The Process: Development of *AHEAD* Program Standards

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Abstract

During the past twenty years, the number of college students with disabilities has increased dramatically. There has been a corresponding increase in the extent of services offered and the number of programs available for this cohort. Unfortunately, little research has identified Office for Students with Disabilities administrators' perceived importance of service components considered essential for assuring equal access to education for students with disabilities. A 62-item survey was developed to identify those service components postsecondary disability practitioners consider essential for assurance of equal educational access for students with disabilities. The survey development process is described and findings related to the study and its implications are presented.

The number of adults with disabilities choosing to pursue a college education has increased dramatically during the past 15 years. In 1994, the number of full-time, first-time freshmen in the United States reporting a disability was 9.2%, compared to only 2.6% in 1978 (Henderson, 1998). Similar trends have also been reported in Canadian institutions of higher education (Hill, 1992). Programs and services for college students with disabilities have proliferated in response to the dramatic growth in the numbers of students with disabilities accessing higher education.

Unfortunately, little research has been conducted to identify which service components are considered essential for ensuring equal access to education for students with disabilities by Office for Students with Disabilities (OSD) administrators. Disability services does have an existing set of program standards known as the *CAS Standards and Guidelines for Disability Support Services* (Miller, 1997). However, some professionals in disability services consider the standards to be somewhat general and lacking in specificity (L.S. Block, personal communication, July 18, 1997; D. Korbel, personal communication, November 19, 1997). More importantly, the CAS standards and guidelines have not been empirically validated. The only research that has empirically examined essential disability service components has been conducted specifically for programs for students with learning disabilities (Anderson, 1998; Geis, 1989). Given the legal justifications for assuring equal educational access, it is imperative that the profession determines necessary service components in order to promote equal educational opportunity for these individuals. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to identify those service components that OSD practitioners consider essential for assurance of equal educational access for students with disabilities. It is anticipated that the results of this study will enhance existing programs, aid in the development of future programs, improve students' ability to make appropriate postsecondary selections, and assist in the development of comprehensive training curriculums for both present and future practitioners.

Historical Perspective

The climate for students with disabilities at institutions of higher education in North America has improved dramatically during the past 30 years. For example, in the late 1960's, a study of U.S. institutions concluded that only 200 colleges or universities provided some degree of accessibility for students with physical disabilities (Blosser, 1984). In 1970, the first postsecondary program for people with learning disabilities was established at Curry College in Massachusetts (Brinckerhoff, Shaw, & McGuire, 1993). Today, however, after the passage of numerous statutes designed to protect the rights of persons with disabilities, the number of individuals with disabilities accessing postsecondary education is growing annually (Henderson, 1998).

In Canada, the rights of individuals with disabilities are protected by Section 15 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, passed in 1982 (Hill, 1992; Wilchesky, 1986). Its intent, like Section 504 in the United States, is to guarantee Canadians with disabilities an equal educational opportunity. The Human Rights Act, passed in 1991, expanded the coverage of the Charter to include both the public and private

sector (Madaus, 1996). It is worth noting that each province in Canada is responsible for its public education, thus, laws addressing special education are different from province to province (Wiener & Siegel, 1992). As in the United States, special education legislation in Canada has prompted growth in the number of students entering postsecondary institutions (Hill, 1992).

Research Related to Postsecondary Service Components for Students with Disabilities

There have been numerous studies in the United States that have examined both the variety of services being provided to students with disabilities and institutional success meeting the legal mandates of Section 504 (Beirne-Smith & Deck, 1989; Bursuck, Rose, Cowen, & Yahaya, 1989; Marion & Iovacchini, 1983; Sergent, Carter, Sedlacek, & Scales, 1988). However, no research has identified those service components that are considered fundamental for assurance of equal educational access for college and university students with disabilities. In addition, researchers have stated that more effective procedures for service delivery must be established. For example, Kroeger and Schuck (1993) stated that service provision must be founded upon clear objectives and the inclusion of certain components. Albert and Fairweather (1990) have indicated that increased program specialization does not necessarily meet students' needs. Thus, as the population of students with disabilities continues to expand, the corresponding growth in programs and services for these individuals must be vigilantly monitored and coordinated (Anderson, 1995). Clearly, a necessary step in the development and refinement of services provided to students with disabilities is the identification of those elements considered essential for ensuring equal educational access.

Early examinations of services provided to students with disabilities at institutions of higher education found that there were few options for these individuals (Ayers, cited in Blosser, 1984; Scales, 1986). The U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare noted that by 1968, only 200 institutions had some degree of accessibility for individuals with physical disabilities (Blosser, 1984). A survey of 80 universities in the United States, conducted in the mid-1970's, found that the primary goal of most institutions was the improvement of the campus physical plant (McBee & Cox, 1974). Following the passage of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, services at postsecondary institutions began to expand to include not only coverage for students with physical and sensory disabilities, but also students with learning disabilities (LD).

It was at this time that more research-oriented studies were conducted. In 1983, Marion and Iovacchini found that most institutions were making a sincere attempt to meet the requirements of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. Bursuck et al. (1989) also assessed the efforts of colleges and universities in the United States as to their success in meeting the requirements of Section 504. The majority of respondents stated that services mandated by Section 504 constituted the focus of their institutions. In another study, Beirne-Smith and Deck (1989) examined the types of services available to students with learning disabilities. The authors gathered information regarding each institution's referral and assessment procedures, the academic and nonacademic services provided, the length of time services were provided, and the type of population served by the college or university. Results indicated a lack of necessary services as well as variation from institution to institution regarding the availability of services. Finally, in 1988, Sergent et al. investigated Offices for Students with Disabilities over a 5-year span. These authors also concluded that the services being offered to students with disabilities were both wide-ranging and varied.

Studies of Canadian institutions of higher education have also focused on the variety of services available to students as well as the perceived needs of postsecondary service providers (Drover, Emmrys, McMillan, & Wilson, 1993; Hill, 1996). In 1993, Drover et al. examined the needs of LD program coordinators. The overall purpose of the study was twofold. First, the study was intended to determine what practitioners at postsecondary institutions in Canada perceive to be their most pressing needs, and, second, to identify future national initiatives for improving delivery of services. The authors concluded that service providers have numerous training needs and also recommended that the number of programs available to students with learning disabilities be increased.

Hill (1996) investigated the perceptions of students with disabilities regarding the adequacy of services available through the Office for Students with Disabilities and the willingness of faculty to meet students' accommodation needs. Results indicated that both the quality of services provided to students and the willingness of faculty to accommodate this population need to be improved. In order to enhance existing programs, to aid in the development of future programs, to improve students' ability to make appropriate postsecondary selections, and to develop comprehensive training curriculums for both current and future practitioners, it is necessary to determine those service components essential for assurance of equal educational access for persons with disabilities.

Methodology

This study was designed to examine essential service components of Offices for Students with Disabilities. The Association on Higher Education and Disability (*AHEAD)*, the professional organization for postsecondary disability service providers, funded the study. Professionals currently serving as administrators of OSD's across North America rated the importance of 62 service components across twelve categories using a 5-point Likert scale (1 – Not Important, 2 – Slightly Important, 3 – Moderately Important, 4 – Very Important, 5 – Essential).

Sample

    Eight hundred disability service practitioners in North America served as the sample for the study. Eighty percent of the sample held membership in *AHEAD* and the remaining 20% were non-*AHEAD* members. Names of potential participants were selected from: (a) the 1997 *AHEAD* Membership Directory and, (b) a guide containing a list of college and university disability service providers. Survey recipients were OSD administrators or coordinators of specific disability programs (e.g., learning disability, attention deficit disorder, psychiatric disability). Only those individuals identified as the program administrator or coordinator were considered for participation. If a program administrator or coordinator was not identified, the survey was sent to the designated institutional contact (e.g., Dean of Student Services, counseling services director).

    Three methods were used to ensure respondents were either OSD administrators, specific disability program coordinators, or the institutional contact (Madaus, 1996). First, surveys were only sent to those individuals identified as OSD directors, program coordinators, or institutional contacts. Second, the survey cover letter instructed any recipient who was not an OSD administrator or program coordinator to forward the document to the appropriate individual. Finally, each respondent was asked to provide a job title, thus serving as a final means of identifying appropriate respondents.

Instrument Development

    Content validity. The researcher and the *AHEAD* Program Standards Task Force collaborated to develop an instrument to identify those service components deemed essential for postsecondary students with disabilities. The design of the survey followed the guidelines described by Gable and Wolf (1993). These specifications included: (a) conducting an extensive literature review; (b) developing a list of statements (service components) that spanned the universe of content; (c) conducting a judgmental review of the statements; (d) preparing, piloting, and analyzing the data provided by the pilot instrument; and (e) making revisions to the final instrument based upon the results.

    The first step in the development of a survey instrument, an extensive literature review, resulted in an initial questionnaire consisting of 54 statements representing 13 categories judgmentally reviewed by disability service professionals. The instrument was then subjected to extensive expert review. First, the items were rated by three judges with expertise in the arena of postsecondary disability service provision (two special education professors and one special education doctoral student). Next, the survey was sent to 15 content experts who were asked to judge the proposed items using a content rating form. During each round of the survey review procedure, the content experts checked the items for word clarity, the appropriateness of the item, the goodness-of-fit of the item with the category, the elimination of any repetitive items, and the addition of missing items. Eleven of the 15 experts provided feedback regarding the categories and their corresponding items. The content experts represented postsecondary institutions across North America and were selected based upon their expert knowledge of service provision for college students with disabilities. Finally, the instrument as well as the suggestions made by the 11 content experts was reviewed by two special education professors and two special education doctoral students using a focus group format (Gable & Wolf, 1993). These four individuals also had extensive experience in the postsecondary disability services arena. Based upon the three levels of review, adjustments were made to the survey and at the time of pilot administration the instrument consisted of 66 items representing seven judgmentally defined categories.

    Pilot administration and sample. The pilot administration of the instrument was conducted to identify any other necessary adjustments. The survey included the 66 items pertaining to service components as well as demographic items related to practitioner, institutional, and programmatic variables. The pilot

survey was sent to 825 OSD administrators selected from a published guide of programs and services for college students with disabilities, a mailing list from the University of Connecticut Postsecondary Education Disability Unit, and the 1997 *AHEAD* Membership Directory. In an attempt to achieve an appropriate sample to population ratio, a large sample size was used in the pilot administration of the instrument (Gable & Wolf, 1993). A total of 330 surveys (40%) were returned, 254 of which contained complete sets of data. The remaining 76 surveys were missing responses for 1 to 2 items.

Analysis of pilot data. Factor analysis was conducted on the 254 complete sets of data using an exploratory common factor analysis with an oblique rotation. A total of 16 factors were derived; 6 of these factors had an alpha reliability level above .70. Upon review, these derived dimensions did not clearly reflect the judgmentally created categories. Further inspection of the item content did not support the development of dimensions for the instrument. Whereas the content experts successfully supported the instrument's content validity on the basis of similarity of service components within each targeted category, the empirical relationships among these items were not present using the "importance" rating scale. Further examination of the item level response distributions indicated that skewness was present. Based on these findings, the analysis of the data in the final survey was conducted using individual item mean ratings and nonparametric chi-square analyses.

Based upon pilot analysis, five items were deleted and two categories were collapsed in the survey instrument. One demographic item was also deleted. The final survey instrument consisted of 62 items across twelve categories and 16 demographic items. The demographic items related to practitioner, programmatic, and institutional characteristics.

Data Collection

The final survey instrument was mailed to a random sample of 800 OSD administrators. Eighty percent of the recipients were affiliated with *AHEAD*, while the remaining recipients were non-*AHEAD* members. The inclusion of non-*AHEAD* respondents served as a check against bias that could potentially result from professional group affiliation (Cullen, 1994). Approximately five percent of the recipients represented Canadian institutions. A letter of support that was written on *AHEAD* letterhead from the organization's Director of Professional Development was included in the mailing of the final survey. Respondents were assured that results were to be analyzed and reported at the group level only. A self-addressed, stamped envelope was included with the cover letter and survey (Isaac & Michael, 1981). Three weeks following the initial mailing, a follow-up letter and copy of the survey was mailed to those individuals who had not yet responded. Seventy percent, or 563, of the surveys were returned.

Results

The research question guiding the determination of essential service components was: "What service components do practicing OSD administrators perceive as essential in order to ensure equal educational access for students with disabilities?" In order for an item to be considered an "essential service component," it was determined that it must have a rating of 4.0 or greater on a 5.0 scale. Results related to each category and respective items can be found in Table 1.

Respondents indicated that 33 items were perceived as important (mean rating of 4.0 or higher). The remaining items (n=29) were all rated below 4.0. Nine service components received ratings between 3.75 and 3.99. The remaining items (n=25) all had ratings 3.74 or lower.

It is worth noting that there were significant differences in the ratings received by various categories. Some categories had all or nearly all of their items rated as essential. For example, the Policies and Procedures and Information Dissemination categories had all their items rated as essential. On the other hand, a number of categories had all or nearly all their items rated as non-essential. Examples include the Assessment and Special Courses/Workshops categories whose items were all rated non-essential.

Limitations

As with any study, no matter how well managed, there remain limitations. The fact that the 62-item survey did not wholly encompass the plethora of services offered by some institutions remains a potential limitation to the study. Certainly, there are services that are particular to an office or program. For example, programs directed by an administrator with a counseling background may offer extensive counseling services. This limitation, however, was addressed by ensuring that the 62 items included in the final questionnaire represented an adequate sample from the actual universe of content. Furthermore, when data were analyzed, no significant differences were found by demographic variables. For example, the mean ratings of respondents overseeing services at two-year institutions were not, as a group, significantly different than the replies from respondents at four-year schools.

Table 1

Ratings of Service Delivery Components for Students with Disabilities

Item	Mean
Essential	

To facilitate equal access to postsecondary education for students with disabilities, the office that provides services to students with disabilities should...

Admissions

1. Promote the inclusion of a statement in the institutional catalog that   4.055
   YES
   encourages students with disabilities to submit an application for
   admittance.

2. Use a cooperative admissions procedure between admissions staff   3.857
   NO
   and staff that provide services for students with disabilities (i.e.,
   collaborative admittance decisions).

3. Include a statement on the admissions application through which   3.815
   NO
   students may voluntarily self-identify as having a disability in order
   to request additional information about disability services.

Assessment

1. Provide screening services for students who refer themselves for a   3.225
   NO

diagnostic evaluation (e.g., ADHD, LD, psychiatric disabilities).

2. Provide a diagnostic evaluation for students who are suspected of   2.854
   NO
   having a disability (e.g., ADHD, LD, psychiatric disabilities).

3. Provide an evaluation to update a previous diagnosis of a disability 2.746   NO
   for a self-identified student (e.g., ADHD, LD, psychiatric disabilities).

<div align="right">Table 1 (continued)</div>

Item	Mean	Essential

To facilitate equal access to postsecondary education for students with disabilities, the office that provides services to students with disabilities should...

Consultation/Collaboration/Awareness

1. Serve as an advocate for students with disabilities to ensure equal   4.592
   YES
   access.

2. Provide disability representation on relevant campus committees   4.278
   YES
   (e.g., academic standards, policy development).

3. Provide representation on a campus-wide disability advisory   4.088
   YES
   committee consisting of faculty, students, administrators, and
   community representatives.

4. Have the primary responsibility for enforcing legal mandates   3.508
   NO
   (e.g., Section 504, the ADA, Provincial Charters of Rights and
   Freedoms) on campus.

Information Dissemination

1. Provide services that promote access to the campus community (e.g.,   4.493   YES
   TDD's, alternative materials formatting, interpreter services, adaptive
   technology).

2. Disseminate information regarding disability services and how to   4.483   YES
   access them through institutional publications.

3. Provide referral information to students with disabilities regarding   4.349   YES
   available campus and community resources (e.g., assessment,
   counseling).

4. Network with community resources (e.g., vocational rehabilitation,   4.174   YES
   mental health).

Table 1 (continued)

Item	Mean	Essential

To facilitate equal access to postsecondary education for students with disabilities, the office that provides services to students with disabilities should...

Faculty/Staff Awareness

1. Provide consultation with faculty regarding academic accommodations,   4.598   YES
   compliance with legal responsibilities, as well as instructional,
   programmatic, physical, and curriculum modifications.

2. Provide consultation with administrators regarding academic   4.461   YES
   accommodations, compliance with legal responsibilities, as well as
   instructional, programmatic, physical, and curriculum modifications.

3. Provide a disability awareness handbook to faculty.   4.123   YES

4. Provide feedback to faculty regarding services rendered by the office   4.042   YES
   that provides services to students with disabilities.

5. Provide individualized disability awareness training for campus   3.592

   NO

   constituencies (e.g., faculty, staff, administrators).

Table 1 (continued)

Item	Mean	Essential

To facilitate equal access to postsecondary education for students with disabilities, the office that provides services to students with disabilities should...

Academic Adjustments

1. Determine with students appropriate academic adjustments and   4.674

   YES

   auxiliary aids based upon documentation.

2. Maintain records that document the plan for the provision of selected   4.492

   YES

   accommodations.

3. Have final responsibility for determining academic accommodations.   4.211

   YES

4. Encourage faculty to determine academic-related accommodations   3.784

   NO

   with recommendations from the office or program responsible for

   providing services to students with disabilities.

5. Advocate for the availability of priority registration.   3.732

   NO

Special Courses/Workshops

1. Provide special course/workshops specifically for students with   3.404
   NO
   disabilities (e.g., social skills, test anxiety, test-taking strategies,
   career planning).

2. Provide a summer transition program for incoming students with   2.996
   NO
   disabilities.

3. Advocate with administrators for course sections specifically   2.748
   NO
   designed to meet the needs of students with disabilities (e.g.,
   smaller student-to-staff ratio).

Table 1 (continued)

Item	Mean	Essential

To facilitate equal access to postsecondary education for students with disabilities, the office that provides services to students with disabilities should...

Instructional Interventions

1. Advocate for instruction in learning strategies (e.g., attention and   4.096
   YES
   memory strategies, planning, self-monitoring, time management,
   organization, problem-solving).

2. Provide instruction in learning strategies (e.g., attention and   3.770
   NO
   memory strategies, planning, self-monitoring, time management,
   organization, problem-solving).

3. Advocate for the availability of content tutoring for students with   3.599
   NO
   disabilities.

4. Provide content tutoring to students with disabilities as a component   3.207
   NO
   of disability services.

5. Advocate for the remediation of basic skills (e.g., math, reading,   3.125
   NO
   writing) for students with disabilities.

6. Provide remediation of basic skills (e.g., math, reading, writing) to 3.120   NO
   students with disabilities.

7. Work with academic administrators to offer remedial courses for   2.588
   NO
   credit.

Table 1 (continued)

Item	Mean	Essential

To facilitate equal access to postsecondary education for students with disabilities, the office that provides services to students with disabilities should...

Counseling and Advocacy

1. Assist students with disabilities to assume the role of self-advocate. 4.545   YES

2. Provide academic advising in conjunction with faculty or other   4.384
   YES
   academic personnel to students with disabilities.

3. Work with other campus resources that provide individual   3.991   NO
   counseling (e.g., interpersonal relationships, school adjustment)
   to students with disabilities.

4. Work with other campus resources that provide career counseling   3.958
   NO
   to students with disabilities (e.g., collaborative workshops).

5. Provide individual counseling (e.g., interpersonal relationships,   3.763
   NO
   school adjustment) to students with disabilities.

6. Provide services to students with disabilities regarding transition   3.592
   NO
   to employment or graduate school.

7. Provide academic advising directly to students with disabilities.   3.494
   NO

8. Establish support groups for students with disabilities.   3.412
   NO

9. Provide a separate orientation session for new students with   2.907
   NO
   disabilities.

Table 1 (continued)

Item	Mean	Essential

To facilitate equal access to postsecondary education for students with disabilities, the office that provides services to students with disabilities should...

Policies and Procedures

1. Establish guidelines for student rights and responsibilities with   4.667
   YES
   respect to service provision (e.g., documentation of a disability,
   course substitution/waiver).

2. Establish guidelines for institutional rights and responsibilities with   4.630
   YES
   respect to service provision (e.g., documentation of a disability,
   course substitution/waiver).

3. Develop written policies and guidelines regarding confidentiality   4.608
   YES
   of disability information.

4. Encourage the development of policies and guidelines for settling   4.590
   YES
   a formal complaint regarding the determination of a "reasonable
   accommodation."

5. Develop written policies and guidelines regarding procedures for   4.550
   YES
   determining and accessing "reasonable accommodations."

Table 1 (continued)

Item	Mean	Essential

To facilitate equal access to postsecondary education for students with disabilities, the office that provides services to students with disabilities should...

Program Development and Evaluation

1. Coordinate services for students with disabilities through a full-time   4.543
   YES
   professional.

2. Collect student feedback to measure satisfaction with disability   4.347
   YES
   services.

3. Collect data to monitor use of disability services.   4.296
   YES

4. Provide services that are based on the institution's mission or service   4.180
   YES
   philosophy.

5. Initiate efforts to increase funding from institutional resources for   4.147
   YES
   required services.

6. Report program evaluation data to administrators.   4.087
   YES

7. Collect data to measure effectiveness of disability services (e.g.,   3.993
   NO
   graduation rates, grade point averages, retention rates).

8. Provide specific services to students with disabilities on a   2.323
   NO
   fee-for-service basis (e.g., diagnostic testing, personal care
   attendants, individualized tutoring by a trained specialist, special
   courses).

Table 1 (continued)

Item	Mean	Essential

To facilitate equal access to postsecondary education for students with disabilities, the office that provides services to students with disabilities should...

Training and Professional Development

1. Adhere to the Association on Higher Education and Disability   4.479
   YES
   (*AHEAD*) Code of Ethics.

2. Provide services by a professional with training and experience   4.384
   YES
   working with college students/adults with disabilities.

3. Provide disability services staff with on-going opportunities for   4.357
   YES
   professional development (e.g., conferences, credit courses,
   membership in professional organizations).

4. Apply relevant aspects of the Association on Higher Education and Disability (*AHEAD*) Professional Standards. 4.245   YES

5. Schedule regular staff meetings/training for disability services personnel. 3.951

    NO

The degree to which results may be generalized is a potential limitation of any study. In order to address this concern, all appropriate instrument development techniques were used to ensure the validity of the survey instrument. Content validity was addressed through the use of a content rating form and the use of focus group meetings to discuss modifications to the questionnaire. In order to assess construct validity, the survey was piloted and the resultant data was subjected to a factor analysis. In an effort to address external validity, the inclusion of non-*AHEAD* respondents served as a check against bias that could potentially result from professional group affiliation (Cullen, 1994).

Several means of maximizing response rate were also used. For example, respondents had the opportunity to win one of two random drawings of $25.00 each (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996). Respondents were assured that results would only be analyzed and reported at the group level. A self-addressed, stamped envelope was also included with the cover letter and survey (Isaac & Michael, 1981). Other methods used to improve response rate included the use of a clear and concise survey instrument, follow-up mailings to non-respondents, and a survey cover letter from a recognized authority of *AHEAD*, the sole professional organization representing postsecondary disability service providers. Given that all appropriate research methods were used, the author believes that the potential limitations of the study have been minimized.

Implications and Discussion of Results

The principal purpose of this article was to describe the research process used to determine what service components disability service providers consider essential for promoting equal educational access for college students with disabilities. This section of the article will briefly describe the implications of the results, as well as the value of developing program standards (Also see Shaw & Dukes, this issue).

In the categories entitled Policies and Procedures and Information Dissemination all program elements were rated as essential. The fact that service providers considered the establishment of policies and procedures of considerable importance speaks to the evolving nature of the OSD. No longer does the OSD work in isolation. It has become a necessary part of the campus community at many institutions of higher learning. It appears that practitioners believe that the establishment of clear and legal parameters for both the OSD and its students is a priority.

Service providers also verified the considerable importance of the information dissemination component of the OSD. Schuck and Kroeger (1993) listed outreach services as a key element of a program for students with disabilities. Interestingly, Blosser (1984) found public relations, which incorporated services similar in nature to those in the Information Dissemination category in the present study, to be a high priority among practitioners. It appears that circulating information about the OSD on campus and in the community remains a high priority.

A number of other tentative conclusions may be drawn from the mean data collected for the research question. First, the fact that all or nearly all service components in the categories Consultation/Collaboration/Awareness, Information Dissemination, and Faculty/Staff Awareness were rated as essential may speak to the evolving role of the OSD. Specifically, it appears that OSD administrators may perceive the OSD as a campus and community resource regarding disability related issues rather than simply a direct service provider available solely for use by students with disabilities. Second, though some institutions provide program elements such as assessment services or summer programs, they were not rated as essential. It is clear that these services can consume scarce staff time and sometimes require creative fundraising or extensive financial resources. Third, service providers in this study did not rate remedial services or content tutoring as essential. In addition, service components that stated that the OSD should provide students with disabilities with services provided elsewhere on campus (e.g., counseling, academic advising) also received low mean ratings. Yet, when items specified that the

OSD should provide services such as counseling and academic advising in collaboration with other personnel on campus the items were then rated much more highly. This is noteworthy because traditionally many OSD's have, in fact, been resources for services such as remedial assistance, content tutoring, counseling, and academic advising.

Value of Program Standards

The identification of components considered to be essential elements of a disability service program will serve as a critical step in the process of developing an empirically validated service delivery system for postsecondary level students with disabilities. Given the dramatic increase in the population of students with disabilities and the corresponding growth in postsecondary programs to ensure equal educational access, it has become vital that the components and procedures used to secure access be validated empirically. It is important to note that numerous factors contribute to the fact that, presently, programs "vary widely in the quality and consistency of services they provide" (Schuck & Kroeger, 1993, p. 59).

It is anticipated that the development of program standards will enhance programs already in existence. Minimal research has been conducted to determine those services that are either effective or essential for students with disabilities. At present, the parameters of service delivery are rarely based upon systematic planning (Sergent et al., 1988). This is a serious concern given the fact that programming for students with disabilities is under scrutiny. Economic downsizing and challenges regarding the legality of certain service practices are becoming more commonplace on campuses today. The clarification of those service components deemed essential for assurance of equal educational access will help demonstrate the importance of specialized programs in higher education for students with disabilities (Blosser, 1997).

Furthermore, the changing demographics of students pursuing postsecondary education additionally tax already burdened practitioners. The rapid increase in college students with learning disabilities (Henderson, 1998), the recent influx of students with psychiatric disabilities on college campuses (Loewen, 1993), and new developments in medical technology that have made postsecondary education an option for people with serious physical impairments (Blosser, 1984) all challenge existing programs. In short, postsecondary disability programs are faced with the responsibility of providing individualized and flexible services to students with a wide range of disabilities (Madaus, 1996). These services, to be most effective, should be based upon reliable empirical data (Anderson, 1995).

Program standards can be used to develop training curricula for both present and future OSD staff and should also enhance the professional status of the office for students with disabilities. "More than ever, our programs require highly trained and experienced staff, and this requires program, as well as campus, commitment to staff development..." (Blosser, 1997, p. 46). Next, standards for OSD programs and resultant training curricula will serve to enhance the status of this emerging profession. Moreover, it will clarify for other campus administrators the complexity of the responsibilities of the OSD. The promulgation of program standards will clearly aid in the development of equitable and effective service delivery systems.

In this era of rampant litigation, program standards may help to shift the focus from what is required of a program by law to what will best engender equal educational opportunity for students with disabilities. "...OSD professionals need to be proactive in developing appropriate accommodations and services" (Shaw, 1997, p. 3), rather than simply reacting to what a judge believes is required (Kincaid, 1996). To this end, program standards will serve as a tool that allows practitioners to proactively develop appropriate services, rather than responding to legal judgments.

Perhaps most importantly, program standards will improve the chances that students will make a suitable postsecondary choice for themselves. Presently, available services vary widely from institution to institution (Bursuck et al., 1989; Hill, 1992; Sergent et al., 1988). This is not only problematic for practitioners and campus administrators (Anderson, 1995), but also poses a dilemma for students with disabilities. Clarification of the services that may be available at a particular college or university will simplify the selection of an appropriate postsecondary choice for students. As institutions implement the program standards, more consistency with respect to the range of services that may be expected at an institution should result. Due to the fact that OSD programs exist to enhance equal educational opportunity for students with disabilities, it is imperative the disability services profession implement program standards so that the students themselves may make appropriate choices for their postsecondary education (See Shaw & Dukes, this issue).

Development of Program Standards

A summary of the status of the project was presented to the *AHEAD* Program Standards Task Force at the 1997 *AHEAD* Annual Conference in Boston, Massachusetts. The task force meeting was also open to organizational members interested in discussing the development of the standards. A discussion ensued regarding potential changes to the final questionnaire. As the final survey was developed, consideration was given to the suggestions made by the task force and the *AHEAD* members in attendance.

The results of the study were presented at the 1998 *AHEAD* Annual Conference in Las Vegas, Nevada. The meeting was attended by a wide cross-section of the organizational membership. The attendees debated each item and its respective category. During this initial presentation of the data, no changes were made to the items or their categories.

The *AHEAD* Board of Directors then reviewed the proposed standards. It was decided that the criteria for inclusion as an *AHEAD* Program Standard would be more rigorous than the criteria used within the study. As in the original study, items must have had a rating of equal to or greater than 4.0. However, in addition the items must have also had a rating of 4.0 across all four of the following demographic variables: 2 or 4-year status, competitive or open enrollment admissions standards, public or private status, and whether located in the United States or Canada. Twenty-seven items met this more rigorous criteria. Further, during this review, two items were reworded and the stem that precedes each item was also slightly modified. Following these changes, the Executive Board tentatively approved the standards pending a final vote by the membership of *AHEAD.* The standards were formally adopted by *AHEAD* after the organization's constituents overwhelmingly approved them. The approved *AHEAD* Program Standards for Offices for Students with Disabilities were formally presented to the membership at the organization's annual conference in Atlanta, Georgia in June 1999. (See Shaw & Dukes, this issue)

It is worth noting that the approved standards have undergone an extensive three- year review. At each stage in this process, *AHEAD*'s leadership and its membership have played a vital role in this process. In total, approximately 1,000 OSD administrators have participated in the development of these standards, with *AHEAD* membership representing approximately 80% of this total.

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