

DISSERTATION
QUALITATIVE INTERPRETATIVE CASE STUDY: DISABILITY DOCUMENTATION ON
ONE COMMUNITY COLLEGE CAMPUS

Submitted by
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In partial fulfillment of the requirements
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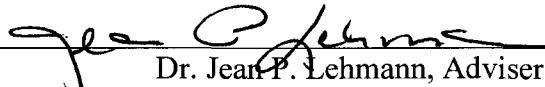
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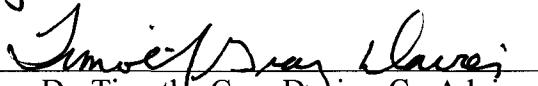
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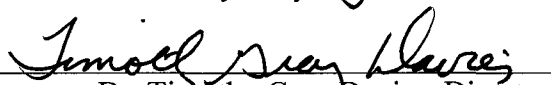
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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

QUALITATIVE INTERPRETATIVE CASE STUDY: DISABILITY DOCUMENTATION ON
ONE COMMUNITY COLLEGE CAMPUS

The relationship between disability service providers and the students they serve is complex. What seems to connect them initially is the documentation that students provide when they request services. Few studies have focused on how disability service providers use the documentation they receive to make eligibility and accommodation decisions. This interpretative case study examined multiple perspectives on disability documentation. It examined how eligibility and accommodation decisions are made based on documentation.

Data were collected from multiple sources. The three service providers who make eligibility and accommodation decisions on behalf of their college participated in two sets of in depth interviews; a college official who serves as the disability ombudsperson, the ADA Compliance Officer was also interviewed. In addition, eight students participated in focus group interviews to share their perspectives about documentation. Some of the students participated in special education services in their pre-collegiate years while others did not. Pre-collegiate experiences seem to play key role in the ability of the students to provide complete documentation. An interpretive case study design was selected in order to describe and explore themes inherent in the data. Six themes emerged from the data (1) broken and dysfunctional systems; (2) bottom of the barrel; (3) squeaky wheel gets the grease; (4) disability is a mixed bag; (5) college is an opportunity of a life time; and (6) not disabled enough. The resulting

themes are discussed in light of access to disability services at college. Implications for practice and future research highlight the need for continued research.

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Above all, I am eternally grateful to my heavenly father for bringing me to this point. I thank Him for sending my way people that helped shaped not only my life but also my professional career.

DEDICATION

To God be the glory for the completion of this journey because without Him, none of this would come to be.

This work is dedicated to the most influential people in life. First, to the memory of my teacher, hero and mentor, Late Alhaji Malik Adewara Owolabi. Family relationship will call you my uncle, but you were in every way my father. It was you who went against the common believe that girls do not deserve an education. You held nothing back from me and always found learning in mistakes. You seized every moment of mistake to help me learn. How I wish you can share this success with me and to know you were right all along. Though you are gone, your memory lives on. I love and miss you dearly.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background and Overview

Every institution of higher education (IHE) in the United States has a mandate to provide access to its curriculum, programs and services. The law does not prescribe how the access should be done as long as it is done. Consequently, institutions find ways to ensure that the legal mandate is implemented by designating individuals responsible for the function. Those individuals are referred to as the Disability Support Service (DSS) providers.

One of the critical elements of DSS providers' task is making eligibility and accommodation decisions (Simon, 2000; Hatzes, Reiff, & Bramel, 2002). These decisions are not made in a vacuum; they are guided by the information in the documentation provided by the students who request services. The information contained in the documentation that students provide must inform the DSS providers' decision to arrive at a reasonable determination of whether or not the student is eligible for services, the type of services that can and/or should be provided, and level of services that will minimize the impact of their disability in the educational environment (McGuire, 1998; Ofiesh, Hughes, & Scott, 2004; Getzel, Briel, McManus, & Lovelace, 2006). Exactly what the documentation should look like, what it should contain, who is qualified to provide the documentation, and how recent the documentation needs to be are still contentious in the disability services field (Gregg, Scott, McPeck, & Ferri, 2005; Gordon, Lewandowski, Murphy, & Dempsey, 2002; Getzel, et al., 2006; Harding, Blaine, Whelley, & Chang, 2006).

There is no question among the DSS providers that any student requesting academic accommodations at any IHE must demonstrate a need for services. Students are expected to

provide information to confirm the existence of a disabling condition, the functional limitations resulting from such condition(s), and possible and or recommended accommodations (Hurtubis-Sahlen & Lehmann, 2006). Unfortunately, service providers have not been able to develop consistent documentation policies and requirements that apply across disability category (Nolander, Shaw, & McGuire, 1990; Gregg, et al., 2005). The lack of uniform policies and guidelines is a challenge for service providers, thus an overwhelming majority (80 percent) of the service providers seek information on best practices (Harbour, 2004).

Statement of the Research Problem

Students with disabilities seeking services to equalize their opportunities for access and participation in the postsecondary education environment must self identify, provide documentation, and request services from their respective colleges or universities. The designated individual to whom students must identify and provide documentation in most colleges and universities is the DSS provider. These professionals are charged with making eligibility decisions and determining reasonable and appropriate accommodations. Their decisions, however, must be supported by the documentation the student provides (Harding, et al., 2006).

Making eligibility and accommodation decisions can be difficult, challenging, and complex especially for students with hidden disabilities (Hatzes, et al., 2002). The less obvious the functional limitations are, and the more far reaching the accommodation request, the greater the need becomes for comprehensive documentation. For most service providers, this process is an ordeal and produces unsettled feelings, especially when the disability is hidden, when documentation is unclear, and when the condition is new and unfamiliar.

Current knowledge and research in the area of inconsistent documentation requirements is limited at best, and there is no established national or state policy that lends a uniform approach to deal with such an issue (Madaus, 1996). Each institution of higher education across the country and in Canada develops and publishes its own guidelines of what should be included in the documentation that supports the existence of a disability (Hurtubis-Sahlen & Lehmann, 2006).

While Canada has a consistent requirement for documentation as evidenced in its guidelines, the requirements vary widely between schools in the United States of America (Gregg, et al., 2005). As a result, students with disabilities and their parents or responsible adults in their lives are consistently challenged by the need to interpret and understand differences in the documentation policies that vary by institution and by disability (Shaw & Dukes, III, 2006). In addition they are challenged with various admission requirements. This is the case even though the laws that guide the provision of access as it relates to disabilities across the country are the same (Simon, 2000).

Requirements for detailed disability documentation unfairly target a subset of the student population, those with invisible disabilities, more than others (Madaus & Madaus, 2001). The stakes are higher not only for the students but also for the DSS provider. Consequently, the documentation that students with invisible disabilities provide is scrutinized more by the DSS providers than the documentation for students with obvious disabilities. Students with invisible disabilities are those whose disabilities are not easily apparent (e.g., learning disabilities—LD, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder—AD/HD, health/systemic illness, Autism Spectrum Disorders, traumatic brain injury, and psychological disabilities). This group of students constitutes a significant proportion (more than 50 percent) of those registered in many disability

service offices in the United States (Heyward, Lawton, & Associates, 1991; Henderson, 2000; Stodden, 2006). Unfortunately, due to the level of scrutiny and questioned legitimacy, many of these students are reluctant to identify themselves as "disabled", though most of them will not make it through college/university without the services and support that the DSS office can provide (Gormley, Hughes, Block, & Lendmann, 2005).

Reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities, visible or invisible, determine whether or not a student will be successful in college and attain a degree. The US Department of Education's 2006 report indicated that students with disabilities are 50 percent less likely to attain a bachelor's degree in a 6 year period compared to their peers without a disability. Specifically, 15 percent of students with disabilities earned their degree in a six year period compared to 29.8 percent of students without disabilities. The study also found higher attrition rate (41.2 percent) for students with disabilities that attempted college (Walker, 2006).

The need for support and services for this group of students cannot be underestimated. Inconsistent documentation requirements pose a challenge for students with invisible disabilities. A lack of useful information limits the ability of the DSS provider to adequately and effectively facilitate support services for students with disabilities and their effectiveness in advocating for their needs at the postsecondary level.

Purpose of the Research

The purpose of this case study was to explore the different understandings and perspectives about disability documentation while examining the principles and practices of one institution. The study sought to understand how disability support service providers use the documentation to make eligibility and accommodation decisions.

Research Questions

This study uncovered multiple understandings and multiple perspectives for requiring documentation and how well the documentation provided by the student guides DSS providers in making eligibility and accommodation decisions. The following questions will guide this research:

1. What is the purpose of disability documentation?
2. What pieces of information are considered essential to be included in disability documentation?
3. How do disability service providers use disability documentation to make eligibility and accommodation decisions?
4. What are the reasons behind requiring differing documentation based on disability types?

Definition of Terms

The following terms are defined for the specific purpose of this study.

Access: Modifications such as removal of physical barriers to provide communications access in programs and activities offered on and off-campus buildings and facilities that are being used in connection with the institution's courses or extracurricular activities.

Accommodations: Auxiliary aids and services that are designed to provide equal access to programs and services for qualified individuals with disabilities provided at no cost to the student. They may include modifications to policy, procedure or practice (AHEAD, 1999).

Documentation: Paperwork or reports that contain detailed information that provides a decision-maker with a basic understanding of a student's disability, and adequate information to anticipate how the current impact of the disability is expected to interact with the institution's structure of courses, testing methods, program requirements, etc. (AHEAD, 1999).

Disability Support Services (DSS): Direct services aimed at promoting equal access to educational opportunities for students with disabilities (Embry, Parker, McGuire, & Scott, 2005).

Invisible Disabilities: Disability conditions that are not seen and are, therefore, difficult to establish legitimacy. Nonetheless, they have significant effect on the ability of the individual experiencing it. It includes Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Learning Disabilities (LD), mental illness or psychiatric disabilities, neurological disorders such as Autism Spectrum, and brain injury (Matthews & Harrington, 2000).

Institution of Higher Education (IHE): A public or other nonprofit educational institution in any state that is legally authorized within such state to provide a program of education/diploma beyond secondary education and has been nationally recognized by an accrediting agency or association to award bachelor's degree or to provide not less than a 2-year program that is acceptable for full credit toward such a degree; (Higher Education Act, 1965).

Otherwise qualified student: A student who has been offered admission and is able to perform the requisite in the college or university's course with or without reasonable accommodations (Eckes & Ochoa, 2005).

Reasonable Accommodations: Adjustments made within a college or university to allow an otherwise qualified student with a disability to perform required tasks without jeopardizing the safety of self or anyone else or pose an undue hardship for the institution, and do not fundamentally alter the nature of a program or service (AHEAD, 1999).

Student with a Disability (SWD): A qualified student: (a) with a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities; (b) with a record of such an impairment; or (c) who has been regarded as having such an impairment (Americans with Disabilities Act, 1990).

Substantial limitation: A significant restriction as to the condition, manner or duration under which an individual can perform a major life activity of caring for oneself, walking, talking, breathing, seeing, hearing, or learning as compared to the average person in the general population (Americans with Disabilities Act, 1990).

Limitations of the Research

Postsecondary access for students completing high school requirements extend beyond institutions of higher education (IHE). However, this study focused on access issues related to the academic and nonacademic offering within a select IHE in a South Atlantic region of the United States. Because access challenges that students with disabilities face as they matriculate to the IHE of their choice are many, this study is limited to the issues of disability documentation related to the eligibility and accommodation determination in a select IHE. This is a case study using convenient and purposive sampling. Because the findings cannot be generalized beyond the setting of the study or beyond similar institutions in the area, there is no intent to generalize the findings.

Limitations and contributions of the Study

This case study attempts to understand multiple perspectives of disability documentation by exploring the experiences and perspectives of three diverse groups at the Citywide Community College (CWCC). The findings from this single case study cannot be generalized to other disability support services at other colleges and universities. It follows that the findings discussed for this college also cannot be generalized to other disability service offices. However, it does provide an example of a disability support service that is specific to CWCC and cannot be generalized to disability services on other college campuses.

The purpose of a case study research, according to Stake (2000) is not to represent the world but to represent the case at hand. Therefore, despite those limitations, this case study contributes to the literature on postsecondary access for students with disabilities. This study is one of the first attempts at researching and understanding how disability service providers use disability documentation to make eligibility and accommodation decisions. Therefore, what this study presents are the unique experiences of the students who participated in this study, and the views and perspectives of service providers at CWCC.

Concerted efforts were made to triangulate data across multiple sources, participants, and methods. An integral experience of any college student is faculty and college administrators. The voices, opinions, and experiences of those groups of professionals were not captured. What was heard from the students was not completely reflective of the voices and experiences of all students with disabilities who are registered and are receiving services at CWCC.

Furthermore, my understanding of documentation, my past involvement with the development of documentation at different campuses where I have worked, my involvement at facilitating the alignment of statewide documentation guidelines, and my current position and approaches to making eligibility and accommodation decisions may have resulted in possible bias.

Significance of the Research

There is abundant research and writing on the essential components of postsecondary education access for students with disabilities. Numerous studies have explored transition planning for students with disabilities moving from the high school to IHE (Eckes & Ochoa, 2005; Gormley, et al, 2005). Many have addressed the importance of self advocacy and self determination skills in assuring successful postsecondary experiences for students with

disabilities (Skinner, 2004). Yet, others have concentrated on the legal and systemic differences between high school and IHE (Raskind, Goldberg, Higgins, & Herman, 1999; Murray, Goldstein, Nourse, & Edgar, 2001). However, few studies have dealt with the challenges of documentation, how documentation guide DSS providers' decisions on eligibility and accommodation, and differing views and perceptions of documentation requirements. Given that the determining and delivering disability services is complex and that the practice relies heavily on information from a third party and professional judgment, studies addressing essential elements of the documentation that guide service delivery are essential. This is important, not only to inform the DSS profession, but also to address issues for students they serve, and to help the institutions in which they practice. This study will attempt to fill this gap.

Researcher Perspective

My interest in this topic is both personal as well as professional. As a DSS professional, I have struggled with lack of uniform and inconsistent documentation requirements. I have worked at a large community college and two land grant universities and have either developed or amended the disability documentation at each the colleges. There are times when I feel confident and comfortable with the documentation requirements that I help develop and there are other times that I struggle with the same set of requirements. The struggles often come when I listen to a student's stories and accounts of academic challenge despite high intellectual ability and great efforts. Some of these students have comprehensive documentation that support their stories and experiences but those documentations date back to their earlier educational experiences that will not meet the requirements at the postsecondary level.

There are other students, especially those from low income, first generation, and from a minority group who were never identified because they neither had persons to follow up with

them nor the financial resources to seek needed documentation. These groups of students will be determined ineligible for services and accommodations, not because their issues and challenges are not legitimate, but because they cannot provide the type of documentation that can support my decision to make them eligible for services. I have worked with different agencies to provide resources for these students to obtain documentation. I have also worked with the financial aid office of my institution to include the costs of documentation as part of the costs of attendance. I have also worked at state level with colleagues to bring together colleges, universities, state department of education, school district personnel, special educators, parent groups, and other service agencies to address inconsistent documentation. Yet I find as I move from my local to another or from one state to another, the issue persist.

From my professional perspectives, I understand the challenges of DSS providers who are always balancing their role as advocates with their responsibility to protect their colleges and universities. I have had instances where I had to make the tough decision to deny services to a student in order to maintain the integrity of the program and services for all other students. I hope this research will help me discover and uncover a greater personal understanding of the nature of documentation. It may offer insights and contribute to the conversation of the nature and challenges of DSS professionals and how documentation requirements add to those complexities.

My background as a DSS provider will contribute to the rich interpretation and analysis of the data because I will be able to understand the content and context of what will be provided. At the same time, I am aware that the same background also has the potential to limit my interpretation of the data and cloud my judgment. Triangulating data from multiple sources from

multiple perspective, and member checking will put some of my biases on guard and help my objectivity.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

An increasing number of students with disabilities are matriculating into institutions of higher education (Henderson, 2001, Wolanin & Steele, 2004; Walker, 2006). The number more than tripled between 1978 and 1994, increasing from 2.6 percent in 1978 to 9.2 percent in 1994. Recent data from a national survey of postsecondary education revealed that an estimated 11.3 percent of undergraduate students and 17 percent of the entire student body reported having a disability (Stodden, 2006; Walker, 2006). These increases have been credited to the passage and implementation of the requirements contained in Section 504 of the Rehab Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (Lehmann, Davies, & Laurin, 2000; Henderson, 2001; Wolanin & Steele, 2004; Hardin, et. al., 2006).

Such increases have elicited a different type of challenge; the challenge to balance the rights of students with disabilities and protect them from discrimination, and to uphold the mission, vision, and obligations of institutions of higher education (IHE) to serve only those who qualify (Simon, 2000; Getzel, et al., 2006).

Special attention has been called to the increasing enrollment of students with diagnosed disabilities and the resulting implication of such access. Such attention has led to several précised and focused research. Research conducted relative to postsecondary disability services in the last twenty years has focused primarily on postsecondary students with learning disabilities, the challenges they face, and the lack of adequate preparation of those who work with them. Such studies emphasize what ought to be rather than what is the reality of service coordination and delivery (Michael, Saland, Bennett, & Harris, 1988; Norlander, Shaw, &

McGuire, 1990; Madaus, 1997; Shaw, McGuire, & Madaus, 1997; Finn, 1998; Dukes & Shaw, 1999).

Studies that attempt to address the broad disability services focus on issues surrounding transition and self advocacy (Murray, et. al., 2001; Cobb, Lehmann, Tochtermann, & Bomotti, 2000; Eckes & Ochoa, 2005), the discrepant nature of the documentation requirement between secondary and postsecondary levels (Gormley, et. al., 2005), professional development for postsecondary faculty (Debrand & Salzberg, 2005; Burgstahler & Doe, 2006; Vogel, Leyser, Burgstahler, Sligar, & Zecker, 2006) and the legal implication of disability access (Gregg & Scott, 2000; Hatzes, et al., 2002). While those studies have been enlightening, their contributions to the appreciation for and the complexity of what informs the critical decisions of eligibility and accommodation by DSS providers, based on the documentation students provide, has been limited.

To better understand the issues of postsecondary access and support services for students with disabilities and the challenges posed by differing requirement to verify the existence of disability, it is important to provide an overview of the educational access and the necessity of documenting disability. This literature review focuses on studies and writings published in the field in the last 20 years with particular attention to studies related to the role of DSS providers and the legal defense for postsecondary access for people with disabilities. Therefore, this chapter is structured along specific themes identified in the literature as central to the development of a comprehensive perspective on issues related to documenting disability and support services in postsecondary education. The theme areas are not mutually exclusive and each has direct impact on the other. They are the following:

- Legal basis for postsecondary access for students with disabilities
- Unintended consequences of the laws
- The dilemmas of documenting disability
- Professional preparation of DSS providers

Legal Basis for Postsecondary Access for Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities have been described as the most recent marginalized group to move toward equal opportunity in education, following the path of low-income persons, racial, ethnic minorities, and women (Wolanin & Steele, 2004). Unfortunately, the needs of this group of students remain removed from the needs of other historically marginalized groups on college campuses; the benefits that continue to be extended to other groups (specialized admissions, scholarships and programming) are usually not extended to this group of students. Yet, they face many challenges across the educational spectrum compared to their peers without disabilities.

High school graduation rates for this group of students (78 percent) are lower than the general population (91 percent) and of those that graduate, only 57 percent of the 2001 cohort reported having received a standard high school diploma (Wolanin & Steele, 2004). There is no doubt, then, that their college enrollment rate (72.9 percent) is far below their peers (84.2 percent). Even more striking is that their college graduation rates (56 percent) have proven to be even lower than their counterparts without disabilities (80 percent) and their drop out rates are quite high comparatively (Skinner, 2004; Wolanin & Steele, 2004; Walker, 2006).

These types of demographics document a need for both improving access and supporting persistence for students who are deemed to be “at-risk” of dropping out or of failing out of not only high school, but also failing out of college. Without adequate preparation, ongoing support when the student gets to college, and availability of reasonable and appropriate accommodations

to ameliorate the effect of their disabling conditions, students with disabilities will drop out or fail out (Wolanin & Steele, 2004; Harding, et al., 2006). When access to services is denied because accommodations and support services are not in place for students that need them, their level of success diminishes (Gormley, et al., 2005). This reality resonates with many individuals in the United States. Therefore, efforts in the form of governmental interventions were proposed to support and address issues of diversity and equal access to education.

For so long, government intervention and involvement through legislation have critically shaped education and educational access in the United States (Poterba, 1995). From the passage of Morrill Act in 1862 where the federal government donated public lands to states and territories for the purpose of establishing land grant colleges for agriculture and mechanic arts, to the GI Bill of Rights of 1944 that provided financial assistance to World War II veterans to pursue higher education, government has always used its power of intervention to extend educational opportunities to its citizenry. Government has also used its power of intervention to correct longstanding injustices in the educational system as evidenced in the passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA). This legislation was developed under the principle of redress and to provide access for underprivileged children. Similar principles led to the passage of Sections 504 of Rehab Act of 1973 that provides civil rights protection and the recent inclusion of Section 508 to increase electronic access for students with disabilities. These types of governmental involvement and interventions in the education system have opened doors for many people who otherwise would not have had such opportunities (Schugurensky, 2002).

Americans believe that education is not only the key to national defense but it is also the key to independence, empowerment, and individual freedom from poverty (Wolanin & Steele,

2004). President Lyndon Johnson espoused this belief when he signed the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) into law on April 11, 1965. This piece of legislation, hailed as the Equal Opportunity Law, was designed to expand educational opportunities for students from low-income families and depressed communities. It has been described as the first and largest comprehensive federal education law that provides substantial financial support to school districts to provide inclusive educational programming (Levine, 1996). Since that time, several laws have been adopted to specifically address equity and access for children and adults with disabilities.

The two most significant legislation that assure postsecondary education access for adults with disabilities in the United States are Sections 504 of the Rehab Act of 1973 (29 U.S.C.A. § 794 and 29 U.S.C.A. § 794d) and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) (42 U.S.C. § 12101). These laws were implemented to correct the long standing injustices and marginalization of people with disabilities across the educational and employment spectrum (Schugurensky, 2002).

Section 504 of the Rehab Act (Section 504)

Section 504 (P.L. 93-112) is an anti-discrimination legislation passed to address educational inequity and to prohibit discrimination for programs receiving federal funds. Simon (2000) describes Section 504 as a statute that adds a positive side to an enforcement obligation. The positive obligation of the statute requires that reasonable and appropriate accommodations and/or modifications be made to the educational environment, policies, programs, and services of an educational institution so that a student with a disability is assured equal access and equal participation as those students without disabilities. Section 504 was passed in 1973 when the Vocational Rehabilitation Act was up for reauthorization and during which time criticism

abounded that the federal government did little to encourage participation and access for people with disabilities (Schugurensky, 2002). The Act therefore serves as the first national declaration of the rights of people with disabilities and the “defining legislation for the determination of accommodations at postsecondary institutions” (Mull, Sitlington, & Alper, 2001, p. 105).

Section 504 states in part:

No otherwise qualified individual with a disability in the United States, as defined in section 705(20) [29 U.S.C.A. § 705(201)] of this title, shall, solely by reason of her or his disability, be excluded from the participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance or under any program or activity conducted by any Executive agency or by the United States Postal Services.

Within the educational environment, Section 504 prohibits discrimination in all areas including instruction, admission, recruitment, and testing across all educational levels. An important aspect of this anti-discrimination legislation is the notion that an individual has to be “otherwise qualified.” For an individual to be qualified under this provision, she or he must meet the requisite for participation and is able to do the job with or without reasonable accommodations (Simon, 2000; Hurtubis-Sahlen & Lehmann, 2006). The critical part of the legislation is that the disability has to be considered substantial for such an individual to qualify for services; in other words, it has to pose a limit to one or more major life functions (Simon, 2000).

Enforcement of Section 504 falls under the purview of the Department of Education (DOE). When DOE issued the regulations in 1977, it prescribed minimum standards for IHE in the areas of admissions and recruitment, treatment of students, academic adjustments and accommodations, housing, financial aid and employment assistance, and nonacademic services. Minimum standards under the admissions and recruitment prohibit pre-admission inquiries or requirements that unnecessarily target individuals with disabilities or the disabling condition. At

the same time, schools are not required to use affirmative action to admit individuals who are not qualified by lowering the admission standards. Applicants may voluntarily disclose their disability and ask for special admission considerations. The school may decide whether or not to grant such request as long as the criteria they use do not discriminate. It is also important to note here that the disclosure at this point will only assist in the admission decision but does not guarantee accommodations. That is a separate process that the student will have to pursue.

Section 504 mandates that IHE must make reasonable accommodations or adjustments but only for qualified students. To ensure that eligibility decisions are consistent and fair, many IHE designate an office or an individual to be responsible for determining who is qualified based on the extent of the impact of the disabling condition and level of support that the individual would need to level the playing field in that particular educational environment. This requirement thus sets the stage for establishing specialized offices and a line of postsecondary education professionals charged with fulfilling this role.

For a student to qualify for disability related services, she or he must self disclose and request services from a designed office or personnel. The process of self disclosure and service request begins with the student providing evidence to support the identification and services request. The evidence (documentation) that the student provides has to meet the requirements established by that institution. In general, it must contain enough information to determine the level of impairments and the resulting limitations caused by the disability within the educational environment. The evidence may be in the form of medical reports, psychological assessments, history of treatments, or educational test results. It is on this basis of the evidence that the student provides that eligibility for services are made and the scope of service determined (Gordon, et al., 2002). Therefore, it is not enough for an individual to have a disability; there has

to be clear evidence either in documentation or as seen that the disability leads to the inability of the individual to perform one or more major life functions as defined in the environment. For example, learning is considered a major life function in the educational environment; therefore, any condition that affects the ability of an individual to learn or to demonstrate acquired knowledge is eligible to be accommodated (Gregg & Scott, 2000).

Once a student has self disclosed, provided necessary documentation that meet the requirement to make eligibility and accommodation determination, it is incumbent on the IHE to assure full access and participation. Section 504 requires that an IHE make necessary program and or policy modifications and adjustments so as not to discriminate or have the effect of discriminating against a qualified student with a disability (Burgstahler & Doe, 2006).

Significant improvements were made in the educational environment for students with disabilities as evidenced in the higher matriculation rate. However, there continues to be lack of access to some segments of the education environment, employment, transportation, communication. Despite the passage and implementation of Section 504 in 1973 and the establishment of responsible personnel to coordinate services, students with disabilities continue to experience systematic exclusion, especially at many private colleges and universities. While some reported exclusion from specific program areas others reported that many of their needs remained unmet, especially in private institutions of higher education (Farone, Hall, & Costello, 1998; Jarrow, 1997).

Consequently, PL 101-336, also known as the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), was enacted 1990. The law reinforced Section 504 and extends civil rights coverage to education, training, employment, public services, public transportation, public accommodations, and telecommunications (Simon, 2000).

Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA)

While Section 504 was described as the first national declaration of the rights of people with disabilities, Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) has been described as the most comprehensive civil rights legislation for people with disabilities (Jarrow, 1993). ADA guarantees civil rights protection and extends access for individuals beyond education in the United State into areas such as employment, private institutions of higher education, and transportation (ADA, 2001). There are five parts to this legislation (employment, public service, public accommodations, telecommunications, and miscellaneous provisions (P.L. 101-336). Two of the five parts (Titles II and III) are pertinent to the discussion and relate specifically to the provision of accommodations to assure postsecondary education access.

Title II (public service) covers state and local government entities, transportation, and public institutions that include community colleges and 4-year colleges and universities. The provisions within Title II reinforce Section 504 mandates in a broader sense. They address issues of access in public secondary and postsecondary education institutions and prohibit discrimination against an otherwise qualified student with a disability on the basis of their disabling condition. Title III (public accommodations) extends this protection beyond what was already covered by Section 504. It extends the same protection to students in private institutions of higher education, transportation, testing agencies that administer exams for educational and professional access and in housing.

ADA is said to be the most comprehensive law in the United States passed to protect American citizens with disabilities from discrimination and to guarantee them access to education, employment, and public transportation (Henderson, 2001). The law comes with some specific provisions that are only unique to it when compared to other laws passed to protect the

rights of specific group of individuals. Some provisions of the law are that an individual must be qualified; must be willing to be considered a part of the group by the process of self identification; and must be willing to work in collaboration with a designated agency or individual to determine the level of service. The individual with a disability has the burden to prove that they are qualified and eligible to receive services. It is therefore incumbent upon the individual with a disability to determine whether there are likely to be barriers in the environment and then connect with someone and request services. In the postsecondary environment, it involves an individual connecting with the designated office and making a formal request for services.

Postsecondary access is more than what will happen when a student arrives on a college campus; it includes what happens as the student prepares to enter. Because postsecondary education institution is an eligibility environment (an individual has to apply, be determined to qualify, and be admitted), access includes how institution make admission decisions. Ofiesh, Hughes, & Scott (2004) contend that accommodations are critical aspects of access to higher education for students with disabilities and that accommodations must be available at every stage in the process to include college visits, admissions, orientations, participation, and graduation.

It is well documented that standardized tests such as ACT, SAT, GRE, GMAT, LSAT, MCAT are 'tickets' to higher education including professional programs for any student (Gordon, et. al, 2002). So that postsecondary access will be assured for students with disabilities, Title III of ADA mandates that reasonable and appropriate accommodations be granted for students when requested. It, however, makes it reasonable for organizations administering these types of tests to set their own standards of eligibility and enforce a reasonable timeline to review requests (Simon, 2000; Ofiesh, et al., 2004).

It is important to note that Section 504 and ADA are laws passed to level the playing field for people with disabilities. They only assure access for students who are otherwise qualified; they do not require that standards be lowered or minimized to accommodate individuals with disabilities. They are, therefore, not laws or legislations that guarantee access to students with disabilities because of a disability and regardless of their eligibility and qualifications; rather, they guarantee access in spite of disabling conditions as long as students meet established requirements and follow guidelines.

Another piece of legislation that has impact for postsecondary access but not intended as postsecondary measure is Section 508 of the Rehab Act. This is a technology access legislation but it has ramifications for postsecondary access.

Section 508 of the Rehab Act

Despite already established laws and policies, and legal battles between students and their respective IHE resulting from non compliance, students with disabilities continue to experience marginalized experiences especially in the areas of information access. Technology and web access seemed to be the way many campuses are heading. More courses than ever are being offered online or at a distance, and instructors rely more on e-mail communications than face-to-face or telephone interactions. Websites continue to hold pertinent information about course expectations and course resources; thus student interactions are encouraged through the use of Blackboards, and libraries are moving more towards electronic access. Technology seems to be opening up more avenues for interaction and choices.

Students now have more options than previously. There continues to be an increase in the number of hybrid courses where a portion of a course is offered face to face and part offered online. Changes are occurring; the classroom world is becoming broader and more people are

engaged in the process. Not only do we have hybrid courses, we also have hybrid students who take courses from different institutions of higher education because they are all available at a distance or online. It is not uncommon to have students taking courses outside of their own state or even their own country of residence. Changes are occurring; the classroom world is becoming broader; and more people are engaged in the learning process. All of these new approaches are being embraced without proper attention to what it would or could mean for students who are unable to access electronic information because of their disability. Some have and use assistive technology but their assistive technology or device may not be supported by the new wave of electronic access. Therefore, technology is emerging to be the avenue of inequity for students with disabilities.

This technology requirement is currently changing the face of many colleges and universities and waking them to the realization of the needs of students needing alternate methods to electronic access. A student who is blind for example is not able to read without an assistive device. Many of them use JAWS (Job Access with Windows), a text voice device. This device serves as the eyes for them. Many websites are developed and tagged in ways that JAWS cannot read. Consequently, the information on those sites is not accessible to them though others with sight have access. Many instructors now use Blackboard as means to connect with students and to deliver instruction and to share information. Most course syllabi are available on the Blackboard but will only be provided upon request. While the syllabus may be accessible, other resources are in PDF formats that JAWS cannot read.

Technology barriers affect more than students with visual impairments, it affects students with different types of disabilities. Students with sensory disabilities for example are also adversely affected by the move to increase web access. The information on most websites is not

presented in ways that are easily understood and others present more information than needed. Such lead to sensory overload thus limiting access for this group of students. Students with AD/HD who are easily distracted by visual stimuli can easily carried away with very interesting information that may lead them away from what is important on the page. The recent move to web blog with videos that are not captioned creates its own challenge especially for students who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing.

Government intervention is also being used to correct this emerging imbalance. Congress took the initiative at the reauthorization of Section 504 in 1998 to pass PL 105-220. This amendment to the Americans with Disabilities Act referred to the Electronic and Information Technology law (also known as Section 508) extends the general requirements of facilities access to include information on the Web. Section 508 holds federal agencies and departments accountable for ensuring that people with disabilities have access to information and data as others in the general population. They are required to consider accessibility during the different stages of development, procurement, maintenance, and use of electronic information.

Jane Jarrow in her discussion on the disability support services list serve, DSSHE-I on July 26, 2006 wrote in response to the posting on the lack of access on Blackboard, "Now is the time for DS professionals to acknowledge that new delivery methods for education create new challenges to our assigned role in assuring access for students with disabilities." She contends that while the education environment perceives technology as the solution, DSS providers need to be cautious and to pay attention to its potential problems. In essence, DSS providers need to rethink accommodations and pay particular attention to the changing nature of educational delivery methodologies. Those changes will continue to challenge the status quo of embracing technology as the fixers of the bridges that have long existed in higher education.

Though these pieces of legislation can be credited to the increased enrollment and participation of students with disabilities on college and university campuses, the legislations can also be credited for the challenges faced by many of these students and the professionals who work with them. These unintended consequences of the law have been described as the mismatch between policy and practice (Dowrick, Anderson, Heyer, & Acosta, 2005). The essence of the all these laws is to provide access and allow full participation. DSS providers are now being challenged to rethink their philosophies of access to transcend just meeting the letter of the law. Accommodations that are called for in the laws are meant to be usable, functional, practical, and meaningful. However, the fact remains that there are unintended consequences of the law with potentials to limit the impact of the law.

Unintended Consequences of the Laws

Legislation that guarantees educational access for people with disabilities comes with a great number of unintended consequences despite well intentions and good motives. The only way to understand whether or not a particular consequence is intended or unintended is by looking at what has been accomplished by the law and at what price. The discussion of unintended consequences will be limited to Section 504 and ADA. Section 508 is new, not yet fully implemented, and it was not passed as a postsecondary access measure. Therefore, analyzing the consequences of it is, therefore, premature. This section will address issues of interpretation, definition, differing expectations, enrollment, and documentation as causing challenges and representing unintended consequences of Section 504 and ADA.

Furney, Hasazi, Clark-Keefe & Harnett (2003) contend that the only way we can understand policy is through the lens of those who are in the trenches. These are individuals

responsible for the day-to-day policy implementation; they realize the real challenges of implementation.

This analysis presents the conceptual and operational constraints leading to unintended consequences of Section 504 and ADA. The conceptual aspect deals with the outcome (resulting effect of a policy) while the operational aspect is concerned with the output (what policy implementers do in response to a policy). It is well documented that both outcome and output of Section 504 and ADA are numerous and impressive. Particularly, there has been and continues to be an increase in the number of students with disabilities enrolled in institutions of higher education and many institutions of higher education have designated offices and resources to provide services to meet their needs (Harding, et. al., 2006; Walker, 2006). Nonetheless, there continues to be conceptual and operational challenges resulting in unintended consequences.

Conceptual challenges

Federal legislation that addresses general education access was introduced and passed out of the political climate of those times. Crisis of confidence in the general population to do what is right led to grass roots democracy calling for governmental intervention (Madaus, 2000). Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and the ADA were no exception. Both laws were introduced based on the long standing discrimination against people with disabilities. Framers of this legislation, who themselves were touched by disabilities, were interested in the civil rights protection for people with disabilities. For any law to pass, there have to be compromises; some compromises present difficulties in implementation because of ambiguous terms and definitions.

A conceptual challenge of both of these legislations, causing major unintended consequences, is the definition of coverage. The legislation leaves wide gaps in defining who is covered, though it provides guidance on the coverage limitations. These issues have led to

individuals looking to the courts for interpretation resulting in legal cases against colleges and universities to help determine issues of eligibility as defined under the laws (Simon, 2000). The law has a three prong definition of a qualified individual with a disability. It states that an individual with a disability is (1) a person with a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, (2) someone with a record of such impairment, and/or (3) someone who is regarded as having such impairment (Madaus, 2005; Eckes & Ochoa, 2005). It has been argued that the first two are means of protection while the third, “regarded as” is means for legal defense.

Simon (2000) contends that determining who is “otherwise qualified” outside of the admission process is controversial at best. Arriving at a decision of who is qualified to receive services hinges on three main considerations. First, a service provider has to determine that a student has a disability and that the disability has the potential to rise to a level of impairment in a specific context. Second, the service provider has to understand the mission of their respective institution and that whatever accommodation is recommended will not alter the nature or the content of the program and service offering. And third, the service provider has to understand the nonessential criteria of a program or course requirement that can be accommodated. While the last two are usually difficult to determine without collaborating with others across campus, the campus community relies on the DSS provider to make a decision on the first criteria which is who is qualified? The law is neither clear nor prescriptive enough, thus leaving interpretation to individuals or agencies. This ambiguity has and continues to be a source of legal challenges (Furney, et al., 2003).

The differences in the laws and expectations as students move from one environment to another also constitute another major unanticipated consequence. Students who were previously

diagnosed with a disability earlier in their educational experiences tend to have major challenges as they transition to IHEs. For example, at the elementary and secondary level, parents and guardians are required and encouraged to make disability related decisions on behalf of their students. Consequently, students rely on the adults in their lives (home and school) to make all disability and accommodation decisions. When students move from that environment to the higher education environment, the institutional rules and laws change as if the disability or the effect resulting from their disability changed. These students at the college level are now expected to maneuver their own accommodations with the different instructors when some of them may not even understand the full impact of their disability or know when the inability to perform has a direct impact on the disabilities. Though the law that guide secondary services, the special education law, mandates transition planning, exactly how students should be prepared and how such services will be monitored was not addressed.

Another unintended consequence of the laws is the issue of rights versus responsibilities and the economics of that issue. At the postsecondary education level, eligibility is considered only after the student self identifies, provides adequate documentation to verify that a disability exists, and follows established procedure for service delivery. The student is required to meet with the DSS provider who is responsible for determining whether or not the student is eligible for service and the level of service for which the student is eligible. The documentation that the student provides must contain sufficient and compelling information to help the service provider make eligibility determinations (Madaus, 2005). Unfortunately, the documentation is not a cheap investment and the students, their family, or any agency that supports them are burdened with the cost (Madaus, 2005).

The process of enrollment is a major challenge for students with disabilities and definitely not one that was intended. The laws require that students requesting services must not only self identify and request service, they must present evidence to support that they are qualified for services. This issue requires deeper analysis, and because it is the main focus of this research, a thorough analysis will be presented and will be discussed separately in the next section. Unintended consequences lend themselves to creating barriers when documenting disability.

Operational challenges

When laws are enacted, policy makers rely on public agencies to implement them so that the intentions are executed well. Unfortunately, implementation does not happen in many cases. Agencies are said to have their own built in failure guarantors that require constant checks and balances. Public agencies have been described as rule bound and inflexible bureaucratic machines that grind regardless of the consequences, problems, and circumstances because they are concerned more about their own process than the people they serve (Pressman & Wildvavski, 1979). The operational challenge leading to the unintended consequences of Section 504 and ADA can be viewed from this perspective.

The laws do not intend for agencies to treat people differently based on their disabilities and make the process difficult for one than another. The reality is, in fact, that individuals with visible disabilities tend to have easier access, especially physically and architecturally, than their counterparts with invisible disabilities. Those with invisible disabilities also tend to have a higher burden of proof and tend to experience distrusting relationships on college campuses than their counterparts with visible disabilities. This type of view was expressed by the president of Boston University who perceived learning disabilities are “fugitive disorders” and described

students with this diagnosis as “draft dodgers” (Guckenberger v. Trustee of Boston). It is not uncommon for college administrators such as the president of Boston University to be ready and willing to provide accommodations for students with visible disabilities but when it comes to those with invisible disabilities, they tend to question both the legitimacy of the disorders as well as the documentation that students provide.

To understand fully whether a policy succeeds or fails, it is important to understand the three major stages of policy analysis—formation and design, implementation, and evaluation (Pressman & Wildavski, 1979). Understanding what transpired at the formation and design stage helps frame the context of the implementation. Section 504 in particular has a long history of controversy, having gone through multiple introductions and surviving two presidential vetoes before it was passed (Cherry, 2001). Even after it passed, the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (DHEW), the government agency responsible for proper implementation, had a different understanding of the intent. Mr. Cherry recalled DHEW’s position when he contacted them. He recounted that he was informed by DHEW officials that they “had no explicit legal duty to issue a regulation under Section 504 . . . Section 504 was a mere “policy statement” and required no regulatory action (<http://www.ragged-edge-mag.com/0102/0102ft6.html>). It was not until 1977, after public interventions in the form of demonstrations and legal battles, that the implementation regulation was written by DHEW. While this is not the case for ADA, the courts continue to interpret the intent of the law as individuals take their cases to court.

Though it is not the intent of this research to analyze either of these laws, it is almost impossible to understand the environment of educational access for students with disabilities and resulting consequences of the laws without addressing the evaluation aspect. A long standing difficulty with government policies is the difference between what intended outcome of a policy

should be through governmental intervention, and what actually happens when the policy in being implemented. Pressman & Wildavski (1979) refer to this type of difficulty and the resulting effects as the “dashing of expectations” in their book, *Implementation*. Until their work on evaluating the failure of a large federal job creation for Black people in Oakland, implementation studies were rare. Policy failures were often written off as the natural changes that occur during implementation rather than failures in the process of implementation (Pressman & Wildavski, 1979). They contend that the gross failure of the Oakland project and the resulting study brought to light the importance of evaluating and studying policy implementation.

The Dilemmas of Documenting Disability

The laws that guide disability services at the postsecondary education environment (Section 504 of Rehab Act of 1973 and the American with Disabilities Act of 1990) indicate that (1) not all disabilities are covered under the law, and (2) not all individuals with disabilities qualify for services. A critical part of the laws defining who is eligible for coverage is the notion that an individual has to be “otherwise qualified” and that the disability or condition resulting in substantial limitations of one or more major life activity. An “otherwise qualified” individual is someone who meets the requisite for participation in the post secondary institution and can perform what is expected with or without reasonable accommodations. For such an individual who is qualified, there needs to be evidence that the condition (walking, talking, and/or learning) is substantially limited by the disabling condition. Verifying how substantial the limitations resulting from the disabilities are usually pose a challenge to DSS providers and students (Gregg et al., 2005).

The presence of a disability in and of itself does not guarantee service. When there is evidence that the disabling condition is substantially limiting, then the individual will be

considered for eligibility and for accommodations and other related services. Until then, there is no need or cause for eligibility consideration. DSS providers have come to rely on a well written and well presented documentation as the source of information that helps determine whether a student is eligible for services, and the types and scope of services that the student will need.

The three major goals of documentation are (1) to support the credibility of the individual identifying themselves as a person with a disability, (2) to identify the functional impact of a disabling condition, and (3) to help service providers make informed and defensible decisions (Shaw, McGuire, & Madaus, 1997). Unfortunately, documentation requirements are often perceived by students with disabilities and their parents as barriers that IHEs impose to legally keep them out of the postsecondary environment and to continue to marginalize them and their experiences. This view is well articulated by Simon (2000),

An unexpected result of the passage of the ADA is the erection of new hurdles that students with disabilities must vault to demonstrate that they have disabilities. This has taken the form of extensive documentation requirements, particularly for the so-called hidden disabilities, including learning disabilities, ADHD, and psychological disabilities (p. 76).

The process of verifying the functional impact of learning disabilities, for example, is testing to ensure that the student in deed has difficulties with learning. Some students consider this process to be demeaning, frustrating, and punitive. Because of what the intention of documentation is (verify that only qualified students will receive services and that functional limitations will be identified) and what it is perceived to be (punitive, discriminatory), documentation guidelines and requirements have become the most controversial and the most challenging issues with which DSS providers contend (Gormley, et. al., 2005).

The process for documenting disabilities of a physical nature is relatively uncomplicated because they are easily identifiable. This is not the case for disabilities that are hidden or

invisible. For example, students with mobility impairments can be identified when they arrive in their wheelchairs or when they use other devices. Those who are blind can be identified as needing assistance when they arrive using their white canes or when accompanied by their Seeing Eye dogs. The educational environment seems more accepting of such students because some of the challenges can be seen and understood even though services might not be needed if there are no barriers to learning. However, the case is different for students whose disabilities are invisible (Gregg & Scott, 2000). The most challenging part of the situation is the documentation that students need to authenticate their claim and to show that they truly qualify for the accommodations that will provide access.

Most service providers rely on the documentation that the student provides to make eligibility and accommodation decisions. When the documentation proves to be insufficient or not recent enough, and the condition for which the student is requesting services is not obvious, documentation ceases to serve its purpose. It may then become a gate keeping mechanism that service providers use to keep a student “out” rather than being a means of assisting in making support decisions (Gregg, & Scott, 2000; Hatzes, Reiff, & Bramel, 2002). For example, a DSS provider may deny accommodations because documentation is older than 3 or 5 years even though it has been determined in the literature that some neurological disorders are lifelong. Neurological disorders such as learning disabilities and attention deficit hyperactivity disorders cannot be cured and the strategies that students employ in one environment have the potential to fail when environment or situations change (Simon, 2000). When such students are denied eligibility and accommodations, documentation has changed its purpose. To complicate the issue, there are no uniform standards for documentation guidelines leaving each IHE to make their own rules and develop their own guidelines (Gibson, 2000; Mull, et al., 2001).

Many states across the US are now looking into collaboration to align their documentation requirements so that students are not at a disadvantage. Getzel, et al (2006) reported the six year efforts of a statewide consortium of adult service agencies in the State of Virginia to align their documentation requirements. This effort resulted from expressed frustration from students and ongoing frustration of service providers. One of the accomplishments of this group (VA-HELP) is a consistent documentation requirement that all Virginia schools will be using. A critical aspect of the project is the dissemination of the information not only to all DSS providers but also to secondary service providers in the state of Virginia.

Similarly, Gordon et al. (2002) found in their survey of clinicians about accommodations in IHE that they are frustrated with the lack of aligned documentation requirements because it has serious implications for their work. The majority of the clinicians who responded to the survey (83 percent) agreed that their training on ADA is limited and that they desire additional training to help them better serve the needs of their clients and provide the type of information that DSS providers need. But they feel alignment of documentation requirements will help them provide better information and useful information.

In her research about documentation for students with emotional disabilities attending IHEs, Gibson (2000) presented diverse documentation requirements for students with emotional disabilities from five universities—Southwest State University, University of Wisconsin-Madison, University of Vermont, Boston University, and the University of Colorado at Boulder. She found that, while each of these institutions require that students obtain documentation from qualified professionals within a reasonable amount of time (usually 3 years), the content of the documentation and the detail differed.

Other studies about documentation find disparities in the documentation requirements from one disability category to another. Gregg & Scott (2000) found, in their research, that the variability in documentation requirements from one disability to another has implications for access and success of students with disabilities in college. They speculate that this is why the courts have become involved in determining what constitute adequate documentation for students with LD and ADHD especially.

Gregg, et al. (1999) also discussed the efforts of many states and agencies to align documentation requirements to streamline services for students. They found tremendous variability in the definition and eligibility requirements across agencies that provide services for adults with learning disabilities. They found a lack of communication between agencies as a major factor that has potential effect on service eligibility and availability to adults with learning disabilities. They suggest that agencies come together to develop eligibility models that will provide more “ecologically valid and functional information” that adults and their service providers can use to better serve them (p. 222).

Because of inconsistent documentation requirements resulting from lack of specific standards, DSS providers are more challenged with this aspect of their responsibilities than others. Documentation related issues for service providers include: (a) determining exactly what the documentation should contain; (b) who is qualified to provide the documentation; and (c) how recent the documentation needs to be. While some DSS providers will accept a note on a prescription pad as legitimate documentation for ADHD, others will only accept a full psychoeducational assessment with test scores that is within a specific time period (usually 3-5 years). Such information also needs to indicate how the ADHD affects the individual’s ability in the educational environment. Conversely, many DSS providers will not question the information

that an ophthalmologist provides for a student who is blind or with visual impairments or the report from an audiologist for a student who is Deaf or hard of hearing. These types of inconsistencies that exist in the field create challenges not only for those students with disabilities seeking accommodations but for the professionals in the field seeking rationale for their decisions to provide or deny accommodations.

The national organization of DSS providers, Association of Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD) attempted to address inconsistent requirements and to set acceptable standards in 1997. It was a welcome contribution and was widely accepted by professionals but not without criticism. Some DSS providers welcomed the move and accepted the guidelines as comprehensive enough for what they needed. They developed their own institutional guidelines based on the AHEAD suggested guidelines or use them as the ideal. For others, however, the guidelines were too stringent and exclusionary (Gormley, et. al., 2005). The issue of inconsistencies remained unresolved. The AHEAD guidelines were developed based on what was happening in the K-12 environment. In particular, discrepancy theory was determined sufficient and appropriate to assess and diagnose learning disabilities. When there is an evidence of low performance compared to achievement potentials, it is sufficient to diagnose a learning disability. Further, the guidelines were based on the three-year reevaluation criteria where school districts are required to reevaluate the student for continued services and determine progress.

As the legal environment changed and the requirements for school districts changed based especially on the reauthorization of IDEA in 2004, it became apparent that the suggested guidelines brought more controversy to the professionals in the field. The new IDEA passed congress on November 19, 2004. It contained, among other provisions, that discrepancy theory

was no longer necessary to diagnose an LD, that the three year reevaluation was no longer necessary, and that school districts need not perform reevaluation to satisfy requirements of the postsecondary environment. Consequently, on July 10, 2004, the AHEAD Board voted to remove the guidelines from its website and replace it with best practice suggestions (www.ahead.org).

There have been a series of initiatives to help address the challenges of documentation. Different states have stepped up efforts to streamline documentation requirements across their IHEs in the last few years. For example, the Board of Regents of the University of Georgia System created a "Criteria for Accepting Outside Evaluations Documenting Learning Disabilities" and made all 34 schools within the system operate under that criteria (Board of Regents, University of Georgia, 1994). Service providers in Colorado and Wyoming came together to address similar issues and published a set of recommended guidelines in 1998. Service providers in the state of Missouri embarked on similar efforts in 2002; and in 2004, and the State of Wisconsin developed a similar system. Service providers and educational access advocates are currently pursuing similar efforts in the state Iowa, South Dakota, and Virginia.

The National Joint Council for Learning Disabilities (NJCLD) weighed in alleging that the individual and state specific efforts were detrimental because those efforts may limit choices for students. Students who are from states with uniform standards may have lesser difficulties than those from states without the standards. The NJCLD therefore convened a summit of DSS providers and learning disabilities advocates in 2003 and identified documentation disconnect as one of the major issues that students with disabilities have to contend and has been a major cause of the low persistence and lower graduation rates for this group of students. Identifying that a collaborative process and comprehensive study was needed, the NJCLD led the initiative to

understand the issues and identify possible solutions to the long standing problem. In collaboration with the Association of Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD), NJCLD sponsored a study as the first process to understand this disconnect.

The goal of the NJCLD's study was to identify eligibility and accommodation requirements across institutions for students with learning disabilities. One hundred ten (110) service providers representing community college and four year colleges from thirty six states including the District of Columbia participated in the study. Researchers used survey and document analysis as the methods to collect their data. A panel of experts representing postsecondary disability services providers was contacted to develop a checklist related to eligibility and accommodation prior to analyzing the document provided by those contacted.

A major finding is that, of the 36 states that participated, only four (California, Colorado, New Jersey, and Wyoming) had statewide guidelines for 2- and 4-year colleges. They also found the following: (1) for a documentation to be current, it needs to have been completed and signed within the three to five years at the time of the request; (2) the majority of eligibility and accommodation decisions are made by service providers using ADA and 504 criteria; (3) high school documentation (IEP and 504 plans) are usually not acceptable at the college level; (4) the acceptance of documentation at the community colleges does not guarantee eligibility and accommodations at four year colleges; and (5) postsecondary service providers are less likely to grant eligibility and accommodations in the interim while a student is attempting to meet the guidelines within the new environment (NJCLD, 2005).

This obvious lack of consistency between the different environments is not the fault of any of the systems, but is the result of different legal requirements. This has been an ongoing issue and the fact that special education laws and the laws that guide postsecondary disability

services are moving in different directions have been identified in the literature (Mull, et al., 2001). Inconsistent documentation requirements continue to impact access for students with hidden disabilities matriculating into the IHEs across the country (Getzel, Briel, McManus, & Lovelace, 2006).

Simon (2002) and Gormley, et al., (2005) argue that the concerns about when an individual is protected and when they are guaranteed access will continue among service providers for sometime to come. Therefore, the question of who is really qualified for disability protection has been raised, and will continue to be raised and defended in the courts (Simon, 2000). Mull, et al. (2001) warned that if care is not taken by service providers, students with invisible disabilities may be “trapped between regulations of one agency versus the requirements of another” (p. 68). This is especially important for students with diagnosed disabilities at the secondary level where there is no funding to update the records and for those students who decide to begin their college experience at the community college environment with the intention of transferring to a four year college. The researchers called on service providers across the educational spectrum to come together and collaborate to resolve issues of access and documentation mismatch despite the legal mandates.

When we have a group of professionals that depend on what other professionals provide to frame their decisions, it is important for the professionals making the decision to have their own professional guide and good professional preparation. Unfortunately, for the DSS providers, this is not the case. DSS providers depend on the expert opinions of medical and/or psychological professionals as well as the information from students, believed to be the experts on their conditions, to make eligibility and service decisions. There is, however, no specific

background and/or training required on this issue for DSS providers (Madaus, 2000). The issue of documentation is also complicated with disparate backgrounds of DSS providers.

Professional Preparation of DSS Providers

About 30 years ago, immediately following the passage of Section 504 of the Vocational Rehabilitation Act, postsecondary institutions were challenged to create a system through which services would be provided for students with disabilities (Madaus, 2000). Colleges and universities identified and assigned individuals the task of serving this need. For some colleges, it became a function of a part time staff member (Personal interview with MH, 11/2005); for others, it became another added task to an already full plate (Madaus, 1996).

Many of those assigned these responsibilities sought ways to reach out to their counterparts and that led to the formation of the Association on Handicapped Student Service Programs in Postsecondary Education (AHSSPPE) in 1977. The name of the organization was later changed to the Association on Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD), not only to reflect the language change (person first), but also to reflect the diverse representation and functions of its membership. AHEAD is an international organization of professionals involved in the development of policy and the provision of support services for individuals with disabilities in all areas of higher education. The membership of this organization has grown from 36 charter members in 1977 to more than 2,200 in 2006, representing service providers in the United States, Canada, England, Australia, Ireland, Northern Ireland, New Zealand, South Africa, Sweden, Japan and Greece. This growth reflects the burgeoning of the field (AHEAD, 2006).

Disability support services providers help their institutions meet their legal obligations to students with disabilities. Legal obligations within the law mean that the university determines:

(1) who is a qualified student with a disability; (2) what accommodations are reasonable and appropriate; and (3) what types of academic adjustments and support the student need. The field, therefore, has grown in response to consumer expectations supported by legal mandates that IHEs establish specialized offices and positions (Shaw & Dukes, 2001). The field has grown from just few individuals coming together to discuss issues to a line of professionals that are now making impacts on many university campuses.

A major challenge that service providers face is the lack of clear and prescriptive way to carry out their major responsibilities (Madaus, 1996). There is currently no consistent training or professional preparation for DSS providers. People tend to “fall” into the position rather than train or prepare for them (Shaw & Dukes, 2001).

Michael, et al. (1988) examined the roles and functions of disability service providers in higher education using 150 randomly selected service providers from 4-year public and private institutions of higher education. They found the following: (1) a majority of students being served had physical disabilities (mobility, visual, and hearing) with students with physical/mobility being the most; (2) most programs (57%) had no criteria for delivering services; (3) tutoring and counseling were the most frequent services provided, and (4) a lack of adequate funding posed the greatest challenge to service provision. They concluded that DSS play multiple roles and their responsibilities remained undefined. Sadly enough, the findings and conclusions about service providers in 1988 remain true almost two decades later.

Scholarship in the field of student affairs, education, special education, and disability services show that DSS providers come from different backgrounds, and they also have different academic preparations, often with no focus on adult students with disabilities (Schuck & Kroeger, 1993; Yost, Shaw, Cullen, & Bigaj, 1994; Dukes & Shaw, 1999; Finn, 1999; Mull, et.

al., 2001). Many earned their degrees in special education, counseling, law, social work, rehabilitation, or higher education administration (Dukes & Shaw, 1999). The reality, according to many of these authors, is that there are very few programs that fully prepare professionals in the field.

As indicated previously, many DSS professionals were awarded the job because no one else was available to do it. Others slide into the role because either they or a member of their family has a disability and their advocacy role was observable. A personal interview with a service provider made this clear. Ms. MH is a veteran DSS provider at a large community college in Florida. Ms. MH has been in her role for more than 15 years and she took on the job because of her experience parenting a child with learning disabilities. I interviewed Ms. as part of a graduate course requirement. She articulated the lack of preparation of service providers. She reflected, “You know what’s really amazing, I think if I applied for my job now, I wouldn’t be able to get it probably because I don’t have the education that is required now to get in. But I was the most qualified when I applied because I received training to help my child, and I helped many young kids with disabilities in the school district” (Personal interview of Ms MH on November 14, 2005). MH’s interview showed the depth of her understanding of the issues of access for students with disabilities and the level of her dedication to learning how to better understand the needs of students with physical disabilities. Her story matches the findings in the literature.

Dukes & Shaw (1999) reviewed the professional preparation of DSS providers in their article on professionalizing the DSS field. They found that only St. Ambrose University in Iowa offered graduate degrees in counseling with particular emphasis on postsecondary disability service providers. Only two other universities, Pennsylvania State University and the University

of Connecticut, offered some graduate training in postsecondary disability services as part of their special education programs. Though Schuck and Kroeger (1993) warned that inconsistent preparation of personnel has the potential to be detrimental to the profession and can be harmful to the students being served, it does not seem that postsecondary graduate programs are interested in filling the gap. Incidentally, AHEAD did not push for it either. To get a better understanding of the program and future directions, I contacted St. Ambrose University only to find that the program no longer exists. One of the faculty indicated that there was little support for their program. Their appeal to the AHEAD organization to support online courses for practicing professionals was rejected (Telephone/personal conversation with Dr. Andrew Keiser, assistant professor, St. Ambrose University. 12/28/05). However, I am aware that the AHEAD organization is currently intensifying its efforts to provide regional conferences as well as working on developing a certification program.

The lack of professional preparation of DSS providers has been identified as a source of inadequate support for students with disabilities, especially those with hidden disabilities (Madaus, 1996; Shaw, McGuire, & Madaus, 1997; Dukes & Shaw, 1999). This may be one of the reasons why, despite the dramatic increase in the number of students with all types of disabilities matriculating to IHEs between 1990 and 2005, there continues to be a disparity between persistence and graduation levels for students with disabilities compared to their peers without disabilities (Murray, et al., 2001; Wolanin & Steele, 2004; Prevatt, Johnson, Allison, & Proctor, 2005; US Department of Education, 2005).

Many professions define common practice among their membership; the common practice is generally agreed on by the professionals in the specialized area or practice. This is far from reality for the DSS field. Perceptions about the role of DSS providers vary widely. Often,

student and even university administrators' expectations of providers differ greatly from the roles the DSS providers think they should play. An examination of many open DSS jobs across the country reveals a similar trend. Some job descriptions emphasize legal knowledge and interpretation, while others emphasize more administration and budgeting; yet others are strong on advocacy roles.

The study conducted by Dukes & Shaw (1999) uncovered similar trends. They found diverse training background among those who were practicing and those who were entering the field. They argue that professional standards that define and highlight the roles of the providers and their multifaceted obligations will help determine and establish the types of training required to perform the tasks. Dukes' (2001) subsequent research led to his recommendation of program standards that AHEAD revised and published. It might be accurate to assume, therefore, that the roles of DSS providers can be better discussed and understood in the context of the program standards developed in 1999. These standards were recently revised by AHEAD and recently published in 2006 (www.ahead.org).

The standards were originally developed by Dukes in 2001 by surveying over 1000 DSS providers in North America asking them to identify the support services they thought were essential for assuring equal educational access for students with disabilities. Upon presentation to the AHEAD organization, its membership revised and approved the program standards for disability services offices in higher education. The document provides direction to new and seasoned professionals and helps clarify the responsibilities of postsecondary institutions. It provides the field a firm professional base for what DSS providers should do, where they should come from, who they should be, and how they should act (Shaw & Dukes, 2001).

Despite the nature of what they do, the lack of a field that prepares individuals for this roles which result in differing backgrounds of DSS providers, professionals in the field face lots of challenges. One of the major challenges rests in the legal environment of the profession. The laws that guide disability services at the postsecondary level (ADA and Section 504) are specific about the dual measures of access (effective and reasonable). Defining accommodations as being effective and reasonable in the face of limited resources by professionals with limited training, and who are not in the positions to make economic decisions tend to complicate the job of DSS provider (Madaus, 2000; Shaw & Dukes, 2001).

Accommodations are determined to be effective when they are able to minimize the effect of the disabling condition when implemented. A reasonable accommodation is when the implementation of such does not alter the requirement or compromise the integrity of the program or service. The intent is not to guarantee success, but rather, to assure access (Mull, et al., 2001 Harding, et al. 2006). These are difficult determinations to make by service providers because, more often than not, they are not intimately familiar with all the courses or programs offered at their respective institution.

Another big challenge and possibly one of the biggest sources of frustration for service providers is balancing the role of the institution and protecting the rights and ensuring access for an individual student with a disability. DSS providers are responsible for helping the university meets its legal obligations and uphold the institutional mission and integrity by providing services to only those students who are qualified. They also have the responsibility of supporting the needs of students who are qualified and advocate on their behalf to ensure access.

DSS providers are also challenged by the demographic changes of the population. Students who matriculate to college come from different backgrounds, and different academic

preparations. Such diversity in the student body can be problematic. These students often come from diverse background; have unique disability specific issues, and come with disparate academic preparation and support system. The needs of traditional aged students who matriculate to college directly from high school will be different from the needs of students who are considered returning or even those who transfer from the community environment. Additionally, students who received special education services while in high school have very different and unique needs because they have to first unlearn the nature of service and support used in high school and then learn a different service approach and responsibilities. More students are beginning to be diagnosed after arriving on college campuses; some also acquire a disability once they get to college. The needs for each of these sets of students are also different and unique and need a different service model (Wolanin & Steele, 2004).

There is an increase in the diverse needs of students with psychological, emotional, and social impairments. Knowledge and data regarding the best approach to provide services for these groups of students is currently lacking. Gibson (2000) cautioned that while pharmacological interventions produce effective way to ameliorate the impact of the disabling condition, students with emotional disabilities may also suffer from the side effects of the medication. Therefore, service providers need to be active listeners, and should seek to understand the potential effects of issues and circumstances different from the disability itself. They need to be more aware of potential implications of medication and/or treatment in order to provide reasonable and appropriate accommodations.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Yin (1994) compares a research design to a road map that shows a plan for “getting from here to there, where ‘here’ is the initial set of questions and ‘there’ are the set of answers” (p. 19). This chapter presents the ‘here’ to ‘there’ referred to by Yin. It presents the ideology underlying this study as a case study research design. Those ideologies were discussed in the justification for the choice of case as a research method, a description of the research site, research participants, the approach of data collection, and how the data was managed and analyzed.

The underlying research question sought to explore the principles and practice of DSS services and the documentation requirements on one community college campus. Qualitative research approach is deemed appropriate and was used. This study sought to understand what different individuals representing different constituencies consider appropriate type and content in disability documentation. It also uncovered what contents within the documentation inform decisions about types of accommodations and the scope service. The intent of this research was to develop a rich and comprehensive understanding of the issues surrounding documentation. Therefore, the critical, exploratory, explanatory, and descriptive sets of questions asked illuminated and led to a better understanding and appreciation for the complexity of this issue.

A qualitative research method was chosen for several reasons. First, the process of determining eligibility and accommodation is complex and its implications for access and successful completion of a degree program for students with disabilities in IHE is far reaching. This approach will illuminate the multiple perspectives of not only the complexity of

documentation review, but also the understandings and philosophies of different individuals affected by the decisions made based upon documentation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Miles & Huberman, 1994). The approach also allows for the stories and experiences of service providers, compliance officer, and students which emerge in a fashion that allowed me to explore them rather than measure them (Moustakas, 1994).

Secondly, a qualitative method validates the personal interest and the active role of the researcher in the research process and allows for the acknowledgement of the values of the researcher. Furthermore, the qualitative research approach allows the researcher to employ personal experiences, thinking, intuiting, reflecting, and judging as primary evidences of scientific investigation and it provides a forum for researcher's perspective and reflexivity (Creswell, 2003; Moustakas, 1994).

Much of the debate and discussions about disability services in IHE are based on either the single views of service providers as they look outward or on the perception of researchers as they look inside. It was important to me to understand this phenomenon from the perspective of service providers as they look inward to understand and reflect on their practice and of students as they reflect on their experiences and to know what documentation mean to them. Taylor & Bogdan (1984) explains this best when they wrote,

When we study people qualitatively, we get to know them personally and experience what they experience in their daily struggles in society. We learn concepts such as beauty, pain, faith, suffering, frustration and love whose essence is lost through other research approaches (p. 7).

This research approach allowed me to fully examine this aspect of disability services within its context and in relation to multiple users. It further allows for the understanding of multiple realities that surround a single phenomenon that is very important to me as a professional and a researcher. Participants in this research had the opportunity to play an active role in the process

and to contribute not only to the data collection, but also the opportunity to reflect on their own personal and or professional experiences, evaluate their perceptions, and challenge their own assumptions. These are some of the benefits of qualitative research method used by this study.

Research Design

There are many strategies to qualitative research approach. A case study strategy was used to understand the issues of documentation in a single setting but from multiple participants. The purpose of the case study is to further our understanding of a phenomenon and be able to interpret it based on the subjective meanings that people in that environment bring to the issues (Yin, 1994; Merriam, 1998). Yin contends that case study with data coming largely from interviews, direct observations, documentation, archival records, participant observation and physical artifacts, is a good method to use especially “when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (p. 13).

Case study has the potential of producing deep insights into the phenomenon of documentation and how it informs decisions and service provisions on one college campus. A close examination of the phenomenon of documentation within one community college but, from different perspectives, using a case study approach has greater potential of providing information that will be useful to empirical researchers, policy makers, and practitioners. This approach provides useful and practical information about the “hows,” the “whats,” and the “whys” of varied perspective on documentation requirements within the community college that was studied (Yin, 1994).

Site Selection

I used purposeful, convenient sampling to select the site. This is a site where I have a higher chance of collecting the richest sets of data, where I can learn the most about

documentation and how it guides eligibility and service delivery decisions. The decision to conduct this research on a community college campus is driven by multiple factors including where students are likely to go and the reputation of this particular site. National data indicate that students with disabilities are more likely to matriculate to the community college and especially the public community colleges than the four year colleges (Eckes & Ochoa, 2005; Vogel, et al., 2006). Consequently, there is a higher concentration of students with disabilities on public community college campuses than other IHEs.

The decision to use this particular college is guided by the location of the school and the number of students on the campus. This college is the second largest single campus community college in the state and it is closely connected to large state universities one of which is a land grant university. For these reasons, more students with disabilities who are interested and qualified for postsecondary education environment will begin there because they have a higher chance of and a less difficult time transitioning to a 4-year university. Additionally, the community college where this research was conducted is considered accessible and disability friendly.

The objective of purposive sampling is to find data that provides specific information and rich detail on a context (Patton, 1980). This study took place at a large community college east of the Mississippi. The college is an open admission, comprehensive community college with a mission to provide teaching, learning, and educational programming that will promote intellectual, social, and personal development of students. This college has a good number of students registered in the DSS office and reported the highest rate of graduating students with disabilities among the state community colleges. The college's 2006 data based on Fall 2005 enrollment indicate that 654 students (4 percent) of the total unduplicated headcount of 16,584

were registered and receiving disability services. Majority of the students registered (69 percent) are White, 24 percent are Blacks, and 4 percent are Hispanics.

Gaining Access

Securing access and having the opportunity to meet with and gather information from each of the different constituencies was a major factor in selecting this institution. The DSS coordinator served as the gatekeeper to the college. She provided the names of who to contact and possible ways to make the contact. The college granted permission to contact service providers, university compliance officer, and students.

The potential for hurt and harm in qualitative research is real and will be addressed especially as individuals are asked to share their beliefs and thoughts on a particular phenomenon. Realizing how important this is for my research, and how careful I would need to be, I completed the CSU's IRB's training online in December 2005 and sought clearance from the Colorado State University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) before the research commenced.

Potential risks to human subjects were adequately identified and appropriately addressed in the application to the IRB. I also went through the Citywide Community College (CWCC)'s established process for researchers to assure them that care would be taken to protect the students and any information obtained as part of the data collection process. While it may be difficult at times to anticipate situations that may lead to harm during the course of a qualitative research, Bakan (1996) suggested that researchers assess privacy and confidentiality as part of the ethical dilemma at every level of the research. Privacy and confidentiality were ensured based on the level of comfort of each participant. Each participant was informed that at any point during the interview they could decline to answer a question or end the interview. Great care was taken to

be open to the participants' subjective experiences during the interview to ensure that they were respected. All identifying data and information have been removed in the report of the findings in the next chapter.

Participants

To provide broader insight into the alignment of the philosophies or approach at this community college and to present a better approach to data analysis and interpretation, I interviewed all three DSS providers who are responsible for making eligibility and accommodation decisions (Stake, 1995). Each DSS provider was interviewed twice for about 60 minutes each time.

The school also has designated personnel to serve as the ADA Coordinator. This is an administrator responsible for enforcing college wide access and serving as a point person for students to grieve eligibility and accommodation decisions. This individual was interviewed once.

Students are the ones who are highly impacted the most by the eligibility and accommodation decisions. It is, therefore, critical to capture their views on the issue. A combination of snowball and convenience sampling was used to recruit students. Focus group interviews were the major data collection method used with student participants. Several approaches were used to get students to participate. Some students were recruited directly, open times were scheduled with the expectation that students would come, the campus was saturated with flyers on major bulletin boards (student union, recreation center, gymnasium, admission and financial aid, reading and writing labs, and major departments). Flyers were printed and available at the DSS main office, in the DSS providers' offices, and in the Testing Lab where students with disabilities take their exams. Yet it was difficult to find interested students.

Participants were recruited and interviewed from December, 2006, through December 2007. See chart below for the participants and the questions asked of them.

Participant Type	Participant Number	Method of Inquiry	Interview Questions
DSS Providers	3	Two in-depth, personal Interviews	1. What are the purposes of documentation?
			2. What is considered useable and informed documentation?
			3. What do you look for in disability documentation?
			4. What are the issues surrounding disability documentation?
			5. What environmental factors (academic, political, legal) drive the requests for documentation?
Students with disabilities that are receiving services	8 (focus groups 2-4 participants at each session)	Focus group interviews	1. What are the purposes of disability documentation?
			2. How do service providers use documentation?
			3. What are some of the issues surrounding obtaining and providing documentation?
			4. Where and when did you obtain your documentation (source to include whether or not high school information/documentation was useful and accepted)?
ADA Compliance Officer (1)—A university administrator	1	In-depth, personal Interview	1. Why should/do we request disability documentation from students?
			2. What information should we be looking for in the documentation?

Data Collection

Given the exploratory nature of this research, the three primary data collection methods used were in-depth, semi structured, individual interviews, semi-structured focus group interviews, and document analysis. This use of multiple sources of data collection promote the development of what Yin (1994) refers to as the “converging lines of inquiry.” Data were collected over a period of one year. It was relatively easy to schedule individual interviews with the college professionals but finding students to participate was more difficult than anticipated.

As the primary instrument, I kept field notes on observations and impressions as I went into and through each of the interview sessions. All the interviews were transcribed by paid transcriptionists who were made aware of the confidential nature of the information on the tapes. I also kept field notes during all the interviews to help with triangulation of collected data. I used my notes and the audio tapes to correct the transcribed notes before sending to each participant.

Individual Interviews: Individual interviews were the major form of data collection for the professionals who determine eligibility and make accommodation decisions. Once meeting dates, times, and locations were arranged with these group of professionals (DSS professional and ADA Compliance Officer), I sent each a letter detailing the purpose of the meeting and the questions to be addressed. The DSS professionals were interviewed twice but the ADA Compliance officer was only interviewed once. The interview lasted an average of 60 minutes using the Patton (1990) interview guide. The goal of the first interview session was to get to know the service providers better and to explore how each provider reviews documentation for eligibility and accommodation. The second interview session will last from 45 minutes to 90 minutes. The goal of the second interview was to obtain additional information, clarify any questions from the first interview and to follow up on information obtained from the first session.

I arrived at each meeting with a copy of the consent form for voluntary participation and permission to audio tape the session. After giving the opportunities to ask clarifying questions, the consent forms were signed before the meetings proceeded. Each offered to have the interviews in their offices, a venue we agreed to be convenient during the set up stage. They were each promised to receive a copy of the transcript which they may correct and send back. The interview questions were sent to the participants as soon as we agreed on a date. Though the

questions were open-ended, they were provided to them ahead of time to give them an opportunity to review the questions, think through and reflect of what they find to be relevant and meaningful aspect of documentation. A copy of the questions was also presented to them at the time of the meeting. The interviews were conducted in a dialogue style in each of the professionals' offices. Each of the interviews lasted an average of 60 minutes and they were all audio-recorded.

Each of the interview sessions was audio-taped with the participant's permission. There was an attempt to gather information about the background of the participants to see what impact if any it has on how they make eligibility and accommodation decisions. Close attention was paid as to whether or not the participant has a disability of his/her own or has a family member with a disability, how long each has been in the profession, and their professional/educational background and preparation. In addition, the personal context of the participants' remarks was noted and was used in the analysis.

Focus Group Interviews: The students participated in the focus group interview sessions. Each session began by having each participant review and sign an informed consent form, keeping a copy and returning a copy to the interviewer. Some time was spent going over the letter and each of the questions contained in the consent form and the need for them to give permission to audio tape their discussions. Alternative formats (large print) copies of the questions were made available provided to the students. An offer was also made to them to request a copy of the transcript if they wanted. Participants were offered lunches but not as a condition of their participation. They agreed to eat lunch after the interview sessions. Therefore, the lunches were provided immediately following the interview sessions.

I realized, following the first focus group session, that the students stayed together and continued talking about their experiences and how they felt for much longer than they spent with me talking with the focus group. I realized that, while it was difficult to get students to come to talk, once they got together and started talking, it was difficult to stop them. I felt I had the opportunity to capture useful information so I contacted my chair and my methodologists immediately. They both suggested that I request an amendment to my IRB application. The CSU's Human Subject Review Committee approved audio taping the discussions during lunch. The students that participated in subsequent interviews agreed to the protocol and I found that they provided clarifications and depth to some of the information they shared during the formal focus group meetings. Each of the focus group interviews lasted an average of 60 minutes and were audio taped. The subsequent discussions lasted longer than 75 minutes and they were also audio-recorded. The recordings were transcribed by paid transcriptionists. I also kept field notes during all the interviews to help with triangulation of collected data.

Three focus group interview sessions were conducted with a total of eight students. There were two groups comprising of two participants and one group with four students. The interactions with the four students were very engaging and interactive. One of the groups with two students started somewhat dry and uninteresting until we started discussing sports. The second group of two provided rich data because both of the students were close in age, they were both female and they both shared similar background and disabilities. At each of the sessions the students seemed to connect very quickly and I was able to gain their trust as well. The interviews were informal, conversational, interactive, and open ended. Themes were extracted mainly from the information that the students provided.

Document Review: In addition to the interviews, I gathered, read, and analyzed relevant documents such as the institution's documentation guidelines that are provided to students and all published information about disability services available on the institution's website and available in the disability office. I also requested copies of pertinent documents and materials related to documentation from the DSS office because they were not readily available for pick up. I noted and documented my impressions and observations each time I visited the campus and the office. I also used thorough, comprehensive field notes and reflexive journals to supplement the information I heard in the different interviews. The field notes served as the primary record of my observations and interactions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Being a service provider myself, I tried to separate my observations from what participants expressed themselves as their views and beliefs. Any that existed became a part of the data and were identified, reviewed, and analyzed.

Though Marshall & Rossman (1999) espouse that information from documents are considered nonreactive and do not change as a result of the researchers' presence, my experience was different. As a result of my interactions with the DSS office and professionals and the questions, they have had opportunities to reflect on their practice and their information and realized that there was no published documentation guidelines. Therefore, they have begun the process of developing some. The document is in the process of being developed and it has gone through multiple revisions. Yet the final document is not available.

Data Management

Qualitative research produces lots of data. While this can be helpful to further the understanding of a phenomenon, effective management of the data seems to be a challenge for researchers using this approach (Merriam, 1998). The transcriptions were completed as close to

the time of the interview. The transcripts were sent to the professionals (DSS providers and ADA Compliance Officer) and one student who wanted a copy. No corrections were made to the transcript so I assumed that the interview discussions were captured accurately.

Data Analysis

A case description method will be used to analyze this research using within case and cross case (Miles & Huberman, 1994). According to Yin (1994), this approach to analysis is the least favorable but because there is limited research in this area of study and there are potentials for dichotomous view on the phenomenon of documentation, it provided the best form of analysis. In qualitative research, data analysis is the process of systematically searching and rearranging interview, transcripts, field notes, and other materials. The nature of this research calls for such the process alteration. Ongoing data analysis helped to generate revised strategies for collecting new data and to change the protocol from one interview session to the next.

The categories that emerge from the transcript were used to code all transcripts. After each transcript was categorized and coded, data began to emerge in patterns and themes. In addition to interpreting the patterns from the codes, I used content analysis to verify additional patterns and themes (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 1990). For example, I analyzed the different statements and expressions of positive and negative comments to verify the different views and experiences from different group of participants and across the focus group.

The data collected in this research are also triangulated across methods and sources (Patton, 1990; Yin, 1994). I compared the information collected from different sources and provided by different informants. Moustakas (1990) warns that the researcher be aware of internal processes and to include personal experiences that might have any impact on the data and the analysis of the data. As a professional in this field of work, some of the issues and

challenges that student shared were difficult and emotional. There came a time during the first student focus group interviews that the struggle that a student shared caused her to doubt her abilities. She said “maybe they (educators) are right, maybe I cannot do this (school). I realized at that point that the two other students could understand what she was referring to so they offered their support in different ways. We all echoed, “you can do it.” One student actually said to her, “why don’t you prove them wrong.”

Finally, ethical issues were addressed in this research. I was able to gain the trust of all the participants and the fact that they all shared very personal stories with me is an indication of the trust we developed in a short period of time. Bodgan & Biklen (1998) states that the fact that a researcher is an outsider and just a researcher quickly dissipates from the participant’s minds once a rapport is built. Consequently, efforts have been made to protect not only the name of the institution but also the names of the participants. All names are made up; pseudo names are used for the participants and the school in order to ensure confidentiality but their gender and racial background are not concealed. Those characteristics are left to further the understanding of the analysis.

Summary

The purpose of this research is to explore the principles and practices of DSS services and disability documentation on one community college campus. It also explains what information within the documentation inform DSS providers in their decision making process. Analysis and presentation of the data shed light on how the DSS providers make eligibility and accommodation decisions, and whether or not documentation requirements can be consistent across disability types.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of the *Qualitative Interpretative Case Study: Disability Documentation on One Community College Campus*. The chapter is organized into three sections. To give context to the voices of the study participants, section one provides brief biographies and introduces them to the reader. Qualitative data were collected and recurrent themes and patterns are presented to highlight the themes that emerged. Those themes are presented in section two. Section three presents the responses to the four research questions that guide my study.

Section One: Demographics of the Study Participants

Three Disability Support Service (DSS) providers, one ADA Compliance officer, and eight students participated in face-to-face interviews either as individuals or a part of a focus group. The participants' voices provided multiple perspectives and gave meaning to their experiences. All the names including the name of the school are pseudonyms.

DSS Providers

Though there are many professionals within the disability support services (DSS) office, only three of them make eligibility and accommodation decisions. These three professionals, two females (Tammy and Tonia) and one male (Tedmond), were interviewed. All three have master's degrees, are full time employees of the college, and have been long term professional educators. They have over half a century (57 years) combined years of experience in education, 30 of these combined years are with the City Wide Community College (CWCC).

These individuals have differing professional backgrounds but they all share the same goal of assuring access to the courses and programs at CWCC. They are Caucasians of middle age. They are unique in their approach to service determination. Those approaches seem to be influenced by their backgrounds and experiences.

Tammy is a 63 year old Caucasian woman and serves as the director of the DSS office. She has been with CWCC for 16 years at the time of the interview. She has a master's degree in human services. In addition to her professional experience, one of her three children, all of whom are now successful adults, was diagnosed with specific learning disabilities (SLD) and placed in special education classes from elementary through high school. As a young mother who had just moved away from her family of educators, Tammy had never heard of learning disabilities before her son's diagnosis. She was unsure of how to work with and help support her son's learning needs. At that time, the school provided little guidance for students with learning disabilities or reading disorders and the same for their parents. With the help of her sister, an elementary school teacher, and her sister's friend and colleague who was a special education teacher in the elementary school, Tammy had the support she needed. As a result, she was not only able to help her son but also develop skills to navigate what she referred to as the "unfriendly and disrespectful" education system.

Tammy's frustration with services at the school and the lack of understanding of her son's learning needs prompted her to make herself vulnerable enough so that people in the community freely shared resources with her. Through those resources, she acquired new knowledge and skills that prepared her to be her son's educator. She volunteered at the school and became very involved so that she no longer served as the resource for just her son, but for other students, the teachers, and the school. The skills she developed eventually prepared her for

the disability service provider position at the college. She has taken her role and position in the office as a personal mission to make a difference. She recounts unpleasant experiences as a mother of a son with a disability.

And when I would go in for individualized education meeting there would be like 10 or 12 professionals and me. And they would talk down at me. You know, they would talk as if, I didn't know as if I was too stupid to understand. Of course, I wasn't a professional. I didn't know what they knew and I was living with it and in some cases, I knew already, what they were going to do or what was not going to work.

Tammy was treated as if she herself had the disability even though it was her son that was diagnosed with a disability. Her observations and knowledge of her son were discounted because she was not regarded as a professional. Realizing how insignificant she was made to feel, she wanted to make a difference for parents just like her and encourage students with whom she eventually would work. It became obvious that serving in this role and working in this office was more than a job or a profession for Tammy; it was a passion. As she reminisced, she held her head up, held tightly to the cup in front of her with both hands and slightly looked away from me. She choked up, and I noticed her tearing up as her voice broke.

I...I...I wanted to create a program so that no mother will ever have to sit low at the other side of the desk and feel like I did. And so when parents come in, they'll say you just don't know. I would say well, I've actually sat on both sides of this desk. They feel so relieved and so this is very personal for me.

Tammy obviously was made to feel even more discounted as she used the words "sit low" when the needs of her son were discussed in the schools. She wanted to give to students with disabilities and their parents what she wished she had. She understands the needs of parents of students to be respected, guided, and engaged in the learning process of their learners. As the interview continued, she pulled herself together quickly, laughed, and apologized for expressing her emotions. She said, "I usually don't do this you know; I am so so sorry."

Having made the decision to work with students with disabilities, she entered the profession with the goal of making the experiences of students and their family members better. Tammy feels she has been successful in building an office that is considered to be respectful, welcoming, and supportive of students with disabilities and their parents.

Tedmond is a disability counselor at the college, a position he has held for the past 13 years. He is the only Caucasian male professional in the DSS office. Prior to coming to CWCC he worked with students at the middle school and high school levels helping them navigate the system as a counselor for 15 years. He enjoys what he does in serving the needs of students but he knows his limitations when it comes to documentation. He said, "I am not a licensed evaluator; I am not a tester; I don't have a background in testing. So I use the documentation as my road map." Therefore, his reliance on clear, complete, and precise documentation was more evident than his peers. It was clear that Tedmond does not enjoy talking about himself; he is friendly but said little about himself or his background. He tends to approach his role from a precision perspective; he wants policies and processes to be clear cut and direct. Observing him leads me to believe that he appears to feel the most comfort when boundaries and expectations are clear and when he knows he is being consistent and that he is following the rules.

Tonia, a Caucasian woman, is the third DSS professional in the office. She is a school psychometrist by training and earned both her bachelor's and master's degrees. She performed testing to identify students with learning disabilities and cognitive impairments in the pre-collegiate level (K-12th grade) in a neighboring state. This was a job Tonia did for more than 12 years, until four years prior to this interview, when she joined the team of professionals at the DSS office. Tonia seemed to have a very good understanding of the workings within the school district. Because she used to administer the testing that diagnosis learning challenges, she was

familiar with the documentation that students bring from the K-12 environment. According to her, “school psychometrists are careful about what they recommend in a test report so that they don’t obligate the school.” Her expertise is in the reading and interpreting school district generated data for special education purposes. This is probably why she feels comfortable accepting IEP as documentation. Tonia also limited her discussion about herself and her background to her professional roles; she did not offer any information about family background.

These three professionals together bring different perspective to their roles. The diversity of their background, their understanding, and their common sense of purpose enriches the functions of the office and enhances the services to meet the diverse needs of students. They all enjoy their role in making accommodation decisions and facilitating support services that will make college experiences a reality for many students with disabilities. They also realize that students often have difficulties obtaining necessary documentation but they feel that they are not able to influence the policies that require documentation. They understand and believe in the reasons for requiring documentation but they struggle with their inability to make accommodation decisions based solely on their professional interactions with students. Therefore, they struggle with making eligibility decisions when the information they need cannot be provided by students. They talked about their advocacy roles on behalf of students, but they are limited in their ability to influence some instructional staff.

ADA Coordinator

The College designated Grayson as its ADA Compliance officer. As the compliance officer, *Grayson*, a Caucasian woman, helps CWCC meet its obligations to employees with disabilities and serves as a consultant to the DSS office regarding access for students with disabilities. She holds a full time faculty position and also functions as an administrator who

determines eligibility for policy exceptions. She makes decisions for disability related course substitutions (Mathematics and Foreign Language, especially) on behalf of the College and serves as the disability and accommodation related ombudsman.

At the time of the interview, Grayson has worked at CWCC for 27 years but in different departments and not directly in the DSS office. She was chair of the Success Strategy Support Center. She started as part of a grant project working with people in surrounding counties for empowering displaced homemakers. Her master's degree is in social work with a minor in psychology. She worked in the public school system (elementary, middle, and high schools) for 6 years as an entry level psychologist. In that role, she conducted Learning Disabilities (LD), Gifted (G), and Emotional and Mental Health (EMH) assessments. While she was not trained as a psychometrist, she learned the skills on the job and also took graduate level courses giving her adequate preparation. She worked under licensed psychologists who signed off on her reports.

Students

Eight students with pseudonyms of Danny, Hannah, Jacque, James, Jason, Jessica, Monique, and Rhonda participated in the interviews. The stories of these students are uplifting yet at times sad. They are uplifting because their stories show their tenacity even in the midst of challenge. They are sad because it is unimaginable what many of them have had to endure in the hands of those they trust. They share common characteristics: they come from interesting backgrounds; they are driven and hard working, they take their education seriously, and they lead complex lives. The common experience of those who received special education services (pre-collegiate disability services) is unfavorable. They all expressed feelings of marginalization and that they had been denied of the same opportunities available to their peers who were not diagnosed or who chose not to be labeled or not to receive services.

They ranged in age from 18 to over 50 years. Five (63%) of the participants were females and three (37%) were males. Fifty percent of the participants (50%) were full time students and 50% were part time students. Fifty percent (50%) are African Americans and 25% are Hispanic Americans and 25% are Caucasian. Majority of the participants (71%) had invisible disabilities and only two (29%) had visible disabilities (Table 1). More than one third of the students (38%) have a primary diagnosis of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and learning disability (LD); 25% have a primary diagnosis of mobility impairments; and 13% each with blindness, health and systemic illness and psychological disabilities. All but one of the participants (86%) have multiple disabilities and the only one who indicated a single disability is a new student just coming out of high school with a diagnosis of learning disabilities (dyslexia).

Table 1 on the next page presents the demographic data of the students.

Table 1: Descriptors of Student Participants

Participant	Ethnicity	Gender	Academic Status*	Disability Type	Visible Disabilities	Invisible disabilities	Agency Affiliation*	Documentation
Danny	Caucasian-American	Male	PT	Cerebral Palsy	Yes	Yes	Vocational Rehabilitation	Yes (IEP)
Hannah	Latina (Hispanic American)	Female	FT	Blind/Math disorder	Yes	Yes	Division of Blind Services	Yes (Partial)
Jacque	African-American	Female	PT	ADHD/LD	No	Yes	N/A	Yes (IEP)
James	African-American	Male	FT	LD/ Dyslexia	No	Yes	N/A	Yes (Partial)
Jason	African-American	Male	FT	Mobility/ Math disorder	Yes	Yes	Vocational Rehabilitation	Yes (only for visible)
Jessica	Caucasian American	Female	PT	ADHD/LD/Health/Systemic/ Psych	No	Yes	Vocational Rehabilitation	Yes (Complete)
Monique	Latina (Hispanic American)	Female	FT	ADHD/LD/Dyslexia	No	Yes	N/A	Yes (Partial)
Rhonda	African-American	Female	PT	Health/Systemic/ADHD/Psych	No	Yes	N/A	Yes (Complete)

Academic Status: FT = Full Time—students taking at least 12 credit hours
PT = Part time, students taking less than 12 credit hours

Agency Affiliation – Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (VR) and Division of Blind Services (DBS). These are federal agencies that are managed at the state level to provide support and services for people with disabilities. The goal of both of these agencies is to remove barriers to self sufficiency of people with disabilities. They support collegiate education as a way to help their clients obtain needed skills to compete in the job market.

See Appendix B for the definition and description of each of the disability type.

One of the most notable differences between the study sample and the population of students at the CWCC and those using disability services is the high number of African American participants. Participants are predominantly African American and mostly female; African Americans are in the minority at CWCC. A detailed introduction of each of the students is presented below in alphabetical order.

Danny is an 18 year old Caucasian male who is a first year student at CWCC. He matriculated directly from a private high school and, with the help of his mother, was able to connect with the DSS office for services. *Danny* seem to have formed a bond with the DSS staff. *Danny* has Cerebral Palsy (CP). CP is a neurological condition caused by damage to the motor control centers affecting control and coordination of the muscles. *Danny* had hemorrhaged at birth that led to CP. The condition affects his entire right side. *Danny* walks with a very visible limb dragging his right foot. He also writes with his left hand but can be very slow. He did not describe himself as left handed, he said, "I write with my left hand." He also has seizure disorders though the seizures are under control because, according to him, he is very "religious" with his medication. *Danny* was in special education throughout his pre-collegiate education. Therefore, his eligibility for services at CWCC was made from the information in his high school Individual Education Plan (IEP)

Danny is currently a part time student and works part time, usually on weekends at a fast food restaurant. *Danny's* goal is to complete his associate's degree and transfer to a 4-year university. He has an incredible memory for names, dates, and other specific information about events. His ability to connect services, offices, and events to particular individuals usually by name, was too obvious to miss. *Danny* picked his own preferred

pseudonym and refers to himself as 'Danny' in our ensuing contacts. He connected easily with other students and I found Danny to be friendly and personable. Danny enjoys sports and knows college sports in general, even the different statistics. He not only knows about them, he enjoys arguing about them and tends to keep abreast of the star players, the coaches, and the players' subsequent professional affiliations. He is connected with and is being supported by the state vocational rehabilitation (VR) office. Danny acknowledged the role his mother played with his school in general but with his transition to CWCC in particular. He has learned to depend on his mother because, according to Danny, "my mom knows a lot of stuff when it comes to these things." Danny's mother works for the city government and is aware of available resources and obviously very involved with his transition. His mother was aware and approved of his participation in this interview.

Hannah is a 20-year-old Hispanic student in her second year at CWCC. She matriculated directly from high school. She participated in a 6-week residential summer transition program sponsored by the Division for Blind Services (DBS) and held on a large 4-year university campus. Hannah is legally blind; she has ROP (Retinopathy of prematurity ROP) which resulted from premature birth. She was born in one of the US outlining territories. Her father immigrated to the United States when Hannah was still a baby. So Hannah lived with her mother until the end of her 7th grade where she was placed in a residential school for the blind.

She moved to the United States with her father at the beginning of her 8th grade and said the move destabilized her due to multiple cultural changes (school and language). She moved from a familiar environment and culture to a totally different one,

from known to an unknown in all respects. This experience was not only shocking for her; it was also difficult. Hannah spoke with a little bit of an accent, but she had good command of the English language. She was frank in her responses and feelings. For example, when one of the students shared how much it would cost to get documentation for a math waiver, she said, "Oh my gosh that's crazy. That's like paying for the course twice and you don't know if they're even going to waive it. That's ridiculous." In addition to being open and honest with her feelings, comments, and opinions, she is also hard working, reasonable but realistic. She takes responsibilities for her own accommodations and did it without apology.

I went to the computer lab today. I had to turn two computers on. I had one computer to scan and one computer so I could take notes on what I was reading. And I was sitting there with two big computers and a scanner and a book, and I'm typing my notes and it just takes forever. But that's ok but just be reasonable when you want me to finish that homework. You don't know what it takes.

She understands and accepts the fact that accommodation will take time and resources but she was willing to make the investment. She was mainly concerned with the workability of the accommodations but she wants the instructors to be realistic and understanding. She also wanted people without disabilities to understand that accommodations do not make the learning process easy, they make it possible.

Hannah is majoring in early childhood education; she wants to teach young students with visual impairments or who are blind. Her eligibility for services was made on the information in the eye report she provided to the DSS office. She is planning on earning her associate's degree and then transfer to the 4-year college.

Jacque is an first year African American student who matriculated directly from high school. She was in special education services in the public school for her dyslexia, a

form of learning disability. She said she can do the work, but it takes her a long time to read and when she reads, she does not comprehend well; however, when someone reads to her, she comprehends and remembers better. Jacque has an interesting description of dyslexia. “A lot of the words run together, you don’t have a clear understanding of what you’ve read. But when people read to you, you get a clearer understanding. And that’s mainly it with the dyslexia.”

Jacque was in the special education program throughout her education career. Despite Jacque’s long time enrollment in special education services, no one told her or her mother about vocational rehabilitation services or any other agency that could provide support or resources or even about college. She has always been interested in college and communicated her interest to her teachers, but she said, “they don’t care that much.” Jacque and her mother did not begin to search for college until after graduation. Her mother played “a big role” in her decision to attend CWCC, and she provides the resources for her to attend college. She was not aware of financial aid until after registration. She and her mom started the application process for financial aid. She said, “I didn’t even know they had a disability center here, so she [her mother] told me. She found out about it. We didn’t know you can get a loan to go to college, but now we are trying to see about it. The office upstairs told us about it and how to apply.” It was also the mother who found the flyer about the focus group and took a copy home to share with Jacque and encouraged her to attend.

Her mother has been instrumental in her accommodations especially with her greatest challenge, reading. She said, “what my mom normally does is when I read something she will have me explain what I’ve read to her. So I get a clear understanding.

She [her mother] can't read to me because her reading is not too good, but she makes me read a little piece at a time and explain to her. Then I understand."

Of course, both Jacque and her mother understand that college is different from high school and that the strategies they have employed for a long time may not work as well in college. So, together, they already checked out the resources that are available on campus. "I found out that they have labs that you can go to and get extra help after your classes. So I think I'll take full advantage of that," Jacque said. Her eligibility for services was made solely on the information contained in her IEP. She was made aware that the IEP has limitations but unaware of all the limitations. "They just told me that I'm going to need more documentation especially when I leave here. They said I need something stating that I do have dyslexia, so when I go to [4 year college], I can give them that documentation." Again, Jacque will wait to finish a process before thinking of another. She has resolved to waiting until that time when she transitions to the 4 year college to seek additional documentation.

Jacque was registered for three classes (9 credit hours) when this interview was conducted and she was handling things well. She and her mother also decided to just "do school" and "take college easy" so she would be successful. She is still undecided about her major but plans to finish her associate's degree and transfer to one of the state universities.

James is an African American man in his mid thirties who dropped out of school in the 10th grade and went to work. He was diagnosed as "emotionally disturbed" but he said he had ADHD and no one took time to figure that out. His service eligibility was made by a note from the psychiatrist that treats his ADHD and also "the other issues."

He is on medication which he finds extremely helpful. He seemed to have the least to say about anything except about the way he and his mother were treated in high school and how that made him feel. He appeared bitter and resentful about his pre-collegiate experiences and seems to view educators with caution. He was labeled a “no good trouble maker who was wasting time in school.” He said for him, “high school was too painful and too boring” because he was made to feel “stupid” each day he attended.

As a single parent with limited education, James’ mother had “difficulty understanding her son, her son’s needs, and of course, her son’s pains.” She “got tired of being called to the school all the time to be told by all those people how bad her son was so she stopped attending parent meetings.” Because James’ mother no longer attended the meetings, the school thought “she never cared, so they also stopped caring.” The best part of high school for James was when he got to participate in sports, but those times were few and far between. His temper and academic failures would not allow him the opportunity to participate in sports. He was never good enough so he dropped out in 10th grade to seek an alternative to school.

James became a father soon after he dropped out of high school. But because he was “living on the streets” and had no livelihood, he had no chance to make a life with the mother of his son. His son was 16 years old at the time of the interview and James is proud that his son has turned out to be “a good boy.” He later met a girl who encouraged him to take the GED because she believed he was smart enough to go to college. James walked into the office of the vocational school to “see about the GED and decided just to try the test just to satisfy” his girlfriend. He was amazed to find out he not only passed, but he “passed all the sections with flying colors.” That success gave him the motivation

to consider college. He has done very well at CWCC with a 3.9 GPA and his girlfriend who also is enrolled at CWCC, is doing well. James is majoring in human sciences; he wants to work with African American boys in middle and high school because “that’s where you need to catch them. I wish someone cared enough to see I needed that help and guidance.”

James is a writer, a singer, a song writer, and enjoys drawing. He has “so much inside that art is the only acceptable way of expression that will not get him in trouble.” He has one more semester to complete his associate’s degree and has already been admitted to a large 4-year university across town. James has never heard of vocational rehabilitation and said he “does not want any handout” so he is just comfortable “minding his business and working hard to pay” his way through college. He has a full time job at night and is also a full time student during the day.

Jason, also an African American man, was 20 years old when he was interviewed. He was completing his fifth semester at CWCC as a criminal justice major when he participated in this interview. He matriculated to CWCC immediately following high school graduation. Though he was considered inappropriate for college, he is close to earning his associate’s degree. His mother, who works for the city government, was aware of services and instrumental in connecting him with vocational rehabilitation and also in his transition to CWCC. His goal after earning his associate’s degree is to transition to one of the state public universities. He received special education services at the pre-collegiate level because of his physical condition that resulted from premature birth. He was a healthy baby until three days after his birth when the doctor turned off

the incubator to see if he could breathe on his own. The lack of oxygen sent him into a seizure and all his muscles were damaged as a result. He is a wheelchair user.

His eligibility for services at CWCC was determined using information in his IEP. Information in his IEP is limited because it contains only information about his physical conditions. He said, "Even though I was in the ESE math classes there was no specific math documentation to be able to say that I have a problem doing math." Unfortunately, Jason's academic progress has been marred by his failures in math courses.

Jason appeared to be the most comfortable with his disabilities. He appeared comfortable discussing his condition and what happened to him. In fact, he would rather have people ask him why he uses the wheelchair than assume.

A lot of people assume that I'm paralyzed or I'm this or I'm that, or I can't do this, or I can't do that. The general perception of people in wheelchairs is that they are either mentally handicapped, or they're paralyzed. Those are the only two categories people think we fit in. And it's not like that. I like it when people ask questions about my condition so I can help them understand. For example, a lot of kids have even poked me and said "can you feel that?" I don't mind. I'll tell them if I can feel it or not. So why don't you just ask me and let me tell you?

Jason wants to demystify the notion around disabilities by educating people about his own condition. He is very involved in the student life activities and the student government. His leadership role has earned him respect of not only students with disabilities but the general student body.

Jessica, a Caucasian woman, was just a month from her 50th birthday when she participated in this interview. She struggled throughout her pre-collegiate years but her needs were never identified. She lacked support and encouragement at school as well as at home but suffered more cruelty from her older sister and parents who abused alcohol.

My parents are alcoholics. My dad used to beat us. Dad would start them, mom would finish them. That's when we developed cognitive brain

disorders. He used to just hold us up by the arms and just Bam, Bam, Bam! I got rods in my back that was put in last year or two years ago. I could touch my toes for the first time in my life. I couldn't touch my toes before the rods.

The use of “we” and “us” in this instance signifies that Jessica’s parents abused all their children. The relationship in that family is dysfunctional in that both their father and mother engage in the abuse as she said one would start and the other would finish. Her description of the lasting effects on her condition, however, indicated that she endured worse abuses than her siblings. She considers herself the “black sheep” of the family.

Jessica wanted a way out from her family and thought that college would be a good escape from the misery she experienced at home. She had always wanted to go to college and finally in her senior year, she picked two state colleges like some of the people in her class and took the financial aid form home. Her enthusiasm soon dissipated when her father threw the papers in the trash saying “it was no body’s business how much money he made.” Not knowing what the next step would be for her, she said, “I got married two weeks after I graduated from high school.”

Getting married right after high school might not have been the best decision for Jessica, but her children from that relationship serve as her source of support and pride. She said her children have been “the best thing I’ve ever had in my life. My oldest son, he’s 32 years old and the younger one is 28. We grew up together because I was 18 when I started.” Jessica has remarried and is currently in a supportive relationship. Her relationship with her family has not improved. Comparing her VR counselor to her family she said,

My counselor sees that I am functional, and he believes in me and has faith in me. My family? That's a different story. If I cry they'll say, "oh she's mentally breaking down." If I get upset, they'll say, "She takes too much medicine. They'll say if you stop taking those medicines, you'd be alright. If you stop doing this, you'd be alright. But they don't understand; they don't want to know. But my VR counselor, he is good. He said I was one of the few people that he was willing to pay to get a degree. Most people he sends out here just take continuing education, just take a couple of courses and then they go back in the work force. He's paying for my two year degree—might take me longer and he is ok with that because he believes in me, he has faith in me. He's letting me gradually get into it because I've been out of school for thirty-one years.

She said she was unfairly judged by her family and that her family chose not to acknowledge her psychological and health conditions and failed to recognize her needs for love and acceptance. She compared her family to her counselor who seemed to have a long term achievable goal for her. And because of the support from the different sources, she is encouraged and motivated to be successful at CWCC.

Jessica's VR counselor paid for her to go through additional assessment to identify other learning needs and challenges. In addition to her already diagnosed bipolar disorder, she was diagnosed with dyslexia, ADHD, anxiety disorder, seizure disorder, high blood pressure, and thyroid problem. Despite all these conditions, she said she is motivated to complete her degree and make her sons and her VR counselor proud. She has a great sense of humor and appeared comfortable laughing at herself. After listing her disabilities, she said, "with a messed up mind like mine, I'm pretty healthy." The full psycho educational report that VR paid for was what CWCC used to make her eligibility and accommodation decisions. She was granted a tape recorder to take notes in class, books on tape, extra time to complete tests and to take them in a different location. Jessica is very happy and appreciative of the services and support she receives from the DSS office. Jessica who is Caucasian is only interested in earning her associate's degree

and then will go to work.

Monique is a young Hispanic woman who was 25 years old at the time of the interview. She was diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (AD/HD), bi-polar disorder, severe depression, and dyslexia. Her AD/HD and dyslexia diagnoses were made while she was in elementary school, but she refused special education services in high school. Therefore, she did not have an updated documentation when she first enrolled at CWCC and her eligibility for services could not be made without any documentation. She was junior status at the time of the interview but had been at CWCC for more than three years. She seemed to have the greatest challenge getting support and accommodations at CWCC because she does not have the resources to get appropriate and updated documentation. She decided to participate in the focus group because of its focus on disability documentation. She came to the meeting with a copy of the flyer. She expected this session to be an opportunity for her to be tested. Immediately following the description of the research and just before the interview session actually began *Monique* expressed her motives.

Hello, my name is *Monique*. I just was mainly interested in this because I wanted to know where the resources are for documentation. I want to know what path the DSS office is taking to help people like me. Because in my own disability I didn't feel like it was that great of a disability. To me it is not something that would make my learning at a college impossible but it makes it difficulty and it is something that other people don't have to deal with.

Monique's desperation for resources to help with obtaining documentation was obvious. She thought the interview forum could provide her the opportunity to express her needs and possibly an audience where she could finally get her needs met. She lacked resources to have her needs documented in such a way that the disability office at

CWCC would understand her access needs. Her opportunity for success continues to be limited and her chances to attain her dreams seemed to be eroding. Based on her belief, she is not that “disabled,” but she needs the help. It was clear that her expectations for herself and others with disabilities are high. She said students need to be encouraged and nurtured, so they can perform to the best of their abilities whether or not they have a disability.

Monique is the middle child with an older sister and a younger sister all of whom were diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (AD/HD). She said she always was interested in learning and was always very serious with school work and was never in trouble. She believed it was because of these good traits that her needs went unnoticed and services were never provided. She comments that this system needs to change.

Because I wasn't failing horribly, they didn't take a second look at me. I think that if they tested children earlier no matter where they are from or who their parents are and if they helped them earlier instead of pushing them to the side, then they would get the help that they need in order to get what they need. And they can make it to where they want to be and be just as successful as others.

Monique believes her needs were ignored not only because she was a “good girl” but as a motivated student who was not getting in trouble, her background and economic status limited her ability to access services. At that time her parents were struggling to provide for the three children and themselves. This becomes a vicious cycle because she already was relegated at the pre-collegiate level, she could not be helped in college.

I had the correct documentation in elementary school and middle school. But I didn't want the service in high school. Although I had this problem I didn't want to be treated like I was stupid. So all the way through middle and high school, I just passed. . . And for here, I didn't get the documentation that I needed because we don't have the money or the

insurance and my parents didn't have enough money to aid through the testing that is required.

There is a history of a disability, but Monique lacks the supporting documentation. She felt stuck in that her disability is real, it has not gone away, but there are no resources to provide the evidence of her experience. She said her current situation was brought about by her decision not to be tracked in high school and also because of her and her parents' economic situation. Monique was unable to demonstrate her ability through her pre-collegiate years because of her decision not to be treated as if she was 'stupid.'

The effects of Monique's decision not to be labeled in high school continue to ripple and plague her access. She "just passed" in high school, earning grades and test scores that did not reflect her abilities. Because of low test scores and low GPA, she did not qualify for scholarships. Her parents had no resources to support her college goals so her college dream had to be sidelined. She decided to get married right after high school to lessen her parents' financial and emotional burden. Unfortunately, her financial situation did not improve because between her and her husband, they did not make enough money to afford the testing and are not working the type of jobs that would or could provide the type of insurance that will cover such testing.

Nonetheless, a college degree is something that Monique continues to set as a goal. Both she and her husband decided to make the sacrifices that will allow Monique to realize her educational and professional dream. They decided that college will be Monique's full time job, and they have held off having children until after college. Unfortunately, she continues to 'just pass' because of her dyslexia which has not been adequately documented. Just passing is not what Monique wants, she wants to be able to demonstrate her academic ability. But she feels she is at a disadvantage because the

accommodations that she really needs have not been provided. She said accommodations are necessary and important for students with disabilities in college because they “could mean the difference between just passing and doing extremely well.”

Despite her struggle with demonstrating her abilities, Monique still kept her eyes on the ultimate goal of being a physician. Unfortunately, she had two bad semesters where she failed all her classes. During those two semesters, her husband who enlisted in the military was deployed to Afghanistan. She went through a period of depression and was eventually diagnosed with bipolar disorder. She tried to plead her case to the school about her situation but was withdrawn from only one of the two semesters. The failing grades for the other semester were left on her transcript. She believes those grades may destroy the dream of becoming a physician, as one advisor informed her.

You know, we take into consideration that your grades are lower in some areas, but mainly we just look at the sciences. So you have all your core sciences. They're all A's. That's good. But because you have these two semesters, I can tell you that it's going to be virtually impossible for you to get into med school.

This was devastating to Monique. She was helpless and expressed feelings of a victim as she recounts the event. As she continued, she appeared discouraged and for a moment became emotional and as if she was giving up.

And you feel like giving up. And everyone else tells you ‘maybe this is not where you need to be.’ And I’ve had teachers tell me that. I said I wanted to be a doctor since I was four years old. Some will encourage but some of them will look at me strange. They might as well laugh at me. But maybe it’s not for me. Maybe, they are right. Maybe I can’t do it, you know.

The continued struggle that seems to have no resolution became overwhelming for Monique as she felt her dream was slipping away despite all of her sacrifices. This was the only time she showed discouragement and spoke as if she was giving up. Throughout

the interview, she spoke like a fighter who seemed to know where the problem was and was determined to win the battle and achieve her goal of a college or professional degree. But when sharing the past and looking at what continues to happen, she begins to doubt her ability to achieve that goal. She appeared bitter about her school experiences and tended to see things as “them” and “us” as she explains disability services and students with disabilities. It was interesting that she never questioned her ability even when she was at her lowest; she seemed to be giving up because her situation could not be understood. I could not help myself from being emotional, as much as I tried; I broke down myself and so did the other students.

Just for a moment, the entire group seemed emotionally connected as if they had a common enemy, and they were fighting together. Different suggestions of how she could get diagnosed were offered. Her knowledge about resources and service agencies was limited. The group shared information about VR and the services they provide. She was told a VR counselor visits the campus weekly, and she could call to make an appointment with her in the DSS office. She wrote down the information about the VR counselor and promised to follow up to check out how they can help her with the documentation.

Rhonda is an African American woman, a military veteran, and a returning college student who is in her late 50s and working on her second associate’s degree. She is also a full time employee of the college and has been working at the college for more than 17 years. She tends to be upfront with her comments and expressed her feelings with candor. Rhonda said she came from a poor family so she learned very early in life to work hard and to find ways to get whatever she wanted.

I’ve never had anyone do anything for me. Anything that I’ve ever gotten, I’ve had to work for. . . . I’ve done things non-traditionally because I

didn't have the money. I got into the service to travel. . . I did it a different way because I didn't have the money. I wanted to see the world so I joined the army and I went all over. I was in Paris, Holland, and Germany. But I worked for it. Nobody ever gave them to me. Oh no. I wish they did, but they didn't. So everything I have ever done, I have gotten it on my own.

Rhonda felt denied of opportunities. She believed she could not have anything unless she worked for it because of her family's economic background. To her, accommodations are like life, they are what you design yourself to make things work for you; they are not what you wait to have someone hand over to you. Such feelings for Rhonda possibly emanated from her past experiences.

Rhonda has both physical and systemic health conditions, and she has a medical report that documents all the conditions. She was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis (MS), ADHD, PTSD, depressive and bi-polar disorders. But she has found ways to take classes so that she is less impacted and she is less dependent on the DSS office or the school. Speaking about the DSS office, Rhonda said,

I don't use them a lot because I like studying on my own. I do online courses and web courses. Because and only because I feel that I can concentrate better on my own than in a class setting. There are less distractions when I am by myself and I don't have to make people make things work for me. It's just how I work and how things work for me.

Rhonda will do whatever is necessary so she is less dependent. She knows herself more than anyone would or could, so she will work things out on her own. She appeared guarded and selective with what she shared. Several times during the interview, she would say, "I could tell you, but I have chosen not to go there." Each time she says that it sparked my curiosity. So I told her I had the time. To that she smiled and said in a very low tone looking straight at me, "oh dear, you don't have time to hear all about it.

So let's move on, ok?" I offered to meet her for an individual meeting but she declined. At that point I realized she had said all she needed to say and out of respect, I proceeded.

Some of the information that Rhonda shared indicated a series of disappointments and accusations that she tends to use her conditions as excuses, or it may be her way of dealing with a lack of support. For example, when she talked of the challenges and limitations caused by her disabilities, she said no matter what her experience might be, she has no choice but to face reality of her responsibility.

I still have to keep a roof over my head. I have a daughter to take care of and I have to put food in her mouth. So I really don't have time for bipolarism. It doesn't have time for me. I don't have time for MS I don't have time to get sick because if I do, we're out in the street. So I don't have time for sickness.

Rhonda was not denying the fact that she suffers from the effects of bipolar and MS, but it is a fact that if she gives in to the difficulties of the disorders, she might have other issues that she may not be ready to face. She has a responsibility for not only providing for herself but for her daughter. She seemed to have a special relationship with her daughter who is helping her to attain an associate's degree also at CWCC.

Despite her unwillingness to rely on others and not accepting others' kindness and offer of help and support, Rhonda enjoys helping other people. She understands the CWCC system and she wants to use her experience, and her perspectives to help other people navigate the system. She has unique perspectives because of her multiple associations with the college as a student, a parent, and an employee.

I try to console concerned parents. I'm a parent too, so I know what they're going through. I'm also a student, so I know what the students are going through. . . . when I hear students complaining about a department I try to walk them over and try to take the time that they need and that they deserve. Because a lot of times you can be pushed around and told what to do. And I don't like it myself. If I don't like it, you better believe, I'm not

going to make you go through it. That's just me. I'm not saying that I'm greater or nothing, I'm just saying that I'm going to treat you like I want to be treated. And that's in the Bible. "Do unto others..."

Rhonda's perspective also helps her understand how people want to be treated in an environment in which they might be unaware and might feel disempowered. This seemed to be the type of treatment Rhonda longed for but was denied. She shared a perspective that no one else touched. She has more layers of what she considered "problems" than others because of her race, her gender, her military status, and the handicapping condition.

When you are a woman of color and a discharged veteran and then they find out have a disability too, it's like, oh Lord, you really got a lot wrong with you! Now how do I deal with you? Do I deal with your blackness; do I deal with your femininity; do I deal with your veteran status; do I deal with your handicap? How in the world do I deal with you?

Rhonda's description of the intersection of multiple identities (black, female, military veteran, disabled) was an interesting one. In her statement of "How do I deal with you?" seem somewhat curious but at the same time, somewhat aloof. It appears as if Rhonda was describing different layers of victimization depending on the different types of labels that individuals carry or that are imposed on them. She seems to be on multiple sides of a victim. People may tend to pull back not knowing exactly how to approach or relate to her due to multiple layers of what she considers traits that may not be completely understood. This may explain in part the reason why she appeared cautious and guarded; it may be a self preservation strategy for her.

This interview appeared to be a form of intervention and sort of therapeutic for some of these students. The format allowed them to connect with other students they would not have connected with otherwise. They shared as if they found a community

where what they feel, experience, and think seem to matter; they were able to connect with others in meaningful ways and therefore, shared stories that made them vulnerable. Some of them, Monique and James especially, were able to learn about resources which can be of help to them. These were resources they were unaware prior to the interview.

These students perceive themselves as a member of the CWCC community. Service providers share similar views as they work to help the students dissolve in the environment. The stories of these students as evidenced in the themes that emerged seem to touch on equity, fairness, and justice, the three essential elements of a community.

Section Two: Themes

Introduction

There is an understanding of the necessities for requiring detailed documentation across all groups. While college officials were eager to provide the reasons for requiring documentation as evidence in support of service provision, students were more interested in discussing why documentation may not be sufficient to understand their access needs. They seemed to take issue with the lack of understanding or consideration for the challenges they face in providing necessary documentation.

Themes emerged from the students' data as they provided detailed and specific descriptions of their experiences. Their descriptions and themes gave context to their views and perceptions about documentation. Those themes help explain not only why some of the students may not have provided required documentation, but also why their documentation may not be sufficient enough to explain their needs. The themes tell a story of experiences of these students. The story may go like this.

For many students with disabilities, the pre-collegiate system is broken and the collegiate system is dysfunctional. Broken or dysfunctional

systems relegate them to the bottom of the educational barrel. And unless they squeak their wheels loud enough they will not be greased. Students with disabilities are often treated as homogeneous. This reductionistic view of disability fails to acknowledge that disability is a mixed bag. And finally when the curtains to the college open, they quickly reach for the chance because college is an opportunity of a life time. But as soon as they get through the opened curtains, they face a different set of challenge. There is the gate with barricade where it will be determined whether or not they are in deed disabled enough to cross over the barricade.

Above story touch on the following 6 major themes that emerge and that run across the data: (1) broken and dysfunctional systems; (2) bottom of the barrel; (3) squeaky wheel gets the grease; (4) disability is a mixed bag; (5) college is an opportunity of a life time; and (6) not disabled enough.

Some of the categories used to describe the themes were derived from the words used by students as they ascribed meanings to their realities and some are the framework I used to capture what I heard. Though the themes are interrelated, they will be addressed individually using specific quotes by participants.

Theme 1: Broken and dysfunctional systems:

Due to the differences in expectations, services, and accountability, it is important to look at the breakdown of the educational system from the pre-collegiate (K-12) and collegiate systems.

Breakdown in the pre-collegiate system: Pre-collegiate education is a system set up to develop the potentials of school age children while balancing their social, intellectual, physical, and emotional development. To the participants in this interview, the system failed to recognize or acknowledge their potentials, thus, that system of education is broken for them. They expressed that the early education system tends to set the stage for educational failure and diminished access to higher education or even adult

life for students with disabilities. In particular, students feel the high school system failed them so much so that it continues to fail them now that they are in college. This was expressed not only by students who were in special education, but also students who were not. The following exchange among a group of students at one of the focus group sessions centered on what seems to be low expectation, a lack of respect and concern for the future, and a lack of encouragement for students receiving special education services. As they talked about this issue, the students turned to one another and started to dialogue as if they forgot it was an interview.

Monique: I don't know if you had this situation happen to you. You're obviously smart because you're in college. When you were younger did you get put into a special class with other students who had disabilities?

Jason: Um yes, and no kind of. Because I was in partial ESE classes, but not the whole day. It wasn't like a set class that I was in class with special kids

Monique: When you were in your special needs class did you feel stimulated?

Jason: No, it's kind of like they just give you busy work.

Monique: And that was one of the reasons that I didn't seek the documentation while I was in high school. I had a boyfriend who was my boyfriend for about three years. All through high school, or a large part of high school, he was a very smart man, in my opinion. In my opinion he could be in college like me now. But it was something that he didn't even try. Instead of taking classes that would stimulate him, he would take classes like Driver's Ed and P.E.

Jason: Yeah and I think a lot of times that is what they encourage you to do in the school system to just get some credit or something.

Monique: Yes, just so your GPA goes up. And it's stupid because you don't learn anything in those classes. In Physical Education it's so stupid. I mean, we used to play cards in that class. And a lot of disabled students went and took that all the time. I hung out with a lot of the disabled students.

Hannah: So your boyfriend was in the ESE?

Monique: He was in the SLD. They called them “Slow Learning Disabled.” What a label!

Interviewer: Actually SLD is supposed to stand for Specific Learning Disabilities.

Monique: But that’s not even what they called it. All the flyers that I saw that they sent home with him always said “Slow Learning Disabled.” How does that make a child feel?

Hannah: Oh yes, it is sad and oh so bad.

Monique: Every flyer that I saw- and I dated him for a good long time - every flyer that I saw says slow learning disabled.

Hannah: And how would that make him feel?

Monique: Yes, of course, he felt very stupid. [Turning her body to the other student] How did you feel? Did you feel encouraged?

The above exchange is an example of some of the feelings of resentment that students expressed about their pre-collegiate experience. They shared the treatments they received within the special education system while comparing their experiences of lower expectations and disregard for their rights to plan for adult life and life after high school. They wanted to be sure that their individual experiences were not unique as Monique asked Jason directly if he was stigmatized in his special education classes. They ridiculed the system that was established to help them even with regard to the name, “SLD.” SLD is supposed to mean specific learning disability but what the name represented in Monique’s school tends to diminish the ability of those students who were part of it. It is a confirmation to them that the education system has broken for them. Students feel the types of treatment that resulted from a broken system limit their options and narrow their

chances in adult life or life after high school. These limitations, they said, limit their access and the ability to obtain needed services when they got to college.

The system that was set up to safeguard students who are identified as needing services and support and ensure that they are prepared to compete with their peers betrays them. Therefore, their system of support in the educational system was broken. This feeling of disappointment and brokenness in the pre-collegiate system that reduces opportunities for students with disabilities was corroborated by one of the DSS providers who spoke from a mother's perspective.

They did not treat my son well in the educational environment. They were terrible to him, and to his mother; they were not nice. They told him things like, 'you will never do this' and 'you will never do that.' They killed a lot of his potentials and his dreams. It took him a long time to get it back. And while I believe in reality, I know that you don't start out when a child is really small, telling people you're never going to do this in 16 years, because I do believe in trying something to see if it works out. I don't think being unkind is necessary [Tammy].

From a mother's perspective, the special education system betrayed her son and damaged his self esteem. Her son was lucky to get back the motivation, desire to succeed, and compete in the adult world, something that the school system held back from him. Tammy's disappointment in the system was obvious but she turned her negative experience into a positive outcome for her son and, now, for others. Instead of being angry and resentful about the system, Tammy decided to pursue a career in disability services. She believes students who struggle with academics like her son, need the chance to pursue college and their parents need respect, support, and encouragement. She said she wanted to make a difference, to give to students and their parents what she and her son were denied. Tammy said, "That is why I am here today" as if to say she will try to pick up the broken pieces of those students that make it through her service door.

The education system is a set of roadmaps that prepare students at one end and pass them on to another. The expectation at every next level is that the earlier level has done a good enough job that will assure some level of success at the next. Unfortunately, when students are not prepared and even told they do not belong, success at the next level is compromised. The finding in this research is that the broken parts in the education system are not limited to the pre-collegiate environment. The collegiate environment also has its own sets of issues and it will take a lot more people like Tammy at the different areas and department at the college level to make that environment welcoming, receptive and accepting.

Dysfunctional collegiate system: The experiences of these students at the collegiate level seem to be different from the pre-collegiate level. Unlike the pre-collegiate environment where the established structure of support was seen as the major source of failure and brokenness, the collegiate system was seen as dysfunctional. Students expressed support from the disability support services office and perceive them as working on their behalf. Students' expression of the brokenness at the collegiate level is more from the environmental factor and factors outside of the established support structure. At the collegiate level, students and service providers are 'handicapped' by environmental factors such as people, policies, and expectations.

In a dysfunctional relationship, the experience of an individual is diminished and there are no consistencies in what they experience from one member of the community to another. When a relationship is good, it is very good and when it is bad, it is horrible. It is admirable that these students matriculated to CWCC. Unfortunately, it is not enough for a student to matriculate to a college environment. What is important is for a

matriculated student to persist and successfully complete a chosen program or degree.

When students encounter barriers that minimize their ability to either persist or complete their program or degree, the system is dysfunctional.

From their peers making assumptions about the reactions or experience of another student with a disability; to the reactions, treatment, and assumptions of faculty; and to the manner in which access services are facilitated, students perceive that the college environment as dysfunctional. In describing how her health condition affects her, Rhonda said, "Sometimes I walk into walls. I've walked into posts right here on campus and people just look and laugh." In general, people do not understand that certain behaviors are beyond an individual's control but instead they pass judgment. Describing similar experience, Hannah, a first year student at CWCC, seemed surprised and disappointed in the way in which her colleagues tend to judge her actions that result from her disabilities.

The thing is that you would think that people at this point in their lives would know how to deal with disabilities. You would think that most people interacted with somebody with disabilities in high school. But you would be surprised at the amount of people who are ignorant towards disabilities. I feel bad in the fact that people don't know you have a disability, but they judge you by the things that you do. Sometimes you can tell I have a disability, sometimes you can't. And I might bump into something and people start laughing, and say "look at how stupid she is." If I ever bump into you, it's because I can't see you.

College is seen as an adult environment in which people bring with them a series of experiences from what they knew, seen, or learned. Students expressed disappointment in their colleagues' lack of awareness and understanding especially when certain behaviors are expressions of what an individual with a disability is unable to control. The dysfunctionality expressed here is the lack of maturity and awareness of colleagues

without disabilities.

There was a mix of positive and negative views of faculty. Students had several examples of faculty who will go out of their way to get to understand the needs of the student and work with the college to assure access and positive experiences for them both in and out of class. Jessica shared her view of two of her favorite teachers:

My teacher last semester is great. Oh, Mr. Culligan! My God I swear he was on crack. He'll be teaching and he'll be sweating. And he just screamed. He'll be jumping around. I called him my crack teacher. I record his lectures on tape and when I traveled with my husband when my grandson was born, I played the tape all the way there and all the way back. It was a 4-hour drive each way and I played Culligan's lectures. My husband finally told me he was sick of his voice because he hollered. He told me to turn it down. But you know I enjoy him, he gets me excited about what he's teaching. And if I go to him and tell him I need help, he'll ask me to bring my book and my tape and I can record him helping me. He's just the greatest. I passed his class and he sent me this email about how hard I worked and how proud he is of me. He wants me to take another class from him. You know, I will as soon as I find out the other classes he teaches.

This semester, I am in Ms. Smith's class. I love her lectures. She is very different from Culligan, not as animated. She is gentle and kind; she takes time to explain things and go over any questions. No question is stupid to her; she answers every question and asks if we're ready to move on after answer questions. But the textbook is difficult; it is just difficult material. I have my book on tape but when I listen I get distracted and frustrated. So I e-mailed her telling her that there was something I wasn't understanding, and I said, 'it's not your lectures. Your lectures are great.' I have trouble telling her that I'm having trouble understanding because she gives these fantastic lectures. She breaks everything down to a point that you know what she is teaching.

But the book drives me crazy because every other word it seems like it stops and it has 'Mary, 1973' and all these credits and it interferes with the process of thinking. I told my husband the book was driving me insane and I said I can't handle this. He has a degree; he graduated college so he knows what I was talking about but he doesn't understand why I was having so much trouble. He said I was not reading a novel and that they have to put the bibliography in there. And I said, but why can't they put it at the end of the chapter like they do anywhere else? Don't they understand that people are trying to read this and they don't want this crap

in there?’ He said they have to do it by law. But I said that is interfering with my learning! And I just learned in Ms. Smith’s class that it is called noise. So I sent Ms. Smith a very long e-mail and I said, “noise” and I put it in parentheses, and the book is driving me crazy!’ Ms. Smith sent me an email back and she said, ‘good God, girl, just come by my office! Don’t ever send me an e-mail like that!’ She explains it in a way that it makes it better. I still hate the “noise” but I can deal with it. I hear everything. You know she’s such a good teacher. I mean there are some great teachers out here.

These are great examples of good and understanding teachers but two different instructional approaches. Mr. Culligan is energetic and animated; he seemed to excite Jessica with his lecture approach and his willingness to work with her outside of class and allowing her to use her accommodations even during their meetings. Ms. Smith, on the other hand, is more gentle and calmer in her instructional approach. Nonetheless, their impact on Jessica and her perception of them were similar. Their willingness to work with her, their understanding of her needs, and their availability to help her learn were positive. Even when her accommodation was getting in the way of her learning, Ms. Smith did not discard that experience, she made herself available to validate her experience. It is obvious that the distraction with the references did not go away but Jessica was able to handle it after speaking with her teacher. Jessica was struggling in Ms. Smith’s class but she was willing to admit that her struggles were not the fault of the teacher.

Service providers agree with the students’ perception that the majority of the faculty are accommodating. Tedmond articulated this well.

Majority of our faculty, about 90% of them are very supportive of our program. They will basically do what we request of them given the fact that they view us as knowledgeable in this field and because they know we have adequate documentation to support our work.

Many of the faculty rely on the DSS staff to do their job, and they are respectful of their roles, their expertise and their professionalism. Therefore, they cooperate in facilitating required accommodations for students. For the fact that the majority of faculty are supportive of accommodating the needs of students, college officials making eligibility and accommodation decision feel that the policies that guide eligibility and service level determination needs to be upheld. That should be good enough reason for requiring specific information in the documentation according to Grayson.

We have a faculty population that is very accepting and very comfortable with the accommodations we suggest. That's another reason that we require specific documentation. We want our faculty to recognize that somebody outside of this institution is certified to make these diagnoses. That professional has indicated what we are working with and what needs to be done, so that we aren't perceived as a watered down program or second class education, because that is not the case at all.

It is important for professionals that make eligibility and accommodation decisions on behalf of the College to uphold the credibility and the integrity of the DSS office and of the students that receive services through the office. As someone with special education background, Grayson wants to be sure that the DSS services are not perceived as "special education" services as she used the word, "watered down program or second class education." And because of their requirement, the disability program enjoys the respect, understanding, and support of many faculty across campus.

Unfortunately, not all the faculty-students relationships are positive. Many of these students still find the less than desirable relationships amusing but others to be hurtful depending on established relationship or the underlying message that student feel is being communicated. Using an example of a well meaning instructor who lacked awareness of the different meanings and interpretations of an expression outside of what

is acceptable in academia, Jessica said,

So I'm having trouble because she [her professor] said we have to think outside the box. And I said 'Ms. Smith, I have doctors that have been trying to make me think inside the box for years.' And I said I've spent a lot of time trying to think inside the box. Now you're telling me to go back and think outside the box?

Describing that experience, Jessica laughed hysterically and everyone else in the group could not help but laugh with her. They all can relate to that example as if they have had similar experiences. Jessica said the expression used to describe the instructor's expectations for the class was at odds with what she was working to accomplish as someone dealing with psychiatric disability. The meaning that Jessica ascribed to "think outside the box" is very different from what the instructor meant. Jessica understands that terminology from the psychiatric and counseling perspective but the instructor was communicating from a view of freedom of expression. Jessica admitted that the instructor probably had no idea what she was talking about but just thought it to be very funny. This is a break down in communication because of multiple meanings that different people ascribe to the same word. The same scenario could cause brokenness for another with a different sense of humor and understanding than Jessica. It might even be different with Jessica with another instructor. She had a trusting relationship with this instructor and that made a difference.

Not all experiences with faculty are as funny or relationships as trusting. Students shared stories of how the lack of understanding and the unwillingness of some faculty to listen can diminish their experience and detrimental to their ability to fully participate or demonstrate their knowledge. For example, Jessica described what she considered to be an inappropriate reaction of a faculty when she discussed her needs as a student with

seizure disorder and mental illness at the beginning of the semester. Jessica said the professor immediately asked, “so what number do I call?” She was “stunned” and had no idea how to begin to answer. So she responded, “how about we start with 911?” This is the same student who found the use of an instructor’s language humorous. Her feelings of humor in one situation and dismay in another appear to be the difference between ignorance and stupidity and possibly could be the timing. Expression of ignorance could be amusing especially when there is already an established relationship. An assumption of imminent danger, on the other hand, could be perceived as presumptuous and, therefore, considered stupid especially coming from a situation where there has not been an established relationship.

Each of the students had at least one negative and disrespectful experience with CWCC faculty. Some of them expressed their feelings and experiences in general while others used specific examples.

They [the professors] prey on you. They think because you work with the disabled office, you are trying to get the easy way out. They look at you as if you don’t have anything to say; so they think, just sit over there and be quiet [Jason].

I shared my mental health condition with this teacher so he can help me learn how to study in his class. When we got to class, he started talking about when he worked with crazy people. He said ‘I used to work in the mental institution; I know crazy people. And crazy people have done this and crazy people have done that.’ I was sitting in front of the class and I was so ashamed. I started crying. He said he worked in transitions, he was explaining what transition is. I said to myself, don’t tell me I know what transitions is, it is when you don’t get out, you move from one step to another. There’s this little girl in the class. She’s like what you’ll call the teacher’s pet. She asked who the craziest person he’s ever worked with is. He said, I met Jesus and the devil and everything. This continued the entire semester; he made fun of me from day one [Jessica].

Jason’s general description of what students feel had to do with instructors’ assumptions

based on students' association with the disability office. His word choices were noted and interesting. His use of the "you" does not detach him from this type of treatment but it rather indicates that professors who feel this way have general assumptions and preconceived notions about students who are associated with the disability office. Moreover, his choice of the word "prey" is strong enough to indicate that instructors' attitude can make students feel vulnerable by association. With such association, students with disabilities feel like outcasts with nothing to contribute. So for this group of students in classes with the type of instructor described by Jason, the classroom environment quickly becomes segregated and students with disabilities become marginalized. This happens despite the college's efforts of full inclusion, equity, integration, and equal access.

Jessica's description of her personal interaction with an instructor that proved negative also serves as an example of a system working against itself, a function of a dysfunctional relationship. The DSS office has a goal to empower students to be self advocates and to make the college environment inclusive. Jessica's effort to advocate for herself and her needs turned, in this case, to be unpleasant and discouraging. She was bludgeoned with ensuing treatment from the instructor. Students perceive such treatment as examples of preconceived notion about disability and deliberate efforts of some college faculty to marginalize the experiences of students with disabilities. Unfortunately, in this situation, the instructor helped propagate the negative perception of mental illness to Jessica's colleagues.

Like many of the students who participated in this research, Jessica never discussed this experience with the DSS office personnel. They seemed protective of the

office staff and sympathetic to the demands on the DSS providers. They seek to help educate the community by being the educators and their own ambassadors. They shared a sense of obligation to help deal with some of the negative views and perceptions of students with disabilities. These students feel that the DSS office has enough to handle and that they don't have enough staff to deal with what they consider to be their "day-to-day battles" with professors whom they consider to be unaware.

Jessica remained in her class through the semester but used an assignment to "get back" at the instructor. As she tried to recount the experience which was obviously upsetting, Jessica paused, her tone changed, she shifted her body, moved her head from one side to another, raising her eyebrow and with what looked like a snicker, she described with pride how she used her self-determined skill to educate the instructor and her colleagues.

I had to do a presentation in that class and I thought long and hard about it. I brought my psychologist in and I opened up and I just told everything about me. How I was locked up and so on and my way to recovery, my medication, and so on. And when my psychologist came to class, she asked him. "So, I was told you worked with crazy people; what kind of counseling did you do?" Then she said, "I do recommend to those who do counseling to get counseling themselves." She talked real about mental illness and what real counselors do. She tore him up but also talked about mental illness being something that can be treated. It was so funny, he was so embarrassed.

What Jessica considered an inappropriate reaction of the instructor empowered her to educate not only her peers in the course, but also the instructor. Jessica wanted to help the DSS office but also demystify the negative views around mental illness. She thought bringing her psychologist to class had greater impact than for her to present her findings from some research or to have the DSS staff come to speak in her class. She was effective in her efforts and had no regrets for making the professor uncomfortable in

the process. She said her instructor refused to give her back or post her grade for the project. Jessica's grade for the course was not posted online as other students and until she sent email reminders, she had no idea she had earned an A in the course.

The instructors' negative feelings towards students with disabilities are not limited to students with mental health disorders. Students also shared negative experiences especially where instructors seemed uncomfortable or unwilling to change their instructional and assessment methods. Continuing the discussion about their perceived view of professors' lack of understanding of the challenges resulting from a disabling condition, Hannah expressed disappointment and frustration with her math instructor. She described how she felt doubly penalized with instructional delivery and assessment because of her disability. The math instructor failed and refused to notice or accept the reality of her disability because "it might be difficult for the instructor to change" her instructional delivery. Hannah has very limited sight.

You have to see math you know. I mentioned to the teacher that I can't see the board and attendance is important for me because I have to hear it, and it is mandatory for the class. So I may not miss class. Nothing was done; she kept using the board any way. Even though I went to class every time, I practically had to go home, open the book and do the exercises, do what they [other students] saw taught in class. I was in class but not part of the class because I couldn't see what they were doing. So I was practically teaching myself the math because I can't see what was going on. I followed things in my head because I'm not seeing it.

Hannah advocated for herself letting the instructor know her limitations with the method of delivery. The instructor did not make attempts to discuss what might work and how Hannah could be engaged in the class. Her statement of "being in class and not part of the class" also indicates the feelings of being pushed to the margin, an integrated segregation experience. While such was her experience in this particular class during

instructional delivery, Hannah's assessment methodology was the same and equal as her peers. She seemed to experience dichotomous relationship in the same class, between instruction and assessment. She was expected to demonstrate her knowledge in a manner in which she was not instructed—visually working through the problems and showing her steps. Hannah was penalized for demonstrating her knowledge in the same manner in which she was instructed, working problems in her head rather than visually.

Math 002 is super easy, but I failed it. You can't use calculators for this class as you can for basic math. It doesn't matter because I could do all the problems in my head. But I got penalized for that because you have to show your work. And I don't show that type of work because I cannot just write everything down. I can do this stuff in my head. As long as you get the right answer what is the problem! You know I can't cheat on a test because I can't even see my paper well without you seeing me look. So how can I cheat? You can say I cheated on the homework, but I can't cheat on the test. I'm obviously doing it, but it's not the way that they're teaching me. But the answers are the same. I would get points off my notebook, and my quizzes. I mean it's just crazy.

The issue with Hannah's access seems to be multi-faceted. It is difficult to her to reconcile the expectations as they change from instruction to assessment in the same class with the same teacher. Her knowledge and comprehension of the material had no bearing on her grade because both instructional and the assessment methods were discriminatory. The teacher seemed oblivious to these unequal expectations. The expectation for her was to understand the instruction and follow classroom discussion "in her head" but she could do the same to demonstrate her knowledge.

Hannah does have a good point about the perception that she must have cheated if she did not show all her work. It was not the fact that she did not show some work, she just did not show all the steps. If she could not see the board and had to put her nose to the paper before she can read her own paper, it is inconceivable that she could have

cheated. Like Jessica, Hannah did not discuss her challenges with the DSS office. She expressed similar view as Jessica that the DSS staff have greater challenges to address. So she accepted the situation, took her failing grade and sat through the course another semester. Fortunately, she passed the class the second time around but was quick to point out that she avoided the first instructor when she repeated the course.

For many of these students, the college system is dysfunctional because of the lack of uniform understanding of their needs across campus and because the experiences cannot be predicted. When situations work for them, they work well and when they do not work, they tend to be horrible.

Service providers, like the students, are also aware of the handful of faculty at CWCC who are uninformed, uneducated, and therefore, lack respect for the abilities of students just because they have a disability or because they are registered with the DSS office. The DSS providers have multiple approaches to dealing with faculty who are unsupportive of students with disabilities. They sometimes work with the student to steer them away from taking courses from particular instructors based on the experiences and feedback of students who have taken courses from those instructors or from their own individual interactions in working with specific student issues. Tedmond did not want to paint an unrealistic picture of acceptance and awareness on the CWCC campus; so he explains:

You want honesty? We try to avoid the 10% that are difficult to deal with. I know that dealing with them is going to be a hassle for everyone so I steer clear of them. If we have to choose somebody that is not supportive of our program or the students we serve, I usually warn the student. I try not to be negative but I say here are the issues we have had in the past and here is what you can do to kind of grease the wheel a little bit. Then we will adjust if anything comes up but let somebody know immediately and we can begin to deal with it.

Avoiding those instructors who deal with students with disrespect seems to be an understood and an acceptable culture in the DSS office but not something that is publicized because they are as much a problem for DSS providers as they are for students. Service providers seem to have resolved 'picking their battles' so they can be efficient in their work. But when such instructors cannot be avoided, then they try to work with the student. Tedmond illustrated an example of a professor who seems to be notorious for not wanting to accommodate students.

There's one instructor on this campus who teaches a course in the health field. In his opinion he does not want the student in a separate location for exams. These are students that need and qualify for extended time in a different location. The instructor balks at letting them go down and take that exam in another facility and his rationale is 'if they have a question about the exam I am not there I am not able to assist them when they are half way across campus.' So what we do with him is negotiate to be sure that he understands if in fact that's what he wants to do then he is required to provide the extra time to the student. . . .It's one of the ones that happen every time. It's not one of the ones that happen every so often but every time we have the discussion, it is the same. Every time is like its groundhogs day all over again.

Difficult and unaware instructors seem to be problematic and a major source of the dysfunction at CWCC. And because of the effort it takes to deal with them each time ("groundhogs day all over again"), DSS providers avoid them if at all possible. The DSS office also engages top administration, when necessary, to deal with faculty who treat students with disabilities negatively or those who do not want to comply with accommodation requests. Tedmond describes that approach.

We try to keep everybody knowledgeable about what they're going into and again some of those cases end up in the Dean's office. But the nice thing is that when we end up in the Dean's office, everybody, the student included, knows right from the jump start that there could potentially be some problems. The student has been documenting it all along through the

semester and has kept good communication with us so that when we hit the Dean's office there is pretty good evidence that we need some help.

A good example was the use of the calculator in a class. The student demanded it was in his documentation. The instructor refused and said I am not going to do it because there is a part of this course that is essential without a calculator. It couldn't be resolved so we called in faculty, Dean, ADA coordinator, and DSS officer sat down hashed it all out in the meeting and it was resolved. I can't remember but I think in fact it was a requirement not to use the calculator in that section. And the dean made it very clear and everybody walked away fine.

Service providers understand that not all appropriate accommodations are reasonable. They want to work with faculty and departments to uphold the integrity of the courses and programs. So when a requested accommodation is deemed to be unreasonable or inappropriate based on the intent of the course, service providers will support and help the student in other ways. When disagreements occur about the reasonableness and appropriateness of accommodations, there is an established process. Such disagreements are handled at the upper administrative level with the Dean. When it gets to that point, the college looks up to Grayson to provide guidance. As the ADA Compliance Officer, Grayson sometimes acts as the mediator or liaison between the DSS office and the faculty or the student and the department. The DSS providers do use Grayson as "the sounding board, the mediator, and the grievance person" where students and service providers feel students are not "being treated fairly."

Service providers seem to struggle with a lack of cooperation from faculty for specific accommodations, especially when those accommodations have been determined to be not only reasonable but appropriate. Tammy described such specific example.

I just had a very unpleasant experience at mid term with a veteran with brain injury. I think there was an explosion and this woman was hit in the head. She has a dull affect. If you look at her you would think she was retarded. Her face shows no emotion, there's no smile, no glimmer, there's

nothing there. But she is smart. . . . Her report says she was unconscious for over six months. They never thought she was going to live, but she has survived and now she is back in school. She also has epilepsy now; some type of seizure disorder. So she takes medicine which slows down the process in the brain, it doesn't click as fast but she eventually will get it. Can she get the answers? You bet she can get it but it's going to take her a little bit more than twice as long. Her math teacher came to the testing center and fussed at her and my testing supervisor because it was over double time. It upset the young lady so bad she couldn't finish taking the test. I thought she was going to faint or something.

Tammy's anger and frustration showed through her words and her posture. She squeezed her forehead, crossed her legs under the chair, took her glasses off and put them back, and put her hands under her chin as she continued to describe this situation and this woman's untapped ability and determination to not only live but also to succeed at college. Tammy's hands seemed tied in this situation because the student did not want her to approach the instructor for fear of retaliation, an example of reactions in dysfunctional relationships.

The girl is so afraid for me to say anything to the teacher. Although I think it would help the teacher to know, I promised her I wouldn't say anything till after the exams are over but then I will. I am really angry about it. It's wrong. If the girl didn't do well on the test it is because of the professor. She couldn't even do the last page; she was so upset she had to go home. . . . She uses only a few of our services but not a lot; she is very independent. Once the teachers get to know her they like her a lot. It is cases like that that make it very difficult for students. It doesn't say double time or triple time.

This is an example of different perception of accommodations. The service providers view accommodations as tools to increase access and equal participation but the instructor in this example with Tammy view accommodations are unfair advantage of some students over others. As Tammy continued, she realized she allowed her emotions to become transparent. Then she looked straight at me, chuckled and said, "Oh, I've kind of gotten off track haven't I?" I acknowledged her feelings. She said, "I have talked to

the Dean about it and I don't know if it's going to work or not but now this instructor is on my list." This is how instructors get to the list of service providers. When they intimidate and seem to have gotten away with it, service providers honor the desires of the students with whom they work but avoid such instructors for other students. Some of the students might have had similar experiences in the past or have heard of such experiences and so, they don't want to discuss some of the issues with the DSS providers.

The lack of understanding and unsupportive attitude of faculty creates a great divide between the students and their instructors and between faculty and their professional colleagues who work in the DSS offices. It is interesting that, when both the DSS staff and students described positive experiences, they tend to describe the experiences as workable partnerships that engender mutual respect and acknowledgment. They view the college as a community. But when they talked described the negative experiences, they tend to describe two parallel camps of "we" and "they" with suggestions of disrespect and distrustful relationships.

Another interesting dysfunctional aspect of the collegiate system according to the students is their support structure, the disability office. In addition to working with students, this office also exists to guide the college in meeting its obligations to this group of students. As part of its obligations, the DSS office also determines reasonable accommodations based on the documentation they receive from students. Students, service providers, and the ADA Compliance officer agree that the accommodations are working. Students expressed them in form of appreciation and DSS staff and the Compliance officer expressed them with pride. All participants believe that without

accommodations, students with disabilities would experience difficulties making it, or a great number of them may have no chance of making it through college.

Students had very strong message to the office as they work with them to determine reasonable and appropriate accommodations. They expressed, with care that additional support might work better than policy modifications. These students want the same experience as their peers without disabilities. Course waivers, especially math and foreign language waivers seemed to be distasteful for many of these students. They felt they are cheated if they are excused from taking those classes which will teach them life skills. The following statement by Monique captured the sentiments that were expressed.

Opting you out of a math course is a bad decision. Some of your other classes can be helped by some of the problem solving strategies that you learn in math courses. I would say its fair that, yes, he doesn't have to take those classes but it's almost like he's being cheated out of them by not being given the opportunity to learn them with maybe a one-on-one tutor or tester.

Monique suggested looking at other ways of accommodating or supporting instead of seeking a waiver. She seem to be communicating that course waivers are tend to be easy administrative decisions but may not fully support the skill development needs of students. Monique's impression is that problem solving skills are taught in math courses and those skills are needed even in other classes. And when DSS office seeks to waive such a course for students because of their disability, those students are cheated and robbed of acquiring the same skill sets that others will learn. Hannah supported this suggestion. She shared the similar opinion and feels course substitutions should be sought instead of a waiver.

I hate math, I have a hard time with it because I can't see the board. I wish I could get out of it, but I don't want to. We deal with numbers 24/7; they're everywhere so why not learn how to manipulate them. Maybe

teach some real world applications instead of teaching all the stuff as in Algebra and Calculus that you may never even use. Or why not make a different curriculum that deal with real life experience?

Hannah admits her personal challenge with math. Despite those challenges, she wants the opportunity to learn the life skills that the course can teach and that her peers will learn. Her suggestion of reviewing the curriculum for problem solving skills, like Monique suggested, and substituting those courses instead of seeking course waiver was interesting. They all seem to agree that the skills they need to acquire from taking math courses are crucial, and they do not want to be denied such skill development opportunities. They feel the lack of knowledge and understanding on how best to teach and evaluate the skills for some of the students makes them shy away from attempting the courses after several failed trials. The following statements by Hannah capture the feelings of a limited view of people who want to help them.

I failed math the first time and I told the DSS office. They told me I can qualify for a waiver. So I talked to my DBS counselor about the waiver. She told me if I failed a second time, I could get a waiver. The problem is I went to check my major and I need it for my major. I'm going into early childhood, so I do need it. And I did manage to pass it the second time. This last time, I passed with a C.

From these students' perspectives, getting out of the course was a 'rescue' solution that the system of support considered to be appropriate. Though well intended, the solutions proposed to help will eventually limit her career options. So Hannah persisted until she was able to pass the course so she remains in her chosen major. The main issue with the accommodation considerations for Hannah and others like her is that accommodations are considered from the medical model of disability rather than the social model of disability. The medical model of disability views disability from an individual's limitation; the individual has a deficit that needs to be fixed. The social

model of disability, on the other hand, views disability from an environmental perspective; the environment needs to be restructured to accommodate the need of the individual who may experience difficulty. Regarding Hannah's challenge with math, the issue is not that she is unable to learn math, the issue is that the instructors are unaware of her limitations in the instructional environment and also the limitations in a fixed way that she was asked to demonstrate her knowledge. And, the issue for another student Jason, was that he was never taught the skills. So a restructure in the instructional delivery and the material might make a difference for both of these students.

Students seem to be saying that the college needs to consider different ways to accommodate and be open to involving students in such decisions. When the college views accommodation from a fixed perspective, students might feel cheated. They expressed frustrations, feelings of inability and failure as they talked about math more than any other subject. In fact, all the students in the first focus group said they had problems with math, and they had experienced failure at the different levels. Amazingly, college administrators share similar feelings about devising ways to engage students with disabilities in mathematics courses. Obviously, they must have listened and have researched to know the different subject areas where students tend to struggle. Grayson, the ADA Coordinator, also shared similar feelings and the efforts of the college to accommodate the needs of students instead of approving waivers.

We could work and do some accommodating and get some higher success rates in the English and the Writing skills but we knew the Math was becoming to be an issue. So CWCC was being progressive in their administration and working with this population so we created what was traditionally a three hour a week math class. The class met everyday—Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday. We found that students were much more successful. So we started developing this for every level of math class that we have. We even have it for college

algebra. That was twenty something years ago and we still have those classes till today. They are only for students who either have documented disability or who have unsuccessfully attempted the math with demonstrated efforts.

CWCC held a belief that accommodations somewhat guarantee academic success. When that notion did not prove true in one subject area, math, but in others, as in English and writing, the college created an alternative. The administration seemed to have adopted the social context of accommodation by adapting an environmental factor. What the administration found to be true, more than two decades earlier about the experience of students with disabilities in certain subject areas, continue to be true; the majority of students with disabilities struggle with mathematics. So, the college expanded the sections of mathematics to be inclusive of all levels of mathematics with sections that meet multiple times a week which helps with reinforcement.

Unfortunately, none of the students who participated in this study were aware of the system set in place to accommodate their needs, despite their struggles and continued failures. Students shared their struggles to overcome the challenges with math courses. Hannah said she has already failed math once while Jason and Monique had failed college algebra three times. While Hannah and Monique are finding ways to pass and move on, Jason already settled for seeking a waiver but has to wait to get the right documentation. Each of these students appeared surprised and disappointed to learn for the first time at the focus group meeting that the college established a reasonable system to help accommodate their needs. Monique's response captures their response.

I don't know about the sections that meet every day. But I think it's a good idea. This is my fourth time, I feel so stupid. Taking College Algebra four times and not passing? I passed math in high school because we repeated the concepts everyday. That was helpful know for me and I wished they did that. Nobody told me; I wished someone had told me this.

I would have taken that, passed, and moved on. Oh well...

There appears to be a breakdown in communications about what is available to support students. These students had no knowledge about a system established to help them meet their goal so they were unable to take advantage of it. Their chances of success would have increased if they knew about that system because they were sure they would have taken advantage of it. When communication is ineffective, the system for them has broken down because in this case, they failed the math multiple times. It is unclear where the breakdown exists. I found copies of the flyer in the waiting area of the DSS office.

While students agree that the accommodations that they use do work, there was no consensus on the adequacy of the accommodations. In many instances, students are responsible for negotiating their accommodations in the classroom. Negotiating classroom accommodations not only takes time and effort, the process can sometimes be daunting. The combination of the points described above has led to what students to be systemic breakdown and dysfunctional. When systems break down like this, students can often be relegated to the bottom of the barrel.

Theme 2: The bottom of the barrel

The educational system seems to divide students into two major groups, “cream of the crop” and “bottom of the barrel.” The cream of the crop is that group of students who are able to learn, comprehend, and demonstrate what is required quickly and when they are unable, they seem to have a good way to make up or hide their inefficiencies or deficiencies. This is the group that the educational system refers to as being “intelligent” according to Tammy and Monique.

A student at the bottom of the barrel, according to Tammy, falls in with that group of students who can and will learn but the process of learning and demonstrating knowledge is different. According to Monique, it takes more effort, patience, and flexibility from educators to teach and to evaluate this group of students. They require more from educators because it takes time and multiple approaches to teach, patience to ensure that concepts are learned, and the manner in which knowledge is demonstrated tends to be slower or different and can sometimes be inconsistent. Due to the amount of effort and time they require to learn, and because of their unconventional ways of learning and demonstrating knowledge, this group of students is often referred to by the educational system to as 'uneducatable' or 'slow learning disabled (SLD)' according to Monique and James. But many who are close to these students and take time to appreciate their hidden abilities consider them to be 'smart' and, therefore, blame the educational system for not recognizing their abilities.

Like the Bell curve, there is a large group of students who do not belong in either of these two extreme categories. These students are sometimes referred to as the "average" students. They tend to comprehend information and consistently demonstrate their knowledge in average ways. From their experiences within the school system Monique, Jason, and James believe that this is the group that the educational system is better prepared to teach and able to reach. In their views, educators tend to recognize and reward the few students who stand out and are able to demonstrate their abilities. The education system regards this group as the cream of the crop and they seem to be presented with the best opportunities. According to Monique, these students are often placed in Advanced Placement (AP) courses where they are presented ample

opportunities to learn. Describing the unique nature of AP classes, Monique explains,

A lot of those classes they don't give you busy work, and that's why it is easier. They give you the work, they give you study materials, they give you the book, you study or summarize what you can.

Contrasting that experience to the students at the other side of the spectrum, those at the bottom of the barrel, they are given “the busy work” and are often left to their own fate. This experience tends to be a source of frustration for the students who are relegated to the bottom of the barrel. They often are deemed inappropriate for many educational opportunities and even considered uneducatable. They crave the same educational opportunities as their peers but feel denied and are labeled as “undeserving” because of their inability to demonstrate their abilities in the specific and often limited ways in which the educational system is set to evaluate them. These students seem to belong on the ‘outside’ and are usually looking ‘in’ at the education system as if they don’t belong. These students who were identified as needing specialized services and support had feelings of being trapped at the bottom of the barrel.

Students indicated that there were different developmental standards and expectations for students with disabilities and those without. For example, participants who received exceptional student education (ESE) services in high school said college options were never discussed with them. They were unprepared for college, and had no idea what to expect or what would be expected of them when they got to college. While students in regular classes were asked questions as if college was an expectation, students with disabilities were asked why they would even consider college as an option. The treatment was that college is not a place for those at the bottom of the barrel. The following exchange between Jason and Monique explains that sentiment.

Jason: And a lot of the Special Ed students that I've seen are geared towards getting a special diploma- which is basically nothing. It's basically a certificate to say that you showed up to school for such and such amount of days.

Monique: Now they are encouraging college students to go to that next step, to consider graduate school. They do the same thing in high school with regular students. They tell them they need to go to the step. They ask them what the next step for them. They don't even ask you if they're going to college. They ask which college they're going to. They ask if they have already filled their financial aid form. They have guidance counselors, who would do that for them; who would help them dual enroll in their senior year. But with disabled students, they expect the very minimum from them.

Jason: I felt like I could go, [to college] but at the same time it wasn't laid out for me what I had to do. And they weren't exactly sure what I was going to do, or what I had to do to get to the next level. They were just kind of like, "We're just going to get you to this point and what ever you do after this is your business."

These students were clearly disappointed in the disparate expectations between high school students in regular classes and those in special education. Students who are not in special education were left to fend for themselves and figure out what will happen after high school while they take time to work with those in regular classes. Such unequal expectation was also discussed by Tedmond, one of the DSS providers.

In the early 80s students that were diagnosed with a learning disability were tracked away from college preparatory curriculum in the high schools and they did not participate in main stream stuff. And thus the message was, "you're not going to college."

Tedmond described his experience within the context of the past as if that was no longer the case. But students who just graduated from the high school shared similar stories. This indicates the sentiment has not change. He also expressed this disparity for students not just between students with and without abilities but also within the disability categories.

They changed the ESE programs to be inclusive of those students [students diagnosed with LD] and over time, they have matriculated through the public school system into the college levels. I think the same tracking is happening with students with mental health disorders. In the 80s I think the focus was on learning disabled and physically challenged students but mental disorders were kind of left out of that equation a bit. And now I think they are being brought in because we are seeing more students with mental health issues and also aspergers syndrome. Social disabilities are also becoming more apparent on campuses.

Tedmond's categorization of the brokenness is something resulting from a lack of understanding that is often expressed through tracking. The more informed and aware society is, the more inclusive it becomes. Tedmond feels the schools seem to be doing a better job at serving the needs of students with learning disabilities and the plans for them seem to be better than those students with psychological or social disabilities.

Unfortunately, little progress has been made as articulated by students with learning and physical disabilities who had just left the system and participated in this study. Things were probably worse in the 80s than what Jacque, Jason, and Danny experienced in 2005 and 2007. All three shared experiences of being tracked and marginalized. They were not informed or prepared to transition to college even though they expressed their desire to go to college. For example, Jacque said the decision to attend college and preparation for what she would need did not begin until she graduated; it was her mother who discovered that she could receive services at college.

I didn't know that CWCC had a disability program. I just knew they had smaller settings so that's why I said I wanted to come to CWCC first. I know that [the four year college] has 500 kids in a class, and I wouldn't be helped as much as I would be here with only 25 kids in a class.

Jacque and her mother, like the other students who received special education services in high school, settled for the community college first because of the class size. They understand their need for individualized support and felt those needs could only be

met in a small college environment like CWCC. They all share a sense of disappointment in a system that was supposed to help them but did not prepare them adequately and failed to provide them with the information and resources they need to access services at college. Jacque's comment of "I guess it was kind of something you had to find out on your own" captures how they all tried to resolve the disparity and lack of adequate preparation.

Time after time, students said they were told in very specific terms that they had to "outgrow" their disabilities because they will not receive any services in college. The expectations for these students were that high school was the end when it was meant to be the beginning. Especially for students who have been offered special diplomas, they stated that transitioning to adult life quickly becomes a dead end. Jason articulated this best when describing what the pre-collegiate education offer to students; he said, "I don't think its fair for kids that may learn differently to be passed off as "Oh you're going to be over here with your special diploma that basically says that you can't do anything."

Jason expressed this as a matter of equity in treatment and expectation; as a matter of social justice. For some of the students, the lower expectations from their teachers and sometimes their family led them to prepare for college later than others if they eventually go to college at all. Some of them make choices other than college for their transition. The choices that both Jessica and Monique made exemplify this. Both were married right after high school. Jessica did not attempt college until she was in her late 40s but Monique started a little earlier, in her mid 20s. And for those who matriculate directly, their decisions come much later than their peers. Jacque and Danny are good examples. Though college was not an after-thought, for them it was a step that was meant to be

considered after one stage of life is completed. It is like making sure that one foot is placed solidly on the ground before trying to lift another because of the amount of effort it takes.

Theme 3: Squeaky wheel gets the grease

This theme emerged from a student's description of the response to students whose disabilities cause them to act out and call attention to their needs. These are students with behavior difficulties that often cause disruptions to themselves as well as to others around them. Their needs cannot be easily ignored. This theme was described not only within the educational environment; students also discussed how it applies in many adult environments, especially where services are provided. At the pre-collegiate level, students who often get in trouble and cause disruption in the educational process for themselves and others, are often identified, diagnosed, and helped. Monique's comparison of her and her siblings' condition at the school best captures this sentiment.

I have a brother and sister whose disability is more prominent than mine. I look just like everyone else. I don't have the prominent disabilities. But I think that because my sibling's disabilities made them fail entire years of school and a good portion of their life, they got all the attention. For me, I did not get any help.

Monique's use of prominence as it relates to her siblings' disability may be construed as referring to the visible nature of her siblings' disabilities. That was my understanding at first. But I wanted to know the nature of her siblings' disabilities that caused them to fail for a "significant portion of the school." Monique explained, "It's ADHD for them. I think mine is more ADD and also dyslexia." Her categorization of the same condition attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (AD/HD) was interesting. Her explanation of her siblings' behaviors and failures being caused by the hyperactivity form

of the disorder was interesting. She was not hyperactive but she had similar academic struggles because she had the attentional challenges, was unable to pay attention over an extended period of time, misses details and key concepts when presented, and struggled with reading.

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorders (ADHD), according to the American Psychiatric Association and the American Academy of Pediatrics, are chronic neurological disorders that affect an individual's central nervous system and affects the individual's cognitive tasks, the ability of an individual to control impulse, social interactions, or motor control. There are three types of ADHD—Inattentive, Hyperactive, and Combined types (DSM-IV-R). It appears that Monique had ADHD-Inattentive Type (DSM-IV 314.00) and her siblings with either ADHD-Hyperactive or ADHD Combined type (DSM-IV 314.01). The issue with ADHD is not that people with ADHD are not able to pay attention; they pay attention to everything and are unable to filter extraneous stimuli to focus on what is important.

Individuals with Type I ADHD (Inattentive Type) struggle with internal stimuli; they are unable to control internal processes that affect their ability to attend to the task at hand. The manifestation of Monique's siblings (ADHD) was more external or 'prominent' in Monique's words but hers was more internal. And, because they were affected differently, the attention they received and the services offered to them were different despite similar struggles.

Because I wasn't failing horribly or getting into trouble, they didn't take a second look at me. Unlike my sister and brother, I was always very eager to learn and always very eager to speak up in class. Half of the time they were not in school and when they attended, they got in trouble. For me, I was always there but I was crying for help too but in a different way. But they were failing and I was passing. Eventually, they got pulled and placed

in a special school. But because their disability caused them to be troublesome and I was the “good one” my needs got kind of ignored. It’s kind of like the squeaky wheel gets the oil type of thing.

It appears that the behavioral manifestation of a disabling condition often gets attention and leads to some type of action at the pre-collegiate environment. Monique also needed help and attention because she was “crying for help too” but her wheels did not squeak so they did not get oiled. Students explained that when their disabling condition does not cause them to be troublesome, disruptive to a process, or the environment, or cause them to fail, the educational systems tend not to notice their needs and, more often than not, ignore their needs and their often silent ‘cries’ for help. So the needs of the “good ones” like Monique often get ignored.

I’ve always had an interest in school but no one cared. My brother and sister barely made it to high school and then they almost did not make it through high school. They worked with them and gave them lots of attention. Yeah people like me; I look just like everyone else. I don’t have the prominent disabilities. Because my siblings were up running around; they were fighting and getting suspended. They would come home and not do their work and get in fights at home and at school. But me, I would come home and I’d study, and I would study and I’d go to school and sit like the good girl and ask questions and do all my work. But you know, things were very hard for me. I didn’t get much sleep and at times I didn’t finish all the reading. Did anyone notice? Noooo I was invisible to everybody. The attention went to them and I was just here waiting for when somebody would notice.

It is unfortunate that Monique’s calls for attention to her needs were missed. She tried to bring attention to her needs; she was not getting enough sleep, she did not complete her readings, and she was talkative asking lots of questions. These were signs to her but they were not obvious as she said “did anyone notice? Noooo.” From Monique’s perspective, only those who manifest their needs overtly received attention, care, and accommodations. She was overlooked because she worked hard to be the

“good one” and might have been punished for her desires to work hard at school. In her experience which was also validated by other students, the pre-collegiate educational system tends to pay attention to those students whose actions cause disruptions to themselves and to others in the learning environment. Unfortunately, the attentions that such students get are usually at the expense of others who try to be “good” and put in efforts. The special education needs and services of those students who also need services but work extra hard to compensate often go unfulfilled. So as long as their wheels fail to squeak, the needs will not be met because only the squeaky wheels will get oiled.

In addition to having a non-hyperactive type AD/HD, Monique also has dyslexia. It was actually the dyslexia where she needed help the most. She spent an extraordinary amount of time to read and sometimes would stay up all night just to get her reading done and to complete her homework. She tried to compensate just to meet her own expectations of academic success. To her, someone should have noticed that she was struggling because she was not getting enough sleep. The reality for her was that her struggles were never noticed and, therefore, services were never provided even though she had the same diagnosis as her siblings. To her and others like her, the pre-collegiate educational system was set to rescue those who fail because of their disabilities rather than prevent those with disabilities from failing.

Consequently, many of these students have learned to work hard instead of squeaking their wheels. Failure was not an option for them though they did not know how to communicate their needs. According to Monique, “whenever you have a disability and you want to do well, yeah, you have to study more. But even with the services, you still have to work twice as hard.” Disability services and accommodations do not make school easy for students with disabilities. They do help students endure and make the challenge of school manageable. But when students work hard and are

unable to show much for their efforts because services are denied, it often complicates issues for them and sometimes may lead to other conditions. Those conditions may eventually prohibit them from attaining their educational and life goals.

For Monique, possessing ability, motivation, and the will to do well were not enough to make the grades and be successful with academics, she needed some type of accommodation that could propel her efforts and make her hard work worthwhile. Monique spent lots of hours studying so that she could compensate for her slow reading rate, a necessary skill for school that she lacks because of dyslexia. She suffered in silence not squeaking her wheels; her efforts to compensate led not only to scaring her leg, but also to insomnia. One may wonder if Monique tried to scar herself for attention. I did not follow up on this because of the raw emotions; I felt uncomfortable asking the question to clarify that even though I wished I had. But even if that was the case, she the scar was not in a noticeable spot that someone would easily notice.

Students whose wheels squeak would have either not studied because they would not stay up late at night to get the work done, they would have stayed home trying to catch up on lost sleep, or cut themselves in a conspicuous area where someone would notice. Therefore, they either would have failed for not doing the required reading, would have gotten in trouble for their absence, or would have been questioned about their struggles and possibly received counseling services. Failure, inconsistent absence, or possible self mutilation would have gotten the attention of educators and they would have given help and tried to rescue her. For those students, their wheels would have squeaked enough to get oiled. Monique's insomnia and the scar on her leg remain constant reminders of the price she paid for her wheels not squeaking enough.

Hannah recounted a similar experience.

I moved down from [another country] to Connecticut with my dad when I was in 8th grade. I had been in a blind school until then and I always did well in school. I was a straight A student. Things got hard and I didn't get the help I needed. So I spent all my time to study that I did not take time to eat well or sleep well. Well I developed anemia; I lost twenty pounds in my first quarter and was not well. I would do the same thing like you; I would fall asleep in the bathroom while taking a shower and even in class. When people are talking to me, I would just fall asleep and I am gone.

Hannah's situation seemed to have several complicated dimensions. There were multiple cultural dimensions that were at odds with each other and did not work to her advantage. First, she changed school not only from one district to another but from one country to another. She not only had to make new friends, she had to learn new a language in a completely new environment, and she moved from living with her mother whom she knew majority of her life to live with her father that she barely knew. Second, she moved from a residential school for the Blind where she was in the majority and where teachers are trained and equipped to work with students who are blind to a public school where she was in the minority because of the low incident nature of her disability.

Transition would have been hard for any 8th grader but for someone in Hannah's situation, it was even harder. Some students would have started to pick fights as a way to show their frustration and would have received attention because their wheels would have squeaked. But for Hannah, she tried to make the best of her situation and worked harder at the expense of her health. Hannah possibly experienced anxiety from transition similar to what other students would have experienced. But she handled it differently; she worked harder so she could maintain the same level of educational success she had prior to the move. Unfortunately, hard work did not get her what she needed. Even sleeping in class did not get her the attention; after all, she was not disturbing the learning

environment or the learning of others. Her wheels were not greased because they never squeaked loudly enough.

Both Hannah and Monique described how, when the needs of students with a disability failed to be recognized and addressed appropriately, they often lead to more challenges that can potentially jeopardize their learning and their standard of living. This approach of oiling the squeaky wheel was what students described as the “rescue mentality.” Monique shared her experience to illustrate this.

I have now developed insomnia from staying up for long hours trying to study. In fact, I have a big scar on my leg now that was there since 10th grade. That day, I had so much work in English class, and it took me so long to study that I stayed up all night. I was in the shower, getting ready for school after I had stayed up all night. I was shaving and I just passed out. I didn't just pass out because of one night, I had stayed up many more nights and I was busy during the day with other activities. But that day, I was so tired but didn't realize how tired I was. So, I fell and cut myself deep in my legs.

James' experience is a little different from Monique and Hannah. James' wheels did squeak but never got the grease. He needed help, squeak his wheels but no one seemed to notice; instead, he was categorized and labeled and was pushed to the side. If only his mother knew how to make demands and squeak the wheels, someone would have tested James and they would have realized he had undiagnosed disabilities that were making him act out. He was not diagnosed but was labeled “a trouble maker who is emotionally disturbed.” James' wheels squeaked but he was unsure how to call for attention to his needs. Rather than getting his wheel greased, the school system discounted his call for help. He eventually dropped out of school in the 10th grade.

The lack of attention and greasing of the wheels for these students was not limited to the pre-collegiate environment. Similar experiences exist even at the collegiate level

but in different perspective. While at the pre-collegiate environment, the diagnosis does not matter as long as the disorder does not manifest outwardly to be disruptive; the college uses the information in the diagnosis and record to plan for services. At the college level, service providers seek to understand how to meet the identified needs that are documented. The issue at the college level, according to these students, is that service providers operate under the assumption that when conditions are not documented, they do not exist.

Unlike the pre-collegiate environment, disruptions at the college level are not tolerated and are handled differently. All students, whether or not they have diagnosed disabilities, are held to the same level of behavioral expectations. Therefore, when students whose disability may cause disruptive behaviors come to college, they are expected to have learned the skills to cope with their frustrations and how to manage their behaviors. CWCC holds students to the student conduct code whether or not they have a disability. Therefore while the college level will not condone inappropriate behavior, the disability office takes an active role in helping to monitor and educate the students whom they feel might get in trouble. It requires coordinated efforts at the college level and the disability office at CWCC sometimes takes an active role in the process. Tedmond explains,

Violation of student conduct code at the college level flows over into the police department and the discipline side. We are dealing with a whole different element. And how to deal with that and knowing that that student has a disability that may need to be monitored more on campus may be a little different; we are involved.

Coordinating the effort requires care to maintain the integrity and confidentiality of the student, yet hold the students accountable at the same level. Tammy explains the

precautions that the DSS office takes to uphold expectations yet meeting the needs of the students. She explains:

As far as the judicial office, I usually have them sign a release, and it doesn't say judicial office, but I share it in case we are going to have any problems. I also have a release that is for the police because our campus police are responsible for many things including clearing rooms in cases of emergencies."

The DSS office already has plans of engagement in cases where a student with a disability may get in trouble with the judicial affairs office. They make all students sign a release to discuss issues as needed to the benefit of the student. The office tries to balance the need to be supportive with the students' rights to confidentiality. Students are encouraged to sign releases that will allow exchange of information to their benefits. Permission to share information is not only restricted to students with a history of conduct related problems, but for all students in cases of emergencies. This seems to be a positive spin to the squeaky wheel getting greased in cases of emergencies. It is good that there are collaborations across campus using the expertise of different areas to provide the services and support that the students need.

The different adult service environments for people with disabilities tend to be set up to rescue in a lot of cases and, only when the wheels squeak, will get students rescued and be offered services. Monique described how her need for services went unattended until she was on the brink of hurting herself. She was already struggling in college because of her diagnosed ADHD and challenges of her undiagnosed dyslexia. But as long as her husband, whom she considered her friend and confidant, was around, she was fine and could deal with the challenges of education. But when her husband was deployed to Afghanistan, she felt her world spiraled out of control. She recounts, "I

didn't have anyone to talk to. I didn't have my family or his family. I didn't have a counselor." As she described it, the deployment of her husband and the lack of support from families swept her into a deep depression and paranoia. She said it was only when it was obvious that she was in danger to herself, when her "wheel began to squeak" that the military realized she needed help and provided resources to allow her to see a psychiatrist.

They [the adult service environment] don't do that until you're ready to kill yourself. I'm telling you it's serious. I was so depressed and I could barely leave my house. I had to be at the point that I was just not going to be here in order for them to say "maybe let's do medicine for you."

Monique's situation needed attention but until her situation posed danger, she was not noticed or offered support. Even then, the solution seems to be a "band aid" solution to a serious condition. She received short term counseling and medication only for the time that her husband was away. As soon as her husband returned from his deployment, the military stopped her services. Neither the Military nor the medical environment realized that she continued to need help and lacks the resources. So her struggles with school and with life continue.

Not all students with disabilities will exhibit disturbing behaviors that will call attention, at least not at the initial stage. If services and support in the form of medication and counseling are not provided to Monique, her condition may worsen, and it is only because her wheels were not squeaking or not squeaking enough to be noticed.

Unfortunately many students do not understand the type of help and the level of support for which they qualify until they see someone else. They may not even know the types of resources that may be available. For Monique, she said she has been to different offices on campus to tell her story but nobody seemed to know how to help or direct her. It may

be in the way she describes her situation or the fact that she was approaching the wrong people. Students like Monique tend to expect more probing and intuition from the service providers so that when they describe what they experience, the service providers will understand and offer potential solutions. For them, their wheels may not be squeaking as hard as others but their wheels also need to be greased.

Theme 4: Disability is a mixed bag:

This theme explains the general notion that students with disabilities only have deficits. Students made efforts to demystify that notion so that their deficits be balanced with their strengths. They feel that their documentation may not provide a full picture of them that service providers need to understand them and their needs. These students are aware that they have strengths in some areas, but, to them, the educational environments tend to focus on their deficits. They feel people often forget that disability is a “mixed bag” because the areas of challenge tend to be expressed more frequently at the expense of areas where they do very well. Understanding that disability is a mixed bag will further the understanding of these students as individuals so that they are defined by their disabilities. This is a typical feeling of many students with disabilities. All the students who participated expressed this in one form or another. They acknowledge that while they do very well in one area, they tend to do very poorly in other areas as articulated by Jessica.

I have a fourth grade math level but I can do income taxes. My brother calls me over the phone and I do the tax over the phone in my head. I don't use any turbo tax or anything like that. But there are many things I cannot do and it is funny because it does not make sense to many people. For instance, I can reformat a computer and do a lot of things on the computer, but yet, I don't know how to download music. I have a major spelling disability but I read at the college level and I have great comprehension. Yes, I do things backwards.

It appears that the processes such as reading and calculating may create challenges and, thus, people may not see that Jessica can complete the meaningful tasks for which the processes are taught. Jessica is able to complete the task (completing taxes or comprehension) as well as others and even better for many. Students feel it is important to realize that having a disability in one area does not limit them in all areas. Hence, it is important for educators, especially instructors, to understand that disability is a mixed bag and that challenges should be seen for what they are. It is important then for educators and service providers to work with students to identify their areas of strength to help determine what accommodations can accomplish.

A first hand experience proves this point. Danny struggles with academics, especially reading. He expressed the difficulties he has with reading and writing as a result of his Cerebral Palsy. He impressed me with his knowledge of sports (professional and college level). He asked where I go to school and as soon as I told him, Colorado State University, he knew everything about the Rams, the different sports, especially the football team, their history, and their accomplishments during the current season. He was able to talk about the star players by names and the positions they play and the coaches that work with them. He even made a prediction of the NCAA champions this year with certainty. I had to admit that what became very obvious within the first minute of the discussion was that I knew very little about sports. Danny did not make me feel bad but tried to help me. He asked questions to help him understand what I knew which was very little. And when he realized I was less informed about football, basketball, and Olympic sports, he helped change the subject to something with which I was more comfortable. As soon as he realized that I enjoy soccer, he returned to sports and we discussed women

soccer from the school where I work. He knew a lot about professional soccer and world soccer. He even told me how good the Nigerian (my home country) soccer team was and compared them to other soccer teams from different countries. To say that I was impressed would be an understatement.

Students know that while they may have challenges in some areas, they have strengths which need to be acknowledged. Rhonda states that “having a disability is like having a one track mind” where someone with a disability can do some things “really really well, but others really really bad.” But Jessica responds that the fact is that they can do “a lot of things really really well and a couple of things not so well” but people tend to emphasize those areas where they can’t do well and ignore the things they can do well. For them it is important for people, especially service providers, to understand that disability is a mixed bag.

Theme 5: College is an opportunity of a life time:

Many high school students have college as their post high school goal. Few of them make it for one reason or another. All the students who participated in this study had their goal of post high school to include college but many had to wait for several years and then return to realize that dream. Students involved in this research expressed appreciation for their presence on a college campus. College is a life time opportunity that they are not willing or cannot afford to take for granted. From those who matriculated directly from high school to those who returned later in their middle age, they all enjoyed being a part of the college community and being on a college campus, in particular, at the Citywide Community College.

Monique, though young, but did not matriculate immediately after high school

and Jason who matriculated directly from high school, share similar feelings and expressions of college being an opportunity of a life time. When Monique expressed her frustration with watching their peers take college for granted through their actions and attitudes, she said, “They're just here to get their little piece of paper and then leave.” Jason concurred and responded, “Yeah and to just get their financial aid checks.” To these students, while they are trying to take advantage of the opportunity presented to them, the actions of some of their peers leads them to believe that their peers are more interested in taking advantage of the system rather than taking advantage of the opportunity.

Those who returned years after high graduation share the feelings expressed by Jessica, “extremely lucky” to be on a college campus. They feel they have been given the opportunity to realize their dream. For someone like Jessica, college was something she could only imagine because for all practical purposes, it was a dream she would not realize. Reminiscing about her desire to attend college as a high school student, she explained,

This is something I wanted to do when I was in high school. I used to just drive by the campus here and just look at it. It was my dream to be here. I wanted to go here so bad. But I didn't understand the process. I was 18 then and nobody thought someone like me belong here. My family will not even support me and the teachers just wanted me out of their hair.

Jessica's desire for college education was neither supported by her family nor encouraged by her teachers. She had the dream of belonging to the campus like others but her dreams were for naught; she would not experience college until later on in life. The impression she was given was that college was not for someone like her. She expressed her desire to her family by taking what she thought might help her get into

college, the financial aid papers. Her father threw the papers away. While the school could not wait to get rid of Jessica, her father's response was even more discouraging. She said the frustration from the lack of support for her dream to continue her education led her to seek achievement in another way. She said, "I didn't know what else to do so I got married two weeks after I graduated." A similar experience was shared by Monique who, despite demonstrated ability and interest, was not encouraged to pursue college. Both of these students got married right after their high school graduation. Monique had the opportunity to return much earlier than Jessica, however.

Returning to the same school she used to drive past and looked from the outside, she was now an insider at age 50 and she was not taking that opportunity for granted.

But it's like I tell some of the students when I see them goofing off here, I say 'look you have a second chance; you can drop out come back. I don't.' Some of them have actually made fun of me for studying too much. And I said "I don't have a second chance. I'll be 50 years old next month. I have to do this now. This is important to me."

Jessica was determined to cling to the opportunity that she longed for when she was 18 but finally came to her when she is almost 50. Though this is her first opportunity at college, she said because of her age and other circumstances, it was the only chance she has and will try not to lose it. In her words, she does not "have a second chance." James expressed similar thoughts; he said he was running against time and for his goal of working with middle school age students. He wants to get done quickly so he can move on. It is interesting for James because he was not even interested in college because he never thought of himself as a "college material." But now that he is in college and doing very well, he can dream and he wants to realize his dreams quickly. He remains focused and eager. Now that Monique finally made it back to college, she would fight against all

odds to remain and complete her degree. This is a goal that she and her peers knew she could achieve but the adults who surrounded her were not so sure and were not encouraging. These students are all determined to take advantage of the opportunity of college.

These students are no longer outsiders looking into the college campus; they are part of the college experience. These students also feel that because they consider their presence on a college campus an opportunity of a life time, they are willing to work hard so they can be successful and graduate. Therefore, they accept hard work as the norm even when it means working harder than their peers for lesser grades. They said “people just don’t understand” what they endure just to make it from one semester to the next. Jessica states that it is not uncommon for students with disabilities to spend twice the amount of time as other students but have less to show for their efforts. But when they actually do earn better grade than their peers, she said they like to flaunt it. Jessica used a specific example to illustrate this point.

I took prep English last semester and I was in the lab all the time. We were required to put 15 hours in the lab and we punch in each time we went there. At the end of the semester, I had 72 hours. I did very well in the class; my grade was an A. And he [*a peer in the class*] said ‘his C is just as important as my A.’ I said ‘Not to me, its not. I knew I worked for that A; my extra work paid off.’ I didn’t want him to put down what I really worked for.

The example above shows that students like Jessica will not allow anyone to minimize her efforts especially when there is a system that recognizes and rewards hard work and persistence. As she stated, Jessica spent almost three times the minimum required hours and for another student to compare an average grade to her hard earned excellent was not something she was willing to accept. They feel many students without

disabilities have no idea or understanding that those with disabilities have to work extra hard and usually are highly committed to their own expectations. For them college is an opportunity of a life time that they will not allow anyone to minimize.

These students also want to be a part of the college life experience; they want to be engaged like their peers. However, there seem to be rules or policies in place that minimize such opportunity to be engaged. Some of them were very involved in high school and they would like the opportunity to continue their co-curricula or extra-curricular involvement. Hannah, Monique and Jason said they were very involved in extra curricular and after school activities while in high school. Hannah was in the school's show choir, student government, and French club. Jason was involved with the school sports and in student government. Monique said she was in as many as twenty six after school activities not at one time but through her high school experienced. Some of the activities in which she was involved were cheerleading squad, debate team and also on with the dance group. James played football and basketball before he dropped out of school for behavioral issues.

The experiences for each of these students have changed since college. They are not as involved as they used to be. James has removed himself completely from any co-curricular activities, he watches sports but is no longer engaged in any and seem not interested either. While Hannah and Jason continue their involvement, they have lessened the amount of time they spend on any extra curricular activities and they are not involved every semester. Jason is still engaged in campus life and with the student government and Hannah attends the international student organization meetings occasionally but finds time to sing more often. She said,

I sing in the community choir that they have here on Tuesdays. I'm the only student, and everyone else is from the community but it's really cool. That actually helps me get it together because once a week I get to go sing for two hours. And that's actually fun.

Hannah seems to enjoy her involvement with this choir and she said it is easy to be involved in this choir because they don't have strict rules for being involved. Monique, on the other hand, who seemed to be the most involved in high school, is no longer as involved for different reasons.

I tried to get involved with the MESA program. It's for minorities including all ethnicities and women who are interested in math, science and the engineering field. They help you and they have an entire center there. And you can connect with other students and get involved. It is very good. But in order to be involved you have to have a minimum amount of hours that you use the lab per week. . . . And the hours that they're open are not really good for me. If you can come at night, that would be great. For me, I'm in class all day and I have to put in time to study and talk to my teachers. Now I am also married so I have to go home, fix dinner for my husband, clean and study. I don't have time to be trying to make up hours over there. That's the only reason I am not involved." You know my husband is kind enough to have me make school my full time job, I have to treat him right and get what he needs to give him strength to do the work to keep roof over our heads.

Despite Monique's interest to be involved in academic related clubs, she is unable because of the realities in her life. It is obvious she wants to be involved but she cannot because of the policies that she considered unfair for her situation. She appears to still struggle with her decision. While Monique seems accepting of the fact that she is excluded from something she wants, needs, and will benefit her, it is not easy and it does not sound comforting to her. This is a type of choice that many students like Monique face because of rules and policies that are established without thinking of the potential exclusion they can create.

Service learning and student volunteerism is an opportunity available to all

students at the Citywide Community College. Students with disabilities want to be involved in this type of opportunity whether or not it is part of their curriculum. It presents an opportunity for students to have the hours recorded on their transcripts. None of the students talked about the benefits of volunteer hours on their transcripts; they seem to be seeking opportunities to give back to their community, especially the DSS office. The fact remains that many of them cannot because of the life choices they made years back. With family and job related demands on their time, they have limited time to devote to college activities such as volunteerism.

College is an opportunity of a life time; something that all of these students longed for and finally are able to realize. There is more to college than the diploma which many of them are happy will come. Students with disabilities, like other students, want to be involved and engaged in the college activities to enrich their college experience. For these students to fully benefit from college, they need to be engaged in all aspects of the experience, not just the academics. But they are unwilling to sacrifice the academic success because to them, this is an opportunity of a lifetime that they cannot wait to realize.

Theme 6: Not disabled enough:

Students who participated in this research, including those with visible disabilities but with comorbid conditions that are invisible, feel the process for determining accommodations tend to suggest that they are “not disabled enough” to warrant the accommodations they request. This is especially true when their conditions and the potential effects are not documented. A greater need to verify that one is really disabled and impaired in a major life activity permeates the entire adult environment where people

with disabilities seek services. Invisible disabilities pose challenges to those who live with them because they are, by nature, hidden and their implications unseen, though real for the individuals who live with the functional limitations (Madaus & Madaus, 2001). Determining eligibility and making accommodation decisions for conditions resulting from invisible disabilities pose even greater challenges for disability service providers, especially in the adult environments where they rely heavily on the expertise of third party providers for clear and evidence based documentation.

Several of the students shared frustrating experiences across adult agencies where, though their experiences are real, they felt there seemed to be little that the system could do for them. They are unable to provide evidence to suggest that they are “disabled enough” to qualify for services. Adult agencies are always looking for concrete and unequivocal evidence that point to a specific condition, potential impairment resulting from such, and reasonable accommodations that can alleviate the impairment so that the individual will have equal access to participate. In the postsecondary environment, for example, students will not be provided services if they are unable to obtain necessary documentation or when the documentation fails to include and provide support for specific accommodations. Though the experience may be real, the students is then determined not to be “disabled enough” to receive specific accommodations.

Monique shared an ongoing bruising under her legs resulting from her height. She said she is so short that when she sits in the chairs in the classroom, her legs hang because her legs are not long enough to touch the floor. But she said she is “just too tall (4ft 11 in)” than what is considered disabled (4ft 10 in). Therefore, she is not disabled even though she continues to feel the effect of her short legs. This seems to be a painful

subject for Monique but the students found a way to amuse themselves with this notion of “not disabled enough.”

Monique: Isn't being short a disability?

Jason: I think it is but if you are in a chair, it does not matter how short or tall you are, people look down at you any way [He laughs].

Hannah: Well for me it is an advantage. I have a friend and we see the same amount, but she's farther from the ground. At least I'm down here. When we both fall, she will feel it more than I do [She laughs].

Monique: But you don't fall every day you come to school. It is not an advantage when you feel the pain each day you go somewhere. I asked my teacher if there are any seats I can use so my feet can reach the floor. I take all my classes in the same building and I'm up here and my feet are dangling. I dangle my feet all day and the inside of my legs rubs the chair and my legs get bruised. I go home and have bruises on my legs but I can't show anyone to tell them what I am talking about.

Interviewer: Did you try to talk to DSS office?

Monique: No. I went online to see how short you have to be to be considered a little person. At least if I had that, I can go measure myself and show them the paper from the internet. I found out that it is 4'10". And I'm four feet ten and a half inches. There, I am too tall by ½ inch. But I would assume that someone who was much shorter than me would say, "What are you complaining about? You're tall." And for me, when I go home my legs are bruised and you can see it on the inside of my legs. My husband notices them because he sees it and says "What happened what's wrong?" And for some reason he continually asks me but it is always because of the chairs. I know I'm getting heavier and stuff, but the chairs are pressing against the bottoms of my thighs and it is really painful to sit in chairs.

Even if they left a wood block in my class that I could put my feet on, that would do and I don't have to go through this pain. I am too tall to get help because you can't see me and think I am short but I am too short for the chairs in school. I don't have the paper to show that I am a midget either.

This is an interesting conversation that quickly changed from something that provides amusement to something of serious nature with serious ramifications. Jason and Hannah use their own disability and experience to describe that being short may be an

advantage or that it does not matter. Monique changed the discussion to a more serious issue when it is to someone's disadvantage. She wants something done but, because her bruises are located in a place where she is not willing to show as proof and that her research did not give any hope of potential help, she decides to just deal with it and continue to suffer in silence. The fact that she shared this in the focus group suggests that she wants something done but she is not sure how to proceed. There appears to be a lack of confidence in what the DSS can do to help Monique's situation or a lack of trust to discuss an issue such as this. She had an idea of what might work but is unwilling to broach the issue with those who could help her. This unwillingness to approach the office with this issue may be the result of the requirement that students provide concrete documentation to support their requests. Since she does not have concrete evidence to show the DSS office that she is disabled (meets the height requirement and no documentation to support), she is "not disabled enough" to receive services.

Many times, students are unwilling to make a request if they have been made to feel that they are "not disabled enough" and are therefore not qualified for services. Monique shared her experience and frustration with her inability to provide needed documentation for invisible conditions.

I have always had disabilities but the DSS did not trust that I did. I went to them three times and begged for help but they could not help me. I went there and told them the problems I was having with reading and attention and asked how they can help me. They said they could not but told me how much the test was. I left but came back again and asked if there was a system that can test me or if there was anybody that can help pay. So since I can't afford that test they told me, "Sorry we can't help you." For a long time, for the first two or three semesters I was in college, I couldn't get any help. Then I got some documentation and then I got some help but not the one I really really need, for my books. I want the books on tape.

There appears to be an issue with confidence in the how the DSS office deal with undocumented conditions and their use of professional judgment in determining appropriate accommodations. Monique made efforts at getting help with the right people but she was told she could not be helped because her condition was not documented, she was disabled enough to get the paper but the paper was not comprehensive enough to include the very accommodation she needs and requests. She was told what she needs to do and how she can go about it but she had no resources to obtain the documentation and was not directed to any resource where she could get her condition documented. She thought her constant appearance at the office to plead her case might make someone in the office work with her but, for three semesters, there was nothing that could be done because she was not disabled enough to get the documentation that will tell the college she needs accommodations accessing her text. She was convinced she needed help but the issue was the lack of resources because in her words, “we couldn’t afford insurance to get documentation.”

For years, Monique could not access services because she “was not disabled enough.” Her condition worsened and was able to get some documentation with the help of the Military. That documentation was enough to make her eligible for services at CWCC. Unfortunately, her documentation was not comprehensive enough to qualify her for the accommodation she said she really need. She explains,

My doctor only gave me the test for the ADD part but not the dyslexia. The documentation that she [psychiatrist] did give me said that I have ADD and bi-polar. But that only qualifies me for certain things. It qualifies me for extra time on my tests, but not for books on tape. I talked to one lady at the DSS office and she said, "Sorry, you can have the extra time on your tests but it's impossible for me to let you have the reading stuff, because it costs too much. And you have to have the proper documentation to have the books on tape or whatever. So she didn't want

to help me.

It seems to be a never ending story for Monique. She elected to be labeled in high school so she did not get tested beyond what she had in elementary school. Her struggles with academic continue in college but because there was no evidence of her disability condition (documentation), she did not qualify for services. When she finally was able to obtain some documentation, she still could not get what she really need. What she really need is books on tape to help her with the challenges of dyslexia. She did indicate that one of her disabilities was documented by a psychiatrist, a medical professional who was able to diagnose and treat psychiatric disability. But the medical professional was unable to test for reading disorders or diagnose dyslexia. She is back to continue to face her struggles because she was not disabled enough to qualify for the books on tape. The DSS office would not provide books on tape because there are costs associated with that accommodation and because Monique's documentation did not specify that as a recommended accommodation.

It was interesting to watch and listen to the students in the group as they tried to help Monique get what she needed. They all believed she needed the books on tape and wanted to help her. They started to brainstorm and make suggestions on how Monique might be able to get the documentation. Hannah suggested that Monique check with local psychologists that have sliding scales. To that suggestion, Monique responded, "Yeah but sliding scales? I can't even pay my rent." To her, sliding scale was not a viable option because she has no money to pay. I also tried to ask questions that might lead her to potential resources.

I asked if any of the students was aware of the any adult agency such as the Vocational Rehabilitation Services (VR) and how they could help. Monique has never heard of them and wondered how much she would have to pay be a client. Hannah and Jason, both with visible disabilities, were aware of VR services and are clients. Jason informed Monique that a VR counselor comes to the DSS office weekly and takes new clients. Monique seemed excited about the possibility and promises to follow up to see if she can get help. Monique wanted to the DSS office to understand and believe her that she is just not disabled, but that she is disabled enough to qualify for books on tape. But the system seemed inflexible and unaccommodating for her situation.

When it appears as if students are unable to obtain the information they need to document their need for certain accommodations, they tend to do what they have gotten accustomed to doing, “deal with it.” Because the impact of a disability can only be explained by the individual with the disabling condition, it is important to listen to what those individuals might try to explain and try to work with the system to support that individual.

“Deal with it” is the statement these students expressed in the most dichotomous way. They feel comfortable to ‘deal with it’ when the issue is with the limitations imposed by their condition. For example, Jason said, “I want to do something besides what I’m doing, but I know I can’t. So I have to deal with it.” In this situation, Jason understands the limitations imposed on him because of his disability and he was ok with that limitation. To him, he is disabled enough to know there are certain tasks he will not be able to accomplish independently. There are other instances when students with

disabilities have to 'deal with it' because they have learned and developed coping strategies that work.

My disability is not something that would make my learning at a college impossible but it makes it difficult and it's something that other people don't have to deal with. At the same time I feel that so many disabled students have been taught to just push through. So they learned to cope with mechanisms which may have helped in the past to help them push through elementary school and high school. But once you get to college it's a different story. (Monique)

The reality as expressed here by Monique is that students with disabilities are able to accomplish the tasks required to be successful in college but it will take a lot of time, energy, and determination. In addition, it will take different strategies than they were used to. For students with disabilities, it appears they have to have a bag full of strategies to try in different environments because they are forced to, in Monique's words, "just push through." Even then, however, the strategies that they developed in the past may either fail or not be inappropriate for a different environment. For these students who are in college, the strategies they used to push through in elementary or high school will not work. So dealing with it may be difficult. They may not be disabled enough before they arrived on the college campus, the challenges brought to them and their lack of appropriate strategies make them more disabled. But then, they may not have the type of documentation that the school needs in order to provide services and support or the resources to seek them. There is a big price to pay when accommodations are not granted and services are not provided. The difference, as Monique states, is that accommodations make a great deal of difference between "just passing and doing extremely well" in college.

Section Three: Research Questions

The following four research questions guided the study concerning the requirements and use of disability documentation for eligibility and accommodation decisions on one community college campus:

1. What is the purpose of disability documentation?
2. What pieces of information are essential to be included in disability documentation?
3. How do disability service providers use disability documentation to make eligibility and accommodation decisions?
4. What are the reasons behind requiring differing documentation based on disability types?

Research Question One: What is the Purpose of Disability Documentation?

Research question number one focused on the perceptions of different groups and individuals about the purpose for requiring disability documentation and the role it plays in the of disability service delivery process.

There is a common consensus with all participants (students, service providers and the compliance officer) that there are multiple reasons why a disability must be documented and why the college must have full and complete documentation. Students with disabilities perceive disability services at CWCC as an eligibility service reserved for only those students who qualify. Therefore, the documentation that students with disabilities provide help in the process of determining eligibility for support services and accommodations. The most important reason identified by all is that the information contained in the documentation assists service providers in executing the essential

functions of their job and helps them to assure equity within their environment. The essential functions of the DSS providers are to make eligibility determinations and ascertain reasonable and appropriate level of support and services.

The professionals who work with students with disabilities and the students themselves agree that the purpose of disability documentation is to determine eligibility for services. In Tedmond's views, "*students present documentation to be able to participate in our programs.*" Grayson perceives the purpose of documentation is "*to actually verify that there is a disability, what that disability is, and what type accommodations should be granted as a result.*" These professionals, who make decisions on behalf of the college, want to be sure that only students who qualify for services based on supporting evidence will be made eligible.

Students also agree that the purpose for requiring documentation is to determine their eligibility for services. They agree with the requirement and feel that it is important for them to provide documentation to the DSS office as proof if and when they request services. Jessica explained it in a general sense, "*they make us have the documentation to prove that we have that disability*" but Jacque was more specific. Jacque said she provided her documentation to the office "*to make sure I really had the learning disability and to make sure I wasn't saying that just so I could get support.*" To all the students, documenting their disability and making the information available to the DSS providers is reasonable and it makes sense.

Another identified purpose for requiring documentation is to provide guidance for service providers to select personalized accommodations that meet the needs of the individual student. Therefore, disability documentation serves to enlighten the service

provider so that the decisions about the scope of service and support will be specific and individualized for the students. The decisions are not capricious. Tammy reads the documentation and uses the information it contains to “assign services; to see and understand where difficulties might be, and to see if I think that there might be issues.” Using a specific example of a student with aspergers syndrome and how documentation helps to better understand and determine level of support, Tammy explained:

And I use it as I said before if I think that this is going to be an issue. The latest student with aspergers came here in August. He is brilliant; a valedictorian at a very competitive private school here in town. He operates at the genius level but has low frustration level. During my first meeting with him and his mom, he went into one of his episodes. I did not understand it much but after reading about his low frustration level in the documentation, then I understood. Some of his actions made sense. The documentation talks about laying things out for him so he will not feel overwhelmed. That makes sense in picking classes and how far apart the classes will need to be. He is doing well so far; he has not had another such episode.

In order that services will be personalized, service providers need to know how the disability affects the individual student so that services can be tailored to their individual needs without giving advantage. Experience with the student at times can confirm and further explain what the documentation contains. In the example above, Tammy was able to understand the student’s needs and put support and safeguards in place.

Documentation can also serve as a road map for service providers because the information it contains provides justifications for their decision. Tedmond’s view of documentation is that it provides “a road map and serves as a guide to what can be done for the student.” An aspect of this roadmap is understanding specific needs of the students and how to help the student “transition and assimilate into the school system and

connect with other departments” according to Tedmond. Due to the myriad conditions that may result from disabilities and other personal and environmental factors that may affect how the different students can and will deal with the conditions, service providers are not able to predict specific accommodations that will work for specific conditions. The fact that service providers are not treating the disabling conditions but rather, identifying environmental barriers, documentation from each student help them in their decision making process.

In the same light, Tonia expressed that documentation provides the “ticket” that guarantees services for students who qualify. When information in the documentation is clear, specific, and supported, students are guaranteed the services that will help them be successful.

Without the documentation students cannot receive services but once we get the documentation we need to be sure that they get the things they need to be successful [Tonia].

Grayson wants clear and defensible statements in the documentation before the college will consider specific accommodations and support services.

For example, we don't provide tutoring for our students with disabilities unless their documentation specifically says that. Un-timed testing, assistance with writing, readers, or other types of accommodations do have to be specified in the documentation for us to provide them.

Students agree that documentation serves as a guide for determining the scope of services that can be personalized. However, their expressions carry more of a negative overtone, especially students whose specific needs were not adequately documented and their accommodation needs not clearly stated. Monique's greatest challenge is reading, a functional limitation resulting from her dyslexia. She said the extra time she is granted on a test can be helpful, but often she does not need extra time. She said, “I have ADD.

But that only qualifies me for certain things. It qualifies me for extra time on my tests, but not for books on tape.” She finds the opportunity to take her exams in the testing center to be extremely helpful. What she needs the most is the alternate text conversion (books on tape) but because her documentation did not state that, she has not been able to access that service.

Jason also feels that because his need for course substitution was not documented his request for math substitution was denied.

I have a problem dealing with math. I have a math learning disability. But it’s really not documented through my documentation through high school. Even though I was in the ESE math classes there was no specific math documentation to be able to say that I have a problem doing math.

Those students perceive the use of the documentation to determine scope of service as a gate keeping mechanism rather than something that can lead service providers to better understand and provide needed services. But service providers are careful about accommodations with huge associated resources. They are well aware of these challenges and they seem to struggle with the decision but, according to Tedmond, service providers represent the college and they have to carry out the wishes of the college.

CWCC has decided that for cost services, things that cost money for us to provide for example a reader a writer, a tutor, books on tape, and so on, unless that’s part of their recommended accommodations we will not provide. Again, some challenges with documentation would be that student would then not be eligible for something that we think they might need so then we would have to send them for re-evaluation at that point.

There is no doubt that the information in the documentation provided by students, guides the decision on individualized accommodations and services. There are obvious problems with some of the students’ documentation. The lack of useful and supportive

information in the documentation creates challenges for not only the students but also for the providers who work with them. Students tend not to get necessary access and appropriate documentation, and service providers have no access to third party information that they can use to base their decisions. Therefore, for students with detailed documentation, their accommodations are personalized but for students whose documentation is not detailed and specific, not all their accommodations are personalized; they get the general accommodations.

Another purpose for requiring disability documentation is to help introduce the student to the service provider and help the service provider understand the student in context. The impact of any disabling condition varies based on the background, experience, and other factors for each individual. Both service providers and students believe that documentation provides the lens through which service providers can view and understand the student.

. . . . More important to us here on a daily basis is to understand the students' learning needs. There are many different areas that students come to us they come to us with learning disabilities, physical disabilities, mental disabilities and the documentation helps us understand what their challenges are that allows us to help and advise them students to the services that we have here on campus [Tedmond].

In my opinion, disability documentation tells you what we've done, it tells you what grade of disability we have, it tells you how we learn and understand. Basically it gives you the overall picture of our life support so far so that you know the changes that may happen in our lifetime because of our disability [Danny].

Both of the quotes above explain the role and purpose of documentation. Service providers view documentation as helping them to understand the students and to determine how established services at the college can be used to support the needs of the students. Students, on the other hand, believe that documentation can be a way to

introduce them to service providers and might help develop supportive and meaningful relationships. To both providers and students, documentation can be used to see the student as a person with many characteristics, traits, and abilities and not just as a person with a disability.

Service providers and college officials also identified legal obligation or requirements as a purpose for requiring disability documentation. For example, Grayson, the ADA Coordinator, who makes policy related accommodations said, “when it comes to course substitution, course waivers, or waiving any state mandated test, I feel legally, ethically, and academically responsible that I need very specific data and information in writing.” For Grayson, it is an accountability measure. Tedmond feels similarly considering his role as a college official. He said:

Probably the global reason for requiring documentation is that, it is required by law and we are looking at federal, state and college requirements. So the larger global look at the purposes is to abide by the laws that are currently on the books.

While Tammy’s views for the purpose of documentation seem to align with those expressed by others, she expressed a deeper sense of accountability and monitoring. This may be because of her role as the director of the program.

Another purpose is to meet the state audits. We have to prove if we spend money on a student on an interpreter or whatever that we have to prove that that person has a disability if we are ever audited. I have never been audited but I know several colleges that have been audited. I hear that the audits are very thorough so we have to make sure that we have documentation to support our reasons for the services we offer.

The findings suggest that there are philosophical, pragmatic, and legal reasons for requiring disability documentation. What needs to be included in the documentation that students provide was the focus of the second research question.

Research Question Two: What Pieces of Information are Essential to be Included in Disability Documentation?

The question about essential information to be included was asked to help understand what service providers need to make decisions and how they use the information they receive. As discussed in Chapter 2, one of the major issues facing DSS providers across the nation is a lack of common understanding or agreement on what disability documentation must contain. In fact, the Association of Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD) created a work group charged with addressing this issue. The work group created and published a “best practice model” to replace the guidelines that another work group created in 1997. The best practice model contains seven elements considered essential in any good documentation guidelines.

The seven essential elements addressed are (1) the credential of the professional making the diagnoses; (2) clear diagnosis and diagnostic statement; (3) description of the methods of evaluation and the instruments used; (4) effect of the condition on the student in a learning environment; (5) potential environmental impacts on the condition and any possible changes that may occur; (6) description of auxiliary aids, previous accommodations and their effectiveness; and (7) any possible recommendation from the professional.

What the DSS providers at CWCC say they look for and consider essential are analogous to AHEAD’s endorsed best practice model. It appears that all the professionals (DSS providers and compliance officer) are aligned in what they consider essential for acceptable documentation. They strongly hold that the source of the documentation must be legitimate and the professional providing the information be

qualified in the particular area of disability. Tedmond's expression of the importance of the source of documentation seems to capture the feelings of all three the best.

What we look for right off the bat is the credential of the person doing the report. We require that they be a licensed clinical psychologist, school psychologist, medical doctor, licensed therapist, etc. We want them to be qualified in the disability area that they diagnose.

It is important that the diagnosing personnel be determined qualified in the specific area they diagnose. It appears that the qualification of the professional providing the documentation determines whether or not the specific accommodation or policy adjustment request that the student is making will even be considered. Grayson explains,

Frequently I am looking to see if it is a licensed or certified person. If it's a licensed professional I'm not there to second guess him or her. My job is predominately to make sure that all of the requirements for our substitutions or waivers are met.

Grayson sees herself as representing the college. She wants to ensure that the decisions made on behalf of the college are objective, defensible, and will not put the student with a disability at an advantage over others.

Having a qualified person provide the documentation not only serves the need of the service provider, it also provides a strong support and defense for the service providers especially when the instructional personnel question specific accommodations for students with invisible disabilities. Tamara used an example to thoroughly describe this:

I have a phenomenally intelligent instructor who tells me that there is no such thing as ADD or ADHD. He said it is something psychologists dreamed up. And you know this is not true; though this is a very very bright science instructor. The instructor tells me if I see someone in a wheelchair I know they have a real disability, but how do I know when these people come into my room? And I tell him because I tell you that and it is in the documentation. How do you know that that's a good psychologist he asked. I said, well I don't know, I go on faith and I trust

the state board of licensure. I believe the state would not license them if they are not qualified.

Clear diagnosis and diagnostic statement is another major piece of information identified as essential by participants. All three college officials agree that clear and specific diagnosis is highly important for them to know the level of support a student will require. According to Tammy, a diagnostic statement is one of the most essential parts of the documentation. She states, “The first thing I look for is a diagnosis.” Tonia shared similar views and the extent she might go if the documentation does not include the diagnosis. She states, “Of course we have to have their diagnosis that is the key. We will contact people who have done reports if its not written that way and so that’s very important but to meet guidelines; we have to be sure that there is a stated disability.” Tedmond explained that the diagnosis is not just used to understand the situation but also to know how to best support the student and determine the needs of the student. He provides a defense for this philosophical underpinning,

We would like a diagnosis and we would like to understand what the condition is If we know for example a student’s diagnosis is a mental health diagnosis and you look at the testing that’s been done that individual may not have any problems academically but may have problems with social interaction or may be on medication that interferes with some other type of function. Therefore, the diagnosis again helps us understand what challenges they (students) may have versus a learning disability. Student may be fine socially; they may be too social but may have problems in the class. They may have problems taking notes and taking test in a time limit situation. So again I think the diagnosis helps us understand what the student may be facing coming to the campus. I see that it’s linked together—the name of the diagnosis is linked to the recommendation.

In addition to a clear diagnosis, a specific diagnostic statement by a qualified professional, participants said disability documentation need to contain information about the effect of the condition on the student in the learning environment. Having a

disability, in and of itself, does not guarantee accommodation. It is only when the disabling condition results in functional limitations that accommodations will be considered. In essence, accommodations are meant to ameliorate access. Service providers tend to read inbetween the lines to understand potential effects of the disability on the student in the college environment. Though the effect in the larger context of learning and education may have been provided, the providers use the information received from the students to supplement the documentation to determine the level of support a student will need in the environment. For a particular disability type, Tedmond states,

Many of them have a hard time assimilating into the campus. They have behaviors that can get them into trouble in terms of inappropriate dialog or touching someone on the campus and now it flows over into the police department and the discipline side that we are dealing with a whole different element. And how to deal with that and knowing that that student has a disability that may need to be monitored more on campus. In many cases it's not a disciplinary issue; it's channeling the student.

The accommodations that the college considered are not limited to the classroom.

A critical piece of documentation that all participants discussed was the recommended accommodations. Apart from the diagnostic statement, service providers, the compliance officer, and students indicate that specific recommendations for accommodations seem to be the most important element in disability documentation. In an environment where costs are associated with services and certain types of accommodations may create advantage, professionals tend to be more careful and need defense for their decision. That is the case with CWCC.

Service providers indicate that, while they may understand the struggles that students encounter and trust the experience of students as they express them, they are

unable to provide cost-dependent services and accommodations without a specific recommendation in the documentation. In discussing the importance of specific recommendations and why it is needed, Tedmond, states,

I rely on their (professionals) recommendations so for me it's an important document . . . I put a lot of stock in what that report tells me to do . . . No concrete recommendations in the report can limit the student in terms of what we can offer them. Without a clear cut recommendation CWCC has decided that for cost services things that cost money for us to provide for example a reader, a writer, a tutor unless that's part of their recommended accommodations we will not provide those.

Grayson, the ADA compliance officer feels equally strongly with the importance of specific recommendations in the documentation, especially when it "touches on policy matters."

Service providers contend that, when the professionals who provide documentation fail to include specific recommendations, they have done the student a disservice and it is a huge neglect. They feel such neglect puts the students at a disadvantage for the services they can receive at CWCC.

We will at times ask the student to go back and have another conversation with that provider to provide us with a little more information about services, particularly things like, cost services. Somebody that maybe not be blind but visually impaired and needs a reader and I know the original documentation may say visually impaired and gives us the visual acuity but not say anything more than that [Tedmond].

Service providers tend to be willing to assist students in getting exactly what they need. Tammy feels the same way as Tedmond; she explains using specific examples of the length they will go to obtain the specific recommendation that students need,

We cannot provide the services because we think they need it; it has to be stated in the documentation. . . . I am going to tell you a little story. I had not been here more than a couple of weeks and I had a student come in, in tears. She was not a real serious student; she enjoyed her social life a whole lot. 'My parents don't want me to keep coming to school. I know

why I am going to be on probation and I just feel terrible.' Well, I pulled her report and all her documents and her scores really indicated that she had more of a math problem than a reading problem but they had only addressed a reading problem in the psychological report. So through contacts and through talking to her and making contact back with the psychologist she said yes she definitely does have a math disability. So we were able to go back look at the documentation get the services the student needed take care of that and by the end of the next semester she was at the University.

Service providers are aware of the difficulties faced by students when they go back to whomever provides the documentation and the professional is unwilling to do what is required. Getting those professionals to make specific recommendations can be difficult and challenging for students. Tedmond expressed his feelings of disgust,

For the student it is a difficult thing and it's like pulling teeth to get that medical professional to write that. . . . They are willing to make the diagnosis but very rarely are they willing to make the recommendations.

Students also agree that not having specific recommendation puts them at a disadvantage. Monique shared her experience of not receiving services and accommodations because her disability was not documented early enough, and when it became documented, it did not document all her needs with specific accommodations. She stated that she approached the DSS office several times and even though they sympathize with her, they were unable to help her. She explains,

The first three times I talked to somebody, before I actually got my documentation I talked to one or two people before that I came to them and said 'This is the difficulty that I'm having, how can you work with me' because I had tried to get help through the DSS center before documentation. I had told them "This is my problem. Isn't there a system that can test you or is there anybody...?" They told me how much the test was. . . . Well I got my documentation finally through a psychologist. But the documentation that she did give me said that I have ADD. But that only qualifies me for certain things. It qualifies me for extra time on my tests, but not for books on tape.

She explained that what she actually needed, more than anything else, was the books on tape because she is also dyslexic in addition to being diagnosed with ADHD. Because the process of converting books is expensive, she was not granted the accommodations. She explained how she has failed many times and she, in the middle of the focus group, became emotional and expressed doubts about her ability to be successful in college. All the students who participated expressed similar feelings with the disservice that was done to them by not adequately documenting their condition and making specific recommendations.

Research Question Three: How do Disability Service Providers Use Disability Documentation to make eligibility and Accommodation Decisions?

The third research question asked to understand how DSS providers use the documentation that students provide. Success, defined as completion of academic requirements and graduation, seems to be the mantra that resonates with all college administrators (service providers and compliance officer) and they feel the students with disabilities have the right to be successful. They believe that accommodations can lead to academic success for students if they are appropriately diagnosed and if the correct recommendations proposed. From using it as a “road map” according to Tedmond, to relying on the information to “assign services” as indicated by Tammy, service providers depend heavily on the disability documentation to perform their job. The information contained in the documentation that students provide gives college officials the opportunity to devise support strategies that will be helpful to students.

Pieces of information in the documentation guide decisions on eligibility and service delivery according to Tammy.

I use it and along with the transcript to see where difficulties are and I use it as I said before if I think that this is going to be an issue. For a student who is a Vet that I work with, she was unconscious for over six months they never thought she was going to live but she has survived and now she is back in school. What happens is, is that she also has epilepsy now, some type of seizure disorder, she takes medicine which slows down the process in the brain, it doesn't click as fast. Can she get the answers? You bet she can get it but it's going to take her a little bit more than twice as long.

Documentation is also used to understand academic and social needs of students.

Understanding such personal and intimate things about a student can be difficult and broaching such issues can make one uneasy. Service providers expressed that the documentation provides context for discussion in situations that may seem uncomfortable to broach without context. Tammy explains again, "I use it if I can with some of them to find out where they are. I try to get them to talk to me about, you know, where they are, what's going on, that sort of thing." Therefore, information in a good documentation help service providers understand how best to support the students at the college.

Tedmond concurs with using the documentation to provide opportunity for individualized services as he explains,

Again, it goes to what we can do for that particular student. We need to understand the kinds of challenges they may have here on campus. If we know for example a student's diagnosis is a mental health diagnosis and you look at the testing that's been done that individual may not have any problems academically but may have issues with social interaction or may be on medication that interferes with some other type of function.

I think this is where we get guidance to talk the students through what they may have to do in order to be successful; to outline to them that there are services here through DSS and through the campus the college and that they can participate. For example if somebody has a disability in English language skills and writing they are going to have to take courses that they are going to have to tap into the writing centers. We talk about the hours of operations and how they utilize that center. Someone else with difficulty in math we will talk about the need for them to take math and tap into math labs.

The information that documentation contains provides guidance in asking specific questions of the individual student so that service providers will understand the gaps that students may have and how to educate them about resources and support their needs within the environment.

One of the unique functions of the DSS providers at CWCC is that they serve as academic advisors for students. Though students are not required to use them as academic advisors, they all agreed that most students who are registered in the DSS office do. As academic advisors, service providers use the documentation and what they know about the needs of the student to match them up with instructors who teach to their learning styles or evaluate in ways that they are able to demonstrate their knowledge. Tammy expressed with pride how she works to match students with professors in this role,

I'll say you really ought to take the English with this particular professor, and they'll say well I really didn't want to come at nine o'clock and I'll say you really need to take it with this professor. So they say ok, I think I'll take it with that professor. That's one of the reasons our program is successful. . . . If I have someone who is ADHD I try to get them in with the faculty that has a lot of energy that's going to keep them engaged that is going to help them love the subject as much as the professor does.

In Tedmond's view, students benefit from the extension of the DSS providers' roles beyond just making eligibility and accommodation decisions to functioning as academic advisors. In their advisor role, they help student with course selection, registration, and graduation checks.

Since we are advisors we look at the documentation we look at that students background we are in a position to talk to that student about balancing things, not taking English, math, history, social science, and physics class all in one semester so even though it might not be written in that documentation. Just knowing what that document says can lead to good discussions about balance and spreading things out. Or may be not

taking a full load and only taking three class rather than 15 credit hours. So again, that's driven by the documentation and the dialog with us and the student.

DSS providers use what they know about the student and the need of the student to make helpful suggestions. This role contributes to the success of the students receiving disability services. Though the advisor role and responsibility are used for all students at CWCC, students who receive disability services tend to benefit more when they are advised by any of the service providers. In addition to helping students identify the best instructor for their needs, service providers are also sensitive to the course selection and course balancing. Students are advised to consider their needs and challenges when selecting courses. For example students who struggle with reading will not take too many courses that require a lot of reading at the same time.

Specific accommodations that require policy adjustments (e.g. course waivers) are determined by the compliance officer. To the compliance officer, specific information in the documentation is used to determine whether or not a requested accommodation will be granted.

And if they do have the diagnosis then the next thing I want in that report is the substitution or the recommendation and or the waiver or both. If that is not there, they don't get it, and I usually send it back and ask for it to see if the tester would add the accommodation as such and I rarely have any problems with that not happening. I will deny it if they don't give me a diagnosis, I will deny it if they give me a diagnosis but ask for an accommodation that has no relation to it which you get sometimes. You have to have the connections here if you have a disability in reading I am not going to give you a waiver for math. But, so, I am looking for appropriate current documentation by a licensed psychometrist or psychologist whatever, I am looking for the diagnosis with the recommendations that are appropriate for the accommodations for the diagnosis.

While there seems to be no question about the advocacy skills of this university official and her commitment to equal participation, if documentation fails to meet certain criteria, Grayson feels comfortable denying policy modification requests. She understands her obligations to uphold the college's program and degree integrity. The college uses information in the disability documentation to make eligibility for service and to determine service level for each student.

Research Question Four: What are the Reasons behind Requiring Differing Documentation Based on Disability Type?

In retrospect, I believe this research question about why differing documentations are required based on disability type was not a good one. It was a poorly constructed question but I am glad the question was asked because I learned a lot about my own bias and preconceived notions about what disability service providers do. I now understand that documentation requirements do not differ based on disability type; rather, documentation requirements differ based on requested accommodations or the scope of service. I realized after going through the entire transcripts that no one answered the question directly. Both providers and students answered the question as if I wanted to know the types of documentation required for disability. Even after going back and asking that question specifically of the service providers, I thought I did not get a straightforward answer. In the process of analyzing the transcripts, especially listening to the experiences of the students, and how the providers responded to the questions at the two different times, I came to understand that accommodation types drive the documentation requirements.

For example, Tonia had a difficult time understanding what I was really asking.

She said,

Let me think about what you're asking. Because those disabilities are assessed or evaluated in different ways. If you have a student who is blind or a wheelchair user, then more than likely there will be a medical doctor involved to do those evaluations. And then if you're talking about a learning disability or reading disorder, more than likely you're going to have a psychologist or some kind of psychometric evaluation. That's why you need the different types. It depends on the disability that will determine the type of evaluation that is needed. Now if you're talking about a student that is ADHD, you could have both. So it just depends on the exceptionality of the type of evaluation that is needed. And sometimes you'll get one and you'll tell the student you need them to get another type of evaluation depending on what they need. Well I think there are specialties in different areas. I mean, if you're talking about a student who is hearing impaired, you're going to get a report from an audiologist. So you're going to have a specialist in that area. If you're talking about a student who is wheelchair user, you're going to have a medical doctor to provide information. And if you're talking about a learning disability, it's going to be someone who specializes in testing for those areas, a psychologist.

Tamara answered the question similarly when I expanded on the question and asked whether they require the same documentation for different disabilities. She said,

No, it's different. If a student has a learning disability then the documentation is usually educational, psychological evaluation that gives us the learning strengths and weaknesses of the student. It gives us a summary, it gives us accommodations and recommendations so that we can help the student, and lets us know how we can best serve the student in the classroom through tutoring or whatever. With students who are blind, it is usually, well not usually but sometimes, from a medical doctor, and the services are, many times, more 'set.' You provide magnification if they have low vision; you provide Braille if that's what they use; or you provide tape recorders if that will work better. Whereas a student who has a learning disability, a learning disability, I think, is where everyone is a little bit different. Just like your fingerprint, there's a lot of variation. And so accommodations are so much varied from student to student that we sort of tweak it as we go along whereas somebody who is visually impaired, you tweak it to a certain extent depending on their amount of vision, but still it's within a certain range. Do you understand what I'm saying?

Tamara provided a clearer explanation for me, notwithstanding the fact that I have been in the field for almost three decades. What I learned from this is that visible disabilities can sometimes be more prescriptive in the types of accommodations needed because the barriers seem to be more obvious. For invisible disabilities, however, it requires, as Tamara said, lots of “tweaking”.

This seems to be where there are disparate requirements. Even for students with visible disabilities, but with undiagnosed underlying challenges caused by invisible conditions such as learning disabilities, psychiatric disabilities, or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (math or reading disorder not related to physical disabilities), they will not receive certain types of accommodations. Therefore, the type of accommodation that a student requests determines the type of documentation that the disability office request. It is not the disability type that determines that. When a student requests a set of accommodation that have cost associated with them, the request often goes through a different level of scrutiny. Tedmond explains,

CWCC has decided that for cost services, services that cost money for us to provide for example a reader a writer, a tutor unless that’s part of their recommended accommodations and we see that it is supported, we will not provide those. Again, some challenges with documentation would be that student would then not be eligible for something that we think they might need so then we would have to send them for re-evaluation at that point.

Whether a student has obvious or hidden disability, CWCC requires documentation of all students that request services, as Tedmond explains,

We require documentation for two main reasons. One, I guess, is legality. We’re always concerned about audits. Because we get questions from students and faculty asking, ‘why do you ask for documentation for somebody in a wheelchair that you can obviously see,’ well the answer is that the auditors do not see them if and when they come in to review our process. So that is more of a technical approach that we have to, as a college, present proof that the people we are serving have a disability and

meet the letter of the law. Secondly, the reasons for different documentations would be to help apply services to them. Somebody with a visual impairment may need different accommodations than somebody with a physical disability. Many times now, the documentations come with recommendations of services. So it helps us provide appropriate accommodations to that particular student.

Depending on the type of accommodation requested by a student, the comprehensiveness of the accommodation may differ. Specifically, students who request course substitutions or waivers are required to provide convincing evidence to support their request. The evidence makes the service provider believe that providing such accommodation will not give advantage to a student with a disability over their peers without disabilities. And, for accommodations that have costs associated with them (books on tape, tape recorder, or tutoring), the documentation needs to have strong evidence to suggest such accommodations are necessary and appropriate. Therefore, some of the reasons for requiring different documentation are accountability related; others are related to fiscal matters which will be revealed in audits. Still others, such as course substitutions or course waivers, have to do with reasonableness and equity. Accommodations need to be reasonable to minimize any barrier created by environmental factors and equitable to assure that the student with a disability is not being given an advantage over others without disabilities.

An analysis of these finding is presented in Chapter five.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND SUMMARY,

An increasing number of students with disabilities are accessing postsecondary education environment. Unfortunately, a great number of them are dropping out compared to their peers without disabilities. A major factor contributing to that high attrition rate is the lack of appropriate accommodations (Hurtubis-Sahlen, & Lehmann, 2006; Vogel, et al., 2006). The fact remains that students with diagnosed disabilities will have a difficult time accessing services without appropriate documentation, especially students whose disability affect them in invisible ways. Without adequate and appropriate accommodations, success will remain bleak for this group of students. Students whose disabilities are either undiagnosed or whose documentation is inadequate will have an even more difficult time accessing the services they need to persist and successfully complete their degree (Janiga, & Costenbader, 2002; Garrison-Wade, 2004). This study sought to broaden the understanding of different perspectives of disability documentation to improve the plight of students' college access. The gap between policy and practice is also examined. Though the findings have limited generalizability, the recommendations from this study can be useful for all disability service providers in postsecondary institutions.

This case study sought to explore the principles and practices of disability services at one community college to provide a deeper understanding of the types of documentation expected to assure access to disability support, services, and accommodations. Emerging themes relating to compromised experiences of students at

both pre-collegiate and collegiate levels were found to stand in the way of access and success of students in the educational environment.

This chapter presents a summary of each of the research questions, limitations of the study, contributions of the research to the literature, and implications of the findings. The importance and implications of the themes that emerged in the interviews and how they affect program and service access for students with disabilities are also provided. Implications for access, practice, policy, and future research are discussed.

Discussion of the Findings

The first research question was “What is the purpose of disability documentation?” The answer is that disability documentation serves multiple and important purposes. It guides the work of the disability support service (DSS) providers and provides objective reasons for their decisions. Documentation provides the basis for the key role of DSS providers—making eligibility and accommodation decisions. DSS providers believe their roles within their institutions are not only to help their institutions abide by legal mandates, but also to educate the campus community about access and to advocate on behalf of the student with whom they work.

Research question two was “What pieces of information are essential to be included in disability documentation?” The answers provided establish that for a student to be assured comprehensive disability support services at CWCC, the documentation they provide must be from a professional who is qualified in the specific disability. The documentation must include information such as the clear diagnosis, a discussion about functional limitations or impact of the disability condition, and very specific accommodations.

The third research question posed was “How do disability service providers use disability documentation to make eligibility and accommodation decisions?” Service providers understand that the needs of students with disabilities may go beyond the classroom. Therefore, the information in the documentation helps to identify other support services that will enhance the experience of students. It also helps to determine how the college can collaborate to ensure the safety and wellbeing of the student.

Research question four was “What are the reasons behind requiring differing documentation based on disability types?” The answer is that differing documentation based on disability types is not required. Rather, differing documentation is required based on the type accommodation that the student requests. For accommodations that require policy adjustments or those with associated costs, the documentation is required to be more comprehensive and provide clear evidence and support. Incomplete documentation may guarantee eligibility for services but will not assure specific accommodations, especially those with associated costs.

While it was important to answer the research questions, it was even more enriching to discover the emerging themes related to this important access issue. Six themes emerged through the interviews (broken and dysfunctional systems, bottom of the barrel, squeaky wheel gets the grease, disability is a mixed bag, college is an opportunity of a life time, and not disabled enough). Those themes are powerful for three main reasons: (1) they provided a functional understanding of the complexities of the work of disability service providers; (2) they highlighted the complexities of the issues faced by college students with disabilities; and (3) they highlighted unintended consequences of policies.

Complexities of the work of disability service providers. Several access challenges were identified by participants. Some of the challenges are policy related; others are linked to practice. Service providers understand that students must provide appropriate document to assure comprehensive service. Students agree that they need to provide documentation in support of their request. What seems to challenge all parties is how to secure the documentation and what the contents of the documentation should be.

Service providers depend on the information in the documentation to make informed and defensible decisions. They require comprehensive documentation. Unfortunately, documentation is expensive and many students lack the resources needed to obtain it. In addition, those who provide the documentation may be unsure of how students will be affected in the educational environment. Therefore, they cannot be prescriptive in their recommendations. Also, students perceive themselves as experts in their own experiences; they understand their challenges and how their disability affects them. Unfortunately, their words are usually not enough because they do not provide strong enough support for service providers.

Expectations at different environments also pose challenges especially for students who received disability services at the pre-collegiate environment. Eligibility requirements differ from the pre-collegiate to the collegiate environment. Therefore, the documentation deemed to be adequate and sufficient at the pre-collegiate environment may not be sufficient at the college level.

Implications for access: Although the impact of accommodations is well documented, the impact of insufficient documentation on participants' experiences is not adequately discussed or reviewed in the literature. The emerging patterns of this study

are likely to have further implications for policymakers and the AHEAD organization as they seek to improve the abilities of DSS providers to make professional judgment.

Complexities of issues faced by college students with disabilities: Disability services are guided by legal mandates which in turn call for different entities to develop their own policies. Though there are policies requiring students to provide adequate documentation in support of their needs, there are no established processes assuring that service providers will make efforts to meet with students to understand their needs beyond the paperwork provided by students. As evidenced in this research, the issues that students face on the college campus go beyond what the faculty letter for some accommodations can achieve. Service providers need to devise ways to meet with students to review the usefulness and applicability of the accommodations. There also needs to be a forum where students can share their experiences and offer suggestions.

Unintended consequences of policies: The policy for requiring documentation was developed to safeguard the integrity of the disability services and to guide those who may require services. Effects of this, as shared by students, seem to highlight unintended consequences of policies which may build barriers when, in fact, the goal was to break down barriers. For students who participated in this study, it is not only that the policies seem to marginalize their experiences; it is also that the requirements are not adequately communicated to students and their parents.

Implications

For some time, disability service providers have argued about the use of professional judgment in determining reasonable and appropriate accommodation. Yet, there has not been any objective evidence of its usability nor is there any guide on how to

implement. Previous research explores postsecondary access from the transition perspective (Garrison-Wade, 2004; Eckes & Ochoa, 2005; Gormley, et al, 2005); specific skill development (Skinner, 2004; Hurtubis-Sahlen & Lehmann, 2006); specific disability related issues (Hatzes, Reiff, & Bramel, 2002); legal environment of disability services (Raskind, Goldberg, Higgins, & Herman, 1999; Murray, Goldstein, Nourse, & Edgar, 2001) and professional preparation of disability service providers (Michael, et al., 1988; Madaus, 1996; Shaw & Dukes, 2001). This study cuts across all those areas and highlights fascinating practices to be documented in the literature.

This study added a new dimension to the understanding of the challenging role of disability service providers. There is a gap between what the literature espouses about the experiences of students with disabilities and their access to services. Although the findings from this single case study represent unique perspectives of students, programs, and college campus, I hope others who are interested in exploring the DSS profession, the dynamics of their functions on their campuses, and access services for students with disabilities will find my research useful and informative. A unique finding is the willingness of students to assist the DSS office to educate faculty and the college community about disabilities. Perhaps, most important, is the fact that disability service providers feel their voices are as silent as the students. While service providers understand the limitations of documentation, they are hampered because of rules, policies, and accountability measures that could jeopardize their program. The voices of service providers, which have remained silent in the literature, were opened through this research.

Perspectives of college officials who are involved in making and ensuring services and accommodations and of students for whom these determinations are made, offer unique views on this issue. Findings from this research will contribute to the literature on disability documentation at the postsecondary level. A common goal seemed to emerge in this study. Postsecondary disability services are moving beyond access. Services are moving towards enhancing academic and social experience for students with disabilities and ensure academic success. Sadly, the limitations imposed by administrative policies and the lack of alignment between the educational systems stand to minimize the goal.

In particular, documentation is presented as a gate keeping measure as perceived by both students and service providers. This is an unintended consequence of the requirement. This finding raises a serious question about the alignment of policy with practice. Additionally, it appears as if the requirements for disability services at the pre-collegiate level seem to be at odds with those at the collegiate level. Unfortunately however, students tend to get caught in the middle. Therefore, their access to services and their level of success seem to be minimized.

An interesting observation is the number of minority students who participated in the focus group interviews. They seem to be overrepresented in this study. The disproportionate representation of minority students, African Americans especially, in the special education services at the school district level (K-12) is well documented in the literature (Artiles, & Trent, 1994, Burnette, 1998). It is uncertain what happens to them after high schools. Few of them use adult services or disability services at the college level (Dunham, Holliday, Douget, Koller, Presberry, & Wooderson, 1998). There could

be a number of explanations for this because the question was not explored. It could be because I am from the minority population myself or it could be that many of them continue to seek avenues to secure documentation. What was important was that they came and they shared their experiences.

Recommendations for Practice

As a professional in the disability services field I struggled with my decisions to deny services when the stories of students' struggles and experiences are not documented. My own practice has been informed by what I heard from students and I wonder how many Moniques, James, and Jessicas have walked through my office doors. I am fortunate to hear the stories and interact with these students in such intimate ways. But the reality remains that such opportunity hardly presents itself for practitioners like myself. It behooves us as professionals to develop better ways to capture the realities of the students with whom we work.

- Given that DSS providers seek ways to objectify their work so their decisions to accommodate are defensible and a good number of documentations they receive lack defensible information, service providers need help. Service providers will be best supported if the Association of Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD) designs structure for professional judgment. This process could be similar to what the Offices of Financial Aid use to make decisions on special circumstances.
- Given that complete documentation and reports are required to assure comprehensive services that will assure access and success, students will be best served if the college's documentation requirements are published and

communicated in multiple ways—website, welcome letter, pamphlets, flyers, handouts, handbook, etc.

- The majority of the students were involved in extra curricular activities before college. Many of them are still interested but have not been able to connect; as such, they are not well connected with the campus. Therefore, students with disabilities will be best served if the disability support services office will collaborate with the student activities office. Such collaboration will identify how students with disabilities can achieve better engagement and be included in the college community. They will also be better served if the DSS office will design an intentional format for students with disabilities to form valuable connections and participate in clubs and other activities. Service providers are encouraged to work with the student activities and the volunteer office to devise ways to make their policies, programs and activities accessible and more inclusive.
- Given that non residential campuses have limited opportunities to connect students, many students, especially those from the minority group may feel isolated. Students with disabilities will be best served if the college campus create an environment for dialogue where different groups who may feel disenfranchised come together to share their stories. It will be essential for the DSS office to identify potential campus allies, identify areas of common experience, and create ways to engage them.
- Participants identified a lack of understanding and awareness about disabilities on the campus and especially on the part of some faculty. This lack of awareness stands to minimize the campus and classroom experiences of students with

disabilities. Students who participated in this study are willing to represent their issues as a way to increase campus wide awareness. As such, the college will be better informed about disability related issues, and issues related to access with well coordinated and sustainable student led awareness programs and training.

- Colleges and universities would be wise to ensure that they have in place policies and practices that appropriately address how to identify students with disabilities and how to accommodate them.
- Students who received special education services at the pre-collegiate level identified dissatisfaction with their services and they felt they were not adequately prepared for college. Thus, students who receive special education services at the pre-collegiate level would be best served by academic experiences that adequately prepare them for post high school.

Findings and conclusions of qualitative research often leads to many more questions and need for future research. There will continue to be an increase in the number of students with disabilities in the postsecondary education environment. Disability services is and will continue to be a major support structure for students at the collegiate level and the disability support services offices will continued to be challenged on how best to document and identify the needs of this group of students. There are numerous areas of policy and practice that need further research.

Recommendations for Future Research

The following are areas that need further research to increase our understanding of educational access and support services for students with disabilities:

1. Undertake in depth studies of resources available to support students with disabilities, especially those resources that will help them obtain updated documentation, and how students can connect with and access the resources.
2. Conduct a longitudinal study of the experiences and accommodations for college students with disabilities who receive special education services and those who did not receive services for a comparative analysis of experiences and academic preparation.
3. Undertake in depth studies of how DSS providers do their work to better understand the nature of what they do and to develop best practice models.
4. Conduct qualitative research studies to identify how disability service providers and the students they serve can better interact to better understand the emotional, social, and academic needs of the students.

Summary

The findings from this single case study represent unique perspectives of students, program, and a college campus. I hope others who are interested in exploring the issues of disability documentation, the DSS profession, the dynamics of their functions on their campuses, and access services for students with disabilities will find this research useful and informative. This study added a new dimension to issue of disability documentation, the understanding of the challenging role of disability service providers, and the complexities surrounding the lives of college students with disabilities.

There is a gap between what the literature espouses about the experiences of students with disabilities, the support services they need, and their relationships with DSS providers in their efforts to access to services. Students are encouraged to be self

advocates and to be self determined. What became obvious in this research is that those skills are not sufficient to counter the complex relationship between students and faculty in the classroom. Service providers have for some time ignored the expertise of the students about their own needs. What became evident in the findings here is service provider can no longer underestimate the collaboration they need to forge with their students to select appropriate accommodations and ensure that those accommodations work. Compounding these complexities is not only the issue of inadequate third party information but also the lack of uniform professional preparation of DSS providers.

The impact of the lack of uniform preparation of service providers to gather and document data to be used in support of accommodations is clear. The result of inadequate preparation of students with disabilities at the pre-collegiate level and the effect of marginalized experiences is also clear. The need to revamp special education services for students and to establish professional training and development of DSS providers is dire and growing. It is important that students with disabilities are held to high standards as their peers at the pre-collegiate level. It is also necessary that service providers know how to acquire and apply self report data to supplement third party documentation. These are complex and complicated consideration that demand further inquiry.

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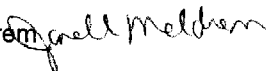
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Notice of Approval for Human Research

Principal Investigator: Jean Lehmann, Education, 1588
Co-Principal Investigator: Beatrice Awoniyi, Education, 1588
Title: Qualitative Interpretive Case Study: Disability Documentation
on One Community College Campus
Protocol #: 06-257H
Funding Source: N/A

Number of Participants/Records: 70 participants
Committee Action: **Approval Date:** December 7, 2006 **Expires:** October 23, 2007

HRC Administrator: Janell Meldrum 

Consent Process:

The above-referenced project was approved by the Human Research Committee with the condition that the appropriate attached consent form is signed by the subjects and each subject is given a copy of the form. The appropriate cover letter on CSU letterhead for each group must also be used. *NO changes may be made to this document without first obtaining the approval of the Committee.*

Investigator Responsibilities:

- It is the PI's responsibility to obtain this consent form from all subjects.
- It is the responsibility of the PI to immediately inform the Committee of any serious complications, unexpected risks, or injuries resulting from this research.
- It is also the PI's responsibility to notify the Committee of any changes in experimental design, participant population, consent procedures or documents. This can be done with a memo describing the changes and submitting any altered documents.
- Students serving as Co-Principal Investigators must obtain PI approval for any changes prior to submitting the proposed changes to the HRC for review and approval.
- The PI is ultimately responsible for the conduct of the project.
- A status report of this project will be required within a 12-month period from the date of review. Renewal is the PI's responsibility, but as a courtesy, a reminder will be sent approximately two months before the protocol expires. The PI will be asked to report on the numbers of subjects who have participated this year and project-to-date, problems encountered, and provide a verifying copy of the consent form or cover letter used. The necessary continuation form (H-101) is available from the RCO web page www.research.colostate.edu/rcoweb/.
- Upon completion of the project, an H-101 should be submitted as a close-out report.
- If approval did not accompany a proposal when it was submitted to a sponsor, it is the PI's responsibility to provide the sponsor with the approval notice.
- **Should the protocol not be renewed before expiration, all activities must cease until the protocol has been re-reviewed.**

This approval is issued under Colorado State University's OHRP Federal Wide Assurance 00000647.

Please direct any questions about the Committee's action on this project to me for routing to the Committee.

Attachment Date of Correspondence: 12/18/06

APPENDIX B

Disability Types and Definitions

Disability Type	Definition
AD/HD	A neurobehavioral disorder characterized by pervasive inattention and/or hyperactivity-impulsivity and resulting in significant functional impairment. Affects functioning in multiple settings, including home, school, and in relationships with peers. Symptoms of include impulsiveness (acting quickly without thinking first); hyperactivity (inability to sit still or interrupting others while they are talking), or inattention (daydreaming or easily distracted by what is going on around or with internal stimuli). (http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/adhd/)
Blindness	Inability to see or with a vision worse than 20/200. (http://www.who.int/topics/blindness/en/).
Cerebral Palsy (CP)	A neurological disorder that appear in infancy or early childhood and permanently affect body movement and muscle coordination. It does not worsen over time. (http://www.ninds.nih.gov/disorders/cerebral_palsy/cerebral_palsy.htm#What_is)
Learning Disabilities (LD)	A neurological disorder that affect the individual's ability to receive, process, analyze, or store information. It can interfere with a person's ability to organize, concentrate or focus and can cause someone's mind to wander too much. (http://www.ncld.org/)
Math Disorder	Affects the acquisition of mathematics skills and trouble remembering math facts. Math skills are significantly below normal considering the student's age, intelligence, and education. (DSM-IV-Mathematics Disorder, 315.2).
Mental Health/ Psychiatric Disorder	Psychological or physiological illness that manifests in a person's brain. It affects the way a person thinks, behaves, and interacts with other people and is usually associated with distress or disability that is not expected as part of normal development. (DSM-IVR)
Systemic Health	A disease that affect any major organ (heart, liver, or kidneys) or any condition that ultimately affects the whole body.