

A QUALITATIVE INTERVIEW-BASED STUDY OF THE EXPERIENCES OF
COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISABILITY SERVICES PROVIDERS

by

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ABSTRACT

Jennifer Sorenson Nichols. A Qualitative Interview-Based Study of the Experiences of Community College Disability Services Providers
(Under the direction of Mark D'Amico)

The purpose of this study is to explore and capture the experiences of disability services providers (DSP) within the community college setting as it relates to facilitating and coordinating accommodations for students with disabilities, collaborating with faculty and staff in implementing and arranging accommodations for students with disabilities, and collaborating with administrators of the institution and/or systems within which they work. The study was conducted using a qualitative phenomenological methodology with in-depth interviews and shadowing observations. The participants consisted of seven community college professionals who identified themselves as primary contacts for students with disabilities seeking accommodations at their individual institution. Data were collected using audio recordings of seven interviews and field notes made by the researcher following the shadowing observations of two participants. Pre-interview questionnaire, interview transcripts, observation field notes, and documents were reviewed and analyzed with inductive thematic analysis. Three themes emerged from open-coding and captured shared experiences and perceptions of the participants: importance of awareness and education, pushing through barriers and overcoming obstacles, and value of relationships.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my incredibly amazing and supportive husband, David Nichols, and my two fun-loving boys, Drew and Zack. Without your unconditional love and unwavering support, I would not have been able to finish this project. I love you each so very much, to the moon and back and to infinity and beyond.

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Chapter One

Introduction

In 2016, the National Center for Education Statistics reported that approximately 11% of college students identify as having a disability. According to Ma and Baum (2016), students with disabilities are more likely to enroll in a community college setting than other sectors of higher education. The American Association of Community Colleges (2016) reported that 45% of students with disabilities who go on to pursue postsecondary education enroll in community colleges (American Association of Community Colleges, 2016). Disability rights and the rights of students with disabilities has been a part of higher education since long before legislation dictated rules and regulations. A great deal of research exists that examines and critiques the experiences of students with disabilities within the college setting. Little, however, is known about how disability services providers experience and interpret their roles. To bridge this gap that exists in the literature, this study looks to explore how disability services providers experience and interpret their contributions within the community college setting.

According to the Association on Higher Education and Disability (2017), disability services professionals set the tone for how a campus both addresses and frames disability related matters. Disability support personnel within the field of higher education carry a great responsibility as the primary contact for all things related to the American with Disabilities Act (ADA) for students who have identified as having a disability and needing accommodations. Additionally, disability resource personnel often advocate for students as they struggle for civil rights both in and out of the classroom. Disability services providers play a pivotal role in the student experience for students

with disabilities (Graham-Smith & Lafayette, 2004; Wessel, Jones, Markle, & Westfall, 2009).

Statement of Problem

Many strides have been made for students living with disabilities throughout recent history regarding access to higher education. However, access does not dictate success. Research shows that students with access to needed accommodations, with support from faculty and disability services staff, and with key personal qualities (for example, perseverance or self-awareness) are more likely to be successful and obtain degree completion (Barber, 2012). Research on retention and academic success of students with disabilities provides insights to college staff, faculty, and administration on how practices at the institution can directly impact students with disabilities (Barber, 2012; Christ, 2008; Graham-Smith & Lafayette, 2004; Izzo, Murray, & Novak, 2008; Kutscher, 2016; Orr & Goodman, 2010). These students are not just seeking education from the traditional four-year institutions, but from community colleges as well (Ma & Baum, 2016). As a result, community colleges must also focus on how current policies, practices, and procedures may impact the student success of students living with disabilities.

The student populations at community colleges grow more and more diverse each year. Since World War II, the role of the community college has shifted away from being an extension to high school to now include job training, vocational education, workforce and personal development, and academic preparation for a bachelor's degree (Kasper, 2002). This leaves community colleges with a unique challenge – a very diverse student population with many different needs. Support staff need a diverse set of skills to

effectively help the diverse student populations found at community colleges and to effectively address the unique needs and issues that accompany such diverse populations. These diverse student populations include a growing number of students with disabilities, and student support services are charged with addressing the issue of accessibility for these students while also assisting other students with personal, career, and academic counseling related matters. Christ (2008) identified key elements of the institution that influence the success of post-secondary disability support programs. The specific elements that were found to be influential include funding and legislation, collaboration between and within departments of the organization, positive leadership characteristics, and creative strategies for being efficient. Christ's findings are applicable to the disability support office/program and to the coordinator/supervisor of those programs. While the study details what makes a successful program, it does not provide much insight into the perspectives of the individual support providers as it relates to their individual role within the program.

Community colleges, similar to other institutions of higher learning, must provide equal access to success for students with disabilities mandated through legislation like Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and the American with Disabilities Act (ADA). Institutions of higher learning must provide disability services and designate staff to facilitate services like accommodations for students with disabilities. The professionals assigned the duty of enforcing ADA for students need professional development opportunities specific to the law and to the skills needed to effectively implement services for a diverse student population. Pineda and Bowes (1995) found that an opportunity for professional development for counselors working with diverse student

populations is essential for effectively helping students. Many colleges do not have the funding to provide staff devoted to solely assisting students with disabilities. Barber (2012) found that all too often offices providing disability services are underfunded and very high-volume operations. This is especially true within community college settings where it is common for support staff, like advisors or counselors, to wear multiple hats beyond that of just disability support services (Grasgreen, 2012). If these same staff are also charged with disability support services, one can expect that these staff might become overwhelmed with other responsibilities in addition to maintaining ADA guidelines. Additionally, there is growing scrutiny of how institutions are enforcing ADA. In a 2014-2015 review of lawsuits against institutions of higher learning related to higher education disability law, Colker and Grossman (2014) analyzed 29 cases from within the two-year window. The expectation of administrators to avoid a legal blemish, paired with having multiple responsibilities beyond just that of focusing on assisting students with disabilities, places a lot of pressure on staff charged with disability support services.

Recommendations for what a disability services program should do are plentiful. Arzola's (2016) research points to the importance of collaboration between stakeholders, specifically between the institution's library and the Office of Disability Services. Other research suggests that students need access to assistive technology (Kim-Rupnow, Dowrick, & Burke, 2001; Levy, 2001; Moisey, 2004). Further research found that pairing the right assistive technology with support is directly linked to the students obtaining their educational goals and gaining needed vocational and social skills (Goodman, Tiene, & Luft, 2002; Riemer-Reiass & Wacker, 2000). While assistive technology is clearly

linked to student success, little is currently known about how disability services providers gain needed knowledge about assistive technology and its uses or what training may be needed of disability services providers to stay current in assistive technology, the trends, and various uses.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of community college professionals who work with post-secondary students with disabilities. Exploring the professional experiences and observations of disability support service providers will expose important elements of disability services programs and the key skills, knowledge, and training disability providers associate with success within the profession. This research will offer a foundation to the limited literature about professionals who provide disability services in the higher education setting, specifically in community colleges.

Disability services staff play a key role in the success of students with disabilities in education. The disability services provider is typically the most knowledgeable person when it comes to disability and professional development (Oertle & Bragg, 2014). When assisting students with disabilities, it is the responsibility of the disability services provider to look at each student and his or her disability individually and to evaluate the functional impact of the disability for that student. Duties of the disability services professional in research are mostly identified in relation to student needs and are from the student needs perspective. For the purposes of this study, the definition of “disability” is the same as defined by the Americans with Disabilities Act:

a person who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, a person who has a history or record of such an

impairment, or a person who is perceived by others as having such an impairment.
(Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, 42 U.S.C., §12101 et seq., 1990;
ADAAA § 12102(1); 29 C.F.R. § 1630.2(g)(1), 2008)

Research Questions

To achieve the purpose of this study, four specific driving questions will be addressed:

1. What do community college Disability Services Personnel perceive as the greatest challenges for students with disabilities and the institutions that serve them?
2. What do community college Disability Services Personnel perceive as the most rewarding aspects of their role within the community college setting?
3. What do community college Disability Services Personnel perceive as the most significant challenges they face as disability services providers?
4. What are the perceived needs of community college Disability Services Personnel in assisting community college students?

With these driving questions in mind, a qualitative study informed by phenomenological methods was selected as the best fit for the research design.

Moustakas (1994) described the Husserlian approach as a research method that examines life experiences by placing emphasis on the self-description of a person's experiences and by setting aside all preconceived ideas. The researcher of this study used an approach to identify themes and structures of the experiences of disability services providers as described directly from the research participants.

The data for this study were collected primarily through interviews. Patton (2015) identified that the purpose of an interview is to find out what is “in and on someone else’s mind” (p. 426) and to learn the things that one cannot easily observe: thoughts, feelings, meanings, and intentions. The researcher focused on the research questions of this study while using pre-interview questionnaires, shadowing observations, and document analysis to learn how disability services providers interpret their role with a community college disability services office.

Role of the Researcher

Each participant will see the world through his or her own lens. The role of the researcher is to document each research participant’s experiences and analyze participant responses for themes and structure while not imposing the researcher’s ideas or biases on the participants or the results. Based on background of the researcher as both a disability services provider and as an administrator who oversees an Office of Disability Services, expectations and hopes for the study may exist. It was important for the researcher to remove personal biases related to the topic based on these previous experiences.

Examples of how the researcher accounted for this include:

- monitored and reduced bias by maintaining needed distance so as “to explore, not to share, assumptions” (Seidman, 2013, p. 102),
- made efforts to reduce any inclination to interpret too quickly (Patton, 2015),
- avoided leading questions or attempts to influence responses (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016),
- conducted interviews consistently and in accordance with the interview design,
- handled and managed all data consistently per the research design, and

- analyzed and interpreted all data as indicated in the research design.

Limitations

A limitation is the inability to control extraneous variables. Another limitation is the sampling method chosen for identifying participants for this study. Participants were solicited through an email to two North Carolina disability list serve groups, of which the researcher is a member. This sampling method was used so as to identify participants who were within close enough proximity of the researcher to allow for face-to-face interviews to be conducted. The use of a convenient and purposeful sampling method means the data set is reliant on the participant's location to the researcher and the participants' decision whether or not to participate in the study. Additionally, it is possible there may be differences between the participants of this study and other disability services professionals not included in this study. This study is being conducted in just a small subset of community colleges in North Carolina and, as such, transferability is limited to similar institutions within similar community college systems. Wertz (2005) notes that, as is often the case with qualitative studies, a limited sample size, like that used in this study, has limited transferability of results. The influences and policies of each individual college may be unique to its own disability service program.

Definition of Terms

Accommodation: a service, support or alteration of curriculum format, equipment, or environment aimed at providing a student with a disability equal access to content and/or to complete an assigned task while maintaining the academic and technical standards of the course (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2016).

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA): a law that prohibits discrimination of people with disabilities (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2016).

Assistive Technology: any item, device, or system used to increase, maintain or improve the overall functional capacity of a student with a disability within a learning environment (Moisey, 2004).

Disability: “any person who has a physical or mental impairment which substantially limits one or more of such person’s major life activities, has a record of such an impairment, or is regarded as having such an impairment” (Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, 42 U.S.C., §12101 et seq.; ADA 1990 § 12102(1); 29 C.F.R. § 1630.2(g)(1), 2011).

Disability Services Provider: an individual employed by an institution of higher learning that works within the Office of Disability Services to assist students, faculty, and staff to provide accommodations that give students equal access to the institution’s programs and activities (Dukes & Shaw, 1999).

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA): legislation that mandates that all students with disabilities are entitled to a free appropriate public education that takes their individual needs into consideration (U.S. Office of Special Education Programs, 2007).

Office of Disability Services: an office of institutions of higher learning responsible for overseeing the provision of accommodations to students with disabilities with the aim of equal access to college’s programs and activities. Staff employed by this office are responsible for the coordination and training of

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and the ADA (Smith & Lafayette, 2004).

Universal Design: an educational framework that serves as a guide for flexible learning environments that are accessible to all students regardless of ability, age, or learning differences (Izzo, Murray, & Novak, 2008).

Conclusion

This chapter began by defining the role of the disability services provider within the higher education setting. Chapter One also provides a statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, the driving research questions of the study, limitations, and definitions relevant to this research project. The remaining chapters will discuss literature relevant to the proposed study and the proposed research methods for data collection and analysis. Chapter Two reviews the literature related to disability services within the higher education setting, specifically within community colleges, and relevant literature about students seeking disability services and what those students are looking for in a disability services provider. Chapter Two will also discuss the limited research available related to the experiences of disability services providers. Chapter Three provides a detailed description of the methodology to be used in this study, how participants were identified, data collected and analyzed, and the trustworthiness of the study. Chapter Four outlines the results and analysis of the data as it relates to the research questions and identifies key themes that emerged from the analysis of the interviews. Lastly, Chapter Five provides a summary of the research project, followed by a discussion of conclusions made from the results, and shares recommendations for practice and future research related to the field of disability services in higher education.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

Introduction

In this chapter a brief history of disability services is provided followed by recent laws and regulations related to disability services that impacts post-secondary education today. This chapter will also discuss challenges and positive contributors to student success for students with disabilities enrolled in higher education, specifically in the community college setting. This chapter will wrap up by looking specifically at literature related to disability services programs and the facilitators and staff of those programs.

The following table outlines how this literature will be presented:

Table 1

Challenges and Positive Contributors to the Field of Disability Services

	Challenges	Positive Contributors
History of Disability Students' Accessing Higher Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Students with disabilities had limited access to higher education in late 1800s and 1900s (Madaus, 2011) - Only isolated instances of students with disabilities enrolling in higher education before legislations opened access (Cohen & Kisker, 2010) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Gallaudet University opened (Gallaudet, 1983) - Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (U.S. Office of Special Education Programs, 2007) - Federal funding for education for veterans returning from World War I and World War II (Cohen & Kisker, 2010). - "Learning Disability" accepted as disability covered under IDEA (Hallahan & Mercer, 2001) - Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Section 504 of Rehabilitation Act in 1977, Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990,

		<p>and Amendments of 2009 increased access to higher education for students with disabilities (U.S. Department of Education, 2011)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Joint Dear Colleague Letter of 2010 (U.S. Department of Education, 2010) and Dear Colleague follow up to 2010 guidance letter and accompanying Frequently Asked Questions document (U.S. Department of Education, 2011)
Impact of Students with Disabilities on Higher Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Staffing and budget issues for support for the large number of students with disabilities accessing community colleges (Dukes & Shaw, 1999) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 45% of undergraduate students with disabilities enroll in two-year institutions (American Association of Community Colleges, 2016)
Successes and Challenges of Students with Disabilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Decisions about whether to even self-disclose disability to the college (Izzo, Murray, & Novak, 2008) - Students often not initially aware of how to access and navigate Office of Disability Services (Barber, 2012; Getzel, 2008; Gordan, Lewandowski, Murphy, & Dempsey, 2002) - Negative stigma often associated with the Office of Disability Services (Ashmore & Kasnitz, 2014) and their disability in 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Caring disability support staff provide safety and security for students with disabilities (Graham-Smith and Lafayette, 2004; Wessel, Jones, Markle, & Westfall, 2009) - Quality of student life, self-efficacy, and mindset impact success of students including that of students with disabilities (Kutscher, 2016) - Identified key factors needed for success – access to a mentor, personal qualities like perseverance and determination, access to needed accommodations,

	<p>general (Orr & Goodman, 2010)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Faculty with negative attitudes and unwillingness to engage with students with disabilities (Bruder & Mogro-Wilson, 2010; Hartman-Hall & Haaga, 2002; Muller, 2006; Vogel, Leyser, Burgstahler, Sliger & Zecker, 2006) or simply not knowing enough to help students with disabilities (Grasgreen, 2014; Lombardi, Murray & Dallas, 2013) - Course completion rates are lower for students with disabilities (Geith & Vignare, 2008) - Additional stresses with having a disability (Collins & Mowbray, 2005) - Professional development and training opportunities are needed for faculty related to disability awareness and needed knowledge about accommodations (Barber, 2012; Hartman-Hall & Haaga, 2002; Vogel, Leyser, Burgstahler, Sligar & Zecker, 2006) 	<p>and an overall positive attitude (Barber, 2012)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Faculty willing to work with students with disabilities and who try to understand the experiences of all students (Allsopp, Minskoff, & Bolt, 2005; Barber 2012; Grasgreen, 2014; Moisey, 2004; Orr & Goodman, 2010; Rao, 2004) - Access to needed accommodations (Levy, 2001) like assistive technology (Goodman, Tiene, & Luft, 2002 Moisey, 2004) - Strong supports systems (Barber, 2012; Orr & Goodman, 2010) and engagement with college (Belch, 2004-2005; Mamisheishvili & Koch, 2012) - Strong personal qualities of self-determination (Barber, 2012; Orr & Goodman, 2010; U.S. Department of Education, 2011) - Faculty have a willingness to assist students with disabilities with accommodations (Vogel, Leyser, Burgstahler, Sliger & Zecker, 2006)
Community Colleges in Higher Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Accountability (American Association of Community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Open door admissions policy and diverse student population

<p>and Challenges Faced by Community College Disability Services Programs</p>	<p>Colleges, 2012; Duggan, 2010) and tracking of student data (Barber, 2012; Bragg & Durham, 2012)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Funding (American Association of Community Colleges, 2012; Christ, 2008; Pacifici & McKinney, 1997) and staffing concerns (Yenney & Sacco, 2016) - Legislation mandate key elements impacting program (Christ, 2008) - Professional development is key to counselors working with diverse populations (Barber, 2012; Madeus, 2000; Pineda & Bowes, 1995) - Access to assistive technology (Kim-Rupnow, Dowrick, & Burke, 2001; Levy, 2001; Moisey, 2004) - Disability office has many responsibilities including educating faculty about appropriate accommodations and modifications (Villareal, 2002), assisting students with accommodations (Moisey, 2004) 	<p>(American Association of Community Colleges, 2012; Bailey & Morest, 2006; Bragg & Durham, 2012; Van Noy, Heidkamp, & Kaltz, 2013)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Positive leadership characteristics and good collaborations between departments on campus improve disability services program (Christ, 2008) - Promoting self-determination theory (Field, Martin, Miller, Ward, & Wehmeyer, 1998; Getzel, 2014) - Program should collaborate with areas across campus (Arzola, 2016; Harbour, 2004) - Community colleges are close to home and offer less restrictive admissions criteria (Ma & Baum, 2016; Milsom & Sackett, 2016)
<p>Disability Services Staff</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Disability staff wear many hats (Sharkin, 2012) - Disability staff are most knowledgeable 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Program standards and performance indicators as a guide for staff working in Offices of Disability Services has

	<p>about ADA on campus and therefore the onus, and stresses that comes with it, falls on the Office of Disability Services for compliance with laws and regulations (Oertle & Bragg, 2014)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Expected competencies of staff – assessment, instructional skills, cognitive interventions and leadership skills (Norlander, Shaw, & McGuire, 1990) - Knowledge needed of diverse types of technologies (Moisey, 2004) - Disability staff serve as mediators between student and faculty (Izzo, Murray, & Novak, 2008) 	<p>been developed (Association on Higher Education And Disability, 2017; Shaw & Dukes, 2001)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Convenient “one-stop” model for students allow for help regarding multiple issues all in one office and by one person (Dean, 2000) - Disability staff play important role in success of students with disabilities (Graham-Smith & Lafayette, 2004)
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History of Students with Disabilities Accessing Higher Education

Students with disabilities have been pursuing post-secondary education from as early as the late 1800s. The first students were admitted to the National Deaf-Mute College in the fall of 1864 (Gallaudet, 1983). While there were other isolated examples of individuals with disabilities accessing higher education in the late 1800s/early 1900s, these instances were mostly isolated (Madaus, 2011). It wasn't until most of the legislation that followed World War I and World War II that college campuses really started to see a diversifying of their student populations as financial assistance was available by the federal government for veterans returning from war who wanted to pursue higher education (Cohen & Kisker, 2010).

In the 1960s and 1970s the civil rights movement, partnered with legislation within the K-12 section of education, sparked a big increase in the number of individuals with disabilities entering post-secondary education. In 1975, Congress passed Public Law 94-142, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act, later named the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (U.S. Office of Special Education Programs, 2007). This Act provides students with disabilities within the K-12 education system to a Free Appropriate Public Education that is individualized to their unique individual needs. As a result, special student support services were developed to allow for individualized education programs and monitoring of progress of these individualized plans at the elementary and secondary levels. This legislation resulted in more students with disabilities being eligible to seek admission to higher education.

Early on, disability categories where services were provided were mostly physical in nature and ranged from mild ailments to more severe physical disabilities like paraplegia and quadriplegia. In the mid-1960s the term “learning disability” debuted (Hallahan & Mercer, 2001). Since then special education has identified specific learning disability as a disability category within primary and secondary education settings (Kavale, 2005). With the addition of learning disability as an acceptable disability for coverage under IDEA, the number of individuals diagnosed with a learning disability grew (Hallahan & Mercer, 2001). The growth in students identified as having a learning disability led to an increased need for support services for students with “hidden disabilities” (Hallahan & Mercer, 2001).

The first legislation that directly involved higher education was the Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1973 that stated no qualified individual with a disability could be

excluded or discriminated against with regards to any program receiving financial assistance from the Federal Government. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act came along in 1977 and part of it was directed specifically at public and private post-secondary institutions. This legislation requires institutions of higher learning to consider the applications of qualified students with disabilities. With the admission of students with disabilities, Section 504 also mandated implementing required accommodations and auxiliary aids for admitted students with disabilities. This legislation proved to be very beneficial in increasing access to higher education for students with disabilities. In 1990, the passage of the American with Disabilities Act (ADA) furthered the access paradigm shift. The ADA not only further benefited students with disabilities, it brought with it awareness to the general population of disability rights.

By 2008, the courts decided that the ADA needed a few additional points of clarification, and with that the ADA Amendments were put into law. While the definition of disability did not change with the ADA Amendments of 2008, additional considerations were included: reduction in documentation requirements for students seeking accommodations, use of term “substantially limits” replaced “severely or significantly limiting” in eligibility criteria, and expansion in list of major life activities that could be impacted (Grossman, 2014). Further points of clarification came in June 2010 and May 2011 when the Office of Civil Rights partnered with the Department of Justice to issue *Dear Colleague* letters (U.S. Department of Education, 2010, 2011) and a Frequently Asked Questions document (U.S. Department of Education, 2011) which specifically addressed the use of technology related to electronic book readers and how institutions should respond accordingly, specifically with regards to the use of technology

in course materials and their concerns with the lack of accessibility of these course materials for many students with disabilities who may be reliant on text to speech functionality. Essentially the letters strongly recommended that any course material or document used should be accessible to anyone who may access the course or course materials regardless of ability/disability.

All the legislation and guidance provided by the Federal Government is responsible for opening the doors for students with disabilities to easily gain access to post-secondary education. These laws have also molded the disability services programs and the profession of disability services within higher education.

Impact of Students with Disabilities on Higher Education

According to “A Guide for Disability Rights Law” published by www.ada.gov (U.S. Department of Justice, 2009), all government funded agencies are required to offer Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)/Section 504 considerations for participants. Many institutions of higher education are government funded and therefore are required to identify a person/department/office to assist and address issues of accessibility as faced by students with disabilities. With an increase in the number of students seeking services, colleges are facing many staffing and budgetary challenges as they work to provide appropriate accommodations (Yenney & Sacco, 2016). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (Snyder, de Brey, & Dillow, 2016), about 11% of college students identify as having a disability.

The American Association of Community Colleges (2016) reports that 45% of undergraduate students with disabilities choose to enroll in two-year public institutions. Graham-Smith and Lafayette’s (2004) research identified that one of the biggest factors,

from the student's perspective, that impacted a student's accessing disability support services was having "caring people" who provide students a "sense of security" and a "safe environment" within the Office of Disability Services. From the perspective of the college administration, the disability services providers would need to be knowledgeable enough to ensure compliance with all things ADA (Dukes & Shaw, 1999). With community colleges serving nearly half of the undergraduate population of students with disabilities, both personality and training for these college employees are instrumental to the success of students with disabilities and the college.

Successes and Challenges of Students with Disabilities

There are numerous factors that influence the success of students with disabilities including faculty engagement (Grasgreen, 2014), internal characteristics like mindset and self-efficacy (Kutscher, 2016), sense of belonging and care from disability services providers (Graham-Smith & Lafayette, 2004), and social connections (Grasgreen, 2014). Geith and Vignare (2008) which found that course completion rates are typically lower for students with disabilities than other students. The following section looks at literature related to both success factors and challenges impacting students with disabilities in their post-secondary educational experiences.

Successes. Success of students with disabilities has been the focus of much research. According to Levy (2001), students with disabilities at institutions where supports are in place to help students in finding accessibility solutions exceed their academic goals at higher rates than do students at institutions where finding alternate learning and teaching approaches is not an activity supported or available to faculty and students. Moisey (2004) looked at success of students with disabilities based on the

support services they received over a three-year period. This study found that supports needed varied by student and the type of disability the student possessed. Overall, Moisey found that the more types of supports a student was afforded the higher the course completion rate. Additionally, certain types of assistance were found to be more beneficial based on the type of disability.

Interpersonal relationships and a strong support system have been reported repeatedly throughout research as positive contributors to the success of students with disabilities (Orr & Goodman, 2010). Orr and Goodman found that students with disabilities felt more engaged and accepted when faculty embraced students with disabilities by trying to understand their unique needs in and out of the classroom. Additionally, Orr and Goodman's research also found that students found greater success with faculty who are available to meet one-on-one with them, who are willing to work with them on needed accommodations, and who encourage them to get involved in campus activities. In a case study completed by Barber (2012) that investigated which factors influenced successful degree completion for students with disabilities, the participants of this case study overwhelmingly responded that significant relationships with either a faculty member or a professional staff member within the Office of Disability Services significantly contributed to their successful completion. Additionally, this group of participants attributed much of their success to support from family members.

Assistive technology is one of the main avenues of support for many students with disabilities. Moisey (2004) found that assistive technology was especially effective for students with learning disabilities and resulted in an increase in completion rates for

students who had access to assistive technology. Use of assistive technology paired with support services results in students with disabilities obtaining their educational goals and gaining needed social and vocational goals (Goodman, Tiene, & Luft, 2002).

Faculty attitudes toward students with disabilities also have been found to be a success factor for students with disabilities (Rao, 2004). Faculty engagement and willingness to understand and work with students with disabilities is linked to student success in the areas of retention and graduation (Allsopp, Minskoff, & Bolt, 2005). Research conducted by Barber (2012) also found involvement, with both faculty and other students, to be a contributor for students with disabilities in successful course completion.

There are also many individual qualities that if possessed by a student with a disability increases their likelihood for success. Barber (2012) identified the following as qualities possessed by successful students with disabilities: self-awareness, insight about their disability, focus, interpersonal skills, and perseverance. Barber indicated that these qualities were particularly important for students during transitions- the first year of college, transitioning to work, or continuing education by transferring. Almost all participants rated high in their ability to self-advocate. Being able to 1) fully understand one's disability and 2) having the self-advocacy skills to seek needed services needed to be successful were identified as common themes among successful completers. Orr and Goodman (2010) found that many students with disabilities feel like "survivors" after living through many moments of embarrassment and inadequacy while growing up. This quality of perseverance or resiliency is directly related to the personal characteristic known as self-determination. Attitude and self-advocacy are two of the most important

factors in determining success or failure for students with disabilities in post-secondary education (U.S. Department of Education, 2011), and anything the institution can do to teach or foster these skills for students with disabilities the more successful the students with disabilities will be.

A longitudinal study conducted by Mamisheishvili and Koch (2012) found that students with disabilities who enroll full-time, maintain high grade point averages, have high aspirations, and meet regularly with academic advisors were more likely to persist. Additionally, students are greatly benefited by interactions with peers, faculty, and staff both in and outside of the classroom (Belch, 2004-2005). These interactions create a sense of inclusiveness and belonging which was linked to success in college, according to Belch.

Challenges. The barriers to higher education are quite numerous and vary student to student (Andres & Carpenter, 1997; Rodriguez & Wan, 2010). One of the first barriers a student with a disability has to overcome is the lasting emotions and self-concepts associated with having a disability. Orr and Goodman's (2010) research identified the emotional legacy of learning differently as the most powerful theme identified by the students who participated in their study. Most participants reported feeling "stupid" at very early ages, and those feelings continued for many into adulthood, with some participants reporting feelings of "inadequacy, embarrassment, and frustration" extending into the post-secondary environment. Collins and Mowbray's (2005) research looks specifically at psychiatric disabilities within higher education, and they found that the onset of serious mental illness typically occurs between ages 17 and 25. This aligns with the timeframe in a young adult's life when one is likely seeking post-

secondary education. Mamiseishvili and Koch (2012) report that transitional periods, while difficult for all students, are especially difficult for students with disabilities, as transition is associated with uncertainty and a great deal of stress. In addition to learning to navigate a college campus, developing needed study habits, and figuring out typical logistics associated with starting college, students with disabilities also have to figure out how to access needed supports, how to get needed accommodations, and how to manage aspects of their disability in a new setting. As discussed in Mamiseishvili and Koch, an example of this might be a student with a psychiatric disability of depression is likely to experience symptoms of insomnia, fatigue, and reduced ability to concentrate during stressful times like that experienced during transitions. The stresses of transitioning into post-secondary education are also often compounded by the onset of disruptive symptoms.

Students with disabilities are often not aware of their rights and responsibilities as it relates to academic supports needed in the higher education learning environment (Barber, 2012). One reason for this lack of awareness is because there are numerous differences between the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), the law that governs the secondary educational system's disability accommodation processes, and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), the law that governs institutions of higher learning's processes. These differences are illustrated in Appendix A. Since high schoolers have only ever been exposed to the IDEA aspects of accommodations for learning and disability support, they are often at a loss when they are transitioning to college and not aware of the different rights and responsibilities they have under ADA. Based on current ADA legislation, students with disabilities that enter higher education

must initiate a request for disability support services by self-disclosing that they have a disability, which is different than K-12 where students are given accommodations based on needs. Additionally, in K-12, students are often given accommodations that are not even asked for in advance. Because it is the student's responsibility to seek services at the post-secondary level, awareness of the available services, including awareness of the Office of Disability Services and its function, is key in students getting the accommodations they need (Pacifci & McKinney, 1997). Evaluations and documentation sufficient to justify high school accommodations are often not deemed sufficient at the post-secondary level (Gordon, Lewandowski, Murphy & Dempsey, 2002). Getzel (2008) states that the most critical self-determination skill needed by a student with disabilities is understanding how to access and use needed accommodations. As a result, students with disabilities need to be informed about documentation requirements at the post-secondary level because their lack of adequate documentation could serve as yet another barrier to accessing needed accommodations (Getzel, 2008).

In addition to lack of awareness about ADA rights and responsibilities, faculty attitudes can also be a barrier for students with disabilities. Faculty support plays a key role in the success of students with disabilities enrolled in college classes. Muller (2006) and Harman-Hall and Haaga (2002) both found that some faculty shy away from working with or assisting students with disabilities because they don't feel prepared to adequately teach these students. In a study conducted by Vogel, Leyser, Burgstahler, Sliger, and Zecker (2006), faculty at all participating institutions indicated they had a low degree of knowledge about Section 504. This study found that faculty felt they were most in need of professional development related to specific teaching accommodations. Grasgreen

(2014) found that faculty “have a lot of learning to do” when it comes to students with disabilities. Several students reported that faculty were dismissive of psychological conditions because they “don’t see” their affliction. According to Lombardi, Murray and Dallas (2013) faculty often are not sure how to interact with students with disabilities and Bruder and Mogro-Wilson (2010) found that faculty reported feeling pity, awkwardness, and even embarrassment at times when they met a student with a disability.

Community Colleges in Higher Education

All community colleges, although individually quite different, have shared goals of access and service (American Association of Community Colleges, 2010). These goals of access and service within the community college system became dominant during the 1960s which is when many community colleges entered the field of post-secondary education (Vaughn, 1982). Community colleges attempt to serve numerous missions that include providing workforce training, remediation for underprepared students entering higher education, community support and enrichment, and serving as a stepping stone to a four-year institution through college transfer programs (Community College Research Center, 2017). While striving to be all things to so many members of the community, community colleges often experience many challenges, but this does not stop community colleges from trying (Cejda & Leist, 2006).

Open admissions continue to be one of the staple characteristics of public community colleges within the field of higher education (American Association of Community Colleges, 2012). Most community colleges are public, state-funded organizations that are strategically located to allow for minimal commuting distances for prospective students which provides even greater access to students who may not have

the ability to move or who may need to stay close to home for personal or financial reasons (Pannoni, 2015). Additionally, community colleges offer lower tuition rates than four-year institutions and other private two-year options, and financial assistance opportunities through federal financial aid programs cover most/all of the community college tuition compared to only a small part of the tuition at four-year institutions. Pair these benefits with the standardized tests not being required for admission to community colleges (Milsom & Sackett, 2016), the ease of entering college by starting at a two-year institution, and the ability to live close to home (Ma & Baum, 2016) make community colleges a good fit for many, including many students with disabilities.

Challenges Faced by Community College Disability Services Programs

On a national level, community colleges are constantly being challenged to meet the needs of 21st century students in this 21st century economy. Graduation rates, job placement rates, college transfer rates, and all “the gaps” (career planning gaps, achievement gaps, and degree gaps) are all scrutinized by local, state, and national leaders, and overall institutional accountability is higher than ever (American Association of Community Colleges, 2012). The American Association of Community Colleges launched a new 21st Century Initiative in 2011 with the goal to educate an additional five million students with a credential by the year 2020. As a result of this initiative, the American Association of Community Colleges (2012) conducted a listening tour from 10 different regions of the country and the following issues were identified by the over 1,300 stakeholders: the need to reexamine the mission of the community college, concerns about underfunding, overall student success rates, concerns about meeting job market needs, issues with helping students transition to community college and from community

college to baccalaureate programs, the need for incorporating better data metrics to allow for transparency and ease of access to needed data, and a great need for strategic partnerships with key stakeholders (business, local community organizations, and K-12 and four-year transfer institutions).

The open door admission policy results in the most diverse array of students attending colleges today; qualities or characteristics commonly found on college campuses include students who are low-income, first-generation, and minority, as well as “nontraditional” aged students, working adults, and students with disabilities (American Association of Community Colleges, 2012; Bailey & Morest, 2006; Bragg & Durham, 2012; Van Noy, Heidkamp, & Kaltz, 2013). Each different quality or characteristic possessed by a student adds layers of complexities to the student and impacts the types of support services the student may need to be successful, as each of these characteristics often carries with it many different challenges. Community college staff must be familiar with the many challenges faced by their students and know how best to help these students find success despite these challenges. Each characteristic does not stand alone, and it is not uncommon for students to have a combination of these characteristics. Any one of these characteristics paired with having a disability can compound difficulties for a student, making success even more difficult.

Disability services programs need to know how to assist students with disabilities who may possess these characteristics and at the same time be familiar with the individual disability the student possesses and be able to identify ways to provide needed access to learning materials and programs of the college (Yenney & Sacco, 2016). Categories of disabilities often encountered within the community college setting include

learning disabilities, sensory disabilities (like blindness or deafness), physical impairments, autism, mental illness, and developmental disabilities (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016). With substantial increases in the numbers of students with disabilities seeking admission to higher education following federal legislation like the American with Disabilities Act, one challenge associated with the open door admissions policy is the extensive costs incurred for providing accommodations to students with disabilities (Thomas, 2000). Barber (2012) conducted a focus group with college professionals concerning disability services programs, and participants shared a concern regarding an increase in the number of students with the need for mental health services and counseling.

Failure to meet the needs of students with disabilities can have legal implications. If a student feels the college failed to adequately provide reasonable academic accommodations, the student has the right to file a complaint with the Office of Civil Rights. Any discrimination claim could lead to costly legal fees and result in immeasurable hours of personnel time spent to remedy the issue (Duggan, 2010). This certainly adds pressure to the disability services providers to ensure the needs of students are being met, not just in their office, but also by other staff and faculty on campus who may be assisting a student with documented needs and accommodations.

Additionally, community colleges should strive to better meet the needs of students with disabilities by focusing on outcomes in addition to accessibility (Bragg & Durham, 2012). Barber (2012) found that community colleges experienced difficulty identifying students with disabilities who were completers of their institution. Additionally, the colleges that participated stated they were unable to easily access

information regarding which services the completers used while attending their institution, which suggests a need for a targeted way for identifying this information and other factors that influence successful degree completion. Tracking of students with disabilities and historical information specific to students with disabilities are often not easily available or in some cases not available at all according to the findings of the Barber study. This indicates a great need for all community college disability service offices to have a solid record keeping system for recording services history and outcomes of students with disabilities.

In the early 1950s, the American Council on Education performed a study looking at veterans with disabilities who accessed higher education. This report was one of the first to investigate what services were offered by the institutions to veteran students with disabilities (Madaeus, 2011). The supports put in place to assist the mass number of individuals with disabilities returning from war using G.I. Bill benefits and the like were the beginnings of disability services in higher education (Madaus et al., 2009). Supports at this point were related to transportation, housing, and facilities. A strategic approach to disability services was not embraced by all institutions of higher learning across the nation at this early date but rather was more of an as-needed approach, assisting students with disabilities when they enrolled and demonstrated a need for accommodations.

In the 1990s following the ADA, higher education disability services had a more focused mission and had specific guidance for achieving that mission. With the passing of the ADA legislation, higher education disability services programs began to develop a strong focus on self-determination theory. Essentially, the idea of this theory is to help individuals with a disability identify their strengths and limitations and help them develop

the skills and confidence to be autonomous as much as possible (Field et al., 1998).

Disability support services personnel were predominantly responsible for helping build the confidence needed, as identified in self-determination theory, of students who entered higher education settings. Getzel (2014) suggested that ways to increase and foster the development of self-determination in students with disabilities is through faculty and peer mentoring programs, receiving needed accommodations, and collaboration of services across campus.

The disability services office is typically housed within Student Affairs but has been known to reside in Academic Affairs at some institutions (Harbour, 2004). Disability services personnel typically come from student services or counseling backgrounds as these types of professionals are often deemed more qualified than most to assist students with disabilities and understand disability specific needs of students (Madaus, 2000). Additionally, the title of the office varies institution to institution as was evident in a study by Harbour (2004) where they studied 424 disability services administrators and “Disability Services” was most commonly included in the title of the program/office.

Regardless of placement around campus, collaboration across campus is essential for the success of a disability services program (Harbour, 2004). According to a survey conducted by the American Association of Community Colleges (2016), three out of four institutions that responded indicated they had an office dedicated for disability support services, and the remaining institutions had no more than two full time staff dedicated to serve students with disabilities. Since such a large percentage of students with disabilities

is seeking enrollment within the community college setting, this level of staffing is not sufficient (Yenney & Sacco, 2016).

Accommodations for students with disabilities should not follow a cookie cutter approach based on the type of disability a student possesses. The support needed by students with disabilities varies by student (Madaus, 2000). The disability services provider must assess the individual student's needs and identify and facilitate needed accommodations based on the student's designated limitations (Shaw & Dukes, 2001). Common services and accommodations, as identified by Moisey (2004), are categorized as course specific accommodations, exam specific accommodations, external supports, or assistive technology accommodations. Course specific accommodations may take the form of alternate formats of course materials, and exam accommodations may mean extended testing time. External supports include note takers and interpreters, and a screen reading software would be an example of assistive technology that may be used as an accommodation for students with disabilities.

Not all accommodations have the same impact on student success, however. Moisey (2004) found that extended time to complete the course beyond the standard semester timeframe was not helpful towards student course completion, but with the right combination of accommodations, students are more likely to be successful. Being able to assess an individual student's needs to create the various accommodations needed to provide equal access to course materials and participation within the course is the charge of the disability services provider under ADA.

Disability Services Staff

Sharkin (2012) showed that the community college counselor is often charged with “wear[ing] many hats,” which means these individuals offer multiple services for students. These services include personal counseling, career assessments, academic assistance through advising, transfer assistance, support for students in academic jeopardy and on academic probation, mental health counseling, community referrals, case management, and disability services. Dean (2000) referred to this approach as a “one-stop shopping” model. Sharkin (2012) noted that unlike at many four-year institutions, where they will have an Office of Disability Services or specialists to allow counselors to focus on specialty services, the community college counselor is often the only resource available to provide disability services to students while still being responsible for personal counseling and “other” needed services.

Disability services staff coordinate accommodations for students with disabilities, facilitate academic modifications, and provide and train students in the use of assistive technology for courses, programs, college services, and institutional activities (Van Noy, Heidkamp & Kaltz, 2013). Disability services providers are also charged with maintaining confidentiality of both records and communications related to a student’s disability (Barber, 2012). In addition to working closely with students to ensure their access to educational materials, disability services providers must collaborate with faculty to ensure academic standards are being maintained when providing accommodations (Izzo, Murray, & Novak, 2008; Van Noy, Heidkamp, & Kaltz, 2013). Together, the disability services provider and faculty will work together to make sure the content, quality, and level of instruction are not compromised. Many disability support

offices also have strong partnerships with community organizations to assist in their providing services to students with disabilities (Pacifci & McKinney, 1997). Examples of common partnerships include connecting with community resources for the Deaf or the Blind or developing contacts with local mental health agencies.

Pacifci and McKinney (1997) identified several support services often provided by disability support programs, including disability assessment assistance, orientation, academic advising, career exploration, tutoring, and assistive technology assessments. Norlander, Shaw, and McGuire (1990) surveyed 299 disability services practitioners, and they identified key competencies of personnel who assisted students with learning disabilities. The administered survey aimed to identify needed competencies of disability services providers as identified by disability services providers and as identified by administrative personnel. Disability services providers identified “assessment skills, cognitive interventions, and instructional skills and techniques” (McGuire, 1990, p. 15) as desirable competency areas for their position. Administrative personnel responses indicated management and leadership skills as most desirable competencies of disabilities support staff. This study is one of only a few studies that elicited feedback from disability services providers about their profession.

Numerous challenges face disability services staff. Disability services providers not only must assess a student’s need for technology, but they must also make arrangements to fund and then purchase the equipment. Additionally, staff must learn enough about new technology in a very short period to turn around and train a student how to use it with minimal training on their own (Moisey, 2004). Pacifci and McKinney (1997) point out that other barriers to providing effective services to students with

disabilities are “difficulty in obtaining adequate funding, lack of training and limited understanding of disabilities among faculty and staff, and inadequate referral services” (p. 3). On top of coordinating all these purchases and training students, disability services providers often end up serving as mediators between the student and faculty (Izzo, Murray, & Novak, 2008).

The Association on Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD) is a professional organization for individuals involved in assisting students with disabilities. Since 1977 this organization has been providing training opportunities for disability services personnel and is one of the first organizations formed to provide professional development for the disability services profession (AHEAD, 2017). A foundational mission of AHEAD is to improve the overall quality of disability services afforded to students with disabilities within higher education, and, ultimately, to promote making college environments as accessible as possible. AHEAD has adopted twenty-seven program standards (Shaw & Dukes, 2001) which they recommend all disability services programs embody. The AHEAD Program Standards and Performance Indicators provide a minimum standard for essential services that should be available through a disability services program. Additionally, these standards detail the needed skills and knowledge required of the personnel responsible for administering the disability services program and overseeing the Office of Students with Disabilities. The standards all fall in one of the following areas: consultation/collaboration, information dissemination, faculty/staff awareness, academic adjustments, counseling and self-determination, policies and procedures, program administration and evaluation, and training and professional development (AHEAD, 2017).

While a great deal of research looks to identify factors that influence success of students with disabilities, little research exists to address the role of disability services personnel. Even though Graham-Smith and Lafayette (2004) identified the importance of this role within the success of students with disabilities, no one has tried to identify characteristics and qualities disability services providers associate with success in their profession. Additionally, there is little research that explores the disability services providers' unique perspective relative to their role in assisting students with disabilities. With continual growth in the number of students with disabilities seeking services and an increase in the number of post-secondary disability services personnel needed to serve these students, it is more important than ever to make sure that people in this profession can facilitate their position in a way that results in success of the students they serve and protects the institutions where they work.

Conclusion

The history of students with disabilities and disability support services in higher education, and community colleges in particular, are reviewed in this chapter. The literature indicated minimal results related to the experiences of disability support providers for students with disabilities enrolled in higher education. Success and challenges of students with disabilities is discussed at length, as are elements of college campuses that impact student success which include the Office of Disability Services. The available research speaks more to the types of programs students with disability services are seeking. Little research is available regarding the roles and perceptions of the disability services providers and what aspects of a disability services program they identify as important/necessary for students and the program's impact on student success.

Further research is needed to look at issues faced by disability services offices, including adequate staffing, institutional support, budgets, and faculty perceptions.

Chapter Three

Method

Introduction

This chapter addresses the methodology used for this research project. The theoretical underpinnings for using a phenomenological approach are shared, along with the specific procedures for participant selection, data collection, and data analytical procedures. Additional considerations are discussed including the researcher's role and methods used to ensure trustworthiness of the data collection and analysis. The four specific research questions driving this research project are:

1. What do community college Disability Services Personnel perceive as the greatest challenges for students with disabilities and the institutions that serve them?
2. What do community college Disability Services Personnel perceive as the most rewarding aspects of their role within the community college setting?
3. What do community college Disability Services Personnel perceive as the most significant challenges they face as disability services providers?
4. What are the perceived needs of community college Disability Services Personnel in assisting community college students?

Overview of Qualitative Methodology

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) describe qualitative research as an interest “in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (p. 5). This research is aimed to understand experiences of community college disability service providers and

administrators working alongside students with disabilities as they attempt to successfully navigate through an educational program at a community college. As such, the use of qualitative research allows for in-depth understanding of opportunities and challenges within education and has the potential to reveal possible sources of problems as well as opportunities for solving problems.

The qualitative interview-based research design is informed by phenomenology. In phenomenological studies the researcher relies on participants' experiences and perspectives to gain insight into a phenomenon (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). When trying to describe a phenomenon, i.e., the experiences of disability services providers at community colleges, the goal is to study the experience and present findings related to the perspective of the research participants. While various phenomenological research methods are available, the researcher used a combination of questionnaires, interviews, shadowing observations, and document analysis for a triangulation of data.

The purpose of this qualitative study is to better understand the disability services providers' experiences and to learn more about their perspectives related to their job responsibilities. Participants were recruited using a purposeful sampling method from a community college system in a southeastern state of the United States. Specifically this study looks at disability service providers within the North Carolina Community College System (NCCCS). The NCCCS is the third largest system of higher education in the United States and is comprised of 58 colleges across the state of North Carolina and enrolls around 710,000 students (North Carolina Community College System, 2017). This system has a strong focus on student success, as is evidenced by a recent launching of a Student Success Center through funds awarded by Jobs for the Future. North

Carolina was only one of the 14 states selected to participate (Jobs for the Future, 2017). Additionally, the NCCCS was an early adopter of the Completion by Design framework (Stancill, 2015) and currently has 10 schools that have been named Achieving the Dream schools (Achieving the Dream, 2017); both organizations serve as reform movements focused on student success. Additionally, a purposeful sampling method was used to identify individuals with firsthand knowledge of working with the phenomenon (Patton, 2015). Data saturation was used to determine when an adequate sample size was reached (Wertz, 2005). Creswell (2013) suggests that adequate sample sizes for qualitative and phenomenological research range between five to twenty-five participants. Once themes began to repeat and no new information was being collected through the interviews and analysis, the researcher ended the interviews. Additionally, the researcher shadowed two participants for approximately one work day each to observe their experiences in the work setting as they aligned with the research questions. The researcher reviewed the dataset collected through the interviews for emerging themes. Interviews, questionnaire results, documents, and observation notes from the shadowing experience, as well as documents provided by the participants, served as the data sources in this qualitative study.

Researcher's Role as an Insider

According to Seidman (2006), only through studying the experiences of the individual people involved in an organization or process can a researcher adequately learn the ins and outs of that organization or process. Seidman also said that only those who have the experiences being studied can truly speak to whether or not the practices of that organization or process are a “best practice” since they are the ones directly affected.

The researcher is a community college administrator whose duties entail overseeing the Office of Disability Services at the institution where she works and previously served as a Disability Services staff member. She has worked with people with disabilities since the age of 18. Professionally, the researcher has worked extensively in the areas of community college counseling, advising, disability services, admissions, testing, recruiting, and teaching for over 13 years. Before joining the community college system she served for two years as a legal assistant for a medical malpractice legal office that specialized in debilitating injuries and as a community support worker assisting young adults in developing independent living skills for three years. Since her undergraduate work, the researcher has been working to better the lives of individuals living with disabilities. Her interest and passion for individuals with disabilities and the people who work with individuals with disabilities is a major contributor to this research study.

Researchers bring their own views of the world, and this often shapes the direction of the research (Creswell, 2013). Creswell also describes four philosophical assumptions regarding researchers: ontological (the nature of reality), epistemological (what and how researchers know what they know), axiological (values and their role in research), and methodology (methods employed in research process). Researchers work to embrace multiple realities from different individuals' points of view (ontological) and to collect subjective evidence collected by getting close to participants being studied (epistemological). Additionally, researchers actively share their values and biases in the research study as well as impact the methodology that is shaped by the researcher's experience in data collection and analysis.

There are advantages and disadvantages to the researcher's previous experiences and current role within the field of disability services. The previous experiences of the researcher serve as an advantage in this research project by creating rapport through shared experiences. The researcher emphasized her role as researcher and not that of a peer or colleague in the interview setting in an effort to ensure responses were genuine to the participants' experiences and were adequately descriptive, thus not assuming that the researcher understands the setting already. The previous experience of the researcher as a disability services professional provides a common foundation that both the researcher and the participant share. A possible disadvantage of the researcher's former experiences produces possible biases, predispositions, and attitudes that the researcher made a conscious effort to avoid showing or sharing, both during the interview and during data analysis and interpretation so as not to impact the responses of the participants. The researcher took a stance that is nonjudgmental and respectful of the interviewee and consciously made every effort to achieve *epoche*, as described in Moustakas (1994), during both the interviews and data analysis. Additionally, a peer debriefer was used in data analysis to ensure dependable data coding. The peer debriefer selected for this study has over 10 year experience in higher education, specifically in the community college setting, and currently oversees the Institutional Effectiveness Office at the college where she works. She has been heavily involved in both qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis for the last nine years.

The researcher, who currently serves as a director who oversees the disability services office at her institution, was aware of how her position may influence the

responses of participants. As a result of this awareness, the researcher made every effort to emphasize her role as a researcher and not that of a peer, colleague, or supervisor.

Participants

Participants were solicited using a purposeful sampling method through the North Carolina Association of Higher Education and Disabilities email distribution list serve and the North Carolina Community College Student Development listserv, of which the researcher is a member of both. This form of sampling provided the researcher with participants who were in close proximity to the researcher so that face-to-face interviews were possible. The purposive element of the sampling method is to ensure participants who have experienced the phenomenon (Patton, 2015). A criterion-based selection process was used to ensure key attributes/criterion of all participants to adequately address the driving questions (Creswell, 2013). The participant selection criterion included:

1. Individuals working as disability services professionals
2. Individuals who have been in their current position for at least a year so as to be beyond the typical training phase of a new position and beyond any new employee probationary period
3. Individuals who are currently working within the community college system.

The email solicited participation from community college staff who are responsible for assisting in the facilitation of disability services. The requirements for participation were that the participant be currently employed in a community college assisting students with disability services identified as a responsibility and part of their

job description. Participation was based on a participant self-selecting to participate in the study.

North Carolina's community college system is comprised of 58 community colleges, each with one or more staff responsible for assisting students with disabilities and two of the top 50 community colleges in the nation, according to <thebestschools.org> (2017). The North Carolina Community College System (NCCCS) enrolled 431,000 students during the fall 2016 semester (North Carolina Community Colleges, 2017). The target population for this study includes 58 disability services programs, one at each of the 58 community colleges in the state. Within this system, as noted in the state's Disability Services Resource Guide, seven institutions have numerous staff identified as disability services providers and the other 51 programs only have one staff person devoted to serving in the role of disability services provider (North Carolina Community College System, 2014).

Participants who agreed to be a part of this study were provided informed consent (Appendix B) information before the interview and each was well informed of the study's purpose, and results have been shared with all participants. Participants were reassured that every effort would be made by the researchers to protect their identity, and they were notified of any potential risks associated with their participation. Data saturation was used to determine when an adequate sample size was reached (Wertz, 2005). The researcher cut off the sample size when the themes and data collected did not generate new information or themes and data collected were redundant to previous data collected. For this study, the total sample size was seven, which is within the recommended range

for this type of qualitative research (Creswell, 2013). Detailed information of the participants are in Table 2.

Table 2
Participant Demographic Information

Name	Years in Current Position	Years in Disability Services	Years at Current Institution	Enrollment at Current Institution	Number of SWD Registered with DS office	Number of SWD Personally Worked With	Number of Other DS Staff	Percentage of Work Week Spent Working with SWD
Abby	1	1	1	7500	700	Varies	1.5	40%
Brian	1	4	7	4600	100	65	2	85%
Carrie	5	5	15	2800	40	12	2	5%
Gwen	1	2	1	2200	38	38	1	40%
Helen	7	7	7	5400	160	120	2	50%
Laura	2	4	11	2100	40	0	1	2%
Marsha	3	10	3	9000+	2200	3	13	20%

Table 2 outlines basic demographic information obtained from participants as a part of the pre-interview questionnaire. Participants were assigned pseudonyms to protect their identity. The assigned pseudonym is in no way reflective of participant's race, given name, or institution. Participants, while primary points of contact for disability services for the institutions where they worked, had additional responsibilities beyond that of just assisting students with disabilities with the accommodation process. Additional responsibilities ranged from academic advising, personal counseling, career exploration and development services, financial aid assistance, veterans affairs services, childcare grant oversight, and facilitating new student orientation.

Ethical Considerations

According to Creswell (2013), the researcher has a responsibility to anticipate any ethical issues that may arise as a result of the research process. The researcher made

every effort to protect the research participants as much as possible, and this was achieved by ensuring there was no misconduct during the data collection, analysis, or storage process. Most importantly, the researcher has an obligation to respect the participants and their rights and values (Creswell, 2013). The nature of this qualitative interview-based research did result in sensitive responses to the questions during the data collection, and the researcher made every effort to protect the statements and opinions of the participants by removing references to names and any context that might link the participant's response to a certain institution. Additionally, the researcher employed the following safeguards in an effort to protect the participants and their rights:

1. Communicate objectives – Objectives of the research were provided in writing as well as articulated before the interviews to all participants.
2. Voluntary participation – Each participant was informed both in writing and before the interviews the voluntary nature of their participation. Participants were informed that they could decline to answer any question or withdraw without penalty from the entire study at any time if they so choose.
3. Informed consent – A signed written consent form (see Appendix B) was obtained from each participant and a copy of that consent form was provided to each participant.
4. Transparency – Participants were notified of data collection activities, provided written transcriptions of all data collected, and given final interpretations of the data.

5. Privacy – Researcher made efforts to ensure the safety and security of the participant’s responses, contact information, and interview notes by storing all elements in a secure location.
6. Pseudonyms were used for participants and their institutions to protect their identity.

Data Collection Process

Seidman (2006) argued that the primary method for analyzing an educational institution or process is “through the experiences” of those who are actually involved in the educational institution or process that one wishes to study. For this study, data were gathered using interviews, a questionnaire, document review, and observation by job shadowing two participants for up to one day. See Appendix C for the interview protocol, Appendix D for the questionnaire, and Appendix E for the observation protocol. Through data analysis, the aim of this study was to better understand disability services staff, their role within the institution, and the elements of transition programs that assist students with disabilities as they move from high school to the community college. This research provides community college disability services staff and administrators with a greater awareness of staffing and program needs to assist student with disabilities in their journey to be successful within the community college environment.

Interviews, questionnaires, observation, and document analysis were the primary mediums for data collection for this study. Merriam (1998) argues that when conducting qualitative research, data collection and data analysis are simultaneous processes. The researcher met face-to-face with participants in their primary work location at their home institution with the request that the designated space be one where we could talk candidly

about their position and responsibilities for the interviews. Interviews allow for an in-depth understanding of individuals' experiences and how they interpret their own experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The researcher was responsible for all data collection. A list of guiding questions is included in Appendix C and served as a guide for the interviews. A semi-structured approach for interviewing was used to allow for follow-up questions and tangents based on participants' responses. This structure was chosen as it allows a degree of freedom and adaptability between the interviewer and interviewee. The ultimate goal was to gather the opinions and points of view of the disability services staff responsible for coordinating and supporting students with disabilities at their institutions.

A pre-interview questionnaire (Appendix D) was sent to each participant to gather basic information that might otherwise take away from the interview flow and provided the researcher some basic information about the participant along with a copy of the informed consent form in advance of the scheduled interview to allow participants time to review and pose any questions related to the study. Items on the questionnaire included work experience in the community college system and before accepting their current position. As hoped, the pre-interview questionnaire saved time during the interview and allowed for more in-depth information during the interview itself.

Each interview was recorded electronically and transcribed. A copy of the transcript was shared with each participant to ensure adequate interpretation on the part of the researcher. Participants were given a copy of the transcript from the interview and were given an opportunity to clarify and elaborate on any aspects of their interview as they deemed needed. Additionally, the researcher conducted a member check following

each interview through a follow up telephone call to review researcher interpretation with each participant and ensure that researcher interpretations match that which the participant intended to be the takeaway. Any corrections or further elaboration that was generated from this review of the transcripts by participants or through the member checks were also incorporated into the data set for this study.

The researcher focused efforts on maintaining the essence of phenomenological research during data collection. Moustakas (1994) identified *epoche* as an essential component of the phenomenological procedure for data collection. The component of *epoche* entails the researcher removing biases and preconceptions related to the phenomenon so as to experience and explore the phenomenon as if it were the first time (Moustakas, 1994). This element allows the researcher to fully experience the participants' experiences.

Additionally, two participants were shadowed. Each participant who volunteered to be interviewed was asked to be shadowed and the first two that agreed to be shadowed and were available in a timeframe that aligned with the researcher's schedule was selected for the shadowing observation portion of this study. Shadowing can be used as a method to understand roles and perspectives, according to McDonald (2005). Shadowing provided an opportunity to document and observe real situations and provided much more insight than would a recount of an incident in an interview environment. It was the hope of the researcher that observing participants in the field, combined with the information gathered from the interviews and questionnaires, would provide interesting insights into these professionals' experiences, and it did.

Lastly, the researcher additionally reviewed pertinent documents utilized by disability services professionals as referenced in the interviews and as identified during the observations. While the specific documents included in the documentation review and analysis were dependent upon the disability services staff and the observation, the researcher also included website review along with the documentation provided by participants. Table 3 shows which data was collected from each participant:

Table 3
Data Collected from Each Participant

	Abby	Brian	Carrie	Gwen	Helen	Laura	Marsha
Pre-Interview Questionnaire	x	x	x	X	x	x	x
Interview	x	x	x	X	x	x	x
Shadowing Observation			x	X			
Documents from Institution	x	x	x	X	x	x	x

One male and six female participants provide a diverse blend of both professional training and years of experience within the field of disability services. Additionally, the interviewees were from diverse institutions with student body populations ranging from 2,100 students to well over 9,000 students. The number of students with disabilities registered with the Disability Services (DS) office at each institution also varied with one school having 38 students receiving accommodations and another had over 2,200 students using the services of the DS office.

None of the participants shared the same career path to their current positions which provided for diverse perspectives related to their position. Additionally, the “other duties” the participants were responsible for other than working with students with disabilities varied across participants. Table 3 briefly illustrates the seven professionals’

demographic information as it relates to years in current position, number of SWDs both at their institution and that the participant works with individually, along with percentage of their work week that is devoted to working with SWDs.

Data Analysis

As recommended by Merriam and Tisdell (2016), the researcher began data analysis following the collection of all data after each interview and/or shadowing observation. The researcher made sure to remove all identifying names from the data to ensure the security of the participants. All recordings were stored on the researcher's UNC Charlotte Google Drive so as to be housed in a secure location. Each interviewee was assigned a pseudonym, and the master list of pseudonym to participant will be in a locked cabinet during the data analysis and write up portion of the project but will be shredded when no longer needed. Transcripts and researcher interpretations were shared with participants to ensure accuracy of content before analysis begins. Feedback from participants was incorporated into new data as a result of their participant feedback from both the transcript evaluation and the member check. All data from shadowing observations were in the form of researcher's notes.

The main goal of data analysis was to organize and sort the data in hopes of gaining insight into the driving questions of the research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Data analysis began by assigning pseudonyms to participants and transcribing the interviews. The first step employed when coding transcripts began with the researcher reading and rereading the transcribed interviews to establish a deeper understanding of each participant's background and experiences. During the first review of the transcripts, the researcher began identifying significant statements made by the participants. Through

subsequent multiple readings, the researcher began identifying quotes relevant to the professional's experience under investigation— key words and/or phrases. This is a process known as horizontalization (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). The organization of data continued with creating codes/categories and subcategories and sorting through those codes/categories to look for emerging patterns, themes, and insights. Following the identification of all relevant words and phrases, the researcher developed a coding sheet with columns and headings that represent the categories of relevant information. Next, the researcher explored each relevant quote or phrase and began grouping together those quotes with similar intended meanings into codes/categories. Initially as a part of the data analysis, the number of categories/meanings were rather large, but as more and more data were analyzed, consolidation of subcategories resulted in larger categories. Essentially, the review of transcripts and coding of notations of significant statements allowed the researcher to slowly integrate similar statements to identify essential themes that speak to the unified experiences of the participants as related to the phenomenon of serving as disability services personnel. Key quotes were noted during the data analysis as large themes emerged. A similar approach was used with the notes obtained during the shadowing observations. Additionally, the notes from the observations and the findings from the document review will be used to triangulate the data gathered during the interviews. Spreadsheets were used to keep track of incidences when categories came up in the interviews. In summary, first data was categorized and described, next data reduction led to successfully identifying themes, and lastly, data was analyzed and interpreted for implications for the profession. Ultimately, this research was able to provide insight into the profession of disability services personnel by identifying themes

that will allow for practical implications in the world of disability services programs. Additionally, it is the hope of the of the researcher that the data collected and analyzed through this project will be of particular interest to administrators in charge of hiring disability services personnel and overseeing disability services programs and other disability services personnel working in the field of disability services today.

Trustworthiness/Credibility

A common criticism of interviews is that they can be limited by the researcher's sensitivity or relationship to the topic (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In order to attempt to account for this concern, approval for this study was sought and granted from the University of North Carolina at Charlotte Institutional Review Board. Additionally, all interviews will be audio-recorded and transcriptions of the interviews and the researcher's interpretations were shared with interviewees for verification purposes known as a member check. Providing transcripts of the interview to the participants allows for correcting of inaccuracies and adding or clarification of information discussed during the interview. Triangulation of data was used as a measure to strengthen the credibility of this study.

Transferability

While this study does not make broad claims beyond that of the sample population, it does have applications beyond disability service providers in community colleges in North Carolina. The researcher invites readers to make connections beyond that of the research subjects and their own experiences. The findings of this study have applications for anyone working in disability services in the field of education. Additionally, the findings from this study have benefits for anyone working with students

with disabilities in higher education. Furthermore, administrators in education who oversee staff who work with students with disabilities services or who are in charge of the oversight of accommodations for students with disabilities could benefit from the findings of this study.

Dependability

Procedures for interviews, questionnaires, shadowing observations, and document analysis procedures are outlined in this chapter so as to allow potential future researchers to repeat this work in an effort to account for dependability of this study. Additionally, having a dissertation chair and a methodological expert to assist in the design of this research plan further speaks to the dependability of this study.

Confirmability

To address the question of confirmability of this data, the researcher employed a peer reviewer to ensure the researcher did not influence the data based on individual researcher bias. The researcher had two interview transcripts coded by a peer independent coder to allow the researcher to compare her analysis to that of an outside evaluator to ensure consistency in data analysis and dependability of findings. The purpose of the outside evaluator was to confirm accuracy of identified codes and themes made by the researcher and to identify points of concerns or discrepancies. The external evaluator has been involved in numerous research projects to date, the most recent of which was the completion of her doctoral dissertation looking at the effectiveness of two-year plan development for students using the services of a Transfer Advising Center. In her current position as the Associate Vice President of Academic Affairs, she oversees the Office of

Institutional Effectiveness and is the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges Liaison for the community college where she works.

Researcher bias was accounted for by continually reviewing the driving questions of this research study and using a self-reflective approach of staying focused on the research and the purpose of the study. Additionally, the researcher shared transcripts and key notes with interviewees to ensure evaluated content matches the interviewees' intended message.

Conclusion

This chapter provided an overview and summarization of the methodology to be used in this qualitative phenomenological study of disability services professionals employed by community colleges. Details are provided of participant criteria and selection, role of the researcher, and data collection processes. Details regarding data collection through questionnaires, interviews, document analysis, and field notes were also presented, followed by a discussion of ethical considerations, data analysis, and trustworthiness. This research ultimately aims to better understand the experiences of disability services professionals related to their roles and responsibilities as disability services providers in a community college.

Chapter Four:

Results and Findings

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate the experiences of community college disability services professionals. Disability services staff have a significant impact on the success of students with disabilities (Oertle & Bragg, 2014). Available research related to this important profession is limited, and this study offers a more in depth analysis of the experiences and perceptions of this population, specifically as it relates to the community college setting.

Chapter Four presents findings from data collected through interviewing seven disability service professionals working in community colleges in North Carolina. Several themes concerning how these participants perceive their positions as disability service providers emerged from the data analysis. Three major themes were identified from the participant interviews, document analysis, and observations which are discussed in detail in this chapter. *Importance of awareness and education, pushing through barriers and overcoming obstacles, and value of relationships* were identified as common themes from the data analysis. The purpose of chapter four is to provide details of the data analysis of the interviews, shadowing experience, and document analysis and to discuss how these results fit within the driving research questions of this study.

All participants were interviewed at their respective work sites; two participants were shadowed for one work day to allow adequate time for the researcher to observe experiences of a disability services provider, and documents shared through these exchanges were reviewed with the following research questions in mind:

1. What do community college Disability Services Personnel perceive as the greatest challenges for students with disabilities and the institutions that serve them?
2. What do community college Disability Services Personnel perceive as the most rewarding aspects of their role within the community college setting?
3. What do community college Disability Services Personnel perceive as the most significant challenges they face as disability services providers?
4. What are the perceived needs of community college Disability Services Personnel in assisting community college students?

This chapter outlines the findings of this study. A summary of participant narratives introduces each participant and an insight into what each participant finds most rewarding about his or her position as a disability services professional. Next, this chapter shares the analysis of the data including the classification process, reliability measures, and data coding procedure. The results are shared through the three themes identified from the interviews, along with the shadowing observation and document analysis results. Lastly, the results are linked back to the driving research questions for this study.

Participant Narratives

Through the use of qualitative inquiry, the researcher was able to investigate the phenomenon regarding how disability service providers in community colleges experience their roles at the institution where they work. The descriptions below aim to provide the reader more insight into each participant so as better to relate to the overall essence of their experiences. One of the first questions posed during the interviews was, “What do you find most rewarding about serving students with disabilities?” as this was

one of the driving research questions for this study. Their responses are found at the end of each participant's description and are representative of each participant's voice.

Abby

Abby is relatively new to the field of community college disability services, at least compared to the rest of the participants. She has only been working in her current role as a disability services professional for a year, but she has been working with individuals with disabilities her entire career. Her previous experiences with individuals with disabilities began back in undergraduate school when she provided respite care for children with autism. She then worked in a residential and acute care psychiatric facility. Just before taking her current role, she worked with Vocational Rehabilitation. She has a bachelor's degree in psychology and a master's degree in rehabilitation counseling. She feels her previous experiences did a good job of preparing her for the diverse student situations she experiences in her current role in the community college. She stated:

I really enjoy helping people meet their goals, no matter what that goal may be.

... I just really like helping people meet whatever goal it is they have in life. And here it's all about helping people complete some sort of training with the hope that they will transition to something better in their lives.

Brian

Brian is a major proponent of the community college. His educational experience entails a bachelor's degree in human services and a master's degree in school counseling. He previously worked as a high school counselor where he was exposed to IEP's and 504 plans under IDEA. He attributes his experiences with students with disabilities in the high school setting as a major reason why he accepted his current position in disability

services. Brian has been in his current role for one year, but he did have experience in the community college setting before his work as a high school counselor. That experience was within the office of admissions and recruiting. He feels strongly about training and connecting with local resources for the sake of being able to adequately serve his students. When asked about what he finds most rewarding about serving students with disabilities he stated:

You give them those accommodations and then you watch them blossom and use them, and they are successful or really just feel like a regular student. They have the access that a regular student has, and they come in and talk about their tests that they passed and, you know, it's a neat thing to watch them light up and say thank you, but even more so just to watch them do what they need to do. ... we watch their grades go up because they got the extended time ... I worked graduation because we're doing disability services there and coordinating accommodations there and I go, WOW, they walked across the stage. So it's kind of a neat little thing. Start to finish it is pretty cool.

Carrie

Carrie always wanted to be a counselor in some capacity. She has been in the community college setting for over a decade and she knew that if she was going to be a counselor in the community college setting that disability services was an element in which she might find herself working. She has a bachelor's degree in sociology and a master's degree in psychology. She didn't necessarily want to be a disability services professional, but she has been in her current role for five years, and now she is viewed as the unofficial expert at her institution for all things disability services. Before working in

disability services, she worked in admissions. She is a strong advocate for her students and seeks out opportunities to be their voice on campus. Her passion for helping students was evident through comments like:

I really like just engaging with them one on one and seeing how ... if you level the playing field for them, they can really succeed. ... That and the day to day contact. I had one student, and ... if you looked at it on paper, you would never have thought this student was going to succeed, but ... she actually ended up graduating and going on to a local university and is getting very close to graduating there.

Gwen

Gwen worked with children with autism during her undergraduate work. This helped shaped her path towards becoming a disability services professional within higher education. She so enjoyed helping this population deal with various activities in their daily life that she sought a graduate program that would allow her to continue work in this area, and she enrolled in a rehabilitation counseling program. After a few years working for Vocational Rehabilitation, she started looking for work in education, her true passion. She found a position within disability services at a community college and has not turned back. She is a huge promoter of self-advocacy for the students she works with and takes great pride in educating students, parents, and faculty about what that means for the students receiving disability services at her college. She is very focused on student success. Gwen has a passion to serve students with disabilities and loves her work as evident by quotes like this:

We have a student here who is visually impaired, and she took a biology class and so having to figure out how to get all of her diagrams raised and get the Braille embossers and figuring out all those kinds of things. It took a lot of time to do, but it was, it was a fun challenge and it was fun to be able to see her be successful.

Helen

Helen has spent the last seven years working as a disability services professional. She has a bachelor's degree in anthropology and her master's degree in counseling. After interning within the college setting during her master's program, Helen realized that she really loved the college setting. When she found the position of disability services professional, she felt that position was a perfect combination of counseling and helping people but also being able to advocate for social justice, which is really something she is very passionate about. In regards to the rewards she finds in her current position, the following quote captures her feelings about helping students with disabilities in her current role:

It's almost graduation, which I love because you see these students who have been told their whole lives that they're never going to do it and then they do. ... So I think it's been awesome to see them succeed, but then I also think like seeing faculty understand better and like be on the same page has been really rewarding. I think that's a good facet.

Laura

Laura did not really seek out disability services like all of the other participants. Her background is that of enrollment management and financial aid. She has been involved in disability services for two years. She earned a bachelor's degree in liberal

studies, a master's degree in community college administration, and has her doctorate in adult and community college education. She has spent her entire career in student services. She began in financial aid where she helped students with applications for grants, scholarships, and related benefits and later added admissions and disability services to her work load. While she did not go to school to work with students with disabilities and the responsibility just "fell under my role" as is often the "nature of community colleges," Laura still has a genuine passion to help students meet their educational goals by removing barriers and promoting student success:

A lot of students are so very grateful for whenever you are able to help them with like a specific request such as extended time on homework or extended time on classroom work or that sort of thing. A lot of them will come back and tell you that they appreciate what we've done for them. And seeing them graduate ... that is always a rewarding time when we can see them actually accomplish their goals and be successful.

Marsha

Marsha has been working with students with disabilities for 10 years. She has worked at multiple community colleges in North Carolina where she has served in numerous roles as an advisor, a counselor, a department leader, and as a general support for college students, in addition to disability services. She is fascinated with the complexities involved in assisting students with disabilities from reviewing accommodations, problem solving complex issues, researching options to address an issue, and in ensuring that fundamental alterations are not being made throughout the process to the course and/or elements of the curriculum. She has a passion for working

with disadvantaged populations ever since she was in graduate school. Her first experience was with a student she worked with in graduate school who was struggling, and when trying to help her, discovered the student had a learning disability. Marsha was able to help this student by connecting her with needed resources on campus and continuing to check in on her to make sure the student stayed on track. During this time, Marsha met the student's disability specialist, and this was the first time she was aware of how this person could help a student with a disability. Most of Marsha's responses specifically reference the importance of advocacy and social justice for students with disabilities. She stated that she finds her working with disability services particularly rewarding in the following quote:

I think what I find most rewarding is when we are able to ... partner with the student and partner with the faculty to address and resolve an issue, that initially everyone felt like the student shouldn't be here or this is not going to work. I am of the mindset that 99 percent of the time we can find a way to make it work and that doesn't always mean through an accommodation. ... And I think being able to, at the end of the conversation, just see the fruits of our labor resolve what they perceived as not being solvable.

All participants experienced personal satisfaction from assisting students in reaching their personal goals. While participants varied a bit in what exactly they viewed as the most rewarding part of their roles as disability services providers, watching students they had helped graduate was a common response across participants. Several participants also found working with faculty to problem solve solutions to help students to be quite rewarding.

Analysis of the Data

Data Coding

Through the process of analysis, the researcher identified 304 statements of significance from the interviews. The researcher reviewed the initial group of statements by looking at the participant's complete response and then looking at how the response related to the research questions. The first grouping of statements were coded into 12 code clusters: Student Barriers to Success, Preparation for Position, Overall Awareness of Disability Services, Training Needs of Disability Services Providers, Challenges for Disability Service Providers, Educating/Teaching, Administrative Support, Collaboration with Others, Relationships with Other Professionals, Institutional Concerns about Disability Services Program, Undefined Roles and Responsibilities within Institution, Funding/Lack of Resources. *Table 4* shows the frequency of the original coded clusters. With each review of the codes, the frequency chart was updated and cross referenced as the ideas and later themes were identified.

Table 4:
Coded Clusters Frequency

Themes	Coded Cluster	Interviews						Document Analysis						Shadowing		Totals		
		Abby	Brian	Carrie	Gwen	Helen	Laura	Marsha	Abby	Brian	Carrie	Gwen	Helen	Laura	Marsha		Carrie	Gwen
Importance of Awareness & Education	Overall Awareness of DS	1	3	2	1	4	2	12	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	34
	Educating/Teaching	1	3	2	5	3	4	3	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	28
	Student Barriers	6	5	1	5	2	4	6	0	1	0	1	0	0	1	1	1	34
	Preparation for Position	4	2	2	4	4	5	5	0	1	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	30
	Training Needs of DS Providers	1	6	2	3	4	5	4	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	27
	Challenges for DS Provider	1	4	4	1	7	3	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	27
Pushing through Barriers & Overcoming Obstacles	Administrative Support	3	3	2	2	2	1	2	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	1	19
	Institutional Concerns	0	2	1	2	3	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	11
	Undefined Roles/Responsibilities within Institutions	2	0	1	1	1	4	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	11
	Funding/Resources	0	0	2	1	3	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	9
Value of Relationships	Collaboration with Others	1	1	3	1	3	1	3	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	21
	Relationships with Other Professionals	0	3	1	1	2	1	4	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	15

The code clusters continued to change as data were additionally refined. Ultimately, coding analysis led to the materializing of three core themes. These three themes describe the phenomenon of the experiences of disability services providers within the community college setting. The three themes that emerged from the data of how disability service providers experience their roles were *importance of awareness and education, pushing through barriers and overcoming obstacles, and value of relationships*.

The first theme, *importance of awareness and education*, outlines the experiences and concerns held by disability services providers that students, faculty, staff, high schools, and parents are misinformed or lack basic awareness of what the office of disability services can do to help students. The foundation of this theme lies in the constant need for disability service professionals to be educating others about processes, services, and roles and responsibilities related to serving students under ADA. Participants expressed not just concerns but many shared strategies for how they are attempting to combat need for awareness. Disability service providers suggested that awareness of what they do and the services they can offer is a big part of their responsibility, and each participant indicated a desire to increase awareness at his or her institution.

The second theme, *pushing through barriers and overcoming obstacles*, demonstrates what disability service providers perceive to be their biggest challenges in providing disability services in the community college setting. Within this theme lies how disability service providers feel the disability services program is perceived by administration, faculty, and students at their institution. Participants also share how

prepared they felt, after taking into account previous experiences and training opportunities, to serve in their role within disability services.

The third theme, *value of relationships*, describes the importance of relationships with others experienced by the participants. The foundation of this theme lies in the numerous experiences shared by the participants of collaborating with faculty, other staff, other community professionals, and other disability services professionals as a key part of their successes within disability services.

The following breakdown of each theme identified is designed to provide additional clarity to the experiences of the participants and to support the findings of this study. Quotes from participant interview transcriptions are provided to represent the experiences of disability service providers and highlight, using their own words, how the participants perceive and understand the phenomenon.

Importance of Awareness and Education

All participants reported having to deal with reframing and educating others on interacting with students with disabilities. Most participants indicated they are actively working to educate others on how to interact with students with disabilities and on ADA regulations. Educating and bringing awareness for participants begins at their institution with educating faculty and staff who work at their institution but extends beyond that to students, parents, and other community stakeholders such as high school personnel.

Educating Faculty and Staff

Abby has found that “there’s still some people out there who just have a negative mindset when it comes to people with disabilities, even faculty and staff.” Gwen also had experiences where she had to deal with a faculty member who “walk[ed] up to a student

and they said ‘I think you have autism’.” Educating others on how to interact with people with disabilities so as not to be insensitive or discriminatory were common responsibilities of the participants. Abby indicated that disability service providers are regularly “trying to break down some of those stereotypes” and helping others understand that just because a student has a disability or is using disability services “doesn’t necessarily mean that they are automatically gonna fail.” According to Gwen, some technical or industrial faculty “are more geared to thinking solely about safety, and if a student with a disability would want to come in, the faculty would be like, well, we don’t know, that’s not safe.” Carrie put it simply, “I was having to do a lot of teaching them [faculty] how to help and interact with these students.” Several strategies were mentioned for how to develop a greater awareness and understanding for students with disabilities.

Helen described a summer workshop program where:

Faculty get stipends to become disability services certified which just means they have attended so many disability services focused sessions. I think this has really helped create awareness among faculty. It helps educate them about what their responsibilities are as a faculty member and what things they need to be thinking about when they’re designing their courses and working with students.

Others described tactics for improving awareness at their institutions like promoting disability services in orientation programs for new faculty and staff or simply just making oneself more visible on campus by making a point to get out and meet with those that work with students so they have an awareness of who you are and what you do. Gwen said that she does “awareness month activities and events just to promote our services and educate others on interacting with people with disabilities”. Each participant had

different strategies and techniques for educating those on campus about their programs, but all participants noted this as a big part of their roles and responsibilities.

Educating Students and Parents

Faculty and staff are not the only targets of education and promoting awareness for disability service providers; parents of students and students themselves are often the recipients of disability services information and teachings. Disability service providers must share information about processes and procedures with students and oftentimes with their parents as well. Laura recalls an instance when a certain type of accommodation was not approved by the office of disability services and the parent of the student became upset. In order to help educate parents:

We usually keep some regulation regarding ADA nearby; that way we can show it to them and kind of educate them [parents] about what our role is as a community college and a DS provider and how that differs from the K-12 perspective.

Instances like this require disability services staff to be able to not only deescalate difficult situations but also to reframe them in a way that leaves the parents feeling heard and with a feeling that they can still be part of the process. Several participants also reported that there are a lot of students coming to them unsure of the process or even about ADA in general. Marsha said in her experience:

Some students just have unrealistic expectations in terms of what to expect when they graduate from high school. K-12, as you know, their goal is success. The way I communicate that is teachers can manipulate and maneuver and make changes and adjustments to ensure success in high school. We don't have that

luxury because our focus is on access. I have to teach them how the game has changed and that is a learning curve for them.

Several participants had documents available to share with students and parents about the differences between processes in high school and processes in higher education for receiving accommodations. One institution facilitates an orientation for students with disabilities. At this half day orientation they “talk about the roles and responsibilities, the college's roles and responsibilities, and making sure they know about the grievance process and what it takes to be a successful college student with a disability.”

Additionally, they have a student panel at this orientation to allow students with disabilities to hear firsthand accounts of what it is like to be a college student with a disability.

Educating parents is a responsibility shared by all participants as a balancing act when also adhering to guidelines of ADA and their institution. Helen specifically referenced how much she likes this part of her job, specifically the:

family counseling aspect. ... We are open door to parents too. Parents are more than welcome to come in the first session and we kind of set those boundaries very clearly as to what this is gonna look like going forward while trying to reframe that they're coming from a good place.

Educating parents and setting boundaries with parents was a task that multiple participants discussed in their interviews. One participant indicated that she often has to “get creative” when it comes to educating parents and students. She also stated that it takes time to “help them understand that we respect the fact that they want to be involved, but we’re going to treat your child as an adult because they are an adult.”

Strategies for combatting that challenge of educating others about boundaries was shared by several participants. One strategy entailed having information in the disability services handbook where:

there is a section that kind of goes through what if a parent comes in to the meeting. I have a do's and don'ts section and it covers the differences between high school and college. I try to go over the handbook very early on to educate both parents and the student about the process

Three institutions used handbooks as a method for promoting awareness of processes and procedures and communicating expectations. Another institution's disability services office holds special sessions at a disability services orientation, all with the intent to educate parents about boundaries, processes, and responsibilities of both the college and the student in the disability services process. This session gives parents the opportunity to ask questions they may have and allows the college to "explain the process and also educate them about FERPA [Family Education Rights and Privacy Act] and how FERPA even works if they have a question for their child's faculty." One creative way that Laura's institution educates prospective students and parents is by "going out [into the high schools] and speaking with students and their parents who have a disability and who are going to be transitioning to the community college to let them know kind of what the differences are and what they should expect." Working with parents and utilizing creative strategies for how to maintain boundaries with parents, but also include them to the extent that it is possible, was a balance stressed by all participants when talking about parental involvement in the disability services process.

Study participants also indicated they oftentimes have to “teach the students about ... advocating for themselves.” Gwen feels that many of her students need to “understand their disability, how it impacts them, and their options.” This means helping students to “know more about themselves and understand their diagnosis.” Brian shared an example of a time a student came to him regarding a problem with an instructor. To help the student he “pave[d] the way for him” to go talk to his instructor by helping the student step by step to figure out what to say to make an appointment and what to say when meeting with the instructor. By encouraging the student to “do things for himself he will know what to do next time and won’t need my help.”

All participants expressed concerns about their visibility on campus and how aware their general student population was of the existence of the Office of Disability Services. Abby indicated this was a priority for her at her institution:

Our VP has really been pushing us in disability services to make ourselves more visible on campus. ... just to get the awareness out there about what disability services is. To help faculty understand our process more and not just disability services, but accessibility in general. How to make our courses more accessible, how to make the environment more accessible.

In an effort to try to be more visible, institutions are participating in “different events on campus to spread awareness” like at open house and at health fairs. Concerns over visibility on campus is a big concern for Brian as indicated in his quote, “The biggest thing is just knowing I’m here. I’ve got to figure out a way to spread the word and to reach more students because I really think we could reach 100 more students with disabilities.”

Educating Other Stakeholders

Issues with awareness stems beyond stakeholders inside the institution but also to high school personnel who are collaborating with programs at the institution. Carrie shared an instance when a dual enrollment high school student tried to use an IEP/504 in college classes to get accommodations. She had to jump in and try to address the confusion by educating the high school exceptional children staff on appropriate procedures for their college. This process of educating those in the high school was confirmed during the shadowing observation of Carrie where the researcher observed a phone call with staff at the institution's Early College where Carrie had to explain the need of an accommodation form from her office before an Early College student would be eligible for accommodations in a college class. Helen also shared an experience where she too had to step in and help educate personnel from her local Early College on processes within disability services:

We have a lot of early college students and so figuring out ...who's responsible for what has really been a huge challenge. There is nobody that has thought about the DS students that are now dually enrolled and fall under IDEA but also fall under the college law of ADA. So I've been advocating and educating others to make sure our MOU [Memorandum of Understanding] reflects whose responsibility is what and really delineates how this looks.

Other strategies for creating awareness for high school stakeholders included documents that outline the differences in disability services between secondary and postsecondary education. Being able to communicate this awareness with external stakeholders was key

for disability services providers as a part of their awareness of disability services campaigns.

Several participants indicated a concern that the number of students receiving services is not indicative of the number of students at their institution with a documented disability that would benefit from disability services. From all the strategies shared by the participants, some were seeing positive gains. Gwen shared that she is starting to see some impact from all of her awareness campaigns:

The numbers of students receiving services has gone up since I've been here ...

I've been promoting and really going into classes and trying to say, this is who I am and this is what I'm here for. Come find me. I've also been working more with the transition coordinators in the high schools and have gotten a lot of referrals that way.

Stakeholder awareness of the Office of Disability Services and the services available for students with disabilities was clearly a top priority for the participants, so much so that educating others about what they do and the services they can offer students at their institution was consistently described as a big part of what they do. Additionally, all participants employed local strategies aimed at combatting the problem of visibility and awareness of their role at the institution and the services they can provide for students.

Pushing Through Barriers and Overcoming Obstacles

The participants shared a number of concerns they had related to their positions, and there was considerable overlap among the participants about these concerns. They were concerned about how they are viewed and supported by administrators at their

institution. They are concerned about their students and the various obstacles that come with the more difficult student populations that they serve, all in addition to the usual barriers that community college students bring to the table. They were concerned about abilities to help their students in the role as disability services provider. In addition to these concerns, all of the participants expressed a desire for more professional development in at least one area of disability services.

Administrative and Institutional Barriers

All seven participants reported feeling supported by an immediate supervisor. Abby reported that her Vice President told her, “I hired you as a professional, so I trust your professional judgment. That’s really encouraging to me to have someone say, like I trust you.” Helen said, “I have a wonderful collaborative relationship with my supervisor. She’s willing to take things to the table and to be an extra voice and to make my voice louder.” Marsha expressed a pleasurable experience with her direct administrators also. She stated, “They trust my judgment and they trust my experience, and they trust the work that the staff does. And so we have found a lot of support.” Brian also feels supported by his boss as evident when he shared:

My boss and the administration don’t look over my shoulder, and they let me handle everything. They may ask occasional questions, but they have given the program to me and have said run with it and come to us if you need anything.

While all participants felt support from a supervisor, there was still apprehension about how disability services as a program was viewed by administrators overall at their institutions. Laura shared this about how she perceives Disability Services is viewed at her institution:

It has always been here on the back burner and we just deal with it. It's never been a problem that has been brought to the forefront and someone says, hey, we've got these students and we're losing them. This is something that has come up in the past probably two years to where we really said, hey we've really got to start working with these kids. But the problem is that nobody's solely dedicated to DS and has the time to do it. I'm actually working on that. Fighting for that.

This use of the phrase "back burner" was also used by Gwen when she described how she feels the administration views disability services and the need for professional development across campus. She said, "One thing I was really pushing for since I've been here was to do some ADA presentations for professional development. I feel like I get kind of pushed to the back burner." Carrie also shared that "It would be nice if we were able to provide professional development to our faculty. We don't really have a platform to do that yet college wide."

Helen had concerns over her role and where she fit into the organization when she expressed a lack of vision for the disability services office by the administration at her institution. She stated:

So I think sometimes it's hard to figure out what the institution's priority is. That has been a struggle because I think that helping people understand what it is we do day to day can be really difficult. Things have changed in a way where I don't know that all the way up the chain, there's a really firm grasp on what it is that we do.

Helen also shared later in the interview, "It's not that people don't think what we do is important. I think that they can struggle with where do you allocate the resources and

what needs to come first when we are like retention, retention, retention, and completion.” Marsha said, “They're [administration] not thinking about students with disabilities.” Carrie also felt that leadership at her college was not as supportive as they needed to be. She thinks that “executive leadership views disability services as a necessary evil.” She said that they are inconsistent, “You hear that we need to be compliant but then on the practice side sometimes I don't see that push” from administrators. She went on to say that she feels alone and unsupported. All participants expressed ways they felt they could be more empowered by their institutions. Brian shared that he felt disability services needed to be more of a priority and needed more of a backing by administrators. Marsha shared Brian's concerns. Marsha feels there is a college wide need for “mandatory training regarding legal requirements for faculty and staff.” Her frustration stems from other trainings like Title IX and security training which are already mandatory, but ADA training is not. Just to “have the college support our area and make some of these trainings mandatory and giving us access a little bit more” would go a long way for Marsha. Empowerment for each participant was closely linked to administration/administrators actively involving disability services and students with disabilities in their decision making processes.

A general lack of funding for student needs was a common concern for several participants. Funding challenges were present at Gwen's institution to pay for needed equipment, software, and accessibility needs like elevators, accessible doors, and improved sidewalks. During the shadowing experience, the lack of accessible access to the buildings was observed by the researcher. Gwen indicated that the biggest challenge at her institution was funding. “We don't have the money, so what exactly can we do?”

But I think that the money is big; if we had more funding we would be able to change a lot more,” Gwen said. Others felt that they could be more supported through additional staffing. Helen expressed that administration, “just being able to realistically devote staff to disability services. Designating a role solely devoted to disability services and that be all that role does.” Carrie also expressed a similar need to “have a person dedicated to assistive technology... We have limited resources and an overall lack of knowledge about what's out there and no time to figure it out. We could take this program to the next step.” At Helen’s institution, she sees a need for an organizational change in addition to additional staffing when she said they need “our own office of disability services with a dedicated disability services staff member.” She had concerns about their placement in the organization and said, “People don’t think about us being here in this department.” Concerns about a lack of funding either in the form of physical items like equipment or campus facility needs or in the form of personnel/organizational structure were consistent across many participants.

Participants had concerns about how administrators prioritized disability services and students with disabilities at their institution. Concerns about adequate funding and staffing were also expressed by multiple participants as challenges they experience as disability service providers. Participants shared ways they could be better empowered by their institutions, and all of the ways involved funding, staffing, or making disability services activities and awareness a bigger priority within the institution.

Preparation and Training Obstacles

Six of the seven participants expressed concerns related to how prepared they felt as they entered the profession of disability services. All participants spoke of having to

do individual research and seeking assistance or guidance from other Disability Service Providers. Their current level of comfort with their abilities varied greatly across the participants. Three of the participants expressed still having concerns about being able to adequately support students at the time of the interviews. Only one participant felt that their previous experiences adequately prepared them for their work as a disability services professional at a community college. Helen shared that she “had very little training for this position. I feel like I just kind of figured it out as I went along.” Brian reported, “When I first took this job I got two hours of training.” Carrie stated, “As far as what training we got, we didn't get any, we really didn't.” Laura had a similar experience, “I haven't had any formal training to be a disability services officer and my other staff is in the same boat. ... So you asked if I was prepared, not really.” Marsha also conveyed her lack of formal training and how she learned about disability services and ADA law. She stated:

There wasn't really a formalized training. I think it was just a matter of conversations like a lot of these listserves that are out here now, those are valuable, and those serve probably as our best training ground, I think. People were directing to me read about ADA. And I asked a lot of questions about IEPs in the beginning.

Although all participants had at least one year of experience in this profession, they still conveyed concerns over knowledge gaps they felt needed to be addressed by more professional development and training. Abby shared:

I'm still learning. There's actually a lot of stuff I was not aware of, like the built in accessibility checkers, for example ... I've been working with this population

for over 10 years but I'm no guru by any means. I would also like some more training specifically on working with individuals with mental health concerns, understanding more about the various psychotropic meds and more about these psychological evaluation reports we get from students.

Several participants expressed uncertainty and a lack of confidence with their current level of training for their position. Carrie conveyed frustration when discussing needed trainings, specifically with the community college system office:

We've got some little side events that go on that cover best practices. But as far as actual people that really do it and this is what we do and this is what we're experts in ... I don't feel that connection at all as far as professional development goes. I would want training sessions that discuss how do you tackle this problem if it comes up. I feel that we need some subject matter experts at the system office.

Making the right decision for a student was shared by several participants as a concern. Both Carrie and Laura specifically questioned their abilities to deal with difficult cases and defining what is reasonable and concerns over following the guidelines so as not to face complaints from OCR. Carrie said she wonders, "Is this reasonable? If it's not reasonable, how do we handle that? How do we work around it? ... because you can see how very quickly you can get into trouble with OCR." Laura felt strongly that she needed "more training on ADA because we'll have students that request something and we will wonder is that reasonable."

All participants spoke of attending either AHEAD or NCAHEAD trainings or webinars. Five of the seven participants specifically referenced OCR, some as a resource

for questions, another referenced OCR for trainings they had received, and two spoke of concerns of an OCR complaint.

At the point of interview when asked what type of training they felt they most needed, several participants reported wanting training related to a specific disability. Gwen shared, “I’d like to know more about students with PTSD [post-traumatic stress disorder] specifically who are Veteran students,” and Helen also had a desire to learn more about students with visual impairments. “VI is to me like the most challenging disability to figure out how to accommodate.” Brian stated that he would like more networking opportunities and more foundation information on disability law. Gwen shared a recommendation that “maybe standardizing what we each come into the job knowing, you know, some more foundational training is needed.” Helen, who has been in the field over 5 years stated, “I do find like finding training for our field once you're no longer a complete newbie is like really hard. There's not a lot out there. There's a lot of basic ADA 101 type stuff.”

Training was consistently mentioned as a point of concern at one point or another for each participant of this study. Beginner training was clearly important to all participants, and those that expressed a lack of basic beginner training indicated they wished it had been available to them. Regardless of training or background, all participants had areas where they felt their competencies were not where they needed to be to serve all the populations of students with disabilities they serve. Continual professional development and training was clearly a priority for the participants.

Obstacles When Working with Students

For disability services providers in this study, obstacles they encountered when working with students had to do with lack of knowledge about certain types of disabilities, additional student obstacles specific to student population, and a continual need to be self-aware of their possible influences on students. All participants elaborated on common obstacles they experienced within their roles.

As mentioned above, participants recognize they are not experts of all disabilities, hence their desire to have more training to identify gaps. Carrie shared frustration she experienced when she had a student “come in and they had a disability I’d never even heard of much less knew anything about needed accommodations. ... Many times I feel like I’m really behind information-wise in order to be able to truly help a student.” Abby shared a concern she has with students with significant psychiatric disabilities and specifically how to help them deal with socialization concerns they are bringing to her attention. Helen’s “biggest challenge honestly is accommodating students with visual impairments (VI). If I had to talk about what keeps me up at night, it’s how are we going to make the Spanish course work when we have an online module platform that’s not accessible, a book that’s not accessible and I don’t speak Spanish. A similar challenge was experienced by Gwen specific to “how to accommodate PTSD, when everybody’s so different ... there’s probably a lot more we could do that maybe I don’t know about, that we might could offer.”

Specific student populations were discussed by participants as having additional barriers which disability services providers have to help them overcome more often than with other student populations. Non-traditional, sometimes referred to as older, students

were mentioned by several participants as having additional barriers that they must address. The top comments among participants about non-traditional students and the additional barriers faced by non-traditional students with disabilities was 1) they often don't know that they have a disability; 2) they don't know how to ask for accommodations or help when they are struggling academically and they don't know why; and 3) they oftentimes struggle to produce recent documentation if and when they do make it into the disability services office. Traditional students were said by participants to be more knowledgeable of technology and more familiar with procedures for acquiring accommodations than non-traditional students. Participants also reported that when compared to non-traditional students often it was easier for traditional aged students to generate needed documentation. Both Gwen and Brian experienced a tendency of traditional aged students to forego accommodations when first entering higher education after having had accommodations in place while in high school. There was a desire to "try it on their own" without accommodations. Participants suggested that maybe a desire to be like everyone else or a desire to avoid the stigma of disclosing is enough to make traditional students want to try college without accommodations.

Three other special populations were mentioned by participants as having extra barriers present for both the student and the disability services provider: GED students, international students, and first-generation college students. Helen shared some of the challenges she helps students overcome who are in her college's GED population:

That's a group that typically has very little financial resources and that are undiagnosed. When applying to take the actual GED and going through that

process of getting accommodations, if they don't have some of these things documented that they're not gonna get the help they need.

Marsha has had several international student situations that have opened her eyes to additional barriers this population faces if they too have a disability. She expressed concerns about international students and some of the barriers which include lack of documentation, lack of resources to get diagnosed if they don't have a diagnosis, cultural stigmas found in some cultures that impact a student's willingness to seek services, and international student program requirements that can impact the overall success of an international student with a disability. Helping first-generation college students was a concern for Laura, as she has found that many of these students don't know "where to go or what resources are available to them." In order for participants to help these other special populations, oftentimes they have to involve other resources, like referring GED students who need documentation to local psychological service providers for an evaluation so they can get the documentation they need to apply for needed accommodations for the GED test.

Some situations are difficult, not because of a specific student population the student is associated with, but just because of the situation itself. Some student situations can leave disability services providers discouraged for no other reason than they weren't able to help a student. A particular situation that challenges Gwen is when a student has "unrealistic expectations of what they can do ... you can't tell them they can't do it and you don't want to tell them they can't but they're gonna struggle and there is a good chance it won't work." Her frustration is that she feels "I might be setting this person up to fail." Helen shared a similar challenge regarding students with low functioning

intellectual disabilities (ID), a group that she describes as a “tough group because there’s only so much you can do to accommodate these students. Helen said she “feels helpless ... they just have to try and see and then we will regroup and kind of figure out what is realistic.” Students “who, no matter what we’ve done for them who have left us anyways” saddens Brian. Regardless of their efforts, disability service providers each have some students they just can’t help. Words like “sadness,” “frustration,” and “discouraging” were used by participants to describe how they felt when they couldn’t help a student the way they had wanted, and participants were left wondering if there was anything more they could have done to have helped these students.

Self-awareness of one’s possible position and influence over a student was a stated challenge on which they work. Two participants stressed the importance of being self-aware and making sure their position at the institution and possible perceptions of power differential from the student are addressed and don’t impact their work and relationships with students. Helen said, “I think having a level of privilege and like making sure that I’m aware of that and how it may impact how I work with students because community colleges in general have a lot of marginalized populations.” Abby reported that, “Males typically are a little more standoffish when it comes to admitting they may need some assistance or admitting that they have a disability or some other impairment. I have a harder time pulling information out of them.” So gender difference was a challenge that she has to be aware of when working with students with disabilities.

All participants conveyed a genuine desire to help students be successful as was evident by the amount of personal reward they found through student successes. Student populations identified by participants that presented with additional obstacles/challenges

included students with difficult types of disabilities, non-traditional students, traditional students, GED students, international students, first-generation students, and students with unique and difficult situations. As participants discussed obstacles faced when working with certain student populations, their responses indicated a desire to overcome these obstacles so they could serve the students and help the students find success. If a participant did not have a lot of knowledge about a particular type of disability, they wanted more training so they could learn about it. All participants expressed a desire to address and remove any barriers or obstacles that they could.

Value of Relationships

Collaboration with Others within the Institution

Relationships with faculty and others within academic affairs were discussed at length by all participants. The relationships between departments varied greatly across the participants. Laura described a relationship with faculty that is quite strained:

A lot of instructors do not want to take additional time out of their schedule to accommodate students who need testing in a separate room. We're basically telling them they have to do it if they pushback on an accommodation. We've had to involve the dean and their vice president to make it happen because they don't just want to listen to us, of course. At a certain point we're telling them they don't have an option.

On the complete opposite end of the spectrum is Helen who has only positive things to say about her experiences with faculty. She shared an example of how involved faculty are in ensuring access for students. In one quote she said, "We have wonderful faculty who have really been on board and have pushed back at publishers. They have threatened

to pull textbooks unless they fix what needs to be fixed to be compliant.” She also indicated that there has been a shift, “instead of us (DS) against them (faculty), like we’re all on the same team.” Brian also reported great relationships with faculty:

I have not run into a professor, an administrator or anyone here at CDE that has really, really given me any issues about providing accommodations or what we do for our students in any way, shape or form. A lot of them bend over backwards and get involved in that process.

In between, there are situations such as with Carrie, where some effort is needed to achieve that desired level of collaboration:

So there's really a lot of collaboration when it comes to instructors and department chairs. I have found as far as maintaining relationships just to kind of treat them like we do the parents in a sense ... you don't really just say this is what you gotta do, you try to make sure they understand why ... the legal implications, make sure they understand that accommodations are essentially leveling the playing field. ... why an accommodation is needed. No point in the conversation do we want program heads, supervisors, or faculty members saying, 'well I guess I just got to do this because I've got to do it.

Marsha describes a successful strategy she uses of going to faculty and allowing them to have input in the process:

I think a lot of times in these situations you have to get in front of people and learn about what they are teaching, what are the essential requirements, tell me what you want the students to know and let's figure out why this is a problem or

what the solution could be or how we can make an adjustment ... faculty have been very receptive.

Providing disability services to students requires collaboration with more entities on campus than just academic affairs. Facilities, admissions, and other folks within the institution working on ACA compliance were mentioned by all participants. Helen attributes her number of years working at the college as valuable in building relationships with “academic programs, with facilities, and with human resources.” She has been looked to for guidance in policy development and in ensuring desks that are ordered are compliant with ADA, in addition to her collaborative efforts with faculty over textbooks and conducting courses reviews for distance education to ensure ADA compliance.

Marsha also mentioned that she “work(s) very closely with the institution’s ADA coordinator on overall ADA compliance in terms of physical access and maybe any kind of complaints.” Laura shared, “We still have to work together with those students in admissions or financial aid and disability services.” Brian describes how he works with admissions, financial aid, and testing to assist students with disabilities:

It all starts with admissions and financial aid. They'll have a lot of conversations with people that say I need accommodations or my child needs accommodations and the first thing they do is pick up the phone and call.

In a situation where Marsha felt that disability students needed a little more assistance with a particular office on campus she shared:

So I realized that, um, some of our students coming into our office weren't plugged in the way they need to be plugged in and so I decided to reach out to advising, outreach and recruitment, transfer, all the various support services to

say, 'Hey, can we meet for a second, can I introduce myself and kind of talk a little bit about what we do and how we can help you support students?'

All participants indicated the value of positive collaborations with others at their institutions in their experiences and roles helping students with disabilities.

Collaborations extended across the institution to include faculty, staff, human resources, and facilities. Several participants shared strategies or tactics they use to build and maintain relationships with others including making efforts to get their input in problem solving, being sure to explain the why behind processes and procedures in disability services, and making an effort to meet with others face to face and learn about what they are teaching.

Relationships with Other Professionals Outside of the Institution

The importance of external relationships was conveyed by all participants. All participants mentioned Vocational Rehabilitation and local high schools. But their connections went way beyond just those two entities. Tracie shared that she didn't begin her program knowing about very many local support agencies for her students:

When I first came into this job I was tasked with coming up with a community resource guide for this county. ... I spent quite a bit of time researching websites and giving agencies a call to see who my contacts were going to be. Finding out if this happens who can I call and I came up with a multi-page document that I didn't realize at the time, but that document has been my lifesaver at some points just because of the individual contacts I made.

Brian feels that additional collaboration with other disability service providers at other institutions would be beneficial. He indicated that being able to brainstorm with

others and being able to ask basic “what do we need to do [in this position] would have been perfect when I first started out.” He recommended a mentoring program for new disability services staff and said, “We really need to do something like that.”

Marsha shared Brian’s feelings about the importance of relationships with other institutions’ disability services:

I had access to professionals from other institutions; they were always a good resource for me. If I had questions, in terms of what to do, how to do, how do you be sure you're not making any huge mistakes.

Helen mentions connecting with other disability service providers at other institutions. She also mentions the role of the system office within her community college system and how it fits into those connections:

I think overall North Carolina at least does have a pretty good community within the system. I think that we all tend to be connected to other colleagues at different campuses and there's a flow of ideas. I think that sometimes the top down process could use some work.

She expressed concerns over how much consideration was given to students with disabilities when new initiatives were being rolled out to the entire system. Specifically, she cited an example of a new placement test that she stated was not accessible enough for students with disabilities.

Carrie voiced her concerns with her experiences and her relationship with system office point of contact staff for disability services. She stated that rather than being a resource, oftentimes “that person is asking us what do we do, which that’s not confidence building

right there.” Overall, she did not feel like this point of contact served as the resource that disability services staff needed.

Two participants shared experiences they had with a transition program within the high schools as a major contributor to their relationship building with local agencies. Transition programs were described by both Helen and Gwen that involved multiple agencies coming together in the high schools to meet with students with disabilities to discuss both their plans for after graduation, but also to allow agencies to educate students and parents about available resources available to them as they transition out of high school. During Gwen’s shadowing observation, the researcher observed her attending a transition meeting. The researcher observed both comfort and awareness the other members of the transition meeting had for Gwen. Helen also described agencies she was able to connect with at transition program meetings to include:

At the table would be me, somebody from VR, somebody from our local mental health provider, somebody from the housing agency, somebody there to help parents to figure out plans for guardianship, if needed, and someone from a local support agency that assist with B3 services, like encouraging them to apply for Medicaid when the student turns eighteen. ... So that was how we built the relationships with community members and that was huge. ... I think that there's just been so much more communication between all of these agencies.

Gwen also commented that the transition program helps her stay connected with local agencies. Additionally, she attributes this transition program with helping grow her relationships with high school personnel.

I connected with the transitions coordinator ... And so I think it's just she and I have kind of developed a "we help each other" kind of relationship. ... she was willing to learn and willing to help and I kind of felt the same. So that's kind of how we work together.

Relationships with staff in the high schools was emphasized by several other participants as well. Carrie shared, "Our Career and College Promise [a dual enrollment program in North Carolina] has really ... blown up in the last year or two. We're out in the high schools so much now." Laura also stated, "Working with our public high school system. We're still having to work with the counselors and such to work out logistics for their individual school." Abby discussed her relationship with high school staff within the occupational course of study program:

Then also of course the high schools and we work a lot with our OCS, um, programs, occupational course of study, um, and help bring them on campus, do tours and talk to them because that is the population that most likely is gonna seek out services from us.

All participants spoke about connections they have built and are fostering with local support agencies in their area, all with the aim of supporting students with disabilities and staying informed about their options and resources. One agency mentioned by all participants was Vocational Rehabilitation, a federal-state agency that assists people with disabilities or disabling conditions to get or keep a job. Marsha gave credit to her experiences with Vocational Rehabilitation in helping grow her knowledge of ADA, IEPs, and reading evaluations, all skills needed for her position as a disability services provider:

... they became real support in terms of helping us understand that K-12 process, IDEA, and even helping us understand kind of where IDEA stops and where ADA picks up. And so they became real resources for us, especially when we had questions about reading an evaluation and understanding that information.

Brian also stated that relationships with local agencies was a big help to him in his current position, but he attributed his previous work experience in a high school setting as the avenue where he was able to develop and build these relationships with local agencies:

Met with all the different (local) resources in my previous job, like teen pregnancy resources, opioid resources, VR, good for psych evals, use insurance, sliding pay scales. I don't know what I would've done if I'd just come straight in here.

Abby builds and maintains relationships with outside agencies by being involved in the community. She sits on advisory councils for Goodwill and a "human rights committee" for an agency that provides psychological services. Based on responses, it was clear that participants valued their relationships with outside agencies.

Relationships play an important part of the role of the disability services provider. All participants emphasized collaboration with others and relationship building as instrumental to their jobs in the disability services field. These relationships spanned both inside and outside their institution to include faculty, staff, administrators, local high schools, and local community support agencies that offer services for people living with disabilities.

Shadowing Observation

Carrie

The researcher arrived at Carrie's office at 8:30 a.m. as agreed upon to allow Carrie time to get into work and get settled before the researcher arrived. The location for the afternoon observation was the college's other campus. Carrie welcomed the researcher in and pointed out a chair in the corner at a small table for the researcher to sit and take any needed notes through the day. Throughout the morning I observed Carrie bouncing between tasks. She would be returning emails, updating student plans, and documenting early alert outreach attempts and then have to stop in order to answer the phone or to see a student who had walked up to her office. She had several appointments scheduled on the day of the observation; two of the appointments showed up, one a disability services student and the other a student needing advising, and one did not. I observed Carrie being contacted by a liaison from their Early College to see if several students could be sent over right then. Carrie had to explain that she had a student appointment, as was indicated on her calendar which she had access to, in half an hour and she would try to help the three students to the best of her ability but that may have to wait if her appointment shows up. The liaison sent three students. One of the two students who did not keep his appointment was a student with a disability who was meeting with her to discuss his classes. He did email Carrie explaining he simply didn't have anyone to bring him to campus to meet with her and he didn't have a way to get there on his own. Carrie pointed out that this is a common challenge experienced by her students, given the county is so rural.

I noticed a physical change in Carrie's demeanor when a student entered the room. She was visibly happier when a student entered the office. Since I was not in the office while a student was present, when I would reenter after the student left, Carrie's tone was definitely lighter and more upbeat than during other periods observed throughout the day. It was evident that she enjoyed helping students. Several of the students Carrie met during the morning were students who had poor grade point averages and required a plan for improving their grades to be completed with a counselor. I was able to observe several of the other duties that Carrie is responsible for besides disability services.

The afternoon consisted of traveling to the other campus for a meeting with the rest of the counseling department to watch a webinar related to maintaining boundaries when working with students with disabilities and how not to blur lines. Carrie had expressed concerns about training during her initial interview and told me that since expressing that concern with her supervisor they were working to provide more training for the entire counseling staff.

When asked how typical a day this was for her, Carrie replied that the morning I observed is very typical. She shared that she comes to work some days thinking A, B and C are going to happen and more times than not there are a half dozen other letters thrown in there that she didn't anticipate. She said sometimes, "I don't even get to A, B, or C." This was evident during the observation in that she had not anticipated doing the plans for the students with low GPAs, and she had expected to see a couple students who didn't show up. She was also interrupted several times with phone calls, some while working on student files, but also some while with students, that she returned once she wrapped up

with the students. It was also apparent that she wore multiple hats as research indicates is common and was shared by several during the interviews. I observed her doing advising with a student, assisting a faculty member with a procedural inquiry, and addressing a course registration inquiry from an academic department. I also observed her following up on early alerts that had been assigned to her in the early alert program that her college uses.

Challenges that I observed were primarily around lack of time. Carrie seemed frustrated that she didn't have enough time to delve into why these students were struggling to keep their GPAs up. She barely had the time to get into what they needed to do to fix it. Carrie did seem to be rushed once her day got going. There were several instances where she didn't have time to make the notes from her last meeting with a student before there was another student at her door.

Gwen

Gwen greeted me as I walked up to the front doors of one of the high schools in her service area where she requested that we meet at 9:00 a.m. This morning she attended a transition meeting where local support agencies gathered together to discuss options for several students graduating from high school who also received accommodations while in high school. During the transitions meeting, Gwen introduced herself to each student and provided them with contact information if they decided to come to her institution. She actually had to act as a recruiter as well in this meeting in that she was explaining what programs the college offered and how the college could help each student reach whatever goal they were interested in attaining. Gwen clearly had a good rapport with the other agency representatives as they all recognized her and knew her by name. While leaving,

Gwen shared that often these students get pushed by others into pursuing more education, but they don't have clear set goals. She said that is a common issue with transition goals since it is a requirement of the high schools.

Following the transition meeting, Gwen went to assist with preparations being made for an awards ceremony and the college's graduation ceremony which were both taking place that week. When we arrived, Gwen sat outside to wait on a student with a visual disability and a service animal who was going to be speaking at the graduation ceremony and attending the awards ceremony to arrive so she could help her practice for both events. I stayed back in the seating section of the auditorium and observed Gwen and a fellow staff person of the college walk through both ceremonies with the student. There were several instances when Gwen had to problem solve both a seating situation and a situation of placement of the service animal during the practice. I also saw Gwen making sure the student could successfully navigate the steps up and down to the stage. She was very concerned for the safety of the student. I watched Gwen be very patient with the student and with the staff person facilitating the set up. At one point the service animal was not focused on the task at hand and Gwen was very patient as the student worked to acquaint her animal with the new setting.

After lunch, Gwen went back to her office and documented her exchange with the student at graduation practice in the student's paper file that she kept in a file cabinet in her office. She also sent a few emails and started files for the prospective students she had met earlier that morning at the transitions meeting. Once complete with that, we then conducted the interview. Gwen had on a number of hats today also; she was assisting with recruiting and admissions while at the transitions meeting. She was flexible while

helping the student practice at graduation in that they had to make a few adjustments from their initial plans. When asked how typical a day this was for her, Gwen replied that it was a little different with graduation prep but being out of her office and meeting students and reviewing their needs or helping implement an accommodation is very common. She stated, “Every day is so different, though, I’m not sure what typical would be.”

The student was very receptive of Gwen and it was apparent that she very much trusted her. I could also tell that Gwen was very proud of this student. She mentioned at the end several times how happy she was for the student to be graduating. It was clear that Gwen found the experience when prepping for graduation to be very rewarding.

When heading back to her office, Gwen pointed out one of the challenges of her institution is that they need more electronic doors. The door we entered to access the building where her office is located was not electronic. She then told me that none of them for that building were. I asked why they didn’t just move her to another building, and she stated money was the reason they haven’t fixed the doors, and that a lot of other support services are in this building too, so she guessed it didn’t make sense.

Document Analysis

Documents and Forms

Documents and forms are one way of sharing information with students about disability services. These same documents allow for record keeping which is very common practice for all disability services providers. Students working with a disability services office will have a file within that office and what is in that file varies greatly. But at a minimum the file will contain whatever documentation or justification is provided or

used for issuing accommodations to students. This justification may be an evaluation outlining a student's functional limitations related to comprehension, for example. This might be the justification used for approving a student for extended testing time on reading tests. Table 5 outlines types of documents shared with the researcher and which disability service providers utilize certain documents as part of their work in disability services.

Table 5
Documents Used by Institutions

Form	Marsha	Carrie	Brian	Helen	Laura	Gwen	Abby
Application for Accommodations		X	X	X	X		
Accommodation Plan	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Difference Between High School and Community College		X	X			X	X
Notes/Case Log	X	X		X			
Exam Proctoring Form/Procedures		X	X	X		X	X
Student Rights/Responsibilities	X			X		X	X
Nondiscrimination Statement						X	X
Intake Form			X	X			
Consent for Release of Confidential Information		X	X	X			X
Student Guide/Handbook			X			X	X
Flyer Campus Supports	X						X
Accommodation Process Form		X	X	X	X		
General Documentation Guidelines	X	X	X		X		X
How To for Requesting Accommodations	X					X	X

All participants had documents they used as part of their providing of disability services. The accommodation plan was the most common document used by participants. All participants used a form for the purpose of communicating approved accommodations for students with disabilities that was term specific. All participants also had a document outlining basic information available to share about their services and how to obtain their services. This ranged from flyers to FAQs to How to Sign Up for Disability Services.

The number of documents shared by an institution ranged from 2 at one institution to 37 at another. Not all documents were available electronically, while some were only available by visiting the disability services webpage.

Website Review

The number of individual webpages related to information about Disability Services varied greatly among participants. Three of the schools only had one webpage with information about Disability Services. Three schools had between 7 and 10 pages devoted to various disability services related topics and processes. One school had over 44 pages of information related to disability services and information about related topics and processes for obtaining services. While the school with the largest number of students receiving services had the most number of individual pages devoted to their services, there was not a direct relation between number of students served and the number of pages of information available on the office's webpages.

Commonalities

All webpages provided basic contact information and some overview defining the services provided by the office. Additionally, all of the institutions' disability webpages provided contact information for more information about disability services.

Differences

Six of the seven institutions used the word "disability" in the heading for the webpage for Disability Services. Four schools' pages were titled "Disability Services" and one was titled "Students with Disabilities." Two schools used different wording. One school used the word "accessibility" within their title "Office of Accessibility" and the other had the heading "Academic and Physical Accommodations."

Four institutions had documents or forms they use in the office that were not available on the college's disability webpage. The other two institutions had all forms or processes outlined on the disability webpages that were also covered in paper form. One institution did not keep paper copies of forms or processes, but this information was available on their webpage, and they would print anything that was needed when helping a student.

Triangulation of Data

Triangulation was used by employing multiple methods of data collection in the form of interviews, observation, and document analysis in this study. By using different data collection methods, the researcher was attempting to better explore and understand the experiences of disability services providers. Using multiple methods of data collection attempts to account for limitations of individual data methods and ultimately aims to validate the findings of this study.

An example of triangulation is the handbook referenced by Gwen that she shares to educate others of the processes for acquiring accommodations. The existence of this document was confirmed when the researcher observed a large stack of Disability Services Handbooks on the shelf of Gwen's bookcase in her office. Through document analysis, the contents of the handbook aligned with areas of concern presented by Gwen during her interview as it related to parents' roles and rights, the students' roles and responsibilities, and the procedures, which were all outlined in the handbook.

Reliability

Table 6 shows the number of significant words and phrases identified by the researcher for all participants and by the peer reviewer for the two transcripts she coded for reliability purposes. As is indicated in the table below, the peer reviewer and the researcher were very consistent.

Table 6:
Frequency of Words/Phrases Identified During Coding

	Researcher	Peer Reviewer
Brian	55	
Carrie	34	
Abby	30	
Marsha	55	39
Helen	49	41
Laura	41	
Gwen	40	
Total	304	

The use of an independent coder was employed to test the reliability of the coding process conducted by the principal investigator. A sample of two interviews was used for the purposes of testing dependability. The principal researcher identified 55 key

word/phrases for Marsha's transcript, and the independent coder also identified 39 of the 55 key words/phrases with the Marsha transcript resulting in a 71% matching rate in coding significant words/phrases from the transcript of Marsha. The principal investigator and the second independent coder had 41 matching words/phrases identified from the Helen transcript. The percentage agreement of the two coders was found to be 84% for the second interview. The researcher did possess a wider perspective when coding because she had access to all seven of the interviews. This would explain the discrepancies found in coding between the researcher and the independent coder. There was a 94% match between the words/phrases identified by the independent coder and the researcher. From a coding/categorization perspective, both the principal investigator and the independent coder identified relationships, training, and institutional support as common themes of the sample peer reviewed.

Connection to the Research Questions

Disability services is a required service in community colleges as is indicated by the ADA law. Disability service providers play a pivotal part in the delivery of these required services to students. The investigation of how Disability Service Providers interpret their role within the community college setting is at the core of this research project. The following depicts the findings from this research as it relates to the driving research questions.

What do community college Disability Services Personnel perceive as the greatest challenges for students with disabilities and the institutions that serve them?

The first research question addresses the two entities most influential on the day-to-day experiences of disability services providers, the students, and the institution. This question specifically aims to identify how the disability service providers perceive challenges related to these two entities.

One comment from Marsha that sums up the views of how the participants view students with disabilities:

I think the students struggle with the same things that all the other students struggle with and their disability is just an additional kind of layer. So they have some of the same challenges – cost, clear goals, having enough resources. You know, many of these students have always had their disability so they've always had to climb a little higher, push a little harder just to get to the same places as their counterparts.

Each participant made similar references when asked about their views of challenges experienced by students with disabilities. Participants did share some barriers unique to some students with disabilities. One such barrier shared by participants had to do with unrealistic expectations, specifically with regards to not understanding the differences between high school processes within IDEA and community college processes under ADA. An additional common barrier that students with disabilities face that students without a disability do not is that often students with disabilities struggle trying to qualify

for additional resources or are trying to obtain costly testing or evaluations needed to obtain needed accommodations.

Institutionally, the challenges most noted by the participants were funding and limited resources. Funding was a concern for Carrie, Laura, Helen, and Gwen. Funding for needed accessibility concerns on campus include installing electronic doors and fixing sidewalks, as well as devoting funds to address staffing needs or space concerns. Helen, Carrie, and Laura all mentioned concerns over current staffing of disability services. Gwen, Helen, and Laura also shared concerns over adequate space and location of the office of disability services.

From an institutional administration perspective, participants conveyed uncertainty of how big a priority disability services was for their institution's administration. Participants were very passionate that ADA training and additional professional development were needed for the institution, and that this professional development needed to be part of mandated trainings, not just optional. Marsha, Gwen, Carrie, and Brian each shared a desire for administration to institute programming and requirements related to professional development and training within their institutions.

What do community college Disability Services Personnel perceive as the most rewarding aspects of their role within the community college setting?

As was mentioned by one of the participants in her interview, people tend to fall into disability services; it is not often sought out as a profession. This question aimed to get at the heart of why disability services staff choose to stay in the field of disability services. No participant struggled to answer this question. Each was able to respond with ease and without having to think very much before responding.

As depicted in the quotes shared by each participant in the Summary of Participants above, most participants felt the most rewarding aspect is seeing their students meet their goals. This was described a little differently by the participants, as some referenced small victories, like when Marsha and Carrie shared examples of working with faculty to get a student a needed accommodation, and the student was successful, while others shared bigger victories like when Brian, Gwen, and Laura shared how much they enjoy seeing their students graduate.

Additionally, several participants shared how rewarding it is to successfully collaborate with faculty. Helen commented on how seeing faculty better understand and “be on the same page” was very rewarding for her, and Marsha shared how she really likes working with faculty to resolve issues that faculty may initially perceive as unfixable.

Participants also stated they enjoyed the connections with the students. Brian described how he enjoys it when students come tell him how they did on a test and they “light up and say thank you.” Laura, like Brian, she said it was very rewarding for students to come back and be so thankful for how she helped them. Carrie said that simply engaging with students was a highlight of her position. Similarly, Abby shared that she “just really like(s) helping people.”

What do community college Disability Services Personnel perceive as the most significant challenges they face as disability services providers?

All participants shared duties and responsibilities that were a part of their position that extended beyond providing disability services and accommodation assistance to students which supported the research of Grasgreen (2012), but interestingly enough, this

was not perceived to be the biggest challenge experienced by the participants. The most common concerns and challenges experienced by participants revolved around a lack of student and institutional awareness of the office, themselves, and available services. Brian, Carrie, Abby, and Gwen all stated they did not feel their numbers of students served through their office was representative of the number of students in their student population who would benefit from services they provide. Participants stated that visibility and awareness were the reason for this discrepancy.

Faculty were also mentioned by Carrie, Gwen, Marsha, and Laura as lacking needed awareness of ADA and services available through the disability services office at their institutions. Carrie referenced several instances of having to educate faculty about why accommodations were needed for a student. Marsha shared that she would like to be involved in faculty meetings to help faculty better understand the role of the office of disability services, why these services are needed, and how they help students.

What are the perceived needs of community college Disability Services

Personnel in assisting community college students?

In addition to having challenges addressed by the institution, all participants stated a desire for additional professional development to grow either their own individual knowledge base or to grow the disability services program at their institution. For example, Abby and Helen both stated they feel that they need additional technology training to stay current on ways to help students and the concerns of accessibility at their institutions. Brian, Carrie, and Laura wanted to be more confident that they were doing everything they should be doing for their students. Each stated that additional ADA

training and more access to seasoned disability service providers could help bridge existing gaps.

Conclusion

This chapter provides a summary of the results and analysis of seven interviews, two shadowing observations, and the document and website review of seven institutions. The results of the data analysis within this chapter are rooted in a process known as horizontalization (Creswell, 2013), where data is organized by creating codes/categories and subcategories and then sorting those codes/categories to identify emerging themes. This chapter discusses the three identified themes of the importance of awareness and education, pushing through barriers and overcoming obstacles, and the value of relationships produced by the analysis. Lastly, this chapter outlines how the results relate to the four driving research questions.

CHAPTER FIVE

Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

This qualitative study based on phenomenological practice recorded the experiences of seven disability service providers who work within the community college setting. Data was gathered using face-to-face interviews, shadowing observations, and document analysis. All data collected was aimed at answering this study's four guiding research questions:

1. What do community college Disability Services Personnel perceive as the greatest challenges for students with disabilities and the institutions that serve them?
2. What do community college Disability Services Personnel perceive as the most rewarding aspects of their role within the community college setting?
3. What do community college Disability Services Personnel perceive as the most significant challenges they face as disability services providers?
4. What are the perceived needs of community college Disability Services Personnel in assisting community college students?

This chapter provides an overview of the study, followed by discussion of the study and significance of this study. The chapter concludes with recommendations for practice and for future research.

Overview of the Study

The main purpose of this study was to explore the experiences and perceptions of disability services providers who work in the community college setting in order to try to

better understand important elements of disability services programs and training providers associate as needed within the profession. A phenomenological based study was used to examine the life experiences of disability service providers by analyzing the disability service providers' own accounts of their experiences within their role in disability services. The Husserlian approach was used due to its descriptive nature and its emphasis on the self-description of a person's experiences. The researcher used several member check techniques to make sure she was setting aside preconceived ideas and was, in fact, adequately interpreting the participants' responses so as to stay true to the Husserlian approach.

A total of seven participants replied to the solicitation to be a part of the study. An informed consent and a pre-questionnaire were sent to all participants in advance of the interviews. Pre-questionnaires were returned before the interview, and the informed consents were reviewed and discussed before beginning the interviews. Transcripts of the interviews were provided to each participant, and a follow up telephone discussion was scheduled to review the transcripts and make any needed corrections. During this time the researcher and participant conducted member checks to confirm interpretation of participants' responses were as the participants intended. Through the use of semi-structured interviews, two shadowing observations, and document analysis, the researcher was able to identify three themes related to the experiences and perceptions of how disability services staff interpret their role within a community college disability services office. The three themes were (a) importance of awareness and education, (b) pushing through barriers and overcoming obstacles, and (c) value of relationships.

This research has the potential through the participants' stories and experiences to inspire and inform community college administrators and others considering entering the field of disability services to appreciate the role of the disability service provider within the institution and better understand the role these individuals have on the student experience. Furthermore, it is the hope of the researcher that results from this research might help drive hiring decisions of disability services providers and perhaps even change the perspectives of how disability services are viewed by non-disability services personnel within higher education, especially within the community college arena.

Delimitations

The participants in this study were all volunteers who self-selected to participate. As such, it should be noted that the findings of this study may not be representative of all disability services providers. Without additional research on this topic, one cannot transfer the findings of this study to all other disability services providers working within the community college setting. Four of the participants in this study have worked in disability services for less than five years, and five of the participants involved in this study have been in their current positions for three years or less. Additional information would be needed to determine if this is consistent experience of other disability services staff in the target population before transferability can be more readily assumed.

Discussions and Conclusions

A discussion of the results is presented by looking at the three themes of importance of awareness and education, pushing through barriers and overcoming obstacles, and the value of relationships and how together these three create a holistic picture of the requirements and qualities needed for disability services programs. This

discussion of themes begins by looking at the disability service provider followed by looking at fit of provider within the program at the institution.

The Disability Services Provider

Graham-Smith and Lafayette (2004) found that disability services staff play a key role in the successes of students with disabilities. Each participant had a strong desire and saw great reward in seeing students be successful and their responses were very student focused. This finding dictates a direct need for a successful disability services provider to have a student centered focus. With this focus on student success, this research found the greatest satisfaction of these providers were embedded in seeing the students meet goals like getting a good grade, getting admission into a program, or graduating from college.

Collectively, participants expressed concerns about how well they were meeting the needs of students and of the institution, as well as concerns about overall lack of preparedness for their position. Several participants like Carrie, Helen, and Gwen had concerns about working with specific populations of students with disabilities, for example, students with visual impairments. Brian, Laura, and Marsha all said they felt unprepared when they first started working with disability services programs. Dukes and Shaw (1999) found that disability services personnel receive training from diverse disciplines ranging from counseling, law, social work, higher education, and rehabilitation and have not been trained specifically on adult students with disabilities. This was consistent with the finding in this study, as participants had backgrounds in social work, rehabilitation, higher education, and counseling. It would have benefited the

participants in this study had they had more previous experience working specifically with adult students with disabilities as recommended by Dukes and Shaw.

Oertle and Bragg (2014) stated many stresses fall on the office of disability services to ensure that laws and regulations are followed by the institution. These participants all had stresses about how well they were doing individually and as an institution, and each had their own strategies for how they deal with those stresses. Being able to handle these stresses and having the ability to manage areas of stress as well as facilitating strategies for dealing with these stresses would be valuable skills of any disability services provider.

Working with others (Christ, 2008) and being able to serve as a liaison (Izzo, Murray, & Novak, 2008) served to be significant duties for all participants interviewed in this study. Relationship building with local agencies like Vocational Rehabilitation, high schools, and other areas on campus were heavily emphasized by the participants. Efforts to collaborate with each of these areas were a big priority, and each participant employed numerous strategies and techniques to try to build these relationships. This speaks to a skillset that would be imperative for a disability services provider to be successful in this role. Being able to build and maintain relationships is a key skill identified from this research for a successful disability services provider.

Participants shared multiple examples of issues or difficult situations they had to navigate to help a student or to achieve a needed outcome of their program. In each example, participants had to be resourceful and use problem solving skills to overcome the obstacle or problem that they were presented with, which further contributes to the literature about disability services and the staff working within disability services. In

some instances shared by participants, this meant reaching out to others for help as referenced by Christ (2008) and Harbour (2004), in others it meant the participants themselves going out and learning a new technology as mentioned by Moisey (2004), or participants having to research solutions by reviewing legal cases for possible answers as also found by Oertle and Bragg (2014). As a result of these examples, and as also supported through literature, it is evident that disability services providers need to have great problem solving abilities in order to help students and the institution as new challenges arise.

Findings from this study contribute to a profile of a disability services provider by further defining particular qualities that current disability services providers shared as necessary to be successful in this field. Based on the analysis of the interviews, disability services providers who have a student centered focus, experience a sense of fulfillment from seeing others be successful, had previous experience working with adult students with disabilities, have good stress management skills, have the ability to build and maintain relationships with others, and have the ability to problem solve difficult situations are more likely to be successful as disability services providers than those without these qualities.

The Disability Services Program

All community colleges have a disability services office or at minimum at least a designated person who has the responsibility to help students with disabilities to acquire needed accommodations as mandated by law (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). Compliance with federal law, like ADA of 1990 and its amendments in 2009, is not optional; just ask any one of the many schools who have lost lawsuits for not following

the rules established by ADA (Colker & Grossman, 2014). But there is a difference between doing the minimum to be compliant with the law and going the extra mile to create an environment or culture for both students, faculty, and staff that embraces the spirit of the law, provides students with the services they need, and contains staff who are content and confident in their abilities.

Collaboration and awareness. Institutions should strive to create a culture of inclusivity for students with disabilities by incorporating representatives from the office of disability services throughout the institution. Literature suggests this can be accomplished by ensuring disability representation is on appropriate campus committees (Shaw & Dukes, 2001), ensuring accountability of the office of disability services by requiring tracking and reporting of student data (Barber, 2012; Bragg & Durham, 2012), and fostering a culture of collaboration across campus with the office of disability services (Arzola, 2016; Christ, 2008). Participants in this study noted several strategies for improving collaboration and awareness of disability services on their campuses. Marsha found success in getting out of her office and making an effort to have face-to-face meetings with faculty and staff across campus. Helen's institution has a disability services certificate/credential that faculty and staff can obtain by participating in three professional development sessions where they learn more about disability services rules and regulations and about the processes of disability services at their institution. All participants indicated that some faculty were very willing to work with them and students with disabilities, but that more awareness and education were needed suggesting that all institutions have room to improve collaboration with the office of disability services.

Key services. Shaw and Dukes (2001) identified a key responsibility of disability services professionals is to help students learn how to self-advocate. Data analysis identified that numerous participants identified themselves as teachers of self-advocacy. They indicated that students need to better understand themselves and their disability. This aligns with what Getzel (2014) noted as a need for disability service providers to promote self-determination theory through their services and empower students with disabilities to take control of their own lives and own fates.

Professional development and training. Shaw and Dukes (2001) found that on-going opportunities for training and professional development for disability services staff are essential to a successful program for students with disabilities. Barber (2012) states that professional development is key for counselors working with diverse populations. Analysis of participants' responses about training suggested that all participants identified a need for more training. While training was indicated as needed throughout their career as technology and instructional designs change, it was especially noted of increased importance when someone first enters the field of disability services. Suggestions from participants included an emphasis on mentors and a need of the college system to have a foundation training outlining the basics of disability services within the system. Additionally, it was recommended that partnering with local disability support agencies in the area provides a great opportunity for professional development. As a result, institutions should promote and encourage disability services personnel in needed training so staff have needed competencies to help students.

Administrative support. Funding (American Association of Community Colleges, 2012) and staffing (Yenney & Sacco, 2016) are challenges experienced by community

college disability services programs. Staffing and budget concerns were also mentioned by participants as challenges they have in supporting students with disabilities at their institution. Several participants indicated they felt that administration did not view disability services as a priority, rather their experience was that disability services was on the “back burner.” Brian shared that his institution needed administration to “get behind us” and Marsha and Gwen both said that additional resources are needed to support compliance needs for students. Carrie and Laura also referenced that staffing was hindering the disability services program for students, and this concern was not a big enough priority for administrators at their institution.

Institutions that are able to remove barriers for staff by providing needed training up front and early, provide a collaborative environment and foster relationships both internally and with local community agencies, and make disability services a priority by supporting the program as much as possible are more likely to maximize the outcomes of their disability services program based on data from this study. The three themes from this study, if addressed collectively, provide a recipe for an ideal environment for a successful disability services program. Figure 1 depicts a visual representation of what it would look like to emphasize all three themes together.

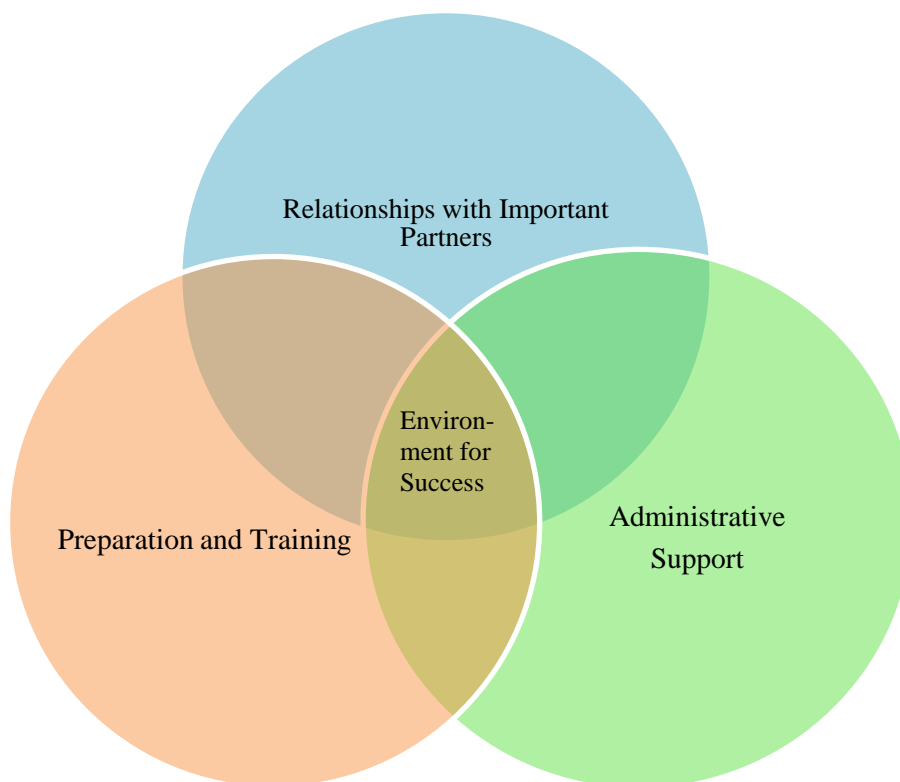


Figure 1 Environment for Successful Disability Services Program

Recommendations for Practice

The results from this study have the ability to directly impact how administrators interact and think about their disability services office. This research identified the importance of administrator support for the disability services provider and for the disability services program as a whole. One participant said, “I think we try to emphasize diversity and HR covers that, but oftentimes disability is left out of that.” All participants had concerns about how informed non-disability services staff were about ADA and the procedures a student would need to take to get assistance through the disability services office. They also expressed concerns about how big of a priority disability services is for

administrators. This finding in particular will hopefully serve as an eye opener for administrators to not think solely about the “average” student, but think about all students, including those with disabilities at their institutions when making decisions that impact students.

As indicated by Shaw and Dukes (2001) and reinforced by the findings of the present study, administrators should be intentional in decision making during the hiring process for selecting a disability services provider based on the personal qualities identified through this research. They should strive to find student centered staff who are driven by seeing successes in others, who have the ability to problem solve complex situations, who can handle a stressful situation, and who are good at fostering and maintaining relationships with other professionals. The study found these qualities to be key qualities of the participants who felt they were being the most successful.

Following a review of all of the interviews, it was apparent that several of the participants in this study could benefit from brainstorming and collaborating with each other, particularly related to training deficits. Participants of this study may learn about new strategies, documents, and processes from each other that have applicability within their roles and institutions that might strengthen the programs at their own institution, make their job easier, or help in prioritizing limited resources at their institution. For example, Abby has a good deal of experience working with the visually impaired population in previous positions, and Helen stated that she experiences a lot of stress around helping her visually impaired students. Were Helen to reach out to Abby, Helen could benefit from Abby’s experiences as she works to help her students. Collaboration with others both on and off campus is supported both through this study and through

previous research to be a valuable element of a disability services program (Shaw & Dukes, 2001).

Recommendations for Future Research

This qualitative interview-based study offers a preliminary look at the essence of how disability service providers experience and perceive their roles, duties, and responsibilities within the community colleges where they work and the field of disability services. Previous research into the field of disability services in higher education did not explore the providers of disability services, but rather focused more on the services offered at institutions and on students with disabilities themselves. This study's findings offer a foundation in which to build upon as future investigations explore the profession of disability services in higher education. Recommendations for future research include: (a) identifying necessary elements of a disability services training program; (b) expanding the target population to include disability services providers from institutions from other states; (c) studying to see if differences exist between types of institutions; (d) investigating how administrators perceive and understand disability services providers; and (e) exploring how roles of disability services providers vary as a function of institution type.

Additional research to identify essential elements of a disability services training program is recommended based on feedback from this study. All participants indicated the importance of training and preparation through training for this position. Several participants noted a need for levels of training, basic information for when entering the field of disability services, and then more advanced training to keep current and to deal

with more advanced situations and cases. Future studies should further explore the needed specific elements of training for disability services providers.

Further research should be done to expand the target population used in this study to include disability services providers from other institutions in other locations and states. The participants from this study were all within the North Carolina community college system and located within a reasonable driving distance of the researcher. Additional research with an expanded target population would enhance the transferability of this study if similar results are found.

In order to identify if differences exist between types of institutions with regards to the experiences and perceptions of disability services providers, additional research would be needed. This study specifically looked just at disability service providers working in a public community college setting. A similar study would need to be conducted with disability service providers at other institution types to see if their experiences would be the same or if they differ from the results of this study. Additional institution types might include looking at disability service providers at public four-year colleges, private four-year colleges, or private two-year colleges. Themes identified in studying additional target populations could be compared and contrasted with the findings of this study in an effort to better describe the phenomenon.

Participants of this study shared many experiences and perceptions about how they felt about administrators and how they felt administrators viewed them. Conversely, further research should investigate how administrators perceive and understand disability services providers. This study focused on disability service providers' experiences and perceptions, which included attitudes about administrator support at their institutions.

Further research should also explore the administrator perspective as it relates to disability services program at their institution.

In this study, there were two disability services professionals where disability services was their primary role. Other participants had many more hats to wear. Further investigation would identify if there are any differences between disability service providers who have disability services as their primary role and those where disability services is one of many roles and they also have many other duties. From this study, other duties for several participants included personal counseling, advising, career counseling, student childcare assistance, financial aid and veterans affairs, and orientation facilitator.

Conclusion

In summary, the three major themes identified through the data analysis were: importance of awareness and education, pushing through barriers and overcoming obstacles, and value of relationships. Implications for administrators and other practitioners working in disability services as well as implications for the disability services programs were discussed.

This research begins to address a gap in the literature related to disability services in community colleges by documenting the experiences of seven disability services providers. This study sought to better share stories and expose the journeys of these seven individuals. Their viewpoints and values provide a deeper perspective into this field of work and details their perspective of the rewards, challenges, and opportunities of those currently doing this important work in the community college.

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Appendix A: Differences between IDEA and ADA

Majors Differences Between High School and Post-secondary (College)

	Secondary Education	Post-secondary Education
What is the law?	IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act)	Sec. 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973; ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 & ADA Amendments of 2008)
What is the intent of the law?	Free appropriate education for all students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment	Ensure that no otherwise qualified person is discriminated against in federally funded programs.
Who is covered under the law?	All infants, children, and youth requiring special education until age 21 or graduation from high school.	All qualified persons who meet entry criteria of the college and can document a disability as defined by ADA.
What is a disability?	IDEA provides a list of disabilities and includes specific learning disability	Any physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities
Who is responsible for identifying and documenting need?	Schools districts are responsible for identifying, evaluating students, and planning educational programs.	Students are responsible for self-identifying to the college and providing documentation of their disability.
Who is responsible for initiating service delivery?	School districts are responsible for providing special instruction, individualized educational plans, and/or accommodations.	Students are responsible for requesting disability services and/or accommodations. The services are provided at no cost to the student.
What related services are mandated?	School districts must provide rehabilitation counseling, medical services, personal aides, social work and other services needed in the school.	Colleges provide physical, academic and program access. Related services of a personal nature are the responsibility of the student.
What about self-advocacy?	The parent or guardian is the primary advocate.	Students are expected to be their own advocates.
Who is responsible for enforcing the law?	IDEA is basically a funding statute, enforced by the Office of Special Education and the Rehabilitation Services in the U.S. Department of Education.	ADA/504 are civil right statutes, enforced by the Office of Civil Rights (OCR), the Department of Justice, and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC).

As found in "Understanding the Differences between IDEA and Section 504" by deBettencourt (2006)*

Appendix B: Informed Consent

Consent to Participate in a Research Study

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to explore and capture the experiences of Disability Services Providers (DSP) within the community college setting as it relates to facilitating and coordinating accommodations for students with disabilities, collaborating with fellow faculty and staff in implementing and arranging accommodations for students with disabilities, and collaborating with administrators of the institution and/or systems within which they work.

Invitation

Jennifer Nichols, a student at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte in the Department of Educational Leadership, invites you to participate in the above research project that she will conduct in order to complete the requirements for a doctoral dissertation. She is supervised by Mark D'Amico, Ph.D. Your participation is requested because of the valuable experiences you have as a coordinator and facilitator of disability services at your institution.

Description of involvement

By participating in this study you will complete a short pre-interview questionnaire outlining your past work experiences and educational attainment, participate in a personal one-on-one interview where you will be asked to answer a number of questions related to your experiences as someone who is responsible for facilitating disability services at your institution, and review your interview transcript to ensure accuracy. In order to ensure all of your opinions and experiences are adequately captured, the interview will be recorded. You must agree to be recorded in order to participate in this study. Additionally the researcher will periodically check in with you during and after the interview to ensure the researcher's interpretation of your responses is accurate and as intended.

Time

Estimated time required to complete the interview is two hours to two and half hours. Additional time will be required for you to review the transcript of your interview to ensure accuracy of content captured by the researcher.

Possible risks

There are no anticipated risks associated with participating in this study. Your name and any other identifying information will NOT be shared with anyone. Answering questions and talking with someone else about disabilities and disability services has the potential to generate emotions, especially if you have personally been impacted by a disability or someone with a disability in your personal life. You may choose not to answer any interview question and you can stop the interview at any time.

Benefits

At the end of this study, the results will be compiled and written into a completed report as a requirement of a dissertation project. This report will document your experiences along with the experiences of all the other disability services providers who participate in this study. The report will provide important information regarding the disability services profession within post-secondary education and will identify common themes and ideas that can be used to improve the work of disability services providers and the disability services programs they oversee.

Contact information

If you have questions about this research or if you need to report a research-related injury or emergency please feel free to contact Jennifer Nichols at 704-299-7431 or email her at jsorenso@uncc.edu or Dr. Mark D'Amico at 704-687-8539 ext. 3 or email him at mmdamico@uncc.edu.

Voluntary nature of the study

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary, and you may withdraw at any time without penalty. You may withdraw by informing the researcher that you no longer wish to participate using the contact methods identified below. No follow up questions will be asked of you if you choose to withdraw.

Confidentiality

Your participation in this study will remain completely confidential. Your identity will not be linked to your data and your responses will be assigned a case number. Each case number will be assigned a random name for the purposes of quoting the participant in the written report. The reason for referring to the quoted individual with a made up name is so the reader can more easily associate participants but also so that the participant will not be identifiable as working at a particular institution and to protect the identity of the participant. The only list connecting your name to your case number or the case number to the assigned random name will be kept in a locked cabinet inside of a locked room. Following completion of data collection and analysis this list will be destroyed.

Consent

By signing this consent form, you are agreeing to be a participant in this study. You will be provided a copy of this document for your personal records and one copy will be maintained as part of the study records. Be sure questions you have about the study are answered and that you understand what you are being asked to do. Of course, you can contact the researcher later if additional questions arise.

The purpose and nature of this research study has been adequately explained and I agree to participate in this study. I understand that I am free to withdraw at any time without penalty.

Name (print): _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix C: Interview Questions/Guide

1. Why did you become a disability services professional?
2. What do you find particularly rewarding about serving students with disabilities?
3. What do you find particularly challenging about serving students with disabilities within your institution?
 - Probe 1: What has your experience been in working with parents?
 - Probe 2: How would you describe the collaboration between you and administrators?
 - Probe 3: Could you describe your collaboration, if any, with other offices to serve students?
4. What do you think are the greatest challenges faced by students with disabilities in your community college today?
 - Probe 1: Is this any different for current students or students transitioning from high school to community college?
5. What are the greatest challenges faced by your institution in serving students with disabilities?
 - Probe 1: Is this any different for current students or students transitioning from high school to community college?
6. What training opportunities have been provided to you since taking on this position?
7. What could your college do to better empower you to serve community colleges students with disabilities?
 - Probe 1: Is this any different for current students or students transitioning from high school to community college?
8. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience in the community college serving students with disabilities?

Additional probing questions will be asked for clarification and depth as needed for primary questions.

Appendix D: Questionnaire

Name: _____ Institution: _____

Current Job Title: _____

Total number of years in this position: ____ Number of years at this institution: ____

Work Experience before current position

Job Title: _____ Employer: _____

Nature of
work: _____

Job Title: _____ Employer: _____

Nature of
work: _____

Educational Experience

Degree

Date

Doctoral:

Master:

Bachelor:

Associate:

Other:

How much time, in terms of percentage or hours per week, do you estimate is devoted to working with students with disabilities? _____ And what percentage is devoted to other activities? _____

Approximate number of students with disabilities at your institution: ____ Of that how many do you personally work with: _____

Number of other staff devoted to assisting students with disabilities at your institution: _____

Total enrollment at your institution: _____

Would you be willing to be shadowed for one work day as part of this research project?

Yes No

Appendix E: Observation Protocol

Researcher Name:	
Participant Name:	
Date/Time:	
Location:	

Notes

<i>Themes</i>	<i>Comments/Feedback/Notes</i>
Greatest challenges for students with disabilities	
Greatest challenges for the institutions	
Most rewarding aspects	
Challenges faced as disability providers	
Needs of disability services personnel	

Debrief Question

Describe how typical a day today has been.	
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