

# Postsecondary Students with Disabilities and Perceptions of Faculty Members

By Marie Kraska, Ph. D., Auburn University

## Abstract

*The purpose of this study was to ascertain the perceptions of postsecondary faculty members related to students with disabilities. A questionnaire, entitled "The Survey of Faculty Attitudes Relative to Serving Students with Disabilities," was used to collect data from a sample of 106 faculty members at a public four-year, state-supported institution in the southeast. No statistically significant differences in perceptions existed based on gender, age, years of teaching, and contact with students with disabilities. Statistically significant differences in perceptions were found for academic rank and academic unit. Such research is useful to help develop and implement policies for serving students and to identify areas in which training programs may enhance faculty knowledge and sensitivity toward students with disabilities.*

## Introduction

Colleges and universities nationwide are experiencing a continuous growth in the enrollment of students with disabilities, especially students with learning disabilities (U.S. Department of Education, 1999). The proportion of first-time, full-time freshmen with disabilities enrolled in postsecondary educational institutions increased from 2.6% in 1978 to 9.2% in 1994 (Henderson, 1995). The implementation of the Americans with Disabilities Act (1990) mandates that all institutions of higher education provide full accommodation services to students with disabilities, regardless of whether or not the program received federal funding. This means that colleges should acknowledge the needs of students with disabilities that provide valid documentation and should provide reasonable academic and classroom accommodations to them upon request (Miller & Miller, 2002). Colleges should provide full access not only to all physical areas of the campus but also to all academic programs and student activities as well. Under the previous guidelines of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (PL # 93-112), only those programs receiving federal funding were affected. Rights advocates from the disabled community, coupled with federal legislation affecting postsecondary institutions, have acted as the impetus for programming for students with disabilities on college campuses (McCarthy & Campbell, 1993).

Most faculty members have little knowledge of the characteristics and needs of students with disabilities, especially in

the area of learning disabilities (Dodd, Hermanson, Nelson, & Fichten, 1990). In addition, many instructors lack the knowledge and skills necessary to incorporate and use instructional technology to ensure equal access to electronic materials for students with disabilities (Fichten, Asuncion, Barile, Génereux, Fossey, Judd, Robillard, DeSimone, & Wells, 2002).

Fichten, Goodrick, Tagalakis, Amsel, and Libman (1990) found: "Some professors were enthusiastic and optimistic when they first found out that they would be teaching a student with a disability. Most, however, were somewhat dismayed; they worried about how to talk to the student, wondered if they would be able to teach the student effectively, and were concerned about the impact of the student with a disability on the rest of the class. Many were also concerned about the extra time and work involved" (p. 120).

Students with disabilities face many of the same challenges as other students as they pursue their college studies (Burgstahler, 1992). Some students with disabilities are concerned about the lack of awareness of their unique requirements by the faculty. Faculty often lack adequate knowledge of the nature and needs of students with learning disabilities and the support services available to these students (Nelson, Dodd, & Smith, 1990). However, students with disabilities often hesitate to request accommodations. Amsel and Fichten (1990) found that students with dis-

abilities perceived it less acceptable to request special consideration while professors perceived it more appropriate to give special consideration to students with disabilities with or without their request. Students with disabilities reported support services and accommodations such as peer support groups, tutors, mentors, understanding their disability, the learning disabilities staff, and attitudes of faculty members contributed greatly to their academic success (Finn, 1998; Greenbaum, Graham, & Scales, 1995).

Faculty attitudes toward students with disabilities and willingness to provide accommodations appear to be related to four main categories: (1) previous contact with individuals with disabilities, (2) gender, (3) discipline, and (4) level of information. Higher scores on attitude scales tend to be exhibited by faculty members who have had some previous contact with persons with disabilities (Satcher, 1992). Female professors in general and the faculty in the fields of education tend to have higher positive attitudes toward students with disabilities than faculty in business and the social sciences (Baggett, 1994). Faculty members with more information about disabilities have more positive attitudes than those with less information (Askamit, Morris, & Luenberger, 1987). In addition, descriptions of individuals with disabilities suggests many attitudinal barriers can be traced to the use of negative terminology such as learning disabled (Minner & Prater, 1984). McGee (1989) suggested a student with a disability may be unable to attain a quality education despite being well prepared to perform academically and to cope with college life.

## Purpose

Attitudinal barriers should not be ignored when striving to provide equal access for students with disabilities in higher education. The attitudes of faculty members may be a significant determinant in the successful completion of educational experiences for students, with or without disabilities. The lack of information related to postsecondary faculty who serve students with special needs provided the focal point for this research.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the attitudes of faculty members at a small regional university in the South toward serving students with disabilities. Attitudes were examined in relation to selected demographic variables of faculty members.

## Research Question

The following research question served to guide the study and the hypotheses to be tested:

To what extent is there a difference in perceptions of postsecondary faculty members toward serving students with disabilities as measured by the Survey of Faculty Attitudes Relative to Serving Students with Disabilities questionnaire when faculty are grouped by (a) gender; (b) age; (c) academic rank; (d) academic unit; (e) years of teaching experience; and (f) extent of contact with students with disabilities?

## Sources of Data and Collection Procedures

Data were drawn from faculty at a public four-year state-supported institution of higher education located in south Alabama, with schools/colleges of Education, Business, and Arts and Sciences. The service area for the institution is southeast Alabama, southwest Georgia,

and northwest Florida. The institution is a commuter university of predominantly nontraditional, adult students with approximately 95 percent of its student body residing within a 50-mile radius of the campus. The academic programs are designed for undergraduate and graduate students at the master's and sixth-year levels. The primary emphasis at the undergraduate level is on upper division programs with a limited lower division serving the needs of transfer students. The institution offers undergraduate programs in education, arts and sciences, and business, and graduate programs in education, counseling and psychology, arts and sciences, and business.

There were 207 faculty members employed at this university during the 2000-2001 academic year, 54 were full-time and 153 adjuncts. Not all adjuncts were employed each term during the 2000-2001 academic year. During the fall quarter of the 2000-2001 academic year, 2,215 students were enrolled. There were 1,656 undergraduate students and 559 graduate students. The mean student age was 25 years. During the same quarter, there were 29 self-identified students with disabilities, representing less than 1% of the total student population.

The sample for this study included 51 of the full-time faculty members and 55 adjunct faculty members. Sixty-two percent of the faculty were male, 38% were female. Thirty-nine of the 54 full-time faculty members received their terminal degrees outside the state of Alabama. However, the majority had terminal degrees from institutions in the southern United States to include Florida (N=11), Mississippi (N=8), and Georgia (N=4). Participants represented three broad academic

areas: School of Education (N=23), School of Business (N=21), and the College of Arts and Sciences (N=27).

The survey instrument was administered at the university in 2001, during the winter quarter faculty convocation. Each faculty member received a cover letter, a demographic data form, and a survey instrument. Faculty members were asked to complete the demographic form and the research instrument during the convocation.

### Instrumentation

Participants responded to a 30 item questionnaire using a Likert-type scale ranging from 5 for, "Strongly agree," to 1 for, "Strongly disagree." Some items are written with positive connotations and some with negative connotations. Sample items included statements such as "Inclusion of students with disabilities will require significant changes in classroom procedures," and "Inclusion of students with disabilities will necessitate extensive re-training of faculty." A total score could range from 30 to 150, with a higher score indicating a more favorable perception of students with disabilities.

Larrivee and Cook (1979) developed the original attitude scale used in this study. The split-half reliability coefficient for the original instrument was  $r = .92$ . The author was granted permission to revise and update the research items to reflect current verbiage and appropriate language for adults.

The author met with a panel of five university faculty and staff members who were instructed to review and suggest revisions for the original survey instrument. Faculty members included one professor in the Department of English and two faculty members in the Department of Special Education. Staff

representation included the Coordinator of Services for Students with Disabilities and the Coordinator of Career Services. Each panel member read and suggested revisions of statements on the research instrument to reflect accuracy in current usage of the language as well as consistency of thought relative to a university setting.

A pilot study using the revised instrument was conducted in November 2000. Twenty-eight faculty members, who had not served on the original panel completed the revised survey instrument and noted any discrepancies on an accompanying sheet of paper. The faculty participating in the pilot study represented the College of Business (N=12 members), College of Arts and Sciences (N=7 members), College of Education (N=5 members), College of Nursing (N=1 member), the College of Criminal Justice and Social Science (N=1 member), and the College of Communication and Fine Arts (N=2 members).

Fifteen faculty members returned usable survey forms, for a response rate of 54%. The Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient for the revised instrument was  $\pm = .89$ .

Discrepancies noted during the pilot study were recorded and changes were incorporated into the final revision of the research instrument. Suggestions for revisions and changes included use of bold and larger font on the survey instrument, additional spacing between questions, and a request for the demographic data sheet and cover letter not to be stapled to the research instrument. Some faculty members commented that they did not like the requirement to answer based on any disability because their answers might have been altered if they were answering based on a specific type of disability.

### Procedures for Data Analysis

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), release 9.0, was used to analyze the data. The research question was: To what extent is there a difference in perceptions of faculty toward serving students with disabilities as measured by the Survey of Faculty Attitudes Relative to Serving Students with Disabilities questionnaire when faculty are grouped by (a) gender, (b) age of faculty member, (c) academic rank, (d) academic unit, (e) years of teaching experience, and (f) extent of contact with students with disabilities. A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) procedure to test for differences in mean scores between groups was conducted for faculty perceptions by (a) gender, (b) age of faculty member, (c) academic rank, (d) academic unit, (e) number of years teaching experience, and (f) extent of contact with students with disabilities. Minimum and maximum scores, mean scores, and standard deviations were computed for demographic data.

One hundred and six survey packets were distributed to faculty members, and seventy-one of the 106 faculty members completed and returned usable survey packets for an overall response rate of 67%. The number of males and females were almost evenly divided, with 36 females and 35 males.

Thirty-two of the 71 faculty members who participated had professorial rank. Thirty-one (43%) with professorial rank were female and 40 (57%) were male. Thirty-nine adjunct faculty members also participated. Fifty-six percent of these participants were female and 44% were males. Thirty-one (44%) of the participating faculty members were age 28 - 44 years. Forty (56%) of the participating faculty members were 45 - 64

years of age. Twenty-seven (38%) of the participants were faculty members in the College of Arts and Sciences. Twenty-three (32%) of the faculty members were in the School of Education. Twenty-one (30%) of the participating faculty members were in the School of Business.

A majority of the respondents indicated having previous contact with students with disabilities. Of the 71 respondents, 40 (56%) indicated previous instructional contact with three or more students with disabilities in the last three years. Thirty-one (44%) indicated 0 – 2 instructional contacts with students with disabilities.

The majority of the respondents indicated having less than ten years of teaching experience. Of the 71 respondents, 35 (49%) indicated they had 1 – 9 years of teaching experience, 21 (29%) indicated they had 10 – 20 years of teaching experience, and 15 (21%) indicated they had 21 or more years of teaching experience.

Mean scores and standard deviations were computed for all groups combined and for each academic comparison group. The minimum score possible on the questionnaire was 30 and the highest possible score was 150. The Likert-type scale for the instrument ranged from 5 for “strongly agree,” to 1 for “strongly disagree.” A higher score indicates a more favorable perception of students with disabilities.

The mean score on the research instrument for males was 85.11 with a standard deviation of 6.74. Scores for males ranged from 71 to 104. The mean score for females was 85.50 with a standard deviation of 6.57. Female scores ranged from 73 to 105. For male and female combined, the mean score was 85.30 with a standard deviation of 6.61. Total scores

ranged from 71 to 105.

The mean score for faculty members age 28 – 44 years was 85.06 with a standard deviation of 6.35. Scores for this age group ranged from 71 to 104. The mean score for faculty members age 45 – 64 years was 85.51 with a standard deviation of 6.90. Scores ranged from 73 to 105. For combined age groups the mean score was 85.30 with a standard deviation of 6.61 and a score range of 71 to 105.

The mean score for faculty members with professorial rank was 83.50 with a standard deviation of 6.80. Scores ranged from 71 to 98. The mean score for faculty members with nonprofessorial rank was 86.69 with a standard deviation of 6.19. Scores ranged from 77 to 105. The mean score for professorial and nonprofessorial rank combined was 85.30 with a standard deviation of 6.61. Total scores for academic rank ranged from 71 to 105.

The mean score for faculty in the School of Education was 82.96 and a standard deviation of 5.17. Scores ranged from 73 to 96. The mean score for the faculty of the School of Business was 84.48 and a standard deviation of 5.11. Scores ranged from 71 to 90. The mean score for the faculty of the College of Arts and Sciences was 88.16 with a standard deviation of 7.94. Scores ranged from 75 to 105. The overall mean score on the research instrument was 85.30 with a standard deviation of 6.61. Scores for all academic units ranged from 71 to 105.

The mean score for faculty members with 1 – 9 years of teaching experience was 84.49 with a standard deviation of 6.65. Scores ranged from 71 to 105. The mean score for faculty members with 10 – 20 years of teaching experience was 87.85 with a standard deviation of 6.56. Scores ranged from 75 to

104. The mean score for faculty members with 21 or more years of teaching experience was 83.71 with a standard deviation of 5.97. Scores ranged from 73 to 92. The combined mean score for all faculty members based on years of teaching experience was 85.30 with a standard deviation of 6.61. Scores ranged from 71 to 105.

The mean score for faculty members who had 0 – 2 contacts with students with disabilities was 85.63 with a standard deviation of 6.32. Scores ranged from 75 to 104. The mean score for faculty members who had 3 or more contacts with students with disabilities was 85.03 with a standard deviation of 6.92. Scores ranged from 71 to 105. The mean score for total contacts combined was 85.30 with a standard deviation of 6.61. Combined scores ranged from 71 to 105.

## Research Question

The following research question guided the study and the hypotheses to be tested:

To what extent is there a difference in perceptions of students with disabilities as measured by the Survey of Faculty Attitudes Relative to Serving Students with Disabilities survey instrument when faculty are grouped by (a) gender, (b) age, (c) academic rank, (d) academic unit, (e) years of teaching experience, and (f) extent of contact with students with disabilities?

The null hypotheses were tested at the .05 level of significance. The first hypothesis was formulated to ascertain whether or not there were significant differences in mean scores of faculty based on the independent variable of gender.

Ho<sub>1</sub>: There is no statistically significant difference in percep-

tions among faculty members toward serving students with disabilities based on gender of faculty member.

The F value for the one-way analysis of variance for gender was  $F(1,67) = .058$ ,  $p = .811$ . This value was not significant at the .05 level. This means that the probability of differences in perceptions between males and females could occur by chance approximately 82 times in 100.

The second null hypothesis was formulated to ascertain whether or not there were significant differences in mean scores of faculty based on the independent variable of age of faculty member (28 – 44 years and 45 – 64 years).

$H_{0_2}$ : There is no statistically significant difference in perceptions among faculty members toward serving students with disabilities based on age of faculty member (28 – 44 years and 45 – 64 years).

The F value for the one-way analysis of variance for age of faculty member was  $F(1,67) = .079$ ,  $p = .780$ . This value was not significant at the .05 level. This means that the probability of observing differences between the age groups of faculty members could occur by chance approximately 78 times out of 100.

The third hypothesis was formulated to ascertain whether or not there were significant differences in mean scores of faculty based on academic rank.

$H_{0_3}$ : There is no statistically significant difference in perceptions among faculty members toward serving students with disabilities based on academic rank – professorial (professor, associate professor, assistant professor) and nonprofessorial (instructor, adjunct).

The F value for the one-way analysis of variance for academic rank was  $F(1,67) = 4.138$ ,

$p = .046$ . This value was significant at the .05 level. Item analysis of the research instrument indicated the mean score on question 8 (Faculty possess a great deal of expertise necessary to work with students with disabilities) was 2.16 with a standard deviation of .73 for professorial rank. Item analysis indicated that the mean score on question 8 was 2.75 with a standard deviation of .93 for nonprofessorial faculty members. The remaining questions on the research instrument showed no significant differences in mean scores.

The fourth hypothesis was formulated to test if there were significant differences in mean scores of faculty based on the independent variable of academic unit (College of Arts and Sciences, School of Education, and School of Business).

$H_{0_4}$ : There is no statistically significant difference in perceptions among faculty members toward serving students with disabilities based on academic unit.

The ANOVA F value for academic unit was  $F(2,68) = 4.337$ ,  $p = .017$ . This value was significant at the .05 level. Item analysis of the research instrument indicated that the mean item score for faculty members in the College of Arts and Sciences was 2.78 with a standard deviation of 1.25 for question 2 (The needs of students with disabilities can be best served through special, separate programs). The faculty members in the School of Education had a mean item score of 2.09 with a standard deviation of .67 for question 2. The School of Business had a mean item score of 1.86 with a standard deviation of .65. The remaining questions on the survey instrument did not indicate any significant differences in mean scores.

The fifth hypothesis was formulated to ascertain whether or not there were sig-

nificant differences in mean scores of faculty based on years of teaching experience.

$H_{0_5}$ : There is no statistically significant difference in perceptions among faculty members toward serving students with disabilities based on number of years teaching (1 – 9, 10 – 20, and 21 – more).

The F value for the one-way analysis of variance for years of teaching experience was  $F(2,68) = 2.235$ ,  $p = .115$ . This value was not significant at the .05 level. This means that the probability of observing differences in perceptions based on years of teaching experience could occur by chance approximately 12 times out of 100.

The sixth hypothesis was formulated to ascertain whether or not there were significant differences in mean scores of faculty based on extent of faculty contact with students with disabilities (0 – 2 students with disabilities in the last 3 years; 3 or more students with disabilities in the last 3 years).

$H_{0_6}$ : There is no statistically significant difference in perceptions among faculty members toward serving students with disabilities based on extent of faculty contact with students with disabilities (0 – 2 students with disabilities in the last 3 years; 3 or more students with disabilities in the last 3 years).

The F value for the one-way analysis of variance for extent of faculty contact with students with disabilities was  $F(1,67) = .139$ ,  $p = .711$ . This value was not significant at the .05 level. This means that the probability of observing differences in perceptions based on extent of faculty contact with students with disabilities could occur by chance approximately 71 times out of 100.

The findings of this study indicated that faculty members at the university from which

data were collected held generally positive attitudes toward serving students with disabilities. However, findings also indicated that academic rank and academic unit were significant variables related to faculty attitudes of students with disabilities. Faculty holding professorial (professor, associate professor, assistant professor) rank had a lower mean score (83.50) compared to nonprofessorial (instructor, adjunct) faculty who had a mean score of 86.69. When academic unit was identified, mean scores for the faculty in the College of Arts and Sciences was 88.16, the School of Education mean score was 82.96, and the School of Business had a mean score of 84.48.

The overall mean score (85.30) for this study using the Survey of Faculty Attitudes Toward Serving Students with Disabilities research instrument was lower than the overall mean score (91.57) reported by Larrivee and Cook (1979) in their summary of normative data information from the Survey of Teacher's Opinions Relative to Mainstreaming Special-Needs Children instrument.

Six null hypotheses were formulated for this study. No statistical significance was found for null hypotheses  $H_{0_1}$  addressing gender of faculty members,  $H_{0_2}$  age of faculty members,  $H_{0_5}$  years of teaching experience, and  $H_{0_6}$  extent of contact with students with disabilities. Consequently, the researcher failed to reject the null hypotheses addressing these variables.

Null hypotheses  $H_{0_3}$  for academic rank and  $H_{0_4}$  for academic unit were rejected. The F values for the one-way analysis of variance statistical procedure indicated that academic rank was significant ( $p = .046$ ). Consequently, the null hypothesis for academic rank was rejected. Faculty with professorial

rank had a mean score of 83.50 and those with nonprofessorial rank had a mean score of 86.69. Item analysis of the research instrument indicated that the item mean score on question 8 (Faculty possess a great deal of expertise necessary to work with students with disabilities) was 2.16 with a standard deviation of .73 for faculty members with professorial rank. Item analysis indicated an item mean score of 2.75 with a standard deviation of .93 for faculty members with nonprofessorial rank.

The F value indicated that academic unit was significant among faculty perceptions of serving students with disabilities. Faculty in the College of Arts and Sciences had an overall mean score of 88.16, faculty in the School of Education had an overall mean score of 82.96, and the faculty in the School of Business had an overall mean score of 84.48, with a between groups  $p = .017$ . The Dunnett T3 post hoc test indicated that the difference was between the College of Arts and Sciences and the School of Business,  $p = .029$ . Item analysis indicated this was triggered by question #2 (The needs of students with disabilities can be best served through special, separate programs). The College of Arts and Sciences had an item mean score of 2.78 with a standard deviation of 1.25. The School of Education had an item mean score of 2.09 with a standard deviation of .67. The School of Business had an item mean score of 1.86 with a standard deviation of .65. Consequently, the null hypothesis for academic unit was rejected.

The generally positive attitudes of faculty toward students with disabilities are typical of faculty attitudes reported in similar studies at other higher education institutions (Nelson et al., 1990; Satcher, 1992).

Other studies also reported that faculty members are willing to make accommodations such as extended time on projects and tests for students with disabilities (Houck, Asselin, Troutmann, & Arrington, 1992; Baggett, 1994). Faculty members who used more than the lecture method had higher attitude scores than those who used only the lecture method. Faculty members generally held positive attitudes toward students with disabilities in relation to classroom management issues and compliance with Section 504 of the Vocational Rehabilitation Act (Schoen, Uysal, & McDonald, 1987).

## Conclusions

It may be concluded that there were differences in perceptions among faculty members toward serving students with disabilities. Faculty rank (professorial or nonprofessorial) and academic unit (School of Education, School of Business, or College of Arts and Sciences) were statistically significant variables in assessing differences in perceptions among faculty members toward serving students with disabilities. Specifically, the professorial rank had lower mean scores (83.50) than nonprofessorial rank. The faculty of the School of Education had a lower mean score than the faculty of the College of Arts and Sciences and the School of Business. Unlike previous research by Fonosch and Schwab (1981) and Schoen, Uysal, & McDonald (1987) comparing faculty attitudes across academic areas, findings in the current study suggest that faculty members in the School of Education are among those holding the least positive perceptions of students with disabilities. Perhaps this was caused by numerous administration and curricular changes in the School of Education that could have resulted

in a great deal of professional stress in recent years. In other words, the School of Education faculty members' responses may have been reflective of the turmoil in their workplace.

Historically, faculty members in the College of Arts and Science and the School of Business have demonstrated a more open attitude toward change than those in the College of Education at this institution. The faculty in the College of Arts and Sciences reflect a research-based academic environment. They seek out and embrace new ideas and philosophies. The faculty in the School of Business typically embraces change because it reflects opportunities for growth and development in the marketplace. Faculty in the School of Education often see change as a loss of identity that must be re-established through difficult tasks that require enormous amounts of energy.

Findings may be more representative of differences in the type of instruction between academic majors than a willingness or unwillingness to accommodate students with disabilities. The School of Education curriculum no longer relies on the lecture format. Faculty members within the School of Education incorporate visual and tactile demonstrations, along with lectures, into a variety of modalities for classroom use and in practicum and internship settings. There may be doubt in the minds of the School of Education faculty that students with disabilities can master the new concepts and utilize the changing technology adequately. Faculty members in the School of Education are also keenly aware of the deficits in technology in many local school settings. Additional training in the use of technology takes time and money. Although most school systems are working to-

ward a goal of technology for the 21st century, funds are not always readily available. Faculty in the School of Business engages in day-to-day contact with large and small businesses that typically utilize the newest technology. Businesses must have current equipment in order to remain competitive in the marketplace. Faculty members in the College of Arts and Sciences generally have access to adequate technological resources provided through federal and state grants and partnerships with both state and local agencies.

Faculty members with academic rank, compared to faculty without academic rank, may have answered more frankly due to the fact that they typically are tenured. Those without such security may feel somewhat compelled to answer in more politically correct terms.

Students with disabilities tend to be transfer students from junior or community colleges. As such, they are required to enroll in the majority of classes taught by faculty members that hold academic rank. Faculty members who do not hold academic rank tend to teach more general studies courses; thus, they may have less contact with students with disabilities than faculty with academic rank. Adjunct faculties do not serve on university committees, develop curriculum, or serve as department chairs. Nonprofessorial faculty are generally retirees or have full-time employment elsewhere in the community. They may not feel the same commitment to academic standards, as do full-time faculty members.

Statistically significant may not be meaningful in terms of practical applications. Faculty members were not presented specific information on the existence of specific disability cat-

egories in the current study. Faculty members were asked to answer the questions on the research instrument without bias toward any category of disability. It is likely that faculty members made individual decisions regarding various accommodation items based on what they deemed as fair for students, with or without disabilities. Overall, the results of this study indicated that most faculty members at the study institution had generally positive attitudes toward students with disabilities.

## Recommendations

The research for this study focused on the differences in perceptions of faculty members toward serving students with disabilities on the independent variables of (a) gender of faculty member; (b) age of faculty member (28 – 44 years and 45 – 64 years); (c) academic rank of faculty member – professorial (professor, associate professor, assistant professor) and nonprofessorial (instructor, adjunct); (d) academic unit – College of Arts and Sciences, School of Education, School of Business; (e) years of teaching experience (1 – 9, 10 – 20, 21 – more); and (f) extent of contact with students with disabilities (0 – 2 students in the last three years; 3 or more students with disabilities in the last three years). Further research could be expanded to include additional independent variables such as subjects taught by faculty members and ethnicity of faculty members. Comparing the perceptions of faculty in the various departments, e.g., perceptions of faculty in the Department of History and those of faculty in the Department of Computer Science, could reveal a closer examination of differences in perceptions.

Many students transfer from one campus location to an-

other. Research could include all of the sites for a specific institution. A larger pool of data may give a more comprehensive picture regarding faculty perceptions within a comprehensive system. Limitations of the present study included faculty members at only one institution of higher education. Caution should be taken so that these results are not generalized beyond institutions with similar characteristics as the institution in this study.

Faculty attitudes toward students with disabilities are critical in determining whether these students benefit from the overall educational experience (Fichten et al., 1990; Fonosch & Schwab, 1981; Nathanson, 1982). Miller and Miller (2002) reinforce the importance of positive teacher perceptions toward students with disabilities in the following statement:

Instructors who convey a positive attitude to students, parents, administrators, and other teachers and who remain flexible and sensitive to the special needs of students with disabilities have a greater chance of being successful. Instructors who are able to adapt instruction for students with a wide range of disabilities can create a positive learning environment and manage a successful inclusive classroom. (41-42)

Quality training programs could serve to improve faculty perceptions of students with disabilities. Training programs increase faculty knowledge related to various disabilities and the various provisions available to accommodate students. Such training should also incorporate the use of assistive technology. Continued research regarding faculty perceptions of serving students with disabilities will be helpful in assessing the training needs of faculty members and other professional staff to

comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Vocational Rehabilitation Act.

## References

- Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, 42 U.S.C.A. § 12101 et seq.
- Amsel, R., & Fichten, C. (1990). Interaction between disabled and nondisabled college students and their professors: A comparison. *Journal of Postsecondary Education and Disability*, 8, 125-140.
- Askamit, D., Morris M., & Luenberger, J. (1987). Preparation of student services professionals and faculty for serving learning-disabled students. *Journal of College Student Personnel*, 28, 53-59.
- Baggett, D. (1994). *A study of faculty awareness of students with disabilities*. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 369208)
- Burgstahler, S. (1992). Computing services for disabled students in institutions of higher education. (Doctoral dissertation, University of Washington, 1992). *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 54, 102.
- Dodd, J., Hermanson, M., Nelson, J., & Fichten, J. (1990). Tribal college faculty willingness to provide accommodations to students with learning disabilities. *Journal of American Indian Education*, 30 (1), 8-16.
- Fichten, C., Asuncion, J., Barile, M., G n reux, C., Fossey, M., Judd, D., Robillard, C., DeSimone, C., & Wells, D. Retrieved April, 2003 from [adapttech.dawsoncollege.qc.ca/pubs/olt01/references.htm](http://adapttech.dawsoncollege.qc.ca/pubs/olt01/references.htm)
- Fichten, C., Goodrick, G., Tagalakis, V., Amsel, R., & Libman, E. (1990). Getting along in college: Recommendations for college students with disabilities and their professors. *Rehabilitation Counseling Bulletin*, 34 (2), 103-125.
- Finn, L. L. (1998). Students' perceptions of beneficial LD accommodations and services at the postsecondary level. *Journal of*

*Postsecondary Education and Disability*, 13(1), 46-67.

- Fonosch, G., & Schwab, L. (1981). Attitudes of selected university faculty members toward disabled students. *Journal of College Student Personnel*, 22, 229-235.
- Greenbaum, B., Graham, S., & Scales, W. (1995). Adults with learning disabilities: Educational and social experiences during college. *Exceptional Children*, 61, 460-471.
- Henderson, K. (1995). *College freshmen with disabilities: A triennial statistical profile*. Washington, DC: American Council on Education and HEATH Resource Center.
- Houck, C., Asselin, S., Troutman, G. & Arrington, J. (1992). Students with learning disabilities in the university environment: A study of faculty and student perceptions. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 25, 678-684.
- Larrivee, B., & Cook, L. (1979). Mainstreaming: A study of the variables affecting teacher attitude. *The Journal of Special Education*, 13 (1), 315-324.
- McCarthy, M., & Campbell, N. (1993). Serving disabled students: Faculty needs and attitudes. *NASPA Journal*, 30 (2), 120-125.
- McGee, K. A. (1989). Attitudes of the University of Virginia faculty and administration toward disabled college students. (Doctoral dissertation, University of Virginia, 1989). *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 50, 10.
- Miller, W. R., & Miller, M. F. (2002). *Instructors and their jobs* (3rd ed.). Homewood, IL: American Technical Publishers.
- Minner, S., & Prater, G. (1984). College teachers' expectations of disabled students. *Academic Therapy*, 20 (2), 225-229.
- Nathanson, R. B. (1982). Faculty attitudes and behaviors toward physically disabled students: An exploratory/descriptive study with proposals for faculty development programming. (Doctoral dissertation, Columbia Univer-

- sity, 1982). *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 44, 5.
- Nelson, R. J., Dodd, J. M., & Smith, D. J. (1990). Faculty willingness to accommodate students with learning disabilities: A comparison among academic divisions. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 23(3), 185-189.
- Satcher, J. (1992). Community college faculty comfort with providing accommodations for students with learning disabilities. *College Student Journal*, 26, 518-524.
- Schoen, E., Uysal, M., & McDonald, C. (1987). Attitudes of faculty members toward treatment of disabled students reexamined. *College Student Journal*, 21, 190-193.
- U.S. Department of Education. (1999). *Students with disabilities in postsecondary education: A profile of preparation, participation, and outcomes* (NCES 1999). Washington, D. C.
- Address correspondence about this manuscript to Dr. Marie Kraska, Department of Educational Foundations, Leadership, and Technology, 4036 Haley Center, Auburn University, Auburn, AL 36849-5221. Dr. Kraska can be reached by telephone at (334) 844-3806 or by electronic mail at [kraskmf@auburn.edu](mailto:kraskmf@auburn.edu).

## News You Can Use

John Gugerty, Column Editor

~~The Consortium on Chicago School Research has produced several new publications available for downloading at <http://www.consortium-chicago.org>~~

### ~~*The Chicago Annenberg Challenge: Successes, Failures, and Lessons for the Future*~~

~~By Mark Smylie, Stacy Wenzel, Elaine Allensworth, Carol Fendt, Sara Hallman, Stuart Luppescu, and Jenny Nagaoka~~

~~This paper describes the Chicago Annenberg Challenge (CAC) and evaluates the success of this community focused reform program. Drawing from student test scores, longitudinal surveys, and teacher and principal interview data, the Consortium team evaluated whether the Challenge catalyzed school improvement and student academic achievement, and investigated the myriad factors that contributed to these results.~~

### ~~*External Support to Schools on Probation: Getting a Leg Up?*~~

~~By Kara Finnigan and Jennifer O'Day with the assistance of David Wakelyn~~

~~This report illuminates a two year analysis of the design of CPS's accountability policy and its implementation in Chicago's elementary schools. Findings center on the role of external partners and probation managers in their implementation of the policy, the constraints their influence posed, and numerous suggestions for policy changes to assist urban centers, such as Chicago, in these dedicated school reform efforts.~~

### ~~*Chicago High School Redesign Initiative: A Snapshot of the First Year of Implementation*~~

~~By Susan E. Spote, Macarena Correa, Joe Kahne, and John Q. Easton~~

~~This publication examines the initiative to turn three large traditional high schools into five smaller schools as described by principals, teachers and students. This project introduces a policy change that will expand in the coming years in the Chicago Public Schools' large scale effort to improve essential supports to student achievement and school success.~~

### ~~*Ending Social Promotion: Results from Summer Bridge*~~

~~By Melissa Roderick, Mimi Engel, Jenny Nagaoka with Brian A. Jacob, Sophie Degener, Alex Orfei, Susan Stone, and Jen Bacon~~

~~This report describes and evaluates the Summer Bridge Program, a large summer intervention program for students with below average test scores. It focuses on the short term and long term effects of Summer Bridge and how staffing and curriculum choices shape the program.~~