

“Smiling and Ready to Learn:” A Qualitative Exploration of University Audit Classroom Instructors’ Experience with Students with Intellectual Disabilities

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Abstract

Transition postsecondary education programs for students with intellectual disabilities create supported environments to help students with intellectual and developmental disabilities transition from high school to gainful employment and independent living. In effort to be inclusive, transition programs often include an option for students to audit undergraduate courses. In order to explore the experiences of audit classroom instructors hosting an audit student, the current study conducted semi-structured interviews with nine faculty members who hosted an audit student. Thematic analysis yielded themes, which included overall experience, preparedness, suggestions for future, and uncertainty, describing the preparation for and experience of hosting an audit student as well as feedback for the program.

Keywords: Postsecondary education, intellectual and developmental disabilities, accommodation, inclusion

Individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) experience deficits in both intellectual and adaptive functioning (American Psychiatric Association [APA], 2013). Diagnostic criteria describe IDD manifesting in difficulties with reasoning, problem solving, planning, abstract thinking, communication, social participation, and ability to conduct typical daily independent living skills. For young adults with IDD, these difficulties often translate into struggles in education and transition to employment after high school (Papay & Bambara, 2014). As a result, individuals with IDD in the United States are largely unemployed or underemployed (Grigal, Hart, & Weir, 2012). As with most young adults, participation in postsecondary education increases the likelihood that individuals with IDD will attain long-term, competitive employment after high school (Ross, Marcell, Williams, & Carlson, 2013). Thus, for young adults with IDD, postsecondary education plays an especially vital role in transition to gainful employment and independent living after high school (Zafft, Hart, & Zambrich, 2004).

Postsecondary Education for Students with IDD

Prior to 2008, limited postsecondary education options were available for students with IDD after high school (Bouck, 2014). Students struggling with intellectual and adaptive deficits often note that traditional college environments lack supports needed to be successful and university staff lack training to accommodate students with IDD (Baker, Boland, & Nowik, 2013). The Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008 (HEOA) created funding opportunities for postsecondary education and vocational training programs specifically designed to support young adults with IDD (Madaus, Kowitt, & Lalor, 2012). Additional funding available through grants and financial aid created new postsecondary education options to address the growing employment gap for young adults with IDD.

Considering adults with IDD struggle with transition to work after high school, Grigal, Hart, and Migliore (2011) reported on a national longitudinal study of students with disabilities transitioning out

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of high school. The Individualized Education Programs (IEP) for the students prior to the transition from high school largely focused on securing employment and pursuing independent living. Overall, students with IDD had less success transitioning to postsecondary education than students with other disabilities, providing evidence for a need for programs specifically designed to support students with IDD. Currently, over 200 postsecondary programs across the country provide specialized training in vocational and independent living skills for young adults with IDD (Grigal et al., 2012). These Transition Postsecondary Education Programs for Students with Intellectual Disabilities (TPSID) offer skills development for students and attending a two- or four-year TPSID is among the best predictors of positive outcomes following transition from high school for young adults with IDD (Papay & Bambara, 2014).

In addition to targeted training, programs create opportunities for inclusion of students with IDD within the college environment fostering self-determination and self-advocacy (Izzo & Shuman, 2013). Taking advantage of financial aid, grant funding, and vocational supports in the community, the goals of TPSIDs are to equip students with skills needed for full-time gainful employment and increased independent living after high school (Grigal et al., 2012). In order to accomplish these goals, TPSIDs foster skills through student-centered coursework primarily focused on independent living and vocational readiness (Hendrickson, Carson, Woods-Grove, Mendenhall, & Scheidecker, 2013). The outcomes of TPSIDs for students with IDD are increased self-efficacy, self-determination, and self-advocacy (Folk, Yamamoto, & Stodden, 2012).

TPSID programs share these goals but vary from program to program in the implementation based on many factors. The TPSID program for the current study was a two-year program that students attended full-time. Because the program did not offer on-campus residency, the students commuted to school five days per week. During the program, students took courses specifically designed for the program that focused on independent living skills, career exploration, and technology skills. Students participated in supported internships each semester to gain work experience. Finally, students chose one academic and one physical education course each semester to audit in an effort to experience an inclusive classroom. TPSID students were supported by peer mentors, who

provided help during internships and courses and also provided tutoring services during structured weekly study hall sessions.

As in the program studied here, TPSIDs often create opportunities for inclusion of students with IDD within the college environment to foster self-determination and self-advocacy (Izzo & Shuman, 2013; Mock, & Love, 2012). Inclusive opportunities within TPSID curriculum may include inclusive work experiences, on-campus housing, accommodated university-level coursework, and connection with peer mentors (Folk et al., 2012; Hafner, Moffatt, & Kisa, 2011). Faculty and staff of TPSID programs often work with the greater university community to offer enrolled students with IDD the opportunity to audit undergraduate academic courses on campus, meaning the student participates in a course but does not earn university credit (Hendrickson, Carson, Woods-Grove, Mendenhall, & Scheidecker, 2013). Auditing protocol for courses differs based on university regulation.

Kleinert, Jones, Sheppard-Jones, Harp, and Harrison (2012) provided helpful information on appropriate accommodations for students with IDD. For example, they note that students in TPSID programs can enter the program with or without a regular high school diploma and can enroll without traditional college placement tests such as the SAT or ACT. However, like all students, they are eligible for financial aid and should participate in academic advising. TPSID program students may take courses for credit or audit and often, the program leads to a certificate rather than a university degree. If the student takes an audit course, course modifications may occur that link the course content to the individualized learning goals of the student (Kleinert et al.). The authors argued that all learning should be framed within the unique goals and objectives of each student so that they can ultimately become successful members of society.

Inclusion on Campus

Participation in inclusive undergraduate academic courses on campus is typically included in TPSID curriculum. College students without disabilities can experience uncertainty regarding how best to interact with and include students with IDD in inclusive college courses (Baker et al., 2013). Typically, this uncertainty stems from lack of knowledge about students with IDD (Griffin, Summer, McMillan, Day, & Hodapp, 2012). Lack of training in supporting students with IDD (Baker et al., 2013) and lack of famil-

ilarity with TPSIDs (O'Connor, Kubiak, Espiner, & O'Brien, 2012) can create a lack of clarity for instructors about how best to include a student with IDD in a traditional undergraduate course. Thus, inclusive experiences included within TPSIDs serve a dual purpose in supported learning for the student with IDD and opportunity for college students without disabilities and course instructors to gain exposure to this population (Hart, Grigal, & Weir, 2010).

Faculty often lacks formal training to support work with students with IDD, presenting additional challenges for audit classroom instructors hosting TPSID students (Baker et al. 2013). Course instructors may experience challenge including students with IDD due to their deficits in social skills and critical thinking (Gobbo & Shmulsky, 2014). Thus, students with IDD transitioning to college-level courses often require accommodations (Zafft et al., 2004). Auditing undergraduate courses offers students with IDD an inclusive classroom experience with more flexibility in accommodation of assignments without compromising the rigor of the course (Hart et al., 2010). When students in a TPSID audit an undergraduate course, the students are not receiving institutional course credit and thus the grading and course work can be more flexible to allow for accommodations (Hafner et al., 2011). For the current study, accommodations were flexible compared to those defined by the formal disability services office. Indeed, they were made either unilaterally by the audit classroom instructor or in collaboration with the TPSID staff. Often instructors could alter assignments or decrease the number of assignments to challenge the students with IDD at a developmentally appropriate level.

In order to inform training and supports for audit course instructors, O'Connor et al. (2012) conducted semi-structured interviews to explore the experiences of lecturers who hosted students with IDD in undergraduate courses. Researchers identified the following themes in instructor motivation to host audit students: desire for social justice, reinforcement by university culture, and previous connections with family or others with disabilities. Beyond these motivating factors, the audit experience represented opportunity to improve skills and gain training in accommodating students with IDD. Overall, instructors reported satisfaction with the audit experience strongly linked to audit student enthusiasm and engagement in the course. Considering these findings, the authors called for future research exploring audit classroom instructor ex-

periences in order to inform postsecondary education programming for students with IDD.

Audit course instructors are vital stakeholders and contributors to the postsecondary education experiences of students with IDD. Thus, the purpose of the current study is to explore the experiences of undergraduate course instructors who hosted an auditing student with IDD. The instructors worked with a TPSID program that included all of the basic elements described here, including skill development (i.e., program-specific courses focused on life and work skills); vocational training (i.e., internship placement); and campus inclusion (i.e., access to audit courses). In order to further explore the experiences of undergraduate instructors hosting audit students with IDD, the current research sought to explore the following research questions: (1) What was the experience overall of having a student with IDD in audit classroom instructors' class?; (2) How prepared and supported were the audit classroom instructors prior to hosting the student with IDD?; (3) What suggestions do audit classroom instructors have for improving the experience of subsequent instructors who host students with IDD?

Method

The purpose of the current study was to examine the experiences of audit classroom instructors who had hosted an audit student, defined as a student with IDD enrolled in the university TPSID program. These students were enrolled in an academic course but did not receive course credit. Based on university auditing protocol, the audit classroom instructor had flexibility to accommodate assignments and course expectations to make them developmentally appropriate for audit students. To examine these experiences, we used qualitative semi-structured interviews to collect data from our participants, described below, and the subsequent required qualitative analysis. To analyze the data, we used the Constant Comparison Method ([CCM]; Glaser, 1965; Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Participants

Participants included audit classroom instructors from one university, all of who hosted an audit student from the TPSID program in one or more of their courses at least once during the past three years. This study included only academic audit classroom instructors; program students also audit physical educa-

tion courses but these instructors were not approached for this portion of the research. The TPSID program associated with the university had begun three years prior to the interviews. The university, located in the southeastern U.S., first created their TPSID in 2011 and had enrolled three cohorts of students, each with an average of eight students, at the time of the study. During the course of these three years, 29 faculty members at the university met our inclusion criteria and were contacted to consider participating in this study. When this study was devised, the TPSID studied here had started to become more established and grown in ways that called for an evaluative look at programmatic elements; one such program evaluation question centered on audit course instructors.

Nine participants (31%) agreed to be interviewed for the study. Participants consisted of seven Caucasian females, one African American female, and one white male. Their experience as a postsecondary instructor or faculty member ranged from two to twenty-five years. Two instructors came from Communication and Information fields, one came from the Arts and Sciences, two taught in Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources, and four taught in Education, Health, and Human Services (see Table 1).

Participants had one to three TPSID students in their courses over the past three years (see Table 2). The audit students enrolled in the audit classroom instructor's courses included six females and five males, all Caucasian and ranging in age from 19 to 25 years old. Student full scale intelligence quotient (FSIQ) scores ranged from 48 to 85 and the students had a variety of diagnoses based on high school IEPs. Overall, each student met the diagnosis of IDD to qualify for the TPSID program.

Data Collection

After obtaining IRB approval from the university, audit classroom instructors were approached through email to participate in semi-structured interviews about their experience with the university's TPSID serving students with IDD. After agreeing to participate, giving appropriate consent, and filling out a short demographics questionnaire, the first or second author led participants through 30- to 45-minute interviews with a set of pre-determined questions that asked them to illustrate their experience with the students with IDD. All interviews were audiotaped, transcribed, and scrubbed of identifying information before data analysis took place. No incentives were

provided to participants and no penalties existed for those choosing not to participate.

The semi-structured interview questions were adapted from O'Connor et al.'s (2012) research on this topic. O'Connor and colleagues developed seven interview questions designed to explore understanding of audit student needs, impact on teaching, and reasons for permitting students to audit their courses. From these, we created interview questions that best reflected our TPSID, resulting in nine questions. Five questions were identical to those used in the O'Connor et al. (2012) study. The remaining four questions developed by the researchers inquired about previous experience with people with IDD.

Data Analysis

To analyze the data, we utilized CCM to articulate the meaning of participant experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). The CCM method involves multiple steps of comparison depending on the type of data collected (Boeije, 2002). First, all interviews were transcribed verbatim and scrubbed of identifying data. Next, the first and second authors coded each of the nine interview transcripts separately using the open coding method. Coding first involved labeling every section of the interview and comparing within the interview to identify initial categories and labels. After each interview was coded individually, comparison occurred across interviews. Then, the entire research team met together and discussed our thematic analysis. In these meetings, we returned repeatedly to the transcripts and negotiated meanings and themes. After these group meetings, we compiled a master list of themes and subthemes for each of the three research questions. After each group meeting, we individually recoded the interviews based on the agreed-upon themes. After multiple meetings, no new themes arose and all interview content was coded.

Trustworthiness. In efforts to maintain the trustworthiness of the qualitative data collection and analysis, we employed several methods. Before beginning the research interviews, the first three researchers discussed their values and potential biases regarding the topic in order to promote self-reflexivity (Tracy, 2010). After the first and second authors delineated the themes from the constant comparative method, the entire research team triangulated the data in order to come to a consensus about the categories that served as conceptual representations of common findings. Additionally, in reporting the results, we in-

cluded direct quotes from the participants to minimize taking contextual understandings for granted (Payne & Williams, 2005).

Findings

The CCM method yielded four themes: uncertainty, overall experience, preparedness and support, and suggestions for future. Each theme is illustrated by subthemes and exemplar quotes from participants.

Uncertainty

Nearly all of our audit classroom instructors ($n=7$) expressed uncertainty throughout the auditing experience. The instructors discussed all of their experiences outlined below but qualified them with phrases such as “I was never quite sure” and words like “worry” and “concern.” Usually, the uncertainty centered on implementing appropriate accommodations, knowledge of programmatic goals, and the auditing process in general. Prior to the experience, instructors expressed uncertainty about the individual student auditing the course, but also about the program as a whole. Instructors were also generally uncertain about the auditing procedures for the university. A combination of uncertainty about auditing protocol, program goals, and the ability level of the individual students left instructors unsure about the amount of preparation necessary to accommodate the audit student with IDD. One participant recalled:

I think the area where I was not as prepared is what it would mean to audit the class. So, um, I didn't necessarily have a good idea of what [she] might want to do or – I didn't know what her particular goal might be in terms of what assignments she would want to participate on and which ones she wouldn't.

In addition to preparation required, the audit classroom instructors had questions about how to engage the students with IDD properly as well as grading and evaluative procedures. Given that feelings of uncertainty were experienced by most participants, even their positive reflections about the actual experience must be understood through this lens. Participants volunteered to host these audit students, but that did not eliminate feelings of hesitation or doubt.

Overall Experience

Five major themes emerged related to audit classroom instructors' overall experience of having a student with IDD in their academic course. The themes included: *increasing student learning*, *impact of auditing*, *blending in*, and *positive student attitude*. Each theme is discussed below.

Increasing student learning. The instructors overall had a lot to share about trying to increase student learning for the TPSID program's students; within this theme, two sub-themes developed: *assignment modification* ($n=9$) and *class time adjustment* ($n=9$). Overall, audit instructors were not asked to significantly alter to structure of their course. Since inclusion of the student with IDD as an auditing student was volunteered as service, the primary focus of audit instructors was on the overall course within their typical teaching requirements. As a result, outcomes and student evaluation primarily aligned with the instructors' academic program, not with that of the TPSID. To navigate discrepancies between goals of the course experience, accommodations were made with the support of the TPSID considering the student's developmental level to support student participation and engagement in the course. These accommodations included additional supports using mentors, and adjustments to assignments in the course. Within the realm of assignments, instructors' experience varied; some altered their assignments to help them be more accessible to the student with IDD while others allowed the student to opt in or out based on the task. Instructors also discussed having to alter assignments during the course of the semester, not realizing the challenges the student with IDD would have with the syllabus as it stood. One participant stated she approached the program director after the first week of class in order to “figure out what we felt would be acceptable to expect of [the student] and how we would work through those things.”

Instructors also reportedly struggled with providing constructive feedback to the students with IDD on the work they did complete, with one participant noting she “didn't want to give him feedback on this paper that hurts his feelings or tell him that he did it wrong.” This challenge to provide developmentally appropriate feedback to the student with IDD led to some instructors altering the way they graded assignments, with one participant noting “I would give (the student) a higher score than I would have given somebody who was not auditing the class because I

know that the score didn't matter." Another instructor echoed this sentiment, saying she did consider "whether (the student with IDD) could actually pass the test that was modified for her, I'm not sure that was really the agenda." It seemed that instructors wanted to help these students gain as much as they could from the audit experience, but often struggled with what would be an appropriate accommodation to promote learning. All of the instructors interviewed lacked training in how to challenge and evaluate students with IDD, relying heavily on the program for guidance with promoting student learning.

Also related to increasing learning, in the classroom a program-established mentor system that paired undergraduate volunteers with program students was helpful in providing accommodations for the student with IDD. All students in the TPSID program were assigned peer mentors who would attend class with the students and help the student navigate in-class experiences. For example, the peer mentors would help audit students to take notes, clarify instructions for in-class activities, and communicate instructions for in-class assignments to the TPSID program. The instructors reported using these mentors as touchstones to check in on the student with IDD in addition to running assignments through them, having them serve as note takers, and offering support to the instructors if needed. One participant stated:

That moved my comfort level even further along the spectrum just because...if I'm trying to cover something and I can't stop them it's great to know there is somebody next to them that can mentor them through the process. ...It's great to know there is somebody else there that can also be of assistance.

The overall focus of the audit experience was participation in class, providing audit students an inclusive experience in campus compared to courses taken with only other TPSID students. Several audit classroom instructors also reported a focus on the engagement and participation of the student with IDD in the classroom rather than on the product of previously discussed assignments; one participant stated, "The experience of being in the class was more important than what she learned." As focus emphasized by TPSID staff was not for evaluation of the content learned in the course experience, but the inclusive participation of the audit students, the addition of a

program-trained mentor appeared to positively influence the learning that occurred for students.

Impact of auditing. Impact, or the influence of hosting an audit student with IDD, included three different categories: *classroom* ($n=9$), *instructor* ($n=8$), and *exposure to diversity* ($n=5$). In terms of classroom impact, all of the instructors overwhelmingly cited the experience as positive, with one participant stating the student with IDD "brought joy to the classroom." Along these lines, another participant said their particular student with IDD helped set the tone in the classroom when that student asked on the first day of class how to spell a word while taking notes: "Later in the semester, other students would be like, 'Oh, could you spell this word?' Because now it was okay, somebody else opened the door." Instructors noted that the tone of the classroom was positively altered by having a student with IDD in the course.

The impact on instructors was two-fold: most of them felt as if they handled the student's presence in the course well and also were challenged in new ways. One instructor said, "It really made me stop and think about my own teaching and the level at which I teach." Most of the instructors who contributed to this subtheme said they learned from the experience; one even said, "If I had (the student) again, I'd be better at it." Participants recognized that learning more about students with IDD affected their overall teaching style. Lastly, five participants noted how beneficial they thought it was for the students enrolled in their course to have exposure to the student with IDD. "I think it's phenomenal for people to understand that we're all contributing to this process for each other," one instructor shared. For these five participants, the impact went beyond them to the overall course experience by enriching the multicultural awareness of their students.

Blending in. Considering the primary goal of inclusion and that most instructors had not hosted a TPSID student prior to this experience, many of the participants ($n=8$) discussed how well the students with IDD fit in to the classroom experience. One instructor said she thought the students might have picked up on the fact that the student had a disability "but we have all rolled with it and he is part of the team." This sentiment stems from the fact that most of the audit classroom instructors expressed concern over not wanting to call special attention to the TPSID student, or highlight their presence or disability with their peers in class. Some of the instructors said because the stu-

dents with IDD fit in so well, they did not feel the need to make any adjustments to their teaching style. "I was going to treat them like I treat my students," one participant said, "I was going to push them a little bit, I was going to mess with them like I do with my students." Hoping the audit students had an inclusive experience participating in the course, instructors may have been initially surprised by how easily students with IDD adapted to the audit classroom, but quickly adjusted their perspective, stating, "they seemed to fit in very well with the other students."

Positive student attitude. Several of the study participants ($n=7$) shared that students with IDD were committed to participating in all aspects of the class, including assignments, group work, and class discussions. In addition, the participants used positive language to describe the students, such as "fun," "engaged," and "bubbly." One participant who had hosted multiple students from the program said, "They came in smiling and ready to learn." Audit students were "interested in the topic" and "excited about the college experience". Participants clearly noted the positive attitudes that program students had about learning, adding it was refreshing anytime they had students excited about being in their course. This sub-theme, as well as all the others mentioned in this category, are underscored by the fact that there was a 100 percent completion rate among students taking audit courses during the three years of the program.

Preparedness and Support

Three themes emerged from instructors describing their experience preparing for hosting an audit student with IDD in their academic course: factors contributing to fit, support from the program, and instructor preparation. Each is discussed below.

Factors contributing to fit. Factors regarding fit impacted instructor decisions to approve the audit student for inclusion in the course. Within the university, individual instructors must provide approval to include audit students in an academic course, including those from the TPSID. Among other institutional factors mentioned, one of the biggest areas for consideration prior to approving audit students was judging for course fit.

Instructors offered feedback about the appropriateness of the selected course for inclusion of an audit student with IDD ($n=4$). Factors contributing to fit included the number of students in the course, the format of the course, the difficulty of course material,

and the teaching load of the instructor. One participant reflected, "I didn't want it to be an afterthought, I wanted it to be a concerted effort if need be. And I was happy to do that, the timing just needed to be right." Similarly, all participants stated willingness to accommodate the student, but some had concerns about the impact of the potential learning environment on the student. For instance, a participant stated, "I also recommended that my class was probably wasn't the one that they wanted. It was a class of 150-175 students, and I could not imagine why a student would want to be in that environment as kind of their first exposure of college." Instructors generally had a lack of knowledge regarding the overall program goals, and thus felt unsure if their class would be able to appropriately meet the needs of the student and the overall program goals. After learning more about the TPSID program, the aforementioned instructor made a suggestion for a smaller course they taught in order to be able to implement accommodations for the student with IDD.

Support from the program. Prior to hosting an audit student with IDD, eight instructors discussed support from the TPSID in adapting syllabi and course assignments to accommodate the audit students. Participants reported needing tangible support from the program in initially adapting course materials. In some cases, program staff met with audit classroom instructors to review the syllabus and answer questions about student ability. This support prior to the beginning of the audit experience was mainly focused on informational support as most participants reported greater need for tangible support after the start of the semester in troubleshooting course assignments for audit students. One participant described the supports required from the program:

I was very aware of FERPA so I don't know how much [the program] can tell me about their challenges but whatever [the program] can tell me is helpful because then I can adjust how I engage with them...[the program] spent a lot of time with me asking ok so what is their reading comprehension, what's their capacity to write?

The greatest support noted by participants was informational support from the program. Many participants had never hosted an audit student prior to being approached by the program, so most were unfamiliar with auditing protocol at the university. The program

provided informational support by reviewing audit protocol for the university. The program provided instructors informational support through general information about working with students with IDD. One participant recalled, "I did find the materials they shared helpful and went through those in terms of being aware of the language that you use and making sure that you clarify as needed."

Many participants expressed a desire to have known even more about the individual student auditing the course prior to experience. For instance, one participant stated:

I was very aware of FERPA so I don't know how much you can tell me about their challenges but whatever you can tell me is helpful because then I can adjust how I engage with them so we talked about that, um we spent a lot of time with me asking ok so what is their reading comprehension, what's their capacity to write?

Participants expressed needing support from the program in deeming the appropriate amount of work and type of instructions necessary to accommodate the student. This support continued throughout the audit experience, but participants expressed specific informational and tangible support from the program in preparing to host the audit student.

Instructor preparation. Beyond informational and tangible support provided by the program prior to hosting the audit student, all nine participants discussed other preparation employed for the experience. Individual characteristics, in addition to personal connection with those with IDD, played a vital role in instructor preparation for hosting the audit student. Instructor characteristics including teaching style, motivation, and personal beliefs influenced the decision to host a student with IDD in their course. Instructor characteristics were evident in participants discussing the decision to acquiesce with the program request. One participant recounted, "I felt prepared in the sense that I had a desire to do it. I wanted to have the experience with those students." Another participant stated:

I think I am a pretty inclusive instructor and I try to adapt my teaching to the needs of the students in my class. Most of the courses that I teach are for students who are going to become teachers so I think I try to go out of my way to model for them how to behave.

Instructors also found comfort and motivation to participate in the program through previous experiences had with individuals with IDD. Most participants discussed previous experience working with youth with IDD as teachers, volunteers, or through personal connections. One participant described her previous experience with children playing a role in her choice to include a student with IDD in her course:

I don't, we don't always recognize autism grown up or I mean I am more familiar because I was a classroom teacher for a long time before I continued to teach. I was more familiar with what it looks like in three and four and five year olds than what it looks like in adults.

Another participant shared:

Well and I started off early in my life working in a group home with teenagers who had gotten into some trouble but sometimes those were related to intellectual disabilities and my own son has Asperger's so there's training and I met people on staff. I just knew a lot of different people in the community.

Participants often felt more comfortable with individuals with IDD from previous exposure to either children or adults. Additionally, instructors often self-identified as advocates for individuals with IDD, hoping to serve as a role model and advocate by incorporating an audit student into their course.

Suggestions for Future

Two major themes emerged from our analysis related to our third research question. The first theme, *advanced preparation support*, included training and information that the audit classroom instructors believed would have helped better prepare them to have one of our students in their courses. All of the participants expressed a desire for more information and increased communication with our program. Four participants asked for more communication from the program prior to students arriving in their courses. They mentioned that they knew a program student was coming, but also noted "I think the degree to which [program] can partner with the individual faculty and talk about the individual students and how they can be engaged and not everything but enough to say so these are their capabilities" and believed "it would have helped to have someone look at what I already had in place." These participants wanted to know more

about the program and increase connections between the program and the audit course instructors.

Five participants offered suggestions related to audit course fit for students. One mentioned “I would recommend obviously making sure that this is a good fit for the student because not every student is going to be as comfortable and I want it to be a positive experience for all of my students.” For these instructors, it was important that the student wanted to learn the material they were teaching and that all involved understood the goals of the student auditing that particular course. Five participants also suggested ideas focused on the audit course itself. They wanted more information about program expectations and how to handle an audit student in general. One instructor mentioned:

So I thought that if I was going to do this again, I might want to be a little but more clear with the student from the start and let’s scope this out. This is what this assignment looks like, can I expect to see this from you.

Participants wanted more direct communication from the program about how the auditing student would fit into their course.

Finally, four instructors our instructors highlighted the need for awareness training and specific training on how to work with students with IDD. For example, one participant wanted more information about FERPA and student privacy while another felt under-prepared on how to serve the needs of our students, “I was well prepared in terms of my own experiences [with people with IDD], but how you translate those experiences into the classroom situation, I was not at all prepared for. So I think doing more of that.” These participants believed faculty would benefit from formal and informal information on how to work specifically with our students.

The second theme connected to *increasing program visibility*. For these four participants, improving the audit course experience was about making sure the university as a whole knew about our program. For example, one instructor noted “it’s marketing, you have to do some marketing, and by that I mean you have to identify almost every department has somebody who is at least open to this kind of thing.” Similarly, another participant explained that program visibility was vital, explaining “I would say that of 36 faculty members that we have, I would say maybe if I say, ‘Do you know what the [program name]

is?’, maybe three of the 36 would know what that is.” These participants spoke about how the university perspective was important and encouraged us to publicize our program more.

Discussion

The experiences described by participants in the current study suggest an eagerness to host students with IDD and an uncertainty about the process of having audit students with IDD in their course. This study extended the initial research by O’Connor et al. (2012), who interviewed 11 instructors who hosted an audit student with IDD. Many of our findings are consistent with their results; however, our research also revealed several additional themes.

Similar to O’Connor et al. (2012), our participants highlighted the important learning that occurred through having students with IDD in their classroom. Faculty, even at a large university who may not have formal training in special education, are interested in working with diverse students and notice the positive impact that student diversity has in their classroom. Also, participants in both studies believed the impact of having these students in class extended beyond any individual and positively affected the student with IDD, the other students in the course, and the instructor’s ability to teach. Finally, participants in our study and in the O’Connor et al. (2012) research noted the importance of participating in these types of programs. Our instructors, in particular, discussed how important it was that students were intentionally placed in their courses and the selected course offered the best learning opportunity for that student.

A major difference between our findings and those of O’Connor et al. (2012) related to the theme of uncertainty. These results support earlier studies by Baker et al., (2013) who found that traditional college instructors lacked knowledge in working with students with IDD. In addition to the reported minimal to no prior knowledge of the TPSID prior to being asked to host an audit student with IDD, our participants expressed an overall feeling of worry or lack of confidence related to the entire auditing process. Unfamiliarity with TPSIDs in general, lack of knowledge about auditing protocol at the university, and minimal training in supporting students with IDD in postsecondary education created uncertainty about what to expect from the experience. These instructors persevered and in some cases went on to host addi-

tional audit students, but the theme of uncertainty still shaped their experiences.

The findings also indicate a lack of adequate training regarding inclusion and accommodation of students with IDD in college courses, consistent with findings from previous research (Zafft et al., 2004). As the TPSID in the current study functions independently from the Office of Disability Services at the university, the audit classroom instructors relied on support of the TPSID or prior training to navigate the audit experience. One of the greatest challenges audit classroom instructors faced was determining appropriate accommodations for students with IDD auditing the course. This struggle with accommodation was largely attributed to lack of prior information shared about the student with IDD auditing the course. Some student information was protected by or unknown to the TPSID, which created some challenges in preparing audit classroom instructors for hosting a student with IDD. Considering their experiences, instructor feedback largely centered on program support prior to and during the audit experience through sharing of student information to the extent possible.

Despite these challenges, participants were overall open and enthusiastic to hosting an audit student with IDD. Many instructors identified a personal connection to individuals with IDD influencing the decision to accept another auditing student with IDD. Although some expressed concern about timing, logistics, or other institutional factors, overall the experiences were positive and participants reported openness to hosting another audit student with IDD in the future.

Implications

While the current study represents a contribution to the literature and offers implications for TPSID programs, limitations must be recognized. The participants all represented faculty from a single university so the small number of participants may not be representative of the entire sample of audit classroom instructors in the identified university. Additionally, the use of qualitative method, while useful in identifying program feedback, may not be generalized to all university audit classroom instructors who have hosted students with IDD. Therefore, all findings must be read with this understanding. Also, it is possible that other researchers would identify different themes from those discussed in this paper. All qualitative data is dependent on the skills of the researchers. Despite

triangulation and measures put in place to establish trustworthiness, researcher subjectivity in coding and interpretation of themes cannot be eliminated. Next, we intentionally built our semi-structured interview from the questions used in a previous study on a similar topic, but the interview format offers opportunity for subjectivity in the part of the interviewer, thus all interview experiences were not uniform. Relatedly, all of the information is based on self-reported data, so it is possible that participants may have attributed information in unintended ways or reported experiences selectively. In most research, it is impossible to know the accuracy and truthfulness of the participants. Future researchers might consider included other measures of outcomes of course learning or program goals, as well as include feedback from audit students to further examine the audit experience.

Implications for College Campuses

The HEOA (2008) created funding opportunities for TPSIDs, instigating the development of programs in universities throughout the country (Grigal et al., 2012). As inclusive auditing experiences are common in most TPSIDs, the findings of the current study offer implications for all TPSIDs. A number of our audit classroom instructors reported lack of program visibility on campus. These findings suggest increased publicity and visibility of TPSIDs on university campuses may yield greater faculty support and more inclusive opportunities for students with IDD in the university community. Presenting at college conferences, highlighting the TPSID program in the university paper, and talking to local media outlets are some ways to increase program visibility. Given that there is support from some faculty for TPSID programming, sharing information about program availability might help programs better connect with interested faculty.

Additionally, instructor uncertainty related to lack of training and preparation prior to the audit experience suggests offering faculty training for inclusion and accommodation for students with IDD could create more options in audit opportunities for TPSID students. Based on our participants, it seems that faculty committed to multicultural experiences or those who had personal experiences with people with IDD are particularly willing to host a program student, even if they feel some uncertainty. Providing training could increase access to faculty who might be interested but might not be aware of the program. For

example, in our program, we began working with our teaching and learning center on campus to help provide training opportunities for interested faculty. We also connected with the disability career office on campus to connect with others who might support TPSID programming.

Participant feedback highlighted the importance of TPSID support and preparation for audit classroom instructors. As deficits in intellectual and adaptive functioning occur on a spectrum for adults with IDD (APA, 2013), program efforts to prepare audit classroom instructors may be useful when tailored to the specific developmental level of the student. Programs offering early and consistent supports in both adapting assignments and troubleshooting inclusion issues throughout the audit experience could yield positive outcomes and increased future participation of audit classroom instructors. Additionally, TPSID facilitators who are familiar with university auditing protocol could guide instructors through the audit experience.

Instructors experienced uncertainty regarding identification and inclusion of the student with IDD auditing the course among peers. Programs could consider creating protocol or offering guidance in how to navigate inclusion of audit students with IDD from TPSIDs and peer supports, potentially reducing some uncertainty for both audit students and instructors. Further, future studies examining the audit classroom instructor experience may consider various interview formats, such as focus groups, and may choose to focus on instructor preparation both directly related to the audit experience, and general training and knowledge of learners with IDD.

TPSID programs supporting students with IDD as they transition from high school to gainful employment often include an inclusive auditing experience (Hendrickson et al., 2013). The findings of the current study serve to better inform TPSID programs at other universities in order to better serve and support young adults with IDD. The audit experience represents a growth opportunity for both the auditing student with IDD and the course instructor. Increased TPSID visibility on campus, better training for faculty in accommodating students with IDD, and consistent program supports specific to the auditing student can help create an overall positive auditing experience.

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Table 1

Instructor Demographic Information

Gender Identity	Ethnicity	Course(s) Taught	Years in Faculty	Tenure Rank
Female	Caucasian	Human Development	3	Lecturer
Female	Caucasian	Child & Family Studies	Not Provided	Not Provided
Female	Caucasian	Public Speaking	3	Lecturer
Female	Caucasian	Computer Applications	15	Instructor
Male	Caucasian	Plants for Health	Not Provided	Not Provided
Female	Caucasian	Child Development	15	Assistant Professor
Female	Caucasian	English Composition	25	Lecturer
Female	Caucasian	Communication Studies	19	Associate Professor
Female	African American	Not reported	Not Provided	Associate Professor

Table 2

Demographic Information for Audit Students Enrolled in Audit Classroom Instructors' Courses

Gender Identity	Ethnicity	Age	Course(s) Taken	IEP Diagnosis	Full Scale IQ
Female	Caucasian	23	Computer Applications	Down Syndrome, Intellectual Disability	53
Female	Caucasian	24	Child & Family Studies	Intellectual Disability	48
Male	Caucasian	24	English Composition	Down Syndrome, Intellectual Disability	65
Male	Caucasian	21	Public Speaking	Autism, Intellectual Disability	63
Male	Caucasian	23	Plants for Health, Child & Family Studies	Intellectual Disability	48
Male	Caucasian	21	Communication Studies	Autism, Intellectual Disability	51
Female	Caucasian	20	Child Development, Child & Family Studies	Tuberous Sclerosis	74
Male	Caucasian	25	Human Development	Autism	85
Female	Caucasian	20	Early Childhood Education	Autism, Intellectual Disability	61
Female	Caucasian	19	Computer Applications	Hydrocephalus, Epilepsy	71
Female	Caucasian	23	Computer Applications, Child & Family Studies	Pervasive Developmental Disorder (PDD-NOS), ADHD	70