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Establishing Learning Disability Support Services with Minimal Resources

Loring C. Brinckerhoff, Ph.D.
Boston University

Abstract

Increasing numbers of students with learning disabilities (LD) are attending institutions of higher education resulting in an unprecedented demand for services. As a result, many colleges are faced with the prospect of developing additional institutional supports at a time when budgets are being cut. This article is designed to assist postsecondary LD service providers who are in the process of developing support services with minimal resources. Practical suggestions are offered on how to define service eligibility, provide reasonable accommodations, establish diagnostic testing procedures, maximize existing ancillary services on campus, and measure program effectiveness.

Several publications have recently appeared in the literature profiling model learning disability (LD) programs at a variety of 2- and 4-year institutions (Adelman, 1988; Mangrum & Strichart, 1988; McGuire, 1988). Each year, more colleges and universities are developing support services for students with learning disabilities (Lazarus, 1989; Vogel, 1982). The number of college students with learning disabilities has increased tenfold in the last decade (Learning Disability Update, 1986). A national survey conducted by the American Council on Education (Hippolitus, 1987) indicated that students with learning disabilities now make up 1.1 % of the total freshman class. With an increased demand for services, colleges are often faced with the prospect of developing additional institutional support services at a time when budgets are being cut and offices are already under-staffed. Given this climate of austerity in higher education, many colleges and universities want to develop a core of support services for students with learning disabilities rather than a comprehensive LD program.

The luxury of offering a comprehensive LD program is often not possible due to funding limitations, inadequate space, or a lack of institutional commitment. When administrators are faced with the prospect of developing LD services from scratch, they often find a staff person who has already shown an interest in learning disabilities. Individuals who inherit the responsibility for providing LD support services often come from a variety of fields, such as: psychology, special education, counseling, social work, curriculum and instruction, rehabilitation, or developmental education (Blosser, 1984; Shaw & Norlander,

1986). Frequently, their current job duties are expanded to encompass serving college students with learning disabilities. Within a year or two, part-time duties evolve into full-time "learning specialist" positions. During this rapid growth of LD support services, the newly appointed "learning specialist" looks for additional resources and contact people who can assist in the development and refinement of support services.

This article is designed to assist this expanding group of postsecondary service providers who are in the process of developing support services on their campuses. The title of "learning specialist" will be used to refer to an individual with specific training in learning disabilities and assessment. The title of "LD service provider" will be used to refer to an individual with a broader counseling or support services background who may not have specific training in the area of learning disabilities. The suggestions made are designed to be relatively inexpensive and within the scope of implementation by one full-time individual. With minimal resources and a dedicated staff person, it is possible to provide adequate support services to the many capable students with learning disabilities who might otherwise not be successful in higher education.

Guidelines For Service Eligibility

Before services are offered, it is important that guidelines for service eligibility be established. These guidelines should fall within the scope of Section 504 of the The Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Federal Register, 1980, May 9) which states that any public or private institution that receives federal monies shall not discriminate on the basis of handicap. The intent of the law is not to grant students access because of the handicap, but simply to prevent exclusion because of it (Mangrum & Strichart, 1988). College students with learning disabilities are clearly protected under Section 504 (Rothstein, 1986) and must be granted an opportunity to compete with their non-disabled peers. Furthermore, these students may expect to be provided modifications or "reasonable accommodations" that will assist them in compensating for their learning disability. However, Rothstein (1986) noted that problems often arise in determining whether a student actually does have a learning disability. The relevance of diagnostic data varies according to its recency. Information gathered at the elementary or middle school level may have questionable value as it pertains to postsecondary accommodations. Issues of eligibility become even more complicated in cases where students have been diagnosed by private consultants and psychologists (Brinckerhoff, Shaw, & McGuire, in press). Clearly there is a need to establish eligibility criteria at the postsecondary level that can be tailored to individual postsecondary contexts (Mellard, 1990). Scott (1990) pointed out that the spirit of the law is to mandate that professionals in higher education apply informed judgment in admitting, accommodating, and educating students with learning disabilities. Once these essential program components are established and validated, individual abilities and accommodations can be considered.

After establishing guidelines for services, the institution needs to determine whether or not it will charge an additional tuition fee to cover some or all of the LD support services offered. Some colleges and universities are offering one or two levels of LD services:

basic and user-fee services. Basic LD services often include a variety of generic accommodations such as: alternative testing procedures, access to tape recorders, readers, recorded textbooks, auxiliary aids, notetakers, or substitution of certain course work. Students who receive basic LD services typically depend more heavily on other campus resources such as the Learning Assistance Center or counseling services and have few opportunities for consulting with a learning disabilities specialist on a regular basis. In addition to the basic LD services previously mentioned, user-fee services may include a complete diagnostic evaluation, on-going consultation with a trained learning disability specialist, frequent tutoring, and personal counseling. Many program administrators are caught in the ethical dilemma of what level of service to offer: either an extensive program based upon a user fee, or less comprehensive services at no additional cost to the student. This decision will ultimately depend on a number of factors including the mission of the institution regarding students with learning disabilities, the availability of qualified staff to serve these students, and access to funds for supporting LD services on campus.

Providing Accommodations

Despite a prevalent fear that the quality of education will be lowered by making accommodations, experience has shown that this does not happen (Scheiber & Talpers, 1987). One of the most frequent requests from students typically involves requests for additional time on an exam. The standard rule of thumb in most postsecondary settings is time and a half, or double time. This policy is a guide to both the faculty member who is likely to give an extra 5 minutes and the "good natured" professor who allows the student to take an exam home for the weekend. Certainly there are problems with either approach, but it is important to maintain uniform standards. On occasion, a student may need more than double time, but such cases should be a rare exception and substantial data documenting reduced processing skills would have to be provided. Service providers must not overlook the possibility of having a student take an exam in a quiet room. Sometimes allowing a student to read out loud, work in a distraction-free setting or take frequent stretch breaks can make a tremendous difference. The exam format can be altered as well. Oral exams may be substituted for written exams, or personal computers in a private room can be used by students who have difficulty in spelling, writing or organizing their thoughts on paper. If it appears that the exam discriminates on the basis of the student's disability, rather than measures knowledge of course content, then testing accommodations should be considered.

Other accommodations may be programmatic in nature. These accommodations may include: priority registration, priority housing assignments, and enrollment in "special sections" of remedial or developmental courses. Several campuses permit students with learning disabilities to take a reduced course load without losing full-time student status or permit students with specific language-based learning disabilities to obtain a foreign language course substitution (Shaw, Byron, Norlander, McGuire, & Anderson, 1988). Similarly, a student with a specific learning disability in mathematical reasoning or problem solving may be an appropriate candidate for a course substitution in an area related to mathematics. As long as the academic adjustments or accommodations

proposed are not viewed as essential to the program or directly related to licensing requirements, they should be considered as possible alternatives for students with learning disabilities.

Course Substitutions

It may take years for some college administrators to agree to the notion that certain students with documented learning disabilities should be allowed to take alternatives to satisfy degree requirements. As long as these requirements do not directly impact upon state certification or licensure and are not viewed as integral to the plan of study, course substitutions may be appropriate. However, institutions are not required to make fundamental alterations to their programs (Rothstein, 1986). For example, if a student with a learning disability in mathematics were unable to complete the requirements for a degree in engineering without substantially altering the program, the student would not be "otherwise qualified" under Section 504. If the same student were an art history major, where mathematics knowledge is not integral to the course of study, the student might be an appropriate candidate for course substitution. In the field of mathematics, for example, substitutions may be offered in research methods classes or in computer courses.

Frequently, students with learning disabilities do not want to be treated differently. Many will persist at trying to master a foreign language or mathematics courses despite repeated failures, just so they won't be perceived as different or as gaining "special treatment." Similarly, many college students with learning disabilities prefer to complete their degree requirements by applying for a course substitution rather than a waiver. The LD service provider and members of a campus access committee may be in a position to implement new policies that will give these students the option of studying the culture of a given country, instead of struggling with two or three semesters of a foreign language (Ganschow & Sparks, 1987). A few campuses nationally permit the study of American Sign Language (ASL) as a viable option for fulfilling foreign language course requirements. Another option, before requesting a foreign language substitution, might be for the student to study a less traditional language. Block and Burke (1988) suggested that some students with learning disabilities may be successful in low enrollment courses where more individualized instruction is possible and in courses where all students enter the course without prior background knowledge of the foreign language (e.g., Chinese or Swahili).

Students who receive approval for a substitution should take the same number of credit hours, or a comparable level of work in the substituted course as they would in the conventional foreign language or mathematics core curriculum. Several campuses have established a course substitution review committee to evaluate requests from students with disabilities seeking course substitutions. The procedures for establishing a course substitution review committee vary from campus to campus, but generally the committee is composed of six-to-eight members representing the foreign language or mathematics departments, along with specialists from related disciplines such as special education, speech and language, or educational psychology. These campus "experts" review the student's petition for a course substitution, evaluate the completeness of the

documentation submitted, and make recommendations for further study. The committee often meets at specified times each year to review cases for the following semester. For students who are not approved by the review committee initially, an appeal process is provided.

Developing Service Forms

Eligibility policies and the procedures for carrying out these services in an orderly manner can be reflected in a variety of service contracts or forms that should be developed in anticipation of future needs. For example, referring a new student to the LD service provider may necessitate the development of a referral form that can be filled out by a faculty or staff member. Additional forms may be needed for arranging alternative testing accommodations, notetaking assistance, or peer tutoring. Students need to be responsible for requesting alternative testing at least 48 hours in advance. Ideally, the alternative testing request form includes information as to how the test will be delivered, the type of testing accommodations to be used, and a designated place for a departmental signature when the exam is returned. Many students with learning disabilities have difficulty remembering what accommodations they are receiving in a particular class, let alone remembering the logistics concerning the delivery and return of an exam. Gajar (1987) has developed a comprehensive collection of support service forms which can serve as a starting point for developing the necessary internal operating procedures to ensure smooth service delivery. Additional forms specific to individual campus needs can be developed by the learning specialist as needed.

Service forms are most frequently used with faculty for arranging alternative testing accommodations. The process of negotiating with faculty can be a delicate issue. Typically, institutions have developed their own protocol for students to follow in arranging reasonable testing accommodations. On some campuses, the service provider will do everything for the student including contacting the professor, verifying the disability, arranging for the accommodations, and scheduling the exam. On other campuses, the student is responsible for making whatever arrangements he/she can with sympathetic faculty. Both of these extremes place the student at a disadvantage. Students who have everything arranged for them are missing out on an opportunity to self-advocate and describe their disability. Conversely, students who have to navigate the system on their own may be forced to try anything that works in order to convince a faculty member that testing accommodations are necessary. The Association on Handicapped Student Service Programs in Postsecondary Education (AHSSPPE) has tried to address this problem by developing a folder that looks official and includes a statement that the student presenting this information has a learning disability that may require some accommodation. One large urban university provides students with a "blue envelope" to take to faculty at the beginning of the semester. In this case, the Disabled Student Service provider makes letters of introduction available to all faculty members. As a result, many students may feel that it is no longer necessary for them to meet with the faculty member, since the contents of the envelope will take care of everything! However, as the demand for services increases, additional problems will arise in trying to keep up with requests and "special" letters of introduction. Although the service

provider's intentions are to pave the way for the student, students may develop a false dependency on the service provider because they think that this is the only way to legitimize their needs with faculty. Students should make their own appointment with the faculty member, go on their own and be prepared to describe their learning disability as it relates to course material. If the faculty member requests documentation of the learning disability, the student should refer the faculty member to the LD service provider, or a counselor who is familiar with the student's disability.

Diagnostic Testing On Campus

One of the primary considerations in differentiating between LD support services and an LD program is to determine how much diagnostic testing can be provided on campus to students who believe they may have a learning disability. Most support services offer some type of intake interview and basic screening process. Comprehensive LD programs are most likely to have access to a diagnostician and perhaps a team of specialists who can assist in documenting a learning disability. Ideally, when the testing is completed it will be reviewed by a multidisciplinary team that can work with the student in generating an individualized semester plan (ISP) based on the diagnostic data (Shaw, Byron, Norlander, McGuire, & Anderson, 1988). Team members are often faculty members who have been solicited from related departments such as: speech and language, special education, or allied health. Goal statements, which include the desired change, the projected time line for services, and resources needed to reach specific objectives, may be included. However, a word of caution is in order. The institution and the LD service provider need to be in agreement as to how much diagnostic testing can be reasonably provided. This is a very labor-intensive service. It may take a learning specialist 10-12 hours to test, prepare, and write a complete diagnostic report. Experience has shown that once diagnostic services are available to students, the learning specialist will quickly become inundated with requests for evaluations.

Although assessment of students with learning disabilities is not required under Section 504 (Brinckerhoff, 1985), many institutions feel they are not meeting the needs of consumers without offering some in-house diagnostic testing. Most likely there are a variety of resource people already on campus or in the community who have an interest and expertise in LD assessment. Because many learning specialists do not have the time or resources to do extensive testing, a "blue chip" referral list of community contacts who can assist in the evaluation of learning disabilities on a fee basis may be helpful in matching students with diagnostic services. This referral list may include brief descriptions of diagnosticians, their training and background, and areas of expertise. It is very important that students select a professional with whom they can feel comfortable working. The diagnostician should have a good working knowledge of learning disabilities, as well as be familiar with different types of diagnostic testing. Some LD service providers with background in assessment may provide community resource persons with a comprehensive listing of the diagnostic testing that needs to be conducted so that comparative data can be gathered across students.

If some diagnostic testing is offered on campus, the student must arrange for an initial intake interview. This interview might include a student needs assessment or a learning style inventory (Anderson & Brinckerhoff, 1990) to be filled out by the student. Typically, the intake interview consists of a thorough review of the student's medical, educational, and family history. The learning specialist should also conduct a complete review of the student's previous diagnostic testing, high school transcripts, and work samples, such as term papers or examinations. During the interview process, it is important for the LD service provider to listen carefully to the student's speech patterns, word choice and word retrieval. If, after the intake interview, the student appears to have a learning disability, then additional testing can be arranged. In order to be of greatest value to the LD service provider, additional testing should include assessment in at least the following three areas: intellectual functioning, information processing, and academic achievement.

Finally, diagnostic testing can often be a costly and time-consuming process. Consequently, students may need to depend on outside agencies for funding and testing. Although the Office of Rehabilitation Services offers diagnostic testing at no additional charge, the waiting period for testing can be several months. Frequently, resource people in the community will work more quickly and may be willing to provide services on a sliding scale. Depending on the student's age, some family health insurance plans will cover diagnostic testing if it is conducted in a subscriber hospital out-patient setting. In another approach, college personnel may be able to secure a student health insurance carrier that covers the majority of the costs associated with conducting neuropsychological evaluations through neighboring hospitals.

Content Or Learning Strategies Tutoring

A common pitfall of many LD service providers is over-committing their time by promising to provide students with regular tutorial support. Because content tutoring is especially time-consuming and by its very nature course specific, it is advisable that the LD service provider refer students to trained tutors who have specific knowledge in a course area. In addition, recent research data do not support the effectiveness of the tutorial approach in helping students with learning disabilities cope with the demands of secondary school curricula (Schumaker, Deshler, Alley, & Warner, 1983; Seidenberg, 1986). In light of this, an alternative instructional approach that promotes learning strategies instruction can be considered in postsecondary settings. The learning strategies model is based on the premise that students with learning disabilities are strategy deficient, not having acquired techniques or rules to complete tasks independently (Shaw, et. al., 1988). With an emphasis on learning "how to learn", the goal of the learning strategies model is to increase performance by teaching these students how to acquire, organize, store, and retrieve information (Deshler, Schumaker, Lenz, & Ellis, 1984). By successfully applying these strategies, students with learning disabilities can experience academic success and independence while developing a more positive self-image (Carlson, 1985). Byron and Owen (1990) have developed a learning strategies course specifically for college students with learning disabilities. Course content is used to teach metacognitive skills for an introductory-level psychology class.

The LD service provider may choose to offer a student occasional assistance with a class, but should avoid becoming a tutoring service for students with learning disabilities. A more effective approach is for the LD service provider to give content tutors specific information about learning disabilities and learning strategies instruction so they will have the necessary background to work with referred students more effectively. The LD service provider can also serve many more students by offering small group workshops on learning strategies. These workshops might include information on how to cluster material to facilitate memorization, how to read a course textbook actively and take notes, and how to use visual imagery or subvocalization to improve retention. Another way of expanding impact is to videotape sessions so that students who were unable to attend can access the strategies at a later time. Self-guided audio study tapes on how to take notes, how to study for exams, and time management strategies could also be made available to students on loan.

Counseling Considerations

LD service providers frequently need to address both the academic and psychosocial needs of college students with learning disabilities. Research clearly indicates that children with learning disabilities do not "grow out of" their handicap, but will continue to show the ramifications of their disability throughout their lives (Shumaker, Deshler, Alley, & Warner, 1983). Individuals with learning disabilities need to have a clear, balanced picture of their own unique strengths and weaknesses. They will especially need assistance in developing a positive self-concept and effective social skills, which can be successfully translated into many facets of adult life (Price, 1988). However, because most LD service providers do not have specific training in counseling or psychotherapy, students needing extensive psychosocial skill development should be referred to a counselor or health care professional. This type of referral serves as an opportunity for awareness raising with other professionals while providing the college student with understandable and accurate information about how they learn and how to describe their learning disability to others. Clearly, it is impossible for an LD service provider to do it all. Academic advisement should be addressed by faculty advisers who are trained in this area. It is simply not possible for an LD service provider to know all the departmental policies or course requirements. However, they can be helpful in directing students toward faculty members who may be particularly supportive.

Vaughn (1985) notes that students with learning disabilities are at risk for rejection and therefore social skills development should be a priority. One low-cost resource that may be helpful to college students with learning disabilities is the establishment of a peer support group. Support groups can be student directed and student run. College seniors or graduate students with a disability who are seeking a career in a related human services field are often excellent role models. Support group meetings with the most success are often brown bag lunches, rather than heavy-duty therapy sessions. Some groups may be composed entirely of students with learning disabilities or have a cross-disability composition. Students may, for example, be required to make a commitment to the group after the second week of attendance. This ensures that members will not drop in or out, and confidentiality is easier to maintain. Other peer groups require each member to seek

out a different member for an activity (i.e., coffee, study break, movie, etc.) so they can interact informally outside the confines of the group. An excellent new resource guide on developing LD support groups has been prepared at the University of Minnesota (Johnson, 1989). Another related resource is a social skills development card game called "Life's Dilemmas" (Jarrow, Brinckerhoff, & Lendman, 1987). Players are presented with a problem situation and must react to it, sometimes challenging another player's reaction.

Ancillary Equipment And Resources

Even the most modest LD support service program needs funds for the purchase of ancillary equipment. Specialized four-track tape recorders, Franklin Spellers(tm), talking calculators, and standardized tape recorders should be readily available for student use. As funding increases through grant or alumni support, computers with a variety of word processing capabilities and speech synthesizers would be a welcome addition. Many LD support services staff have elected to purchase a computer for routine office correspondence, record-keeping, and public relations efforts. Future plans may include placing student files on the computer, in addition to maintaining daily contact records regarding the services requested. Annual report and proposal writing is much easier when information can be called directly from a central database. One Macintosh(tm) software program, which is well suited for data analysis and presentation graphics, is StatView II (1989).

Margolis & Price (1986) have stated that microcomputers serve as an "equalizer" for a subset of students with learning disabilities in a mainstream postsecondary setting. Students who have had little exposure to computers may find a Macintosh(tm) computer to be a good starting place. These computers are easy to use and have been found to be particularly useful for college students with learning disabilities. Some offices have purposely sought out a variety of computers so that students can have the opportunity to work with different machines. The purchase of new computers is not always necessary. Many postsecondary institutions have successfully started labs by securing slightly outdated equipment from local corporations. Berliss (1989) suggested working with local disability-related organizations, the Lions Club, fraternities and sororities to secure funding.

One purpose of establishing a mini-computer lab for students is to help them adjust to using computers in a familiar surrounding before they venture into a larger computer center. In the comfort of the support services office, students can be introduced to computers with different types of adaptive equipment (e.g., speech synthesizers, redundant functioning systems, etc.) and to a variety of software without feeling threatened or pressured. Computer majors with learning disabilities who have a solid background in computers and technology may be good candidates for work-study positions as part-time instructors. After students become comfortable with computers and word processing techniques, they can be encouraged to write papers in the computer center or writing lab on campus. Gradually weaning students off specialized support services equipment and into the mainstream will benefit everyone. The student with a learning disability learns a generalizable skill and the support service office can offer

computer training to a new student. In order to facilitate this turnover each semester, the LD service provider may want to provide all students who know how to use computers with a resource listing of word processing programs and related information to assist those students contemplating the purchase of a computer for personal use.

One additional resource that should be made available to the greater community includes the establishment of a resource library which may contain a variety of journals, brochures, reference books, and videotapes related to postsecondary learning disabilities. Journals and resource guides may serve as references to staff and to students who are writing term papers about learning disabilities.

Public Relations And Outreach Efforts

Once LD support services are well defined and funded, it is time to market services to the campus community. King (1985) noted that it is critical to find out what the institutional priorities are on campus. Listen carefully to the president's speeches and read institutional position papers. For example, if "retention" is the buzz word of the day, then sell your services based on retention and graduation data of LD students vs. non-disabled students. However, LD service providers need to be careful not to oversell or undersell the scope of services offered. It is not unusual to find that LD support services are the best kept secret on campus. On the other hand, service providers need to avoid being a catch-all service for any "at risk" student. This will quickly exhaust the limited resources that have been targeted for students with specific learning disabilities.

Many colleges have chosen to showcase their LD support services in a general disability brochure. This may be appropriate if students with learning disabilities are served through the Disabled Student Service Office (DSS). However, if over half of the pictures in the brochure are of wheelchair users, then a misleading image may be conveyed. Several good faculty guides have been published in the last several years. The City University of New York (CUNY) Professional Staff Congress (1988) published a very complete guide, *Reasonable Accommodations: A Faculty Guide To Teaching College Students with Disabilities*. Northeastern University (1986) developed a faculty guide, *The Disabled Student in Your Classroom*, which includes a complete description of LD support services as well as a listing of auxiliary equipment and services available throughout the campus .

The Association on Handicapped Student Service Programs in Postsecondary Education (AHSSPPE), has broadly distributed the brochure *College Students with Learning Disabilities* (Barry, Brinckerhoff, Keeney, Smith, 1984), which is available in both English and Spanish. Other valuable outreach resource materials include *College Students with Learning Disabilities: A Handbook for College LD Students, Admissions Officers, Faculty, and Administrators* (Vogel, 1990), and a faculty handbook, *Dispelling the Myths: College Students with Learning Disabilities* (Garnett & La Porta, 1984). This booklet includes specific information for faculty on how to meet the unique needs of college students with learning disabilities. By stimulating the growth of a network of positively concerned faculty and administrative staff, the LD service provider will not

have to be the only voice advocating for students with special needs (Lundeberg & Svien, 1988).

The key to public relations is to enhance program visibility through a variety of channels. A newsletter with a special column featuring LD issues could be sent to all faculty, staff, and students who have contact with the DSS or Special Student Services offices. Community contact persons, such as rehabilitation counselors, Learning Disability Association of America (LDAA) parent groups, private consultants, and local high school teachers should receive invitations to an "LD open house at the beginning of each semester. Community volunteers may serve as a welcome resource for publicizing the program. Some colleges have recruited senior citizens to perform routine office functions, tape recording, and other related duties. These individuals in turn can function as ambassadors of "good will" regarding the LD services provided on campus. An LD speakers bureau could be established at no cost. This group might be composed of three or four college students with learning disabilities who are willing to talk to high school students, present at college fairs, or give talks to departmental faculty. For less than \$300, a brief slide show could be produced to augment outreach presentations. An additional technique for maintaining institutional support is to provide key administrative personnel with an executive summary of the annual report. This information may also be of interest to the local or campus newspapers. The message that these students can be successful has broad readership appeal.

As a final concern, LD support services cannot function effectively unless the LD service provider has access to adequate secretarial support. This individual is critical in providing the public with a positive image of disability support services. This support staff person may serve as a receptionist by screening all telephone inquiries and directing students to the appropriate services. Related duties could include word processing, budgetary record keeping, coordinating office supplies, and organizing office files. Work-study students may be used in addition to the secretary to help with clerical overflow. King (1985) stated that disabled student service offices may be a "gold mine" for practicum and internship sites. Disability services can offer upcoming professionals with a unique training environment. Although such positions are not entirely free, they may provide additional personnel at minimal cost. Many LD support service programs have benefited by hiring adults with learning disabilities as staff members. These individuals may start as work-study students, leading into full-time employment.

Program Evaluation

Regardless of the number of students served, it is essential that procedures for collecting and analyzing data be established along with a time line for gathering information. In the initial stages of developing support services, the designing of data collection forms should be guided by efficiency *and* accuracy. Determining the evaluation questions well in advance of data gathering will facilitate the construction of forms that staff can complete within realistic time lines (Brinckerhoff, Shaw, McGuire, & Anderson, 1988). McGuire has developed a time line for data collection so that actual analyses and report

preparation can be conducted during summer months when more time can be allocated to this activity.

A starting point for data collection is to gather descriptive data on the LD students currently being served. Information such as the numbers of accepted or rejected applicants, the transcript profiles of accepted students and the point in time that a learning disability was identified should be available to the LD service provider. Secondly, information regarding the types of related services utilized by students is essential for guiding future program planning. This might include information on the number of tape recorded textbooks ordered, the number of requests for alternative testing accommodations, or the number of referrals made to outside agencies for diagnostic testing. Thirdly, program outcome measures are essential for annual report writing. By monitoring grades, attrition, retention and graduation data, the LD service provider can determine the effectiveness of the support services. This information can be valuable in promoting services to the campus community and strengthening future funding proposals.

Follow-up surveys can be employed to monitor faculty or student satisfaction with the services provided. Marchant, (1990) noted that when large numbers of faculty members are involved and few support services personnel are available, time limitations can make personal contacts very difficult. He suggested that the construction of a faculty questionnaire is one alternative for gathering specific information from faculty members concerning the services required by college students with learning disabilities and their attitudes toward classroom accommodations. The LD support services offered on campus can become a natural laboratory for research. The availability of consistent outcome data and follow-up information on these students is currently lacking in the research literature. Brinckerhoff, et al., (1988) point out that by formulating hypotheses and systematically gathering data, the learning specialist will be in a position to identify those critical variables that warrant generalization of findings and promote consideration of future programmatic issues.

Professional Development

LD support services can not be provided unless the designated staff person has adequate training. Blosser (1984) noted that only 9% of college disabled student services personnel who generally have the responsibility to develop and administer these programs are trained in special education. Since college learning specialists enter the field from a variety of disciplines, it is particularly important that they have access to professional development opportunities. On going professional training will ensure that these individuals are provided with the most up-to-date information available so that support services can be maximized and professional burnout can be reduced.

Summary

More than ever, support staff are faced with increasing numbers of students with learning disabilities demanding services. Given that few colleges and universities have the personnel and financial resources to develop comprehensive LD programs, it is

imperative that LD service providers have access to program development information that is practical, cost-effective and replicable. The focus of this article has been to highlight key areas that warrant consideration and advanced planning in launching LD support services at the postsecondary level. It is hoped that this information will spare others the loss of valuable program planning time and will help to open the doors of higher education to students who have so much potential.

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