Demonstration of Meeting the 2014 Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs Core and the Student Affairs/College Counseling Specialty Standards via Major Artifact Specialty D

A graduate project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Counseling, College Counseling and Student Services

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**Table of Contents**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Signature Page</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgments</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increasing Access to Higher Education among Students with Disabilities</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>by Improving Assistive Technology at Postsecondary Institutions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Abstract

Demonstration of Meeting the 2014 Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs Core and the Student Affairs/College Counseling Specialty Standards via Major Artifact Specialty D

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The aim of this artifact was to examine the literature formed around diverse student populations. Within Specialty D standard access was examined in higher education for students with disabilities. The following reviews of the literature are in response to prompts from the 2014 Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) Standards. Retention and access for students with disabilities in higher education is important, a literature review will propose that assistive technology (AT), when properly implemented, can serve as an intervention that provides access and support for this student population. This paper examines the components of AT in postsecondary settings for students with disabilities to enhance access. Implications for supporting students with disabilities in postsecondary settings are discussed using literature and the theoretical foundation of Schlossberg’s (2011) transition theory.

Keywords: access, assistive technology, students with disabilities, postsecondary institution
Increasing Access to Higher Education among Students with Disabilities by Improving Assistive Technology at Postsecondary Institutions

College institutions have developed opportunities to provide access and engage student populations who identify as having a disability. Universities often do this through social and academic support from established disability resource services on their campuses. In addition, institutions provide student development training for faculty and staff in hopes of enhancing collegiate relationships and experiences for persons with disabilities.

Due to the intentional efforts of some colleges, there has been an increase in the number of students with disabilities enrolling in two- and four-year institutions. As the population of students with disabilities continues to increase, so does the pressing concern for student access and retention. For example, students with learning disabilities, in particular, make up two percent of all college graduates and continue to have difficulties with access in higher education settings (Vickers, 2010).

Research has shown that Assistive Technology (AT) can provide students with disabilities access to information for academic curriculum and personal skill building. However, technological advances in higher education for students with disabilities are still underutilized or not currently available for student use.

AT is defined as any item or any device that assists in the academic or personal development of a student with a disability. Postsecondary institutions are required to provide AT for all students with disabilities entering college in order to provide equitable
access to higher learning and degree attainment. However, AT currently provided is often insufficient or in need of improvement.

AT devices that are used to enhance learning can generate confidence and knowledge in students with disabilities. AT creates opportunities for many people with disabilities to become responsible for their own basic needs, live independently, contribute to community events, and pursue gainful employment (Kaye, Yeager, & Reed, 2008). AT also addresses the critical barriers that make it more challenging for college students with disabilities to persist to graduation, providing help with the instructional needs of students and catering to a variety of learning styles.

Students with disabilities experience hardships in many aspects of their lives including academics, personal, family, and career. These life stressors can cause a student to become overwhelmed or their development to stagnate. Using Schlossberg’s (2011) student development theory in relation to life events can help further address the needs and support that students with disabilities may need.

Theoretical Foundation

Schlossberg’s (2011) transition model has provided an understanding of and dialogue on transitions that take place in life. This model provides an explanation of how individuals process and cope with transitional periods. Schlossberg’s (2011) developmental model helps people make sense of their life transitions and identifies interventions that may create healthy patterns for coping. According to Schlossberg (2011), understanding different types of transitional periods a person is experiencing is important when helping someone make change.
For college students with disabilities, transitions may be a normal part of everyday life. Whether it is disability related, academic, social, or personal, students will have to get through the ambiguity and discomfort that comes with life changes. If student affairs personnel can identify how to effectively manage and assist students during these various life events, it can create smoother transitions for the students. Consequently, this will build confidence and help students with disabilities handle other transitional life events that they will go through.

Schlossberg (2011) explains transitions in terms of three categories: anticipated, unanticipated, and nonevents. An anticipated transition is a major life incident that happens without surprise or with the person having prior knowledge of its occurrence. (e.g., graduation, wedding, birthday, retirement, birth of a child, etc.). In contrast, an unanticipated transition occurs without warning or planning (Schlossberg, 2011). An unanticipated transition often causes interference or disruption in a person’s life because it occurs unexpectedly. During this transition positive or negative outcomes can impact a person’s life. For instance, diagnosis of a major illness or sudden death of a family member, a sudden physical impairment or a traumatic experience, an unexpected promotion or raise in pay, or an unplanned financial burden (Schlossberg, 2011). Nonevent transitions are events that a person is expecting to occur, but fail to happen. For instance, ending an engagement, not getting an expected promotion, surgery being cancelled, or being unable to afford college once accepted. These nonevents can be very hard to cope with and, if not properly dealt with, can affect personal aspirations, reinforce unhealthy coping strategies, and delay progression of one’s life goals (Schlossberg, 2011).
Each person has a different way of coping and may have a unique process. Some people may cope faster in one type of transition, but lack effective coping skills for a different life incident (Schlossberg, 2011). According to Schlossberg (2011) the transition process has three phrases: moving in, moving through, and moving out. For students with disabilities, these three phrases are likely to occur throughout their lives, but may increase in frequency due to a student having a newly formed disability. This can result in the loss of structure of life as they knew it. The event or nonevent can start a cycle of change and create difficult transitions in a student's life.

When enrolling in college, a student with disabilities must navigate and move into a new setting with new ways of doing things. Students often have the opportunity to be a part of a campus integration process, learn how to get involved, and form relationships with peers and faculty. This is the moving in phase, when students must adapt to the new environment of college. Rules and norms are learned with time, negative and positive experiences may occur in the classroom and with their peers and family (moving through). These experiences can be closely related with feelings about themselves, feeling about their disability, or feelings about receiving appropriate accommodations. Finally, as the academic year comes to a close, students get ready to transition out of college for the summer (Moving out).

Student affairs professionals working with students with disabilities should recognize the unique transitions that these students encounter. Students may need different levels of support as they transition. An individual's reaction at the first notion of a major transitional event may be different from their experience when coming out of the
situation. Some students may get overwhelmed or lack a sense of direction, which causes them to never fully move out of or complete a stage of transition.

In addition, students with disabilities have many life roles and obligations in these interpersonal relationships, which include family, friends, peers, work, and religious affiliations. These life roles and life events may overlap while a student is transitioning, which can create more stress. For example, students transitioning into college can find adapting to a new environment and making friends stressful. Simultaneously, a family financial crisis has arisen, which interferes with the life event that is already causing some distress. More than one element can impact the quality of life for students with disabilities. However, if a student with a disability does not have the proper coping skills to manage the transitions he or she is facing, the outcome can be devastating.

According to Schlossberg (2008), the four major concepts that can help someone cope with transition are situation, self, support, and strategies, also called the 4 Ss. When a transition is presented, a person should first try to understand the situation and begin examining it from many different perspectives in order to identify what power and control they still possess. Also, the individual must acknowledge how they are personally affected by an event and be willing to gather together a support team. For many students with disabilities, this can be immediate or extended family, friends, private or school counselors, or faculty members. The student then needs to create healthy strategies for coping with life transitions in order to produce positive outcomes (Schlossberg, 2008; 2011). The 4 S’s also illustrate how educators can take action and provide support for students going through changes.
Students with Disabilities

There are many classifications for persons with disabilities including physical, learning, intellectual, psychological, temporary, visual, or auditory, and ranging from mild to severe. According to the U.S. Department of Education’s National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) (2013), 11% of undergraduates reported having a disability in the years between 2003–04 and 2007–08. During the 2007–08 academic year, approximately 43% of undergraduate males had a disclosed disability as well as 57% of females (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). NCES (2011) data indicates that as being approximately 707,000 students. In 2008-2009, the largest number of students with disabilities enrolled into postsecondary institutions, most of whom reported having some type of learning disability. Students with learning disabilities in particular make up 2% of all college graduates and continue to have difficulties with access in higher education settings (Vickers, 2010). Other students with disabilities include 89%, Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) 79%, mobility limitations or orthopedic impairments at 76%, and mental illness or psychiatric conditions at 76% (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2011). All of these students can benefit from the supplemental help that AT can provide.

The U.S. Department of Education (2013) found that 66% of White undergraduates reported having a disability. Some characteristic differences between students with disabilities and those without include race and ethnicity, age, gender, dependency status, and veteran status. Student veterans, for example, made up 5% of undergraduates with disabilities (U.S. Department of Education, 2013).
Considering the increasing number of students with disabilities who are enrolling into postsecondary institutions, there are still improvements needed to provide equal access to education, proper accommodations, and new programs for postsecondary students incorporating AT (Floyd & Judge, 2012). Improving AT in postsecondary institutions can increase access to higher education among students with student disabilities. To overcome the obstacles presented in postsecondary institutions from the lack of knowledge about AT access, college students with disabilities will need AT resources, comprehensive planning, and AT training for students and faculty (Floyd & Judge, 2012).

When establishing a learning environment for students with disabilities, student affairs personnel should consider and be educated in the K-12 educational system in respect to students with disabilities. Due to system differences between K-12 and higher education settings, there are transitions that student go through. If student affairs professionals understand these systems and the related transitions, better support and services can be provided.

The K-12 system provides students showing signs of intellectual delays or diagnosed disabilities with an Individual Evaluation Plan (IEP). This allows for special accommodations to be made for the student. Post-secondary education also places importance on providing instructional support services for students with disabilities that permit widespread access to learning resources, increased engagement, and the display of skills and information learned. This slightly differs from the K-12 institutions because the primary focus is geared toward assessment and the only responsibility the institution has is to provide practical services and accommodations that must first be requested by the
students (Floyd & Judge, 2012). Once a student begins postsecondary education, by law an institution cannot inquire into an individual’s disability status; therefore, students entering into higher education must learn how to seek help and self-advocate to receive services. (National Council on Disability, 2003).

Students with disabilities making the transition from high school to college face new challenges. One significant transition is from having someone else make sure their needs are met to this now becoming the student’s responsibility, which can be difficult. Often, students must decide whether or not to self-disclose about their disability in order to receive accommodations because of fear or stigma. According to Thoma and Getzel (2005), “many [students with disabilities] shared experiences of not self-disclosing, not advocating for the services they needed, failing, and then choosing to disclose their disability and request the supports they needed” (p. 237). Self-advocacy can be a hard concept for the student to grasp initially, because for many years provisions were made on behalf of the student. If services are not easily accessible, and the student lack self-advocacy skills, the obstacles can be great for students in higher education. The gap in services often experienced by students with disabilities between secondary and postsecondary education creates a challenge in creating successful learning outcomes, smooth transitions, and AT integration into curriculum that supports access specific to this population of college students (Floyd & Judge, 2012).

According to National Council on Disability (2003), struggles that students with disabilities encounter in higher education include medical expenses, housing needs, transportation cost, maintenance of special equipment, and purchasing AT. If a lack of preparation occurs during the transition from the secondary education to college level, it
may result in students being unaware of their legal rights, having insufficient self-advocacy skills, and not being able to make sound financial decisions (National Council on Disability, 2003). Many students with disabilities are often overloaded with financial obligations connected with their disability. For instance, students and their families may have costly medications, tutors, special nutritional diets, and AT expenses. All are examples of added cost that become barriers for these students during their college experience.

For students with learning disabilities (LD), another barrier that influences the ability to advance in postsecondary environments is lower levels of reading comprehension upon entering college. Students with LD face many challenges during their elementary and secondary education experiences and these challenges, if left unaddressed, can persist into adulthood, thus influencing performance to reach a successful outcome at postsecondary institutions (Floyd & Judge, 2012; Vickers, 2010). Many students with LD enter college at a lower reading level and are faced with barriers because of their under preparedness for college coursework. This can impact retention and the confidence a student has in their own capabilities. This can also impede students’ progress to adapt to new learning communities or willingness to try new things (Floyd & Judge, 2012). These challenges are important and need solutions if students with disabilities want to thrive in postsecondary settings and graduate. Student affairs professionals can provide the support that Schlossberg’s (2011) transition theory describes.
Assistive Technology and Postsecondary Education

The entry of AT into postsecondary education was the result of many influential people advocating for the services and benefits AT could give students with disabilities, both inside and outside of higher educational institutions. In addition, the development of AT has evolved from low tech to high tech devices. A few studies conducted on postsecondary institutions and the functions of AT and alternative media have shown AT to enhance learning in subjects like math, oral communication, reading comprehension, organization, and editing (Floyd & Judge, 2012). The goal is to help the student perform or complete a task that would otherwise be challenging to do or to enhance efficiency with which a task is executed (Coleman, 2011). According to Coleman (2011) “even simple everyday items can be AT” (p. 4). AT can include calculators, dictionaries, and highlighting tape, which are considered to be light or basic AT devices (Simmons & Carpenter, 2010). More advance devices include tablets, word processors, mind mapping software, screen readers, speech recognition software, hearing aids, and gadgets that enlarge visual images (Raskind & Higgins, 1998). AT can be software or a device that improves the basic skills of a student in grammar, spelling, and memory. More contemporary, high-tech examples of AT are in the form of mobile or computer applications, or audio recorders, or web assisted tools that provide assistance and strategies for students with disabilities. The devices are used to better develop a student’s reading, spelling, math, writing, and vocabulary skills, as well as their ability to organize thoughts, stay focused, and make decisions.

The aim of technology in higher education is to improve the lives and proficiency of students with disabilities. The benefits of AT for student who are differently abled, is
to enhance learning and improve access to information. AT can help students overcome spelling challenges and connect with peers, provide accessible materials for students to use to build life skills, and improve written and verbal communication for students with disabilities in the postsecondary setting. AT also enables individuals who are visually impaired, physically disabled, or have a specific learning challenge to accomplish their unique academic goals. For many students with disabilities, the determining factor to pursue a postsecondary degree outside of the financial gains is to develop a greater self-esteem and increase quality of life by reaching goals successfully at the postsecondary level (National Council on Disability, 2003).

**Assistive Technology Outcomes and Benefits**

A study conducted by Floyd and Judge (2012) examined the usefulness of the ClassMate Reader on reading comprehension for persons with LD. This device “is a portable reader designed to promote reading and learning independence” (Floyd & Judge, 2012p, 52). This study selected six participants who identified themselves as having an LD. The sample included four males and two females ranging in age from 19-22 years old. The class levels of participants were freshmen to junior level students whose reading levels ranged from 5th grade to 8th grade. The study was conducted in a lab setting. Each person was assigned a passage that measured reading comprehension using a paper-based format, but participants were able to use the ClassMate Reader as an aid. One intervention used during this study was a 55-minute interactive training on using the ClassMate device for all participants. Participants had the opportunity to gain hands-on training, in which they were shown detailed operational functions of the device. Once training was completed, each participant was asked to demonstrate what they had learned.
All were given a reading passage at an 11th grade reading level on the ClassMate Reader then completed a test. The findings concluded the intervention to be moderately effective, with participants scoring between 65 percent and 85 percent. One participant showed a slight increase and one did not show any improvement. Overall, two of the six had a 50 percent increase in reading comprehension and two had an increase of between 19 -17 percent. The results of this study supported the use of the ClassMate Reader to improve reading comprehension performance of postsecondary students with LD.

Thoma and Getzel’s (2005) study aimed to identify what skills students with disabilities deemed important for their success in postsecondary educational settings. The participants of this study ranged in age from 18 to 48 years old. This captured information from students in different postsecondary class levels, including freshmen through seniors. The cultural demographic of the participants came from various backgrounds and disabilities. The total sample size was 32 people. Of the participants, 53% were female and 57% were male. The data for this study was collected from a six to ten person focus group (Thoma & Getzel, 2005). The results of the study showed that student success was linked to students with disabilities having skills in problem-solving, goal setting, and self-management, and being aware of their disabilities. Many areas of the study showed that AT could be used as an aid for this population in the following areas: goal-setting, self-management, time management, and organization. AT is also a useful resource when learning about one’s disability. The Internet is an AT tool that students frequently use when accessing information on their disability. The Internet helps students with self-identity and self-awareness. It also increases knowledge for students wanting to learn how others succeeded in postsecondary settings.
Technology has been a tool for gathering information and learning how other reached success in spite of the challenges they faced (Thoma & Getzel, 2005). Internet based AT, in particular, has been used to supplement educational material taught in class. The participants in Thoma and Getzel's study (2005) showed that internet based AT created opportunities for students to practice skills and re-teach themselves; it increased many students' ability to advocate for their needs. This is congruent with Schlossberg’s (2011) strategy for helping people build coping skills. Once students began to learn about their disabilities, they felt a sense of empowerment and discovered that they could take control over certain aspects of their disabilities. Students developing skills to advocate for their educational and personal needs also allows students to take responsibility over their wellbeing and life decisions. Students regain a sense of autonomy and ownership over their lives.

**Uses of Assistive Technology for Curriculum Enhancement**

Among institutions that enroll students with disabilities, the accommodations that are usually provided consist of benefits like additional time on an exam, classroom note takers, adaptive equipment and technology, faculty-provided written course notes or assignments, help with learning strategies or study skills, and alternative exam formats (Coleman, 2011). Institutions ideally would have staff and faculty that specialized in all areas of AT to assist students with training, evaluation and assessment of software, and the use of AT devices (Coleman, 2011). In many postsecondary institutions this concept isn’t feasible, because of lack of budget. Some schools with hundreds of students who receive special education services only receive two AT specialists (Coleman, 2011). This
is why more teachers and personnel need to be knowledgeable about AT to best serve this student population (Coleman, 2011).

Many postsecondary institutions are limited in the accommodations and services they can provide to students with disabilities due to funding and staffing limitations (Coleman, 2011). Barriers that institutions face regarding implementation of more AT or Universal Design on their campuses can include limited staff resources, lack of available faculty and staff training on accessibility issues, costs of purchasing updated technology, and time required to be spent on other institutional priorities (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2011). As a result, students with disabilities access to higher education suffers.

**Limitations**

Some limitations should be noted for this paper. This theoretical analysis was conducted from gathering information from others’ research to determine the impacts that AT has on students with disabilities in gaining access to higher education. Many studies referenced in this paper catered to a specific category of students with a particular disability, rather than all disabilities that any given student may face (e.g., learning, physical disabilities, high incident). If the study did include participants with a variety of disabilities, it was used to generalize. Further research is needed to provide information on AT and the benefits it can provide to this population of students.

Another limitation presented was the sample size of students with disabilities used in the studies. The results presented were based on the research of six and 32 college students with disabilities. A greater number of students could generate more ideas to achieve more implications to service students with disabilities. In spite of these
limitations, the importance of AT in student life was visible and strategies to create access using AT were expressed.

**Implications and Future Considerations**

To address the needs of students with disabilities, student affairs personnel and faulty should conduct quantitative research. This would help educational institutions evaluate and implement support services and AT access that are appropriate for students. The services can help students succeed during college and increase motivation to finish college. In addition, the assessment would provide information on how student affairs professionals should be trained to reach the goals set by the universities in order to effectively integrate AT for students with disabilities. Sharing the results could also aid parents or other parental figures to maximize the uses of AT in students' lives.

There is a need to expand knowledge around the topic of access for students with disabilities because there are a lack of empirical studies that have investigated the experiences of persons with disabilities in higher education in the existing literature (Floyd & Judge, 2012). In addition, institutions should encourage more employees to attend trainings for disability-related services and emphasize learning opportunities to increase accessibility and AT supports for students with disabilities (National Council on Disability, 2003). Another direction for future research that can be made should include more assessments for AT in relation to retention of students with disabilities. Gathering that information will provide insights on how postsecondary institutions can better serve their students with disabilities. Assessing whether the technical support that is provided to students using AT is also important to measure the effectiveness of these accommodations. This would also identify whether more training is need for students to
grasp the AT and decrease abandonment of technology. As AT, alternative media options, and curriculum-based technology advances in our society, so should the scope and effectiveness of higher education institutions' efforts toward providing similar accommodations and access for students with disabilities (Floyd & Judge, 2012).
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