHAPTER 6

OTHER FINDINGS

This chapter presents the other major findings that emerged from the participants who are exhibiting self-determination in their pursuit of, and participation in, post-secondary education. These findings are also presented as themes. These themes emerged from in-depth interviews with both students (participants) and their corresponding parent, professional, or other individual who was familiar with their pursuit of, and participation in, post-secondary education. The themes are supported by the voices of the participants, and in some cases by the corresponding parent, professional, or other individual identified by the student. “The identification of themes provides the complexity of a story and adds depth to the insight about understanding an individual’s experiences” (Creswell, 2002, p.531). The other major findings that emerged from this data as themes are: (1) use of accommodations, (2) problem-solving, (3) stickability attitude, and (4) family member working in institution of higher education. These themes, supported by the voices of the participants, provided thick descriptions of the self-determination of students with disabilities within the context of higher education. Through these themes researchers, disability professionals, individuals and family members, and other interested individuals gain a richer understanding of how students with disabilities exhibit self-determination: how they set goals, identify steps necessary to reach their goals, and problem-solve barriers along the way.

Use of Accommodations

Almost all of the participants for this research study indicated extensive use of accommodations. The few students who were not utilizing accommodations were also the same students who were not identifying steps to their goals and were not problem-solving barriers to their goals. The participants who were using accommodations shared their experiences with accessing and utilizing accommodations in higher education. Some of these accommodations were arranged by the Disability Services Office in the student's respective institution of higher education, whereas other accommodations were arranged by the student or another disability organization not affiliated with the higher education institution. The types of accommodations used by the students included: extended time on tests, no scantron, use of a computer for papers, scribes, notetakers, Braille, wheelchairs, whitecanes, large print tests and texts, moving classes, priority scheduling, alternative test format, alternative test location, use of a calculator, study assistance through the learning resource center, readers, tape recorders, tutors, personal care attendants, closed circuit television, and teachers' notes.

Allison has used several accommodations in her participation in higher education. Allison elaborates on her use of accommodations:

[I use] extended time, no scantron, [and have] use of computer. I have a professor who comments on my handwriting all the time. I can't help my handwriting, it is part of CP there is nothing that I can do about the fact that I look like I still write like a kindergartener. But he says, "If I can't read it, then it is wrong." And he said "you can have a scribe but that means you have to

spell everything to them.” Do you know how hard that is? I usually don’t realize it is spelled right until I write it. Some accommodations are reasonable, but they just take forever. I’ve never used a scribe before, so I wouldn’t know how that works and I definitely wouldn’t want to find out how that works on a test. You know. Cuz if they screw up...I would much rather write it and know that what I wrote it.

Bart received a computer through a state funded vocational rehabilitation program. In addition, he received accommodations through this school, such as extended time and alternative testing location.

[The school] keeps the computers for me and all that. The State got me a computer too,...so I could do [assignments] at school...They gave me plenty of time but I didn’t need it. They gave me extended time....sometimes I went out the classroom for the tests.

Beth indicated that she is using several accommodations. Some accommodations were arranged formally through the Disability Services Office, and others she arranged on her own. She stated:

The biggest one I am using is extended time for all of my classes. I go to the [Learning Resource Center] lounge and I take an hour and a half [to] two hours to take my test, however long that teacher allows....Other accommodations would be when I take my math test, they let me use a calculator. I use that to my full advantage sometimes because in math they teach you two ways either doing it on paper or doing it on a calculator. When doing it on a calculator, it’s usually simpler to understand and faster to do. And other things I use, they have all kinds of resources for us. That anyone can use whether you [have a] disability or not. They have tutors. I go to math tutoring....I only go once a week but I am going to have to start going twice a week, because the guy offered Monday, Wednesday, and Thursday and I have math class Tuesday and Thursday. So I am going to go Wednesday to do my homework, to go over my lesson plan and I am going to use Thursday to go over what we did on Thursday and to do the homework. They have other stuff out. They have videotapes that you can rent, well not rent, but you can check out to help you with other stuff. Biology, they have tapes that you can watch. Last semester when I took biology, [my teacher] she did a tape and we had a quiz on it. So I went and checked out that tape and watched it two or three times and so I could know what was going on. The biggest thing about that is

having the determination to go and take full advantage of what's out there. Some people they don't worry about, they are like, you know, I'll be on my own. The whole point of stuff being there is because some people they don't do it on their own they have to do it two or three times before they get it.

Beth shared information on how she accesses accommodations:

What I had to do was go to my teacher in my courses and say, hey, I have this kind of accommodation if I think it's going to be timed tests. And they would say—some teachers would say, okay, go to the [Learning Resource Center] room on the test day and I will have everything prepared for you. While others would say, okay, I want you to go and get the form and fill it out and give it to me and on the test day everything will be in there for you. Or some teachers, in some classes, like tonight my, Wednesday night class, we are going to have the whole two and half hours to take the test. So it's up to you whether you can go to the LRC room or not. Some teachers say, okay, well, if you don't finish the test, you can just come to my office and you can finish it later or something like that. Other teachers they let us turn it in late, some of them do because they give us accommodation of that. That's just the teacher itself that gave that accommodation that's not the general rule.

Regarding accommodations, Daniel shared the following:

I do use my wheelchair. That's not just in education, that's all of the time. But I also...have a scribe, someone who takes notes - a note taker, and someone who records my answers for me. I have a Personal Care Attendant...she goes to classes with me. She helps me get books out and do all of that kind of stuff. Other than that, that's the only accommodations really.

James uses several accommodations in his institution of higher education:

He elaborated:

One of my professors is working real close with me on getting me large print, making sure that I understand how to do this. It's mostly up to me to go to them after class if I have problem. And they will gladly sit down with me and discuss it. Because like one of my engineering classes, it was like 9:30 in the morning and I was over there in the building at 7:45. And the professor he was already there in his office. And we have a special room set aside for us upstairs, where we can go and do our homework stuff. Before I go there, I had to stop by his office and get him to explain the homework to him or to me....Then I would go up in there and do my homework in that little lounge

that's set aside for us. Then I would go to class and get the other homework for that day.

Janice also uses accommodations such as notetakes, scribes, readers, and use of a tape recorder:

In fact they have been very accommodating as far as disabilities services. As far as having, providing services such as, a scribe or like when I have a test there is a person there to mark answers or write answers and read me the test questions, because the tests are not provided in Braille, for some reason....I also have a notetaker, which sits in class and takes notes for me. And actually, note takers are handy....I do have a tape recorder for the classes and that helps but they help more so because if teachers give pop quizzes or they give in class assignments, [then] the note takers are there to assist me with those assignments....A lot of times the teachers will say 'I need this assignment by the end of class'....They are not as lenient. Whereas in high school they might have said, 'well oh you can take it home and bring back tomorrow.' They are more like, 'oh, no, we need it by the end of class.' So the notetakers are handy for the aspect....If I do ever need, there are other [accommodations available],...there's assistive technology lab at the campus that has computers, it does have Braille printer, it has an open book scanner. It has a lot of different technology resources that I could use if I needed to do any work on campus, as far as an essay or a paper. Or even if I just wanted to get some work done at school, you know with some quiet, or if I didn't want to come and do work, or something like that. I could use that facility. It does have JAWS, I understand, and the open book scanner is voice activated as well....Most of the time for me, completing my assignments is done at home, because of the fact the college books are not in Braille. And I have not invested in trying to get those books on tape, except for the novels that I would read. Like outside novels or in class novels I have gotten those on tape through the state library. But as far as college textbooks, my parents have purchased the textbooks, the required books for the classes. And most of the teachers provide [the] course syllabus, not saying that they always follow it, but they did provide it....We do have a scanner here at the house. And my parents will do only a certain chapter, if I need chapter 5 or chapter 6 or whatever, and they will scan it. And a lot of times that is a longer process than if I had the textbook on tape. But I do get the work accomplished and assignments done for the appropriate deadlines. And they will try to work ahead to try and get more than one chapter done so that they are not pressed for time. They are trying to 'Are we going to get this done today?' The only thing I wouldn't really like about the textbook on tape, I don't think, is that if there are certain things that—usually like my teachers will give a certain

handout that I need to complete. And if there are certain long drawn out answers with several numbered reasons with why this happened, or why that happened, you know. Sometimes they are long drawn out answers and sometimes it is easier for me to read it in Braille and just type it from Braille instead of having a tape read it out.

Janice also shared the following:

When I have a test there is a person there to Mark answers or write answers and read me the test questions. Because the test are not provided in Braille, for some reason. And I also have a notetaker, which sits in class and takes notes for me. And actually, note takers are handy, not as much-- because I do have a tape recorder for the classes and that helps but--they help more so because if teachers give pop quizzes or they give in class assignments. The note takers are there to assist me with those assignments, because a lot of times the teachers will say 'I need this assignment by the end of class'. And most of them don't say -- they are not as lenient, whereas in high school they might have said, well oh you can take it home and bring back tomorrow. They are more like oh, no, we need it by the end of class. So the notetakers are handy for the aspect.

Kendra uses several accommodations at school, including the use of notetakes. She then uses assistive technology at home to read the notes. She stated:

I have a notetaker that takes my notes in two classes that I have. She takes my notes in American History and in Spanish....The notetakers drop [the notes] off at the office. I go pick them up. And I also have my closed circuit TV, my magnifier in my apartment, so that magnifies everything for me so I could see them bigger....One teacher let me have extended time on tests and I go to the people with disability office to go take my tests because they have the machine that makes the tests enlarger.

Landa arranged accommodations on her own:

My teachers that I have had so far, most of them, are there to help you. They'll tell you and they will have reviews before the test. During the summer time, my history teacher would have one--well he would go over the entire exam. If you didn't know it, that's your fault. They are there to help you. Most of my teachers will be there when you need them. If you need extra accommodations, they tell you where to go, they tell you that come to them, talk to them. I really don't have any trouble, I usually sit in the middle of the

front of the class, so that I can see everything. Everything is pretty much fine in the classroom. I really don't have any trouble....[To study] I have to be in a quiet place. I can't be around any TVs, anything to get my distractions and still sometimes I fall asleep studying. But I wake up. I usually go over it three times, take a break, come back. Go over it three times. And I usually make sure that I go over it three times and that's basically how it's been working for my right now. I don't use flash cards or anything because that takes more time and I am a slow writer. And I do try to--when I am at my mom's, I can use a laptop this year which helps. But the reading over it three times and taking a break really does work for me. And most of my classes my roommate had to take and if I have any trouble, I'll ask her to try to help me. Like her take some notes and call them out to me, I also do that. I say the answers and that helps a lot. And my mom goes over it with me too.

Russell uses both formal accommodations arranged through the Disability Services Office at his institution of higher education and also informal accommodations that he arranges himself. He elaborated on his experiences with accommodations:

Because of my vision, we knew that I would get tired easily and we didn't know how many hours I could take. So we started out very slowly. My first semester I took, well my first two semesters I took two classes. Um, only six hours. My third and fourth semester there, my official freshman year, I was only part time. I only took three classes. And then I slowly increased until I was full time which it started like the end of my second year. I spent like, actually my entire experience at Perdue took about seven years. Um, just because of the non-degree seeking and because I just went so slowly for those years. I finally had 12 by the end of the spring semester my second year and then I went up to like regular, you know, student loads, 16 hours, um, my junior and senior years....What happens is my eyes get tired over the course of time. I actually tend to read slower because my vision turns bad enough that I can't, you know, I can't read as fast as others. Large print books have been, particularly in the sciences have been pretty hard to come by...particularly in sciences which is what I was interested in. I mean there's, I'm sure there's a ton of stuff they wrote for you know really for like math, I took a math minor and my degree in meteorology, you know there's a lot of graphics in the text book and things like that....[My university], they've set themselves up to be a perfect help for me, even without knowing it and they've been, you know, and even when they do know it, you know, they've been very helpful...because like in my pre (inaudible) classes that I just sat

through, the professor actually had all of his notes available for all of his students to buy over at the copy place. And so he had all of that. I could just read through them. I didn't have to take notes. I didn't have to see it on the board. Maybe there only discuss, he followed the notes pretty precisely because he had been teaching the class for a number of years. Now let's see, the first semester of theory class that I was in, the professor there also had his notes available that he would lecture off of. And he, after I told him about it, he actually made a separate copy for me at his own copying expense where typically a page would have maybe four or about six slides on it. (inaudible). Then he expanded the size of the slide so that each page only had one slide so the font size was really increased and pretty easy to see and all his notes were available. Now, of course, whether or not I will get into a class eventually were that they don't have that, you know, that becomes a problem. I'll have a notetaker. I mean, I face that problem a lot in oceanography because it was, the oceanography professors didn't have much available in the way of notes. And so I did have to recruit to get to a certain class and that frequently didn't work very well.

Russell gets materials in large print whenever he can. In addition he stated:

I get double time on tests and in-class time work and I don't do scantrons which at the graduate level (inaudible) specifically faculty members don't do scantrons either. At the undergraduate level that was particularly (inaudible) everything was scantron and in the larger classes that was more of an issue, but Perdue system was a strong enough advocate for through disabilities, students with disabilities, to their faculty that, you know, they have all their faculty working with me to, you know, I would just circle my answer on the actual test book and that or they would actual hand grade it or become (inaudible) I had some professors that would actually fill in the scantron for me....Even though Perdue had like a separate testing room that was set up, you know, for people that have some [difficulty testing in the] classroom, I basically I worked with the professors for whatever was easier for them....a majority of the times here where it happened is take my first half of the test with the class generally and then I would take the second half with my professor in the room that he sets up and things like that. I really have not used the testing facility here.

All but one of the participants in this study indicated that they use disability related accommodations in their pursuit of and participation in postsecondary education. In addition, the students indicated that they use multiple accommodations.

Some accommodations are arranged formally through the institution's Office of Disability Services, such as extended time, no scantron, and alternate testing location. Other accommodations are arranged by the student, such as extra notes, scanned textbooks, and enlarged textbooks.

Problem-solving

Problem-solving was a theme that permeated throughout the experiences of the participants. The types of problems that students experienced ranged dramatically from being minor inconveniences to major problems that if not resolved would have kept them from attending their institution of choice. The types of problems that participants in this study experienced included the following: not having information regarding disability services, inaccessible restrooms, inaccessible building entrances, broken elevators and wheelchair lifts, lack of accessible housing, wheelchair ramps not build to code, lack of curb cuts on all campus sidewalks, lack of accessible campus transportation, negative attitudes, not being given accommodations, financial issues, organizational and time management issues, accessible parking, negative faculty, faculty not cooperating with accommodation, application paperwork, ineffective accommodations, inconsistency with accommodations from one professor to another, orientation to campus, and discriminating policies.

Allison shared her story regarding problems she experienced trying to obtain accessible housing. She explained:

I pretty much applied and got my acceptance letter and no one had any idea that I had a disability which is the way I like it. No one had any idea and then I applied for housing and you are supposed to check if you have a disability

and that check obviously didn't mean anything because I got put in [in a dorm] without an elevator. I said, "I checked wheelchair," and they said, "Where do you want to be?" I said, "[in a dorm with an elevator.]"...[I tried] to convince them that the 3rd floor of Miller really wasn't the best place, and the way that I convinced them was that I had to drive up and they didn't have a ramp to their office so I had to have them come down and meet me. I told them, "I know what I want, I know what works, and I'm one of the few disabled students that live on campus. I know what I want, I know what works so give it to me." They tried to put me in Acadian and I got stuck in the bathroom. It is handicapped accessible for walking people, and there is a difference. They did not realize that there is a difference until after I got stuck. After I entertained all their thoughts and jumped through all their hoops I got in [to the accessible dorm]....

Daniel also reported that he had difficulty securing accessible housing. He

elaborated:

Getting [admitted to the university] was not a problem. Finding housing was a problem. Housing is a major issue...not only at [my university] but on all college campuses housing is a major issue....The only thing I could do was start looking around town for off campus housing for an apartment. I was going to try and live in the dorms but when I went for orientation I looked at the rooms in dorms. And the dorm itself is just dilapidated and kind of old. The rooms just...I compare to hospitals because that's what they look like. They are small. There is just enough room for a bed...not really [enough room for] a wheelchair. And so that was a real issue. And so the only option for me was off campus housing....There is not a whole lot of accessible off campus housing in [this city]. I found one apartment complex that was really accessible and they actually had restrictions on it. After going talk to some people, I was able to get into that complex. Other than that, there are not really that many accessible complexes.

Although Allison and Daniel attend different universities in Louisiana, both have similar problems with the inaccessibility of classrooms and other student buildings on campus. Allison has had difficulty with classes being located in inaccessible buildings. She had tried to avoid scheduling classes in buildings that are

inaccessible. However, even buildings that are considered accessible have caused problems for Allison. She elaborated:

You try not to move classes as much as possible. I don't like filling out paperwork to move classes so I just try not to schedule classes in that building but if you need the time versus the building you need to debate which way you want to go....A lot of the buildings in the quad have a ramp on the first floor and you may have an elevator that works and it might not be big enough but it is still an elevator and they call that handicapped accessible....[The L building] is probably the worst building on this campus and when they blow it up in five years I will be there. Because it has an elevator that gets stuck all the time. And you get consideration for absences but you still miss that entire class, not because you didn't want to go...but because you can't get there. And there is nothing they can do about that one. [Sometimes if you go up,] you can't get down. I've not gotten stuck going to a class, I have gotten stuck coming from a class. Or ramps are too steep so [if] you try to go up them in a manual wheelchair you are going to flip. Or things are too spread out. I usually don't have that problem because I have an electric chair. I try to avoid wheelchair lifts if at all possible.

Allison has to make decisions each semester regarding what classes to take, and when, based on whether the class is offered in an accessible building. She shared an experience she had with an inaccessible classroom:

I took a Biology lab, for instance, and I basically got an A in the lab for doing nothing, because I couldn't. I just kind of sat there and wrote the lab report, that's what I did, because I couldn't do anything. So, I sat there for three hours, I'm not complaining, I got my A, but I couldn't do anything because the lab tables were too high. You can treat me like that as long as you're going to give me my grade.

Daniel had also had problems with inaccessible buildings. He shared the following:

[I've had problems with] accessibility to buildings [and] door openers....I don't know how many buildings on campus [that] I can...independently enter and exit, maybe five....There [has] got to be like at least sixty or seventy buildings on the campus. It's really preposterous.

Daniel also experienced problems with participating in an extra curricular activity due to an inaccessible building. He shared his experience:

The Chamber Singers they actually meet on the bottom floor of the Auditorium. That building is one of the original buildings on [the] campus so it's really old and not exactly accessible....I had to use a back entrance to get down to the choir room, because the big huge cargo elevator that they had in the building is scary.

Allison has a physical disability and Janice has a visual disability, but they both have had difficulty with orientation to the physical campus. Allison needed to learn accessible routes from her dorm to her classes, because the campus had curb cuts on one end of a sidewalk, but didn't necessarily have curb cuts on the opposite end. Therefore, she sometimes has to take indirect routes to get to her classes.

My parents walked the campus with me. You can't use the map because you can have a ramp on one side of the sidewalk and no ramp on the other side. So my parents gave me a notebook and we wrote directions and wrote landmarks....There may be five ways to get to a building, but I would go the exact same way every time, because that is how I was trained in my brain....It was difficult. It was interesting....That's basically how I finagled my way around campus. It was a lot of trial and error. It was a lot of Saturdays with just going driving and seeing where you end up. And finding out...oh that doesn't have a ramp here, let's find another way. No one told you where [the ramp] was, you just had to find it for yourself.

Janice's parents assisted her with learning the number of steps to take to get from one classroom building to another. Regarding problems with orientation and mobility on campus, Janice stated:

A few times, my parents kind of got me a little bit oriented and then I had a girl who also has [a] visual [impairment]. She sees more than I do, but she's got low vision, and she is a student worker there and she's been there for four years or so. She was kind of helping me out, to show me some landmarks. To follow the grass along this side and then, you know, that will show you where you have to turn or you know, there are certain landmarks that I would need to

let me know that I was getting close to a certain building, as far as with getting oriented. And then, I mean, the more I did it. The more I went around to class all of the time, the more I became used to the way that I went around all of the time.

Janice has had some problems acclimating to the campus. She elaborated:

When I was oriented by myself, there weren't as many distractions. So, if like, a bunch of kids walking around and stuff like that...was kind of the drawback was that--and I did have assistance with getting back, you know, into the--like into the routine of where I was going and then some people- there are people that won't offer you assistance. And then there are people that will. Sometimes there are people that will want to help you too much, you know like--they want to help you and then they will try to walk you instead of you saying, 'I can take you arm' and you know. Or you know, some of them will say, 'Oh okay, do I need to do it this way?' And they will accept what I was trying to show, the way that I was trying to show them. And then other people they could care less, they don't really care too much about it, but most of the time I do it on my own.

Several students have had problems with transportation. Three of the students in this study were unable to drive due to mobility impairments. Two other students were unable to drive due to visual impairments. These students had to make arrangements to either live on campus, or find someone to drive them back and forth to school on a regular basis. Allison described her problems with transportation on her university campus:

I didn't have a PCA for first four months at LSU...I had no one. I don't drive. No one to drive you. I can't use the bus system because there is only one wheelchair accessible bus in [this]....The only other problem I had was with the bus system, because if it rains then you basically have to use it in the rain. You can call transportation and they will come get you, but that is not their job and I hate to make it their job. I just wish they would figure out a bus system that would work for everybody.

Another problem that several participants discussed was the negative attitudes expressed by others. Allison shared problems she encountered with attitudes of individuals who were engaged in the same extracurricular activities:

We were at a friend's house and her friend came over and I had met him before and I could tell he was stereotyping me and I just kinda said let's play taboo, and I had to pick his jaw up off the floor because he assumed that physical disability always means mental retardation.

Allison also shared problems she has had with a professor's attitude. She elaborated:

I have a professor who comments on my handwriting all the time. I can't help my handwriting, it is part of CP there is nothing that I can do about the fact that I look like I still write like a kindergartner. But he says, "If I can't read it, then it is wrong." And he said "you can have a scribe but that means you have to spell everything to them." Do you know how hard that is? I usually don't realize it is spelled right until I write it. Some accommodations are reasonable, but they just take forever. I've never used a scribe before, so I wouldn't know how that works and I definitely wouldn't want to find out how that works on a test. You know. Cuz if they screw up...I would much rather write it and know that what I wrote it.

Elaine also had problems with a professor who was also the department head. She shared her story:

For whatever reason I hit a big blocker with the head of my department, who made the comment like, "you're dyslexic, you shouldn't be in communicative disorders because how are you going to teach somebody else how to do something that you can't do?" And I had issues with that....I am still handling that. I am a junior and I am still having problems with the entire department...I have trouble with people who don't want to accept people with disabilities. You would think being in the field that she's in, she'd be more open to people with disabilities. And I understand that she has probably had people in the past that haven't been able to do it, but she needs to see that people are individuals and just because it's good for one doesn't mean it's good for all. And maybe the person that she's had before might have not worked as hard or maybe didn't have the capacity to do it, but it wasn't her place to judge and preconceive. And I am still getting stuff like...oh first it was, "you'll never make it through the classes. This isn't high school, it's not that easy." And when I still had my 4.0, until last semester, then it was, "oh

you'll never make it through clinicals." Yes, I would, I haven't done any yet, but I think if I have the right support, which is going to become an issue because she's not going to want me to have modifications that I want. She's kind of bucked the modifications deal, and has tried to manipulate my accommodations to [her] liking and not to what they are actually supposed to mean.

Several students expressed problems with getting the accommodations they needed. Russell described problems he has had with notetakers:

The notetaker system here at [this university] is pretty much non-existent. They have been tutors only and my mom [has] really tried to get the same type of notetaker system at Perdue where they brought in studious notetakers but they were actually on salary with the university through student employees and they were actually brought in to take notes in classes that fit into their schedule so they weren't actually, ...really ever enrolled in the class...it was pretty much required and accepted in my senior year when to find people with experience...that have taken the class or were notetaking previously and done well in it. And they went through a training program for, you know, notetaking....That doesn't really exist here in and it's unfortunate. And I suffered when I was in [my previous major] here at [this university].

Janice has also experienced problems with notetakes. She stated:

One of my notetakers, ...she does do well with taking notes for me, but she has two or three times not shown up for class. And then I have been stuck without one for that class period, which is not a good situation because if it's like English or math, where you kind of count on that person to be there if you need help. If you are required to write an essay in English in class and that person is not there, [then] you are kind of without someone to write something down for you...

Janice elaborated on the situation:

The only tests that I do in the testing center are my math tests, because my teacher does not allow the notetaker to sit in class and give me the test. All the other teachers have no problem with it, except for the math teacher. And so I-- one of the first test I took I did poorly on it. And my notetaker, one of my notetakers and I started looking it over and seeing these mistakes that shouldn't have been there. And I shouldn't have been held accountable for them, because the teacher marked off because of the way the problem was written down. And the fact was I can't see what she's writing on the board in

class, to notice how she's--which way she's actually writing it down. And it wasn't fair on my part that she was taking off all kinds of points everywhere because of the fact--because of that fact. I had people-- like I had to have the disability advisor and her boss, and the testing reporter and her boss, you know, to try to, you know, I mean they were like all over her to try to get her to understand. And it was like pulling teeth to try to get her to understand that this was not something that--because of my disability that I should not be held accountable for. And what she should be giving me credit for is the fact that I did the problem--I worked the problem correctly and that I understood the concepts and got the answers correctly.

Regarding her math class, Janice explained:

I talked with, um, disability services office, because I wasn't sure who to, um, who to go to report that problem. So I went to the disability services office and they talked to the test reporter and actually made a copy of the test. And, um, then, um, they went over it and the test reporter did see her mistakes. And she apologized for it. Then the most problem that they had was with the teacher, because the teacher didn't want to have to do anything different. Or, you know, she thought that I was-- well it's not written on the paper this way so I should take off the points for it. And they had so much trouble trying to get her to understand, um, you know that fact. So finally what we do is, we tape record the test and I say every step that I am going to do and I tell her every step. And she also writes it on the paper in addition to having the tape. And then the test and the tape are given to the instructor and the instructor listens to the tape and if there are problems that I have missed, she listens to the tape thoroughly, more thoroughly than she does the other ones, to see if I have said the steps correctly or not.

James stated that he has had one problem with using accommodations. James stated:

The guy is very helpful in some areas. Like when I took chemistry, I am used to taking the test over in a disability area in the room where it's quiet. And the professors want me to take it over there in the room where he could keep an eye on me and I was very uncomfortable with that. Because he kept coming in there and interrupting me asking me how much more time I had. And I had to audit that class because I wasn't doing good on the test. And I talked to the disability director and he said, well it's up to the professor where you take the test. And I was like no, it's up to you. You have the right to say, no he's taking it over here....That's one of the problems I ran into with having a disability is people not wanting you to have what you want. And that's one

reason why I am pursuing my secondary education to prove to them that I can do it.

While most students had numerous examples of problems they have had to solve, Ben indicated that he had not had any problems with his pursuit of, and participation in, higher education. Ben elaborated:

The fellow students and the professors help you in any way they can. They come up to you and they actually, if there are any problems, they actually ask that you can come to their office and talk about anything that you need like any special and actually you know, they ask in special disability's departments where if you need modified desks or anything like that, that you just go to them and they let the professors know.

Ben states that his campus is very accessible. "There's no problems with the bathrooms or anything like that. The only problem at [this school] is that they got a slow elevator and that's the only problem, but other than that, it's pretty well...I mean, I've actually found myself having to work harder than other people just because I know that this is my life and I know that I have to work harder than other people for what I want because there's going to be some opportunities that come into my life that, you know, I'm not going to get opportunities like everybody else. So I just have to work that much harder to accomplish it.

Stickability Attitude

A major theme that emerged from the data was the theme of "stickability" attitude. Stickability is synonymous with persistence, however, it was a term used by the one of the participants in this study and captured her precise thoughts. This theme emerged in one way or another from almost all the students. One participant, Callie, defined "stickability" as follows:

You stick to something. Like if you have a goal, you stick to it; you don't just give up because something gets in your way. You're going to do everything you can to overcome the obstacle in order to meet your goal.

Beth had a more descriptive statement regarding what stickability meant to her:

There are days when you go there and you don't even feel like looking at the teacher. But you have to go because if you miss a day of that class it's like missing two days. You know it depends on what type of class it is. If it's a class that's an hour and fifteen minutes, you can't miss it because you are going to miss like two chapters or something. Like tonight I have a class that only meets once a week and if I miss that then I have no clue where we are at the next week. Because we could have changed something on the syllabus or we could have went over like four chapters as opposed to just three or something like that....You got to get a good night sleep the night before because that's one thing—you don't want to go to school the next day because you are not rested. I guess another one is to realize the importance, so you should go to that class. I guess until you have to lose your stubbornness. You have to recognize what's more important for you to blow off class or for you to go to class. It's so much easier to go and listen to your teacher as opposed to having to make up two days work by missing the class. That's really it. Even though you go to class, you are not really there totally in mind it still helps if you are there. If anything comes up, you are still aware of what's going in that class, you are not lost. You are not completely lost.

Kendra also expressed her “stickability” attitude. Kendra stated, “I don't know what to say. I wake up [and say,] like I'm gonna do this.”

Many of the participants expressed persistence in their pursuit of and participation in higher education, despite the fact that they faced many barriers. The term “stickability” was coined by a participant to reflect her attitude of plugging away at higher education on a day by day basis. The expressed stickability attitude is reflective of the participants' determination to persist in higher education.

Family Member Working in Institution of Higher Education

There were four participants who had family members working in institutions of higher education. Landa and Russell both had mothers who were professors at a university. Callie's stepmother was professor at a university and Matt had a father who was a faculty member of a local community college. Callie reported that she would "follow her stepmother to like a little puppy." Russell's mother reported that he was brought to the campus and would sit in the back of the room as she taught classes. Although Matt did not report that he visited his father's office, he did indicate that he thought his father was able to advise him regarding postsecondary education because of his work experience. Landa also indicated her mother was able to advise her because of her position with the university. Landa stated, "my mom also helps me find out which teachers I should take and what is the most easiest [class]."

Summary

Presented in this chapter are the findings from this study that explored how self-determination was exhibited by students with disabilities within the context of higher education. The data for this study were gathered through in-depth interviews with students with disabilities and their parent, professional, or other individual who was familiar with the student's pursuit of, and participation in, post-secondary education. The themes that emerged from the data were derived from the actual post-secondary education experiences of students with disabilities and shared through their own voice. These themes provide a richer understanding of how self-determination is

exhibited for this group of students. These self-determined students as a whole are using accommodations, problem-solving barriers, and possess an attitude of sticking with the pursuit of their goals regardless of the barriers they face. Furthermore, the theme of a family member working in an institution of higher education shows that several of the participants had a relative that functioned as an ultimate resource. The next chapter provides a discussion of the findings in relation to the research questions. In addition, it outlines recommendations for students, family members, higher education administrators, higher education faculty and staff, and policy makers. The chapter also provides final conclusions regarding this research study.

CHAPTER 7

DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was to explore how students with disabilities use self-determination in the pursuit of, and participation in, post-secondary education. The need for this study was due, in part, to the lack of qualitative literature on the topic, both in terms of self-determination of individuals with disabilities, and individuals with disabilities within the context of higher education. This lack of literature results in a need for knowledge regarding self-determination. The sample consisted of 15 participants: 6 White females, 5 White males, 2 African American females, 1 African American male, and 1 Native American male.

Qualitative research methods were employed in this study, specifically the use of in-depth interviews with students and with a corresponding parent, professional, or other individual with extensive knowledge of the student's pursuit of, and participation in, post-secondary education. The research questions were guided by the theoretical assumptions that self-determination is enhanced through:

1. Information and skills that foster a person's capacities for decision-making and self direction (e.g. strategies for planning, achieving goals, developing partnerships with others, and self-management);
2. Access to opportunities to express self-determination (e.g. participation in a full range of educational opportunities, having control over supports and resources);
3. Facilitative support from others (e.g. family, friends, professionals, and mentors) (Powers & Deshler, 2002, p. 11).

Using these assumptions as a base, the research questions used in this study were:

1. How has self-determination training influenced students' post-secondary education goals?
2. What opportunities have students pursued to express their self-determination?
3. How have others supported students in their self-determination?
4. What are the similarities and differences in the utilization of self-determination in post-secondary education between men and women?

This chapter begins with a discussion of the research findings for each question. Next, a discussion of the themes that emerged from the data is presented. Thereafter, recommendations for students with disabilities, family members, high school staff, disability professionals, higher education administrators, higher education faculty and staff, and policymakers are discussed. This chapter concludes with the voice of the participants as they share their overall thoughts on why they are successful in higher education.

Discussion of Results

In-depth interviews were conducted with students and a corresponding parent, professional, or other individual who was knowledgeable of the student's pursuit of, and participation in, post-secondary education. The data collected from these interviews were used to address the research questions. The data revealed major themes across cases, including: support from others, use of accommodations, problem-solving, and stick-ability attitude. A discussion of each research question in relation to the findings is presented below.

Research Question #1

How has self-determination training influenced students' post-secondary education goals?

Powers and Deshler (2002) suggest that self-determination is enhanced through the acquisition of information and skills designed to increase an individual's ability for decision-making and self-direction (p.11). Thus, an individual can be trained to be self-determined. Although self-determination training can take many different forms, participants in this study reported receiving training in four major areas: leadership training, experiences in the transition process, through interactions with formal disability services, and from support from parents and family members.

Leadership Training Programs

Leadership training programs, such as the Louisiana Youth Leadership Forum, Fellowship of Christian Athletes, and Boy Scouts can be a great source for students with disabilities to learn how to set goals, identify steps necessary to reach their goals, and problem-solve barriers along the way. Most of the fifteen participants indicated that they had participated in such programs and had incorporated what they learned into their college life. However, only one student indicated that he was overwhelmingly influenced by the training program he had participated in. The remaining students who had previously participated in training programs did mention the specific program and indicated that it was a source of their learning, but not the sole source.

Transition Planning

Transition planning is required by law to be provided to students beginning at age 16. Transition planning includes identifying future goals and identifying the steps necessary to reach those goals (20 U.S.C. § 1401 [a][19]). Research by Halpern, Yovanoff, Doren, and Benz (1995) indicated that student participation in transition planning was associated with post-secondary success. However, research also has shown that despite the positive benefits of transition planning, in terms of postsecondary school outcomes, not all students with disabilities are participating in transition planning (Wright, 1996).

Several participants in this study reported that they had received some assistance from high school teachers or counselors in their pursuit of higher education. The assistance received from teachers and counselors was mostly in the form of encouragement and the provision of information and referral. What is striking about the findings on transition is that not one of the participants in this study indicated that they had been through any type of formal transition planning.

Disability Services

Louisiana Rehabilitation Services (LRS) and the Office for Citizens with Developmental Disabilities (OCDD) are two state operated programs for individuals with disabilities. LRS is a federally-funded program designed to assist individuals with disabilities in reaching their vocational goals. Eligible individuals with

disabilities meet with rehabilitation counselors and develop an individualized plan which identifies a vocational goal and the steps necessary to reach that goal.

The Office for Citizens with Developmental Disabilities (OCDD) is also a state-operated program supported by federal funding. OCDD provides a wide array of services designed to assist individuals with disabilities in being more independent, including assistance with reaching their employment goals. OCDD, through contracts with providers, works with individuals in developing personal plans based on the individual's abilities, interests, and needs.

Both of these venues afford individuals with disabilities an opportunity to practice setting goals, identifying steps necessary to reach their goals, and problem-solve barriers to goal attainment. In addition, staff from both agencies monitor the progress individuals make in regards to their personal plans and offer their assistance in problem-solving barriers to the individual's goals. In situations where problems cannot be resolved, personal plans are revised.

Several participants in this study had either applied for disability services or were receiving services. One participant indicated that his case management agency, the provider agency for OCDD, was very helpful to him in his pursuit of higher education. However, the majority of participants indicated that the disability agency played a relatively minor role in their pursuit of and participation in post-secondary education. In addition, several participants indicated that the disability agency was actually the source for some of the problems they experienced in higher education.

For example, Kendra reported that the vocational rehabilitation agency was slow in supplying her with disability related technology, and provided incorrect information regarding accessing accommodations in higher education.

Informal Training

A few participants indicated that they learned how to set goals, identify steps necessary to reach their goals, and problem-solve barriers informally from their parents or other family members. This informal training was provided through ongoing discussions and decision-making in regards to the pursuit of and participation in post-secondary education. Many participants indicated that family members were the first person they went to when making decisions regarding higher education.

In summary, one of the theoretical propositions that guided this study is that self-determination is enhanced through the provision of information and capacity building leading to the acquisition of skills in regards to decision-making and self-direction (Powers & Deshler, 2002). This information and capacity-building can come from a variety of sources including leadership training programs, transition planning, disability services programs, and informal training through parents or other family members. A few participants indicated that they had received planning assistance through a specific self-determination training and used that information in their higher education participation. Other students indicated that they learned how to set goals, identify steps to their goals, and problem-solve barriers from their parents or other family members. None of the students credited their information and

capacity-building to transition planning. Although several students had either applied for vocational rehabilitation services or were currently recipients of vocational rehabilitation services, none of the students credited the vocational rehabilitation agency with their information and skills. One student gave partial credit to his case management agency. A few participants for this study indicated that they had not received any training related to setting goals, identifying steps to reach their goals, and problem-solving barriers along the way.

Research Question #2

What opportunities have students pursued to express their self-determination?

A second theoretical proposition is that self-determination is enhanced through “access to opportunities to express self-determination (e.g. participation in a full range of educational opportunities, having control over supports and resources)” (Powers & Deshler, 2002, p. 11). There are many opportunities for students with disabilities to express their self-determination within the context of higher education. Self-determination is operationalized as setting goals, identifying steps necessary to reach those goals, and problem-solving barriers to goal attainment. Students who pursue higher education have already set a goal of obtaining post-secondary education. The decisions they make thereafter are part of the process of identifying steps necessary to reach their goals and problem-solving barriers to goal attainment. Some of the decisions that student participants had to make include: (1) to go to school, (2) where to go, (3) what classes to take, (4) selecting a major, (5) how many hours to take, (6) whether or not to participate in extra curricular activities, (7) which

battles to fight, (8) arranging accommodations, (9) where to live, and (10) whether or not to change majors. Many of these decisions were influenced by the student's disability. For example, when deciding whether or not to go to school, some students had to assess their overall disability and determine their capacity for succeeding in higher education. When considering where to go, some students had to decide how they would get to school if they were unable to drive, or whether or not they would live in the dorms to alleviate the problem of transportation. Regarding what classes to take, students had to first determine if the classroom was accessible, then consider whether or not the professor was known for being accommodating to students with disabilities.

Another component of expressing self-determination is problem-solving. All participants in this study were having to constantly resolve problems related to their disability. The types of problems that students encountered consisted of: inadequate or inaccessible transportation, negative attitude of others, unaccommodating or unresponsive faculty and staff, and inaccessibility – including inaccessible campuses, dorms, and classrooms.

In summary, students with disabilities have many opportunities to express their self-determination. Remember that self-determination is operationalized as setting goals, identifying steps necessary to reach their goals, and problem-solving barriers along the way. Students with disabilities who are currently participating in higher education have already set the goal of attending post-secondary education. They continue to express their self-determination through the decisions they make

such as, where to go to school, what to major in, and whether or not to participate in extra curricular activities. In addition, they express their self-determination through problem-solving barriers to their goal.

Research Question #3

How have others supported students in their self-determination?

Powers and Deshler (2002) proposed that self-determination is enhanced through “facilitative support from others” (p. 11). This means that family, friends, professionals, and other individuals can assist and support the person with a disability in setting goals, identifying steps necessary to reach their goal, and problem-solving barriers along the way. Research by Morningstar, Turnbull, and Turnbull (1995) indicates that support from family, friends, and others has a major impact on students with disabilities and their pursuit of, and participation in, post-secondary education (p. 249).

Participants from this study received a great deal of support from a variety of sources. The support came from parents, other family members, high school teachers and counselors, higher education faculty and staff, disability professionals, and friends and peers. The types of support included: encouragement, assistance locating resources, assistance with decision-making, transportation, assistance with problem-solving, assistance with accommodations, and financial assistance. Some participants relied heavily on family for most of their support needs, whereas other participants relied on support from multiple sources.

Family support was the most prominent type of support in all but one of the case studies. The participants repeatedly expressed that their families strongly believed in their abilities and pushed them to reach their higher education goals. Participants voiced the fact that they would not have been able get as far as they have come, in terms of higher education, if it weren't for support from their families. This was evident by the fact that several parents of participants in this study were intimately involved in their child's education by providing transportation on a daily basis, typing notes, scanning textbooks, and enlarging textbooks.

Research Question #4

What are the similarities and differences in the utilization of self-determination in post-secondary education between men and women?

Self-determination is operationalized by setting goals, identifying steps necessary to reach goals, and problem-solving barriers along the way. For participants in this study, there appeared to be no differences in self-determination between men and women. They were similar in all aspects of self-determination. In addition, they were similar in all aspects related to the three theoretical assumptions guiding this study: self-determination training, opportunities to express self-determination, and support from others. The multiple case study contrast table presented below summarizes the results.

Table 3 Multiple Case Study Contrast Table

	Setting Goals	Identifying Steps	Problem Solving	SD Training	Opport unities	Support from Others
Janice	X	X	X	P	X	X
Beth	X	X	X	P	X	X
Callie	X	X	X	P	X	X
Landa	X	X	X	P	X	X
Elaine	X	X	X	P	X	X
Allison	X	X	X	P	X	X
Kendra	X	X	X	P	X	X
Molly	X	X			X	X
James	X	X	X	P	X	X
Daniel	X	X	X	P	X	X
Bart	X	X		P	X	X
Russell	X	X	X		X	X
Ben	X			P	X	X
Chris	X			P	X	X
Matt	X	X	X		X	X

Note: X indicates that the factor was present in the participant's case but does not necessarily denote an internal theme was present; P indicates that the student participated in some kind of self-determination training but does not necessarily imply the degree of impact on the participant.

There were an additional three specific issues of gender that I believed to be of an even greater concern to women with disabilities as opposed to women without disabilities within the context of post-secondary education; that being self-image, violence, and overprotection or paternalistic attitudes. The issues of self-image and violence were identified as areas of concern because they are issues for women without disabilities, within the context of higher education. The issue of overprotection or paternalistic attitudes was identified as an area of concern after review of the emerging literature on women and disability.

Researchers conducting work in the area of gender issues point out that the experiences of women in higher education tend to differ from those of men, specifically noting that one distinct area of difference is that of self image. For some women, “although they may be successful in other areas of their lives, they place primary importance on their body, size, weight, and overall physical appearance; if they are not thin and beautiful, then they do not believe they are acceptable” (Hensley, 2003, p. 55).

Many individuals have a disability that is noticeable to the human eye. It may be some form of disfigurement, an awkward gait, or a roaming eye. Others may be noticeably disabled due to the technology they use on a daily basis, such as a white cane, hearing aids, or a wheelchair. Therefore, I fully believed that self-image would be an even greater issue for women with disabilities than for those without disabilities. However, this research does not indicate such. The women interviewed for this research appeared to be very self-assured, self-confident, and did not openly

express any negative self thoughts. Instead, there was a theme of confidence, control, and a strong sense of self.

Violence is another area where differences are reported in the experiences of women as opposed to men, within the context of higher education. Pinar (2003) reported that in 1993 there were approximately 33,888 incidences of violence on American college campuses where faculty and staff were the victims, many of them being women and sexual minorities (p. 78). These statistics on violence have a direct impact on decisions that women must make as they pursue post-secondary education. For example, decisions must be made regarding where to live, what time of day to take classes, what transportation to take, etc. Although all students must make these same decisions, the decision that women must make must be filtered through an understanding of the realities of violence against women.

Participants were asked whether there were differences in the experiences of males in postsecondary education versus females with disabilities in postsecondary education. All of the participants indicated that they did not believe there were any differences. Matt responded by saying, “most probably not.” James said, “I don’t think so.” Molly stated:

I don't think that there is a difference in the experiences for males and females with disabilities in higher education. And if I had to say that there was a difference I would only say that it would be the type of disability that each person has.

However, it should be noted that the responses may have differed if more specific questions had been asked, such as “what safety issues have you encountered as a student with a disability in postsecondary education?”

Although the gender questions did not yield responses from these participants indicating that differences existed, an analysis of the remaining data was conducted looking for specific references to actions that could have been gendered, such as safety issues. However, the data collected in this research did not show that participants in this study took any special precautions or made any special decisions with consideration for safety. Decisions made regarding where to live, what time of day to take classes, what transportation to take, for example, were all made from the filter of a disability perspective. Students were limited in where they could live if they needed accessible housing, i.e. a wheelchair ramp, an elevator, the closest dorm to the campus, etc. Furthermore, decisions regarding what time of day to take a class were dependent on when they could obtain accessible transportation, when they could schedule a class with a professor who was very accommodating, or when they could have time to rest in between classes. And the issue of transportation, or lack thereof, often necessitated students living in dorms on campus where they could more easily get to class. The difficulty in securing adequate living arrangements did not appear to have a gendered dimension among my participants.

Reflecting on the phenomenon that women students in this study based many of their post-secondary decisions on the parameters of their disability, seems to

coincide with the philosophical underpinnings of Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Although Maslow's hierarchy of needs does not speak to women's issues and disability issues per se, it conceptually speaks to the fact that there exists a fundamental hierarchy of needs and that certain needs must be met before a person can achieve the needs of a higher level. In Maslow's hierarchy of needs, the base constitutes physiological needs, next is safety, followed by love, and esteem, with the pinnacle being that of self-actualization.

In Maslow's hierarchy of needs, decisions that a person makes are first made making sure that the basic physiological needs are met. For example, if students haven't eaten in a week, then they must first address that need before they can think about higher order things such as safety, love, and self-actualization. For women with disabilities, they may not think about violence in post-secondary education when they don't even know whether or not they will be able to physically get on the campus due to the limitations of their disability. Another example is that if an individual needs a roof over their head, and there is only one dorm on campus that is wheelchair accessible, then they may not stop to think about how well lit it is, or what the crime rate in the area is.

Another issue is that of overprotection or paternalistic attitudes. Again, the data from these participants did not show any evidence to support what is in the literature on gender that women are often overprotected and their abilities minimized as compared to males and as compared to individuals without disabilities. In contrast, these research data show that the women participating in this research study had very

supportive families, were encouraged to pursue post-secondary education, and were not limited by those closest to them, their families. However, this can be explained by the fact that participants in this study were specifically chosen because it was assumed that they possessed self-determination skills. Seven out of the eight female participants for this study had a history of participating in a self-determination training program, the Louisiana Youth Leadership Forum. Furthermore, they had already made the decision to attend post-secondary education; thus, they were functioning somewhat independently in making decisions, setting goals, identifying steps necessary to reach their goals, and problem-solving barriers along the way.

Those skills that lead to self-determination - goal setting, identifying steps, and problem-solving - are skills necessary for any human being to become independent. And independence and overprotection are not fully compatible terms. Therefore, it is logical to assume that in general, over protection of females is common, yet those individuals who are trained to be self-determined would not also be overprotected.

In summary, higher education has been one context in which gender has been a prominent issue. The literature on gender and higher education, and the literature on disability and gender, supports the gendered concepts of violence, self-image, and overprotection or paternalistic attitudes. However, for participants with disabilities in this study, gender did not appear to be an issue as they pursue and participate in post-secondary education. This may be due in part, to the need for individuals with

disabilities to address basic disability needs, such as accessible housing, prior to addressing needs that are more gendered, such as safety.

Key Findings

This research was guided by three theoretical assumptions: that self-determination is enhanced through information and skills, opportunities to express self-determination, and facilitative support from others. I fully expected to find, and did find, that these assumptions held true for participants in this study. However, what was unexpected was that findings from this research indicated a broader aspect of each of the theoretical assumptions. First, I expected to find that participants in this research participated in some kind of special self-determination training to acquire self-determination information and skills. What I found was that participants received information and skills from more than one source over a period of time. Furthermore, participants in this study acquired the self-determination information and skills both formally and informally. Second, I expected to find that students with disabilities had many opportunities to express their self-determination. What I found was that although they had many opportunities, those opportunities were filtered by an awareness of self, meaning that the participant knew their functional limitations as a result of their disability and engaged in activities that he or she believe they would be successful at. Third, I expected to find that participants received facilitative support from others. What I found was that this support came from multiple individuals simultaneously. The participants in this study appeared to have a web of support, with each individual or agency serving a specific role and in some instances

serving in overlapping roles. In addition, I found that the level of family support was in some instances extremely intensive whereby family members provided support on a daily basis.

In regards to gender, I expected to find that there were gendered differences between men and women within the context of post-secondary education. However, it appeared that for these participants there were no differences between men and women in regards to self-determination. In addition, there did not appear to be differences between these participants in the areas of self-image, overprotection, and violence and safety. These were surprising findings in regards to gender. The participants in this study were all selected with the criteria of possessing self-determination, which may account for the similarities in goal setting, identifying steps to goals, and problem-solving barriers to goal attainment. Furthermore, in regards to the issue of violence and safety, it appeared that participants had to make decisions by first considering their disability, before considering other factors, such as safety.

Summary

The data from this study provided a greater understanding of how students with disabilities exhibited self-determination within the context of higher education. Specifically, the findings provided an awareness of the impact of self-determination training, the opportunities students have pursued to express their self-determination, and an understanding of how others have supported students in their pursuit of, and participation in, higher education. A greater understanding has been gained regarding gender, in the sense that it does not seem to be a factor for self-determined students

with disabilities who participated in this study. Overall, the students from this study faced many decisions and problems in their pursuit of, and participation in, higher education; however, they received support from others and were persistent in getting their disability needs met, in order to ultimately reach their post-secondary education goals.

Recommendations

This research study was designed to make multiple contributions to the literature. First, it was anticipated that it would contribute to educational knowledge about students with disabilities in general. More specifically, this study was designed to contribute to educational knowledge by enhancing the literature related to students with disabilities in post-secondary education, the literature on self-determination, and the literature on self-determination as it relates to gender. This study was also designed to help fill a gap in the literature on self-determination within the context of post-secondary education. Finally, this study was designed to contribute to practice by identifying how students with disabilities utilize self-determination skills. It was intended that information gained from this study could be used by professionals who implement self-determination training programs, to refine programs to meet students' needs in a more appropriate way, with the ultimate goal of further enhancing the self-determination skills of students with disabilities.

The research information gained through this research study, combined with my professional disability knowledge and experience, has resulted in several recommendations. These recommendations are designed to improve laws, policies,

and practices for higher education administrators, higher education faculty and staff, high school staff, disability professionals, and policymakers. In addition, these recommendations are also designed to provide family members with information to better support their family member with a disability. For students, these recommendations provide them with information that they can use to empower themselves and ultimately be more successful in their pursuit of, and participation in, higher education. Believing in the mantra “nothing about us, without us,” whenever possible, the student’s voice has been included in the recommendations.

Students

This research showed that most of the participants in this study received some kind of self-determination training prior to enrolling in post secondary education. Therefore, it is recommended that students take advantage of opportunities to learn self-determination skills. This can be accomplished by actively participating in transition planning through high school, through disability related programs such as vocational rehabilitation, or through less formal experiences with parents and teachers. Another way for students to learn self-determination is by attending a formal training program such as a Youth Leadership Forum, Boys State, or Girls State.

Participants in this study had a strong belief in their abilities and a deep determination to succeed in post secondary education. They possessed an attitude of “sticking with it, no matter what.” It important for students with disabilities who

wish to pursue higher education to understand that numerous barriers do exist, but that persistence pays off, even for students with severe disabilities.

Almost all of the successful participants in this study received support from multiple sources. This support came from parents, other family members, friends, high school teachers and counselors, higher education faculty and staff, disability professionals, and even friends and peers. It is recommended that students seek support from multiple sources and avoid individuals who are a negative influence regarding their pursuit of, and participation in, higher education. It is important to remember that although there are many supports and services available to students with disabilities, it is the student's responsibility to take full advantage of those supports and services. Therefore, it is recommended that students self-identify as a person with a disability to their respective institution of higher education. This is usually done through an Office for Disability Services. Students can then request and utilize appropriate disability related accommodations and take full advantage of supports available at their institution of higher education, such as learning resource centers, extra assistance offered from professors, academic or orientation seminars. Finally, students in this study fought for their rights as a person with a disability in higher education. However, in order to students to fight for their rights, they must first be cognizant of what their rights are. Gaining knowledge on disability rights will help students with disabilities better advocate for themselves.

Family Members

This research strongly supports the theoretical assumption that self-determination was “enhanced through facilitative support from others” (Powers & Deshler, 2002). Participants in this study reported that their families supported them in multiple ways: financially, emotionally, and physically. Therefore it is recommended that family members believe in the abilities of their family member with a disability and view them not as DIS-abled, but differently-abled. Parents can work with the school system to ensure that their children receive the proper transition services beginning at age 16. They can have a voice in the process by participating in the transition planning. As their children transition on from secondary education to post-secondary education, family members can assist their child in seeking out support services, such as disability services, the state vocational rehabilitation agency, and other services that may be available.

Higher Education Administrators

Higher education administrators can play a crucial role in making institutions of higher education a place that welcomes all students, including those with disabilities. Higher education might be a reasonable and attainable goal for students with disabilities from the academic perspective. However, students’ academic abilities do not matter if they are not physically able to get to the class. Several participants in this study, specifically those with physical disabilities, had problems with the inaccessibility of their institutions of higher education. Therefore, it is

recommended that higher education administrators seek appropriate funding for transforming higher education institutions into institutions with universal access.

If administrators want to know what works best for students with disabilities, then they need to ask them. Higher education administrators can involve students with disabilities in the creation and modification of disability policies and practices. They should respect the mantra, “nothing about us, without us.”

Molly shared her recommendation for higher education administrators. She stated:

University administrators should do the same as faculty...to just be understanding to the person’s needs. And maybe upon enrolling into college the person with the disability could request a meeting with a university administrator to talk about some of the things that they will need to be successful in school.

Higher education administrators can function as true leaders by setting a good example. Furthermore, they can provide opportunities for faculty and staff to have continuing education in regards to disability issues. Elaine elaborated on this concept:

Administration should also keep an open mind because if the administration is close minded then their subordinates will more than likely share in their views. One way of showing this open mindedness is to schedule disability awareness programs on campus. During faculty in-services, not only the disabilities of disabled students should be featured but also their accomplishments. One idea would be to invite successful disabled students or even alumni to speak of their accomplishments as well as their difficulties. Administrations could also be a bit assertive when it comes to enforcing accommodations such as fixing elevators in a timely manner or even just installing a ramp at a more convenient location. The administration could also more forcefully stress to their faculty, the importance of giving students accommodations.

One parent added a different perspective, Dr. Morgan stated that higher education administrators can “continue to fund effective Offices of Disabilities and directors and staff who know what they are doing. [The administrators can also] work to hire faculty that have some clue as to how to teach students with differing learning styles and needs.”

Higher Education Faculty and Staff

Higher education faculty and staff usually have more opportunity for regular contact with students with disabilities than any other individuals on a higher education campus. This was true for participants in this study. Therefore, faculty and staff are in a great position to positively impact the success of students with disabilities in higher education. To do so, higher education faculty and staff should provide appropriate accommodations and also find ways to be creative in the presentation of their course materials. One parent, who is also a college professor, stated:

What [faculty] can do and what they will do are two totally different things. They can figure out ways to provide extended time. They can provide graphic organizers and study guides. They can provide varying types of assessments within the same course. They can do more than straight lecture.

Faculty members need to invite students with disabilities to meet with them one on one to discuss their disability. James stated:

[Professors should] talk to the people with disabilities and find out how they can help to make their learning experience easier...The professors need to let the people with disabilities know that it is ok to come and talk to them about their disability.

Elaine shared her thoughts on what faculty could do to better assist students with disabilities. She stated:

Faculty and staff should keep an open mind about the abilities of their students. It is very difficult for a student to rise above both their own weaknesses and someone not believing that they can accomplish their goals. Faculty should be supportive, not destructive. They should also be taught that accommodations are not something that is around to make their jobs more difficult but to give a more level playing field to the individual receiving the accommodations. Accommodations may make the life of the educator more difficult for one hour of the day but the educator should realize that the life of the individual with the disabilities is difficult through out their [entire] lives. Making the playing field just a little more level can be the difference between an individual obtaining an education and bettering society or [them] quitting school and drawing from society.

In summary, faculty and staff need to be supportive of students with disabilities by being open minded regarding the student's abilities. Faculty and staff need to be knowledgeable regarding disability accommodations and willing to provide appropriate accommodations. They can be proactive by inviting and encouraging students to meet with them one on one to determine each student's learning style and how to best meet each student's disability needs with in the context of that particular course. However, faculty and staff should not provide accommodations that are not appropriate or justifiable. Therefore, it is imperative that faculty and staff educate themselves on various disabilities and appropriate accommodations so that students are not given inappropriate accommodations, and thus viewed by others as receiving unfair advantages.

High School Staff

Success for students with disabilities in higher education begins long before the student steps foot on a higher education campus. The student's family plays a large role in supporting the student in terms of their post-secondary education goals. However, high school staff, including teachers and counselors, can either supplement or supplant the support received from family. Participants in this study received encouragement, information and referral, and problem-solving assistance from high school staff. However, none of the students received any formal transition planning. Therefore, it is recommended that in order to assist students with disabilities in reaching their post-secondary education goals, high school teachers and counselors need to begin transition planning at age 16 for all students with disabilities. They need to believe in the abilities of the student with a disability, viewing them not as DIS-abled, but differently-abled. Most importantly, they need to include students in the creation and modification of disability policies and practices in high schools.

Disability Professionals

Disability professionals have provided students with disabilities with additional support in their pursuit of, and participation in, post-secondary education. This support has come in the form of financial assistance, provision of supports and services, advocacy, and encouragement. Although participants in this study identified positive support from disability professionals, several students also mentioned the lack of support from agencies they thought were there to assist them. For example, regarding vocational rehabilitation services, students are falling through the cracks

and not receiving services. Several student in this study reported applying for services but never receiving services. Other students reported that they were not even familiar with vocational rehabilitation services. This problem can be resolved through more extensive outreach efforts to transition age youth and through systematic follow-up activities. The state vocational rehabilitation agency needs to be an integral part of all transition planning. This can be accomplished through better coordination at the state level with the State Department of Education.

Many other statewide disability agencies and advocacy organizations are in contact with youth with disabilities and their families, often immediately after birth. These agencies often plant the first seeds in the heads of parents regarding what they can expect from their child with a disability. Agency staff need to support families to believe in the abilities of their child with a disability and to show families and children the possibilities that exist by exposing them to role models with disabilities. Finally, they need to assist families and students with disabilities with accessing all the local and state resources available to the student as the student pursues his or her post-secondary education goals.

Policymakers

Policymakers play a critical role in supporting individuals with disabilities in their pursuit of, and participation in, post-secondary education. They are the ones who hold the purse strings. They are the ones who can dictate performance audits. They can order the development of policies or the promulgation of rules, and they can

work to create laws that either positively or negatively impact persons with disabilities.

The Americans with Disabilities Act was passed in 1990. However, 15 years later we are still facing physically inaccessible institutions of higher education. Higher education is in desperate need of additional funding to finance accessibility modifications and provide programmatic accommodations for students with disabilities. Understandably, this may be difficult in tight financial times, particularly in Louisiana where the state currently faces a proposed 400 million dollar deficit for fiscal year 05-06. On top of that, the President of the United States recently issued his proposed federal budget which includes cuts to state funded programs, including disability programs in higher education. This will make state legislators' jobs more difficult as they enter the 2005 legislative session. However, it is important to keep in mind that one-time permanent accessibility modifications can reap long-term benefits as students with disabilities enter post-secondary education in increasing numbers year after year. These students graduate and move on to higher paying jobs and contribute to the economic structure of our state in the form of sales taxes and state income taxes. Therefore, it is a wise investment long-term.

In summary, this research study was designed to make multiple contributions to the literature. Several recommendations are offered including recommendations for higher education administrators, higher education faculty and staff, high school staff, disability professionals, policymakers, students, and family members of individuals with disabilities. These recommendations are designed to contribute to

educational knowledge about students with disabilities in general and more specifically to contribute to knowledge regarding policies and practices of both high school faculty and staff and higher education faculty and staff.

Implications for Theory

The findings of this research strongly support the theoretical assumptions that self-determination is enhanced through self-determination training, opportunities to express self-determination, and facilitative support from others (Powers & Deshler, 2002). I found that many of the participants in this study received self-determination training either formally or informally, and this training came from multiple sources. I also found that participants in this study had many opportunities to express their self-determination and they received facilitative support from numerous individuals, including family, friends/peers, disability professionals, and educational professionals.

There are two notable implications for existing theory. The first is that the assumption that self-determination is enhanced through self-determination training must be expounded on to clarify that self-determination training comes from multiple sources and in a variety of formats. Many of the participants in this study did not learn self-determination skills from just one source, instead they learned the skills over time from multiple sources. Those sources included both formal skill building programs, such as the Louisiana Youth Leadership Forum, and from informal sources such as parents.

The second implication for existing theory is a clarification regarding the assumption that self-determination is enhanced by access to opportunities to express self-determination, in that that access to opportunities should be filtered by the student's awareness of self. Participants in this study did have access to numerous opportunities to exhibit self-determination, however those opportunities were either limited or altered based on the functional limitations as a result each student's disability. Therefore, it is important that students have an awareness of self and fully understand their strengths and weaknesses and choose opportunities to express self-determination accordingly.

The findings of this research also can contribute to new theories regarding self-determination within the context of post-secondary education, and self-determination in relation to gender. I propose that the following hypotheses need further research: First, self-determined individuals, within the context of postsecondary education, take advantage of supports and services available to them, specifically taking advantage of the use of accommodations. Second, individuals with disabilities make decisions that are filtered by their functional limitations as a result of their disability. Third, individuals with disabilities are positively influenced by role models in higher education. Fourth, there are no gender differences, within the context of higher education, for self-determined individuals with disabilities. These proposed theories, along with other findings from this research, lead to suggestions for future research.

Suggestions for Future Research

The results of this study indicate that there are several areas for further research regarding the self-determination of students with disabilities within the context of higher education. First, further research is needed regarding students with disabilities who are not persisting in higher education. Questions that need to be answered are: Why are students with disabilities dropping out of higher education? What kinds of problems did they encounter in higher education? Were students receiving support from others and, if so, what kind of support? and Were they utilizing disability related accommodations in higher education? The data from this research would help guide University administrators in the creation or modification of supports and services designed to enhance retention for this population.

Second, the U.S. Department of Education Strategic Plan, 1998 – 2002, describes post-secondary education as “America’s traditional gateway to the professions, more challenging jobs, and higher wages” (p. 21). It is clear that post-secondary education enhances an individual’s chances of achieving high status, wealth, and job stability (Bidwell, 1989; Gingerich, 1996; Tinto, 1987). Therefore, a longitudinal study is needed to see if the same holds true for students with disabilities. Are students with disabilities that have completed post-secondary education entering professions of their choice? Are students with disabilities receiving higher wages, high status, wealth, and job stability? With documented research, university officials could promote institutions of higher education for this population.

Third, research is needed regarding the policies and practices of disability services offices in institutions of higher education. Participants in this study shared numerous examples of problems that they had to resolve in order to pursue their postsecondary education. With all of the federal laws in place to ensure that students with disabilities have access to postsecondary education, several questions remain. Why are students with disabilities still having so many problems in their pursuit of and participation in higher education? Why do inconsistencies in the provision of accommodations exist between one institution and another, between one department and another, and from one professor to another? Research regarding institution level policies and practices will shed light on the physical and academic accommodations that are currently being provided to students. This information can assist college or university systems with implementing policies and practices that are consistently applied

Fourth, research shows that when appropriate services are provided, students with disabilities succeed at levels commensurate with their abilities and with their nondisabled peers (Dalke, 1993; Gajoar, Murphy, & Hunt, 1982). Likewise, failure to seek appropriate support is associated with reduced grade-point averages and early withdrawal from school (Dalke, 1993). However, the key word is “appropriate.” The problem is that disability laws that direct institutions of higher education, mainly the Americans with Disabilities Act, and The Rehabilitation Act, are broad in scope and do not provide specific guidance into the actual provision of accommodations. Furthermore, as disability technology and knowledge continually advances, new and

more effective accommodations will be created. As this progression occurs, it is important to research strategies and accommodations that are most effective and appropriate for each individual, in order for them to be successful in higher education. Therefore, continual research is needed on what accommodations are most effective for students with disabilities, by disability type. The results should be incorporated into the practices of disability services offices so that an appropriate array of accommodation options are made available to meet each student's individual needs. With documented research, disability administrators may incorporate evidence based quality standards for the provision of accommodations.

Fifth, researchers interested in gender issues should conduct further research on issues of gender among students with disabilities in higher education. Even though students in this study did not indicate differences between males and females in regards to higher education, several parents' perceptions were that gender did have an impact on students with disabilities and their pursuit of, and participation in, post-secondary education. Also along the lines of gender, research should be conducted to see if gender differences exist among students with disabilities who are not persisting in postsecondary education. Specifically, research should focus on whether or not overprotection or paternalistic attitudes of parents impact males with disabilities differently than females with disabilities.

Sixth, further research is needed in the area of family support. This research indicated that family support was the largest type of support for students participating in this research study. What researchers need to know now is how family members

learned to support their family member with a disability. Did family members already possess a certain attitude regarding the abilities of persons with disabilities or did they learn to appreciate the abilities of a person with a disability? And does family support lead people to become self-determined? The results of this research can influence how doctors, disability services providers, and counselors work with family members. Furthermore, the results of this research can form the basis for the development or modification of programs that outreach to families with members who are disabled.

Another area for research is to study the experiences of students with disabilities by type of higher education institution. It appeared that the participants in this study who were enrolled in a community college or vocational technical setting received more support from their respective institution than did participants who were enrolled in a university setting. This needs to be explored further. If one setting is more conducive to working with students with disabilities, then students with disabilities may choose to enroll in that particular setting in order to increase their satisfaction with higher education and increase the likelihood of reaching their postsecondary education goals. Furthermore, research in this area can shed light on best practices to be adopted by all institutions in order to increase retention rates.

Finally, but most importantly, additional research is needed on the transition of students with disabilities to post-secondary education. It is estimated that youth with disabilities transition to post-secondary education at only about one-fourth the rate of youth without disabilities and one-third the rate of economically

disadvantaged youth (Blackorby & Wagner, 1996; Fairweather & Shaver, 1991).

Some questions that still need to be answered are: Why are students not pursuing higher education? Are students consistently receiving transition services in high school? What components are being included in the transition process? How are institutions of higher education conducting outreach to students with disabilities? With documented research, secondary education professionals can better prepare students for post-secondary education. Furthermore, higher education professionals can create or modify outreach practices for this population of potential students.

In summary, the disability field, particularly in terms of self-determination, is a relatively new field of study; therefore, the opportunities for future research are unlimited. The results of this study have highlighted several areas for future research including research on students with disabilities who are not persisting in higher education, employment outcomes for students who do reach their post-secondary education goals of obtaining a degree, policies and practices of higher education disability services offices, gender issues for students with disabilities, and transition of students with disabilities from secondary education to post-secondary education. Research in these areas should further enlighten professionals, policymakers, students, and family members regarding students with disabilities within the context of higher education.

Concluding Remarks

The participants for this study varied in their enthusiasm for this research. Some of the participants were so excited that someone was listening to the problems

they encountered that they wanted to share every detail of every problem and explain how they solved it. These participants were proud of their success and seemed to want the world to know it. However, a few other participants, although they agreed to participate in the research, were not as willing to divulge information, and it had to be drawn out of them. They were much more reserved. However, all but one of them possessed a strong determination to succeed in higher education. They had set goals for themselves; they had identified steps necessary to reach their goals; and they were certainly problem-solving barriers along the way. Their thoughts on their success, shared through their own voice, can serve as an inspiration to other students with disabilities who wish to pursue higher education. Therefore I would like to conclude this research study with the participants' overall thoughts on why they have been successful students in higher education. Participants were asked the following question: "Overall, why would you say that you're successful whereas other students with disabilities are not?"

Bart: I guess once I get started, [I] might as well finish. I guess that's my incentive. Might as well do it, get it done quick. [I] get things done. Once I start something, I want to finish it. I don't want to leave it there.

Ben: A lot of kids don't know the opportunities that they have. A lot of them they don't even think about college. And if they did, then they could be successful if they wanted to. But a lot of them don't, I don't know if they think they will be treated equally or they think they can't do it or whatever. But they can do it, you know. It's just a matter of going to college or not going to college if they want to be successful or not.

- Beth: I guess the reason I am successful is because I accepted...college. I accept that this is my third year and [I'm] actually taking college algebra. I guess I just accepted it took me five classes just to get to my college algebra. [I] also accept that you are going to get some professors that you do not like at all but you have to take that class because that's a class that you need....I accepted that it would take me longer to go through it.I guess I am so successful because I don't try to overload myself...I have accepted my limitations and I know what I can and cannot do.
- Callie: I'm very stubborn. I don't give up easily. So that's a good thing. So, if I'm frustrated in a class like I was last semester, I keep trying hard to get through. I don't just say, "you know what, I hate that class, drop it" or, "I hate college, I'm going back home." I'm just very stubborn....I push myself and I support myself and tell myself "go" when I need it.
- Chris: To learn more about people and to learn how to get out there and work. And try to...so that when I get out there in future I know what to expect.
- Daniel: I've kind of developed a knack for when someone tells me I can't do something, I find a way around it....I really think I have been fortunate enough to have this support system around me that has really pushed me all of the way. That has really made a difference in my success and pursuing higher education. There have been bumps along the way, but there [are] always going to be bumps. And you just find a way to go over them, go around them, or just bust them down.
- Elaine: Because I work hard, because I know that there are going to be good days and there's going to be bad days, but I just have to prepare for the bad days on the good days. And make sure that I have as few bad days as possibleA good way to succeed is to have a good support system that includes your parents if possible. Surround yourself with people who are positive.
- James: Leadership skills are one of them. I have learned a great deal down here [at the Louisiana Youth Leadership Forum]. I have learned more this weekend that I can use in college....Studying and dedication to my schoolwork is my main priority.
- Kendra: You got to be determined. I mean you gotta have that will to do it. I mean, they say you can't, do it any way.

- Landa: Basically because I push myself. I never want to fail. I think that failure is not a good thing. If you don't think that you can do something you have to give me a good explanation why. And most of the time it's not a good explanation. I think I am also successful because I have my friends and my family to support me, because without them I wouldn't be where I am today. And most of the time it's me pushing myself.
- Matt: Because I'm determined to be in college....[Also, I'm] stronger in the math and sciences,...[which is helpful for my major,] electrical engineering.
- Molly: To me, it's my family. I've built friendships with my coworkers, a few of them. They have been very stable for me, and that's where I grow from. They teach me and I hope I teach them on certain levels, so that's where I've gotten my biggest supports from.
- Russell: Well the biggest reason is the family support. My family has always been close and always been there to help me in terms of my disability [and] in terms of dealing with it on a personal level, dealing with disability services or dealing with faculty, advising me how to handle disability services or how to handle situations with faculty that may arise. Certainly the quality of the disability services office in undergraduate was helpful.
- Allison: You start small when you set goals, instead of a big gigantic goal that you will never reach, and you do your best. You best may not be a 4.0 but as long as you get out of here...as long as you do it. But other than that, don't give up, don't get discouraged, just do it. That's why people don't do well they just give up, a rainy day [comes] when you can't go to class...they give up.

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APPENDIX A: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

ELRC 9000: Dissertation Research

College of Education, Louisiana State University-Baton Rouge

Study Title:	Self-Determination of students with disabilities in post-secondary education.	
Performance Sites:	This study will be conducted in the individual's home or an alternate location of their choice.	
Investigator:	Laura Brackin W: (504) 942-8207	Available: M – F, 8 - 5 H: (225) 644-2801
Purpose of Study:	This study is to research how self-determination is exhibited within the context of post-secondary education.	
Inclusion Criteria:	Criteria for inclusion in this study are that individuals must be college age students with disabilities who have participated in the Louisiana Youth Leadership Forum between 1999 and 2003. In addition, individuals must either be currently enrolled in post-secondary education or have been enrolled in post-secondary education within the past five years. Snowball sampling will be used to identify a parent, guardian or professional who is knowledgeable about the student's self-determination.	
Number of Subjects:	There will be a total of 32 participants for this study. Sixteen participants will be college age students with disabilities, eight males and eight females. The other sixteen participants will consist of parents, guardians or professionals who are knowledgeable about the student's self-determination.	
Study Procedures:	Individuals will participate in one 1- 2 hour interview, a possible follow-up interview, and a member checking interview.	
Benefits:	Through interview questions, participants will possibly become more cognizant of their self-determination skills.	
Risks/Discomforts:	There is no known risk to this study.	
Right to Refuse:	Participation in this study is voluntary and subjects may change their minds and withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or loss of any benefit to which they may otherwise be	

entitled.

Privacy: Data from this study will be kept confidential unless release of data is legally compelled.

Financial: Compensation is not provided for participation in this study.

I, _____, agree to be interviewed by Laura Brackin for the purposes of dissertation research. I understand that I may be asked to reveal information of a personal nature during the course of this interview, and that every effort will be made by the investigator to protect my confidentiality. Any identifying information will be eliminated from the research report, and transcripts and audiotapes of this interview will be stored in a secure location with access limited to the investigator.

I understand that I will be asked to identify a parent, guardian, or professional who is knowledgeable about my pursuit of, , and participation in, post-secondary education. I will provide the name and contact information to the researcher and hereby give permission for the researcher to interview the parent, guardian, or professional that I identify.

I also understand that my participation is entirely voluntary, and I may withdraw consent and terminate participation in all or part of the interview at any time without consequence. In addition, I understand that I will be given an opportunity to ask questions and address concerns prior to and after the interview. I will also be entitled to a copy of the final research report if I so desire.

The study has been discussed with me and all my questions have been answered. I may direct additional questions regarding study specifics to the investigators. If I have questions about subjects' rights or other concerns, I can contact: Robert C. Mathews, Chairman, LSU Institutional Review Board, (225) 578-8692

I agree to participate in the study described above and acknowledge the researchers' obligation to provide me with a copy of this consent form if signed by me.

Subject's name (please print)

Date of Birth

Subject's signature

Today's date

TO BE COMPLETED BY INVESTIGATOR

Case ID No. _____

Number of Tapes _____

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

ELRC 9000: Dissertation Research College of Education, Louisiana State University-Baton Rouge

STUDENT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. Please state your name, age, and hometown.
2. Please describe your disability and functional limitations.
3. What institution of higher education are you enrolled in? What is your classification? What is your major?
4. Tell me about your decision to attend post-secondary education.
 - a. Probe: When did you make the decision to attend post-secondary education?
 - b. Probe: How did you decide which institution to attend?
 - c. Probe: Who did you talk to about your decisions?
 - d. Probe: Did you have any problems in enrolling in higher education?
 - e. Probe: How did you resolve any problems?
5. Tell me about the decisions you have had to make since being in post-secondary education.
 - a. Probe: How did you select your major and which classes to take?
 - b. Probe: Who did you talk to about when making your decisions?
 - c. Probe: Did you have any problems with selecting a major or which courses/classes to take?
 - d. Probe: How did you resolve any problems?

6. Tell me about the extra curricular activities have you participated in since you enrolled in post-secondary education?
 - a. Probe: What made you decide to participate in the activities?
 - b. Probe: Who did you talk to when deciding whether or not to participate?
 - c. Probe: Have you had any problems in participating in extra curricular activities?
 - d. Probe: How did you resolve your problems?
7. What disability related accommodations are you using in post-secondary education?
 - a. Probe: How did you arrange for those accommodations?
 - b. Probe: Who did you talk to when arranging your accommodations?
 - c. Probe: Have you had any problems using your accommodations?
 - d. Probe: How did you resolve those problems?
8. What self-determination trainings have you participated in the past? (Clarify that self-determination trainings are any classes, courses, programs, services, that help students set goals, identify action steps necessary to reach their goal and problem-solve barriers along the way i.e. transition services, LYLF)
 - a. What did you learn from those experiences?
 - b. How have you used what you have learned from those experiences in your college life?

9. Is there anything else that you want to tell me about how you've set goals, made decisions, and resolved problems in higher education?
10. Do you think there are any differences in the postsecondary experiences of men as opposed to women?

ELRC 9000: Dissertation Research
College of Education, Louisiana State University-Baton Rouge

PARENT/PROFESSIONAL INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. Please state your name and your relationship to the student.
2. Tell me about _____'s decision to attend post-secondary education.
3. Tell me about some of the decisions that you know _____ has made since being in post-secondary education?
 - a. Probe: Have you been involved in any of those decision-making processes?
4. Do you know of any extra curricular activities the student has participated in since he/she enrolled in post-secondary education? Tell me about their involvement in those activities.
5. Do you know if _____ is using any disability related accommodations in school?
6. What self-determination trainings has the student participated in the past?
7. What part did you play in the student's educational process?
 - a. Probe: What part did others play? (family, friends, and other professionals)
 - b. Probe: Goal setting, defining action steps, decision making, problem-solving.

8. Are you aware of any barriers that arose in the student's pursuit of post-secondary education?
 - a. Probe: How did _____ handle those problems?
9. Are you aware of any particular successes in _____'s educational experiences?
 - a. What made those successes possible?
10. Do you think there are any differences in the postsecondary experiences of men as opposed to women?

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW SCHEDULING FORM

MALES

FEMALES

#	Contact Information	Interview Information	Contact Information	Interview Information
1	Name: Address: Address: Phone: Email:	Day: Time: Location:	Name: Address: Address: Phone: Email:	Day: Time: Location:
2	Name: Address: Address: Phone: Email:	Day: Time: Location:	Name: Address: Address: Phone: Email:	Day: Time: Location:
3	Name: Address: Address: Phone: Email:	Day: Time: Location:	Name: Address: Address: Phone: Email:	Day: Time: Location:
4	Name: Address: Address: Phone: Email:	Day: Time: Location:	Name: Address: Address: Phone: Email:	Day: Time: Location:
5	Name: Address: Address: Phone: Email:	Day: Time: Location:	Name: Address: Address: Phone: Email:	Day: Time: Location:

6	Name: Address: Address: Phone: Email:	Day: Time: Location:	Name: Address: Address: Phone: Email:	Day: Time: Location:
7	Name: Address: Address: Phone: Email:	Day: Time: Location:	Name: Address: Address: Phone: Email:	Day: Time: Location:
8	Name: Address: Address: Phone: Email:	Day: Time: Location:	Name: Address: Address: Phone: Email:	Day: Time: Location:

**APPENDIX D: CONSENT FROM STUDENT TO INTERVIEW PARENTS,
GUARDIANS, PROFESSIONALS, AND OTHER INDIVIDUALS FORM**

INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM
ELRC 9000: Dissertation Research
College of Education, Louisiana State University-Baton Rouge

Title of Research Study: Self-Determination of Students with Disabilities in Post-Secondary Education.

Investigator: Laura Brackin
W: (504) 942-8207
H: (225) 644-2801

Date:

I, _____, do hereby give permission for Laura Brackin to interview _____ regarding my pursuit of, and participation in, post-secondary education for the purposes of dissertation research. I understand that _____ may be asked to reveal information of a personal nature about me during the course of the interview, and that every effort will be made by the investigator to protect my confidentiality. Any identifying information will be eliminated from the research report, and transcripts and audiotapes of the interview will be stored in a secure location with access limited to the investigator.

I also understand that _____'s participation is entirely voluntary, and I may withdraw consent and terminate their participation in this research at any time without consequence. In addition, I understand that I will be given an opportunity to ask questions and address concerns prior to and after the interview. I will also be entitled to a copy of the final research report if I so desire.

**I have been fully informed of my rights, and I give my permission for
_____ to be interviewed.**

Subject's name (please print)

Date of Birth

Subject's signature

Today's Date

APPENDIX E: RELEASE OF INFORMATION FORM

RELEASE OF INFORMATION FORM
ELRC 9000: Dissertation Research
College of Education, Louisiana State University-Baton Rouge

Title of Research Study: Self-Determination of Students with Disabilities in Post-Secondary Education.

Investigator: Laura Brackin
W: (504) 942-8207
H: (225) 644-2801

Date:

I, _____, do hereby give permission for _____
to release any information to Laura Brackin for the purposes of dissertation research.

Name

Date of Birth

Signature

Today's Date

VITA

Laura Brackin was born Laura Lee Schexnayder on October 1, 1966, in New Orleans, Louisiana. Her parents are Wayne and Jeanne Schexnayder. She attended Robert E. Lee High School and graduated in 1984. She began her post-secondary education at Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge in 1984 and obtained a bachelor's degree in 1992, a master's degree in 1996, and began pursuing her doctorate in 1997. She married Chad Mahlon Brackin in 1989, and together they have two children, Jessica and Foster. They reside in Prairieville, Louisiana. Laura worked for Governor Foster as the Executive Director of the Governor's Office of Disability Affairs for six years. She is currently an Assistant Professor at Louisiana State University Health Sciences Center and Program Director of the Community Development Program of the Human Development Center.