Examination of Online Accommodation Information for College Students with Disabilities in New England

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Examination of Online Accommodation Information
for College Students with Disabilities in New England

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Honors Thesis
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This thesis is dedicated to my grandmother, Barbara Rakers. Although she isn’t here to witness its completion, her love and support for me, as well as those with disabilities, was overwhelming. I hope that I’ve made her proud.
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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to report on the status of information available to college students with disabilities on the websites of New England colleges’ centers for students with disabilities. Primarily, this study focused on information about the application process for a student to receive accommodations. Data was generated by compiling a list of common factors on the websites of centers for students with disabilities at colleges not in New England, and then searching the New England websites to see if they included these factors on their own websites. Three separate categories of schools were included in the study: 2-year schools, 4-year public schools, and 4-year private schools. The data was analyzed to find what information is most common on centers for students with disabilities websites and to describe any patterns by specific types of schools. The most common features on the websites were guidelines for disability documentation and a phone number or email address for a point of contact at the center for students with disabilities. Most schools also stated on their websites that IEPs, 504-Plans, and Summaries of Performance would not be sufficient documentation. It is hoped that the findings from this study will inform transitioning high school students with disabilities when they are researching the accommodation process in college.
Examination of Online Accommodation Information for College Students with Disabilities in New England

Review of Literature

Introduction

According to data from the National Longitudinal Transition Study–2, 60% of students with disabilities who received special education services in K–12 schools are enrolled in postsecondary education within 8 years of leaving high school (Newman et al., 2011). Their disabilities include learning disabilities, emotional disturbances, intellectual disabilities, other health impairments (which includes attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder), speech or language impairments, autism spectrum disorder, visual impairments, deafness, hearing impairment, deaf-blindness, orthopedic impairments, and traumatic brain injury. Although these disabilities can create challenges with learning, K-12 accommodations, modifications, and special education services give these students access to education at the same level as their peers. In college, 28% of all students with disabilities disclose that they have a disability and approximately 1 in 5 receive accommodations (Newman & Madaus, 2015).

Student Rights and Services in Secondary Education

Since November 29th, 1975, when the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (P. L. 94-142) was signed into law by President Gerald Ford, millions of students with disabilities have had the right to an education in the United States. Now called the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), the law has been updated to guarantee students with disabilities the services and accommodations necessary to access the standard educational curriculum from the ages of 3 to 21 (U.S. Department...
of Education). Students who qualify as having a disability are entitled to an Individualized Education Program (IEP); a team of parents, teachers, and professionals for support (called an IEP team); and a free, appropriate, public education. The IDEA also mandates that students' IEPs include plans for their transition to postsecondary life. These plans must be individualized, based on the student’s preferences, interests, and strengths, and they must include strategies for developing functional skills for life in the community, independent living, and, if appropriate, postsecondary education. These transition plans must be developed and discussed by the time the student turns 16 years old at the latest (Learning Disabilities Association of America [LDAA], 2015). Transition plans are similar to other IEP goals, in that they must be appropriate and achievable, but they are focused primarily on functional skills rather than academic and behavioral skills. A Summary of Performance must also be included with a student’s transition plan. The Summary of Performance is a document that is written at the end of a student’s secondary education and summarizes their academic and functional achievements throughout their education. It also offers recommendations for ways in which a student should meet their postsecondary goals. As part of transition planning, it is also recommended that students learn the purpose of the transition planning section of their IEP, the importance of their own input in planning, how to describe their own strengths and weaknesses both academically and non-academically, how to set their own goals, and how to self-advocate for the supports, services, and accommodations they will need to achieve those goals (LDAA, 2015).
Because students with disabilities must self-disclose their disability and request any needed services after leaving public education, one of the most important skills for these students to learn in preparation for postsecondary life is self-advocacy. According to The Arc (2014), “self-advocates exercise their rights as citizens by communicating for and representing themselves, with supports in doing so, as necessary. They have a say in decision-making in all areas of their daily lives and in public policy decisions that affect them.” Researchers have found that self-advocacy is critical in the transition to, and persistence through, postsecondary education for students with disabilities (Vaccaro, Daly-Cano, & Newman, 2015).

**Student Rights and Services in Postsecondary Education**

All students with disabilities have rights that are laid out in Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act of 2008. When students are in K-12 schools, Subpart D of Section 504 requires a school district to provide a free, appropriate, public education and provide regular or special education with any aids and services necessary. When students transition to postsecondary education, they are covered under Subpart E of Section 504, and colleges and universities are not required to provide a free, appropriate, public education. Instead, they must provide academic adjustments only as necessary and appropriate to prevent *discrimination* on the basis of a disability (Duncan & Ali, 2018).

Institutions of higher education must offer “reasonable” services so that qualified students with disabilities will have access to academic programs that is equal to that of their non-disabled peers (Hadley, 2007). Schools need not modify or change the
content of any college courses. At most universities, there are no “special education” classes or programs. Accommodations that are intended to create equity for students with disabilities are the only services that postsecondary programs are required by law to offer. However, disclosure of a disability is completely voluntary for students. Adjustments and accommodations will not be provided unless a student requests them and provides necessary documentation to support the request (Duncan & Ali, 2018). In addition, the process of requesting accommodations at postsecondary institutions is often multi-step and differs at every school. If a student is in need of services, they will have to conduct research to investigate what the process entails.

**Common Services and Accommodations**

At most colleges or universities, accommodations and services that are offered are determined based on a student’s disability and individual needs (Duncan & Ali, 2018). When it comes to providing academic accommodations, a postsecondary institution is not required to offer the same level of support that students may have received in high school. They do not have to substantially modify or lessen essential requirements; change the content of a test or exam; make adjustments that would fundamentally alter the nature of a service, program, or activity; provide support that would result in a financial or administrative burden; or supply a student with personal attendants, individually prescribed devices, or other services of a personal nature, such as tutoring and typing. Rather, popular postsecondary academic supports include simpler accommodations such as priority registration, a reduced course load,
substituting one course for another, providing notes or note takers, recording devices, sign language interpreters, or additional time for test-taking (Duncan & Ali, 2018).

Although these accommodations are often minimal compared to the ones that students may have received in high school, in one study Mamiseishvili and Koch (2011) found that course substitutions, readers, and note-takers or scribes were significantly related to student retention from first to second year at college. This is an important finding because only about one third of students with disabilities who enroll in a 4-year college end up graduating within 8 years and about 41% of them end up graduating at 2-year colleges (Mader & Butrymowicz, 2019). As cited by Newman and Madaus (2015), some colleges also offer students with disabilities academic supports in study skills and learning strategies. However, these types of accommodations are not required by Section 504 and are considered “enhanced or more comprehensive services.”

The Importance of Disability Documentation

In order to qualify to receive accommodations and services at a postsecondary institution, students with disabilities are required to provide documentation of their disability. This requirement is intended to ensure that students with disabilities receive appropriate accommodations and services while fairness and equity for all students is maintained (Banerjee & Shaw, 2007, as cited by Lindstrom & Lindstrom, 2017). The documentation that students provide is reviewed for evidence of functional limitations that would prevent equal opportunities for students with disabilities in typical college
classes (GAO, 2011, as cited by Lindstrom & Lindstrom, 2017). However, the law does
not specify what the content or scope of this documentation should be. As a result, each
postsecondary institution establishes their own standards to inform disability service
decisions.

   Documentation standards for a university are easily scrutinized because of the
significant consequences of accommodation and service eligibility decisions (Lindstrom,
Nelson, & Foels, 2015). For example, a false-negative error would result in a student
with disabilities being denied the benefits of fully and equitably participating in a
postsecondary program, and a false-positive error would result in a student unfairly
receiving unwarranted services.

   Common requirements of documentation for universities and colleges include
specific qualifications for evaluators, recency specifications, a statement of disability,
description of the diagnostic tool(s) used, list of assessments, explanation of functional
impacts, and recommendations for accommodations (Lindstrom & Lindstrom, 2017). As
a result of these requirements, it is sometimes necessary for students to be
re-evaluated or update their diagnosis with a doctor in order to apply for
accommodations. Additionally, students who have not been officially diagnosed with a
disability are often referred to qualified professionals by the office of disability services
for an assessment before receiving services.

Prospective Students’ Access to Information about Postsecondary Disability
Services
Prospective college students use a variety of sources to gather information about the colleges and universities to which they are interested in applying. These sources may be formal sources, such as university brochures or leaflets, interpersonal sources, such as school counselors and friends or family who are alumni, or media sources, such as television or radio advertisements. In addition, many studies have shown that the internet is a particularly key source of information for prospective students (Briggs & Wilson 2007; Mentz & Whiteside, 2003; Simões & Soares, 2010). Students often visit college websites in search of information primarily about admission requirements, majors of study, financial aid, and tuition, as well as information about extracurricular activities and life on campus (Malone, 2013).

For prospective college students with disabilities, the internet is also a common source of information as a part of their college search. After gathering basic admissions information on a school’s website like their non-disabled peers, the homepage for the disability services office can be another important website for students with disabilities to explore. In fact, Harbour (2008) found that a college’s office of disability services is the most commonly used source of information about disability services for 64.5% of the study’s respondents, all of whom were prospective college students with disabilities. This population of students, regardless of what level of service they are seeking, is encouraged to do their research on disability services for every college they are considering. The office of disability services’ websites are used primarily to acquire information about what kinds of accommodations are commonly offered at a particular
school, in addition to what other additional services and supports are available for students (Hamblet, 2009).

**Rationale for the Present Study**

The present study aims to report on the status of information about accommodations and the process of requesting services available to students with disabilities, as found on the websites of the disability services departments of postsecondary schools throughout New England. This research is important because the websites of colleges’ disability services departments play a significant role in informing students with disabilities and their support systems about accommodations and services that can help them to achieve success in their postsecondary education. As expressed by the findings of previous research mentioned in this paper, accommodations and the process of requesting them differ by institution. Consequently, websites that provide comprehensive information about their school’s disability services can prove to be very helpful in a student's transition to postsecondary education.

Students with disabilities who are applying to colleges should be informed about the types of accommodations and supports that are available to them. Students who are uninformed about postsecondary disability services often will not take advantage of them. For example, many students with disabilities in a study by Lyman et al. (2016) either did not know about available accommodations or did not use them because of incorrect or insufficient knowledge. As previously noted, the use of accommodations does have a significant impact on the retention of students with disabilities from year to year in college.
A prospective college student’s IEP team should also be informed about postsecondary services because they will be planning for the student’s transition. For these students to be well prepared for college, they should know what supports and services are available so that a discussion may be had about which accommodations a student should be prepared to request. IEP teams should also be educated about the process for requesting accommodations so that their students are prepared and have all of the skills and documentation they need to be approved for services. The families of students with disabilities should also be informed about college disability services so that when they are deciding whether or not college is an appropriate postsecondary path for their student, they are aware of the options and support that is available. This research may provide important information about what to expect in the pursuit of information about disability services for students with disabilities, their IEP teams, and their families, as they plan to transition to postsecondary education in the future.

Methods

The purpose of this study was to determine the status of information available to college students with disabilities on the websites of selected New England colleges’ centers for students with disabilities. The centers’ websites were analyzed using a checklist survey compiled of features related to disability documentation and available services. The methods used to select the colleges and the data collection process are described below.

Participants
The colleges from which data were collected were purposefully chosen so that a representative group of schools would be included. The states included were Connecticut, New Hampshire, Maine, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Vermont. Schools were divided into three categories by type of school: 2-year, 4-year public, and 4-year private. Whenever possible, three schools from each New England state were included from each category. However, there are only two 2-year schools and two 4-year public schools in Rhode Island, so fewer schools were included in those categories. In addition, the total population of enrolled students was considered. Every effort was made to include a small, medium, and large school, with small being less than 5,000 students, medium being 5,001-10,000 students, and large being 10,001 or more students. Student enrollment data is total enrollment and was acquired from US News and World Report. The list of all schools included in the study can be found in Table 1.

Table 1: Schools Included

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2-Year Schools (Total Enrollment)</th>
<th>4-Year Public Schools (Total Enrollment)</th>
<th>4-Year Private Schools (Total Enrollment)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Connecticut</td>
<td>Connecticut</td>
<td>Connecticut</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three Rivers Community College (4,187)</td>
<td>Eastern Connecticut State University (5,198)</td>
<td>Yale University (13,433)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manchester Community College (6,321)</td>
<td>Central Connecticut State University (11,822)</td>
<td>Wesleyan University (3,217)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accommodation Information on College Websites</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Capital Community College (3,282)</strong></td>
<td><strong>University of Connecticut (27,412)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Connecticut College (1,844)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Maine</strong></td>
<td><strong>Maine</strong></td>
<td><strong>Maine</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Southern Maine Community College (5,972)</strong></td>
<td><strong>University of Southern Maine (8,140)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Bowdoin College (1,828)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Eastern Maine Community College (2,567)</strong></td>
<td><strong>University of Maine (11,404)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Colby College (2,000)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>York County Community College (1,708)</strong></td>
<td><strong>University of Maine - Farmington (2,040)</strong></td>
<td><strong>University of New England (8,010)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Massachusetts</strong></td>
<td><strong>Massachusetts</strong></td>
<td><strong>Massachusetts</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Berkshire Community College (1,847)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Worcester State University (6,217)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Tufts University (11,586)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Northern Essex Community College (5,726)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Bridgewater State University (10,990)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Boston College (14,107)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bunker Hill Community College (11,881)</strong></td>
<td><strong>University of Massachusetts (30,593)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Assumption College (2,329)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Hampshire</td>
<td>New Hampshire</td>
<td>New Hampshire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nashua Community College (1,791)</td>
<td>Plymouth State University (5,059)</td>
<td>Southern New Hampshire University (3,770)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lakes Region Community College (827)</td>
<td>Granite State College (2,028)</td>
<td>Saint Anselm College (2,050)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NHTI - Concord’s Community College (3,666)</td>
<td>University of New Hampshire (15,305)</td>
<td>Colby Sawyer College (858)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhode Island</td>
<td>Rhode Island</td>
<td>Rhode Island</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community College of Rhode Island (14,758)</td>
<td>Rhode Island College (7,771)</td>
<td>Providence College (4,922)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New England Institute of Technology (2,793)</td>
<td>University of Rhode Island (16,883)</td>
<td>Johnson and Wales University (7,360)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vermont</td>
<td>Vermont</td>
<td>Vermont</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community College of Vermont (5,504)</td>
<td>Castleton University (2,193)</td>
<td>Middlebury College (2,626)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Landmark College (461)</td>
<td>University of Vermont (13,395)</td>
<td>Saint Michael’s College (1,950)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vermont Technical College (1,616)</td>
<td>Northern Vermont University (1,145)</td>
<td>Norwich University (3,986)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Instrument**

The checklist survey that was used to analyze each school’s center for students with disabilities’ website was compiled by visiting the websites of college centers for students with disabilities that are outside of New England and, therefore, not included in the study. These schools were randomly selected and included schools of each type (2-year, 4-year public, and 4-year private) as well as each size (small, medium, and large). A list of features that were included on more than one site was constructed, and I used this to generate checklist survey questions. I piloted and refined the checklist survey four times, with additional review each time by an outside user. The final instrument can be found in Appendix A.

**Procedures**

I conducted a Google search on each school’s name, followed by “students with disabilities.” So for example, for Three Rivers Community College, the terms “Three Rivers Community College students with disabilities” were used. The first link that resulted from the search would be clicked on and that web page is where I began collecting data. Some information, if not obviously present on the webpage that resulted
from the search, would require review of other pages on the school’s website. Every effort was made to find the information that the checklist asked for on a school’s website before it was decided that the information was available. To confirm that the information I collected was reliable, an outside researcher collected data on 10 randomly selected schools from the study. These 10 schools accounted for approximately 20% of all schools surveyed and included three 2-year schools, three 4-year public schools, and four 4-year private schools. The results of the outside researcher’s data matched my data with 83.25% agreement. This percentage of agreement was accepted because it is above 70%, which is recommended by Borg and Gall (1989).

**Results**

The websites of disability services offices at 52 colleges across New England schools were analyzed and common themes were identified. First, I found patterns across all 52 schools and then separated the data by type of school in order to identify commonalities among 2-year schools, 4-year public schools, and 4-year private schools.

**All Schools**

There was only one item on the checklist that every school in the study provided on their center’s website, which was a phone number or e-mail address for a point of contact at their center for students with disabilities.

The other most common feature that was available on the websites was the requirements or guidelines for disability documentation (94.2%). In terms of accepted forms of documentation, most schools stated that results from formal diagnostic testing
were accepted, but that additional documentation or explanation is needed (61.5%). Otherwise most schools did not state that an IEP (67.3%), 504-plan (67.3%), or Summary of Performance (94.2%) were acceptable as sufficient documentation of a student’s disability.

For the above graph, 0 represents “No,” 1 represents “The form is accepted, but supporting documents are also required,” and 2 represents “Yes.”

In addition, most schools stated that an in-person meeting with staff from the center was required in order to receive accommodations/services (75%), gave examples of the accommodations and services they offer (63.5%), and provided an application or registration for accommodations and services (61.5%).
The features that were most commonly not included on schools’ disability services websites were advice or recommendations for students who have yet to be diagnosed with a disability (90.4%), a disability verification form to be filled out as documentation (75%), and separate tabs for new and current students (73.1%).

Exactly half of schools (50%) included specific instructions for requesting accommodations or providing documentation based on specific disabilities. Other features that were nearly split between schools included an informational page for faculty (57.7%), hours of operation (63.5%), and a recency of documentation requirement (38.5%).
2-Year Schools

The websites for the centers for students with disabilities of most 2-year schools provided guidelines for documentation of a disability (88.2%). In addition, most of them included examples of the accommodations or services that they offered (64.7%) and stated that an in-person meeting with staff from the center is required as a part of the accommodation request process (64.7%).

Most 2-years schools did not have multiple items from the survey on their websites. First, most schools did not include their center’s hours of operation (70.6%), or provide separate tabs for new or current students (88.2%) or an informational page for faculty (52.9%). Most websites also did not provide an application for accommodations or services (52.9%), advice for students who are not yet diagnosed with a disability (82.4%), or different directions for students based on specific disabilities (58.8%).

![Pie chart showing the percentage of websites that include specific instructions or guidelines for requesting accommodations or providing documentation based on specific disabilities.](chart.png)

In terms of documentation, most 2-year schools did not provide a disability verification form to be filled out as documentation (76.5%) or state a recency of
Accommodation Information on College Websites

documentation requirement (58.8%). Most websites also did not state that an IEP (70.6%), a 504-Plan (70.6%), or a Summary of Performance (94.1%) is accepted as sufficient documentation. However, most 2-year schools’ websites did state that results from formal diagnostic tests are accepted with additional documentation (70.6%).

4-Year Public Schools

Most of the websites for the centers for students with disabilities at 4-year schools provide an application or registration for accommodations (58.8%) and state that an in-person meeting is a part of the process for requesting services (82.4%). Most 4-year schools also provide examples of accommodations or services (76.5%) and the requirements for disability documentation (94.1%). In addition, specific directions for requesting accommodations or providing documentation based on specific disabilities (70.6%) and an informational page for faculty (70.6%) are provided by most websites.

However, most 4-year schools’ centers did not provide their hours of operation (52.9%) or have separate tabs for new students and current students (58.8%), and all of
the 4-year schools’ websites did not offer recommendations for students who are not yet diagnosed with a disability (100%).

Most 4-year schools did not provide a disability verification form to be filled out by a qualified professional (64.7%) or state that there was a recency of documentation requirement (52.9%). Most websites also did not explicitly state that an IEP (76.5%), a 504-Plan (76.5%), or a Summary of Performance (88.2%) is accepted as sufficient documentation. However, the results from formal diagnostic testing were accepted with additional documentation required (70.6%) by most schools.

**4-Year Private Schools**

The websites for the centers for students with disabilities at most 4-year private schools provided an application or registration for accommodations (77.8%) and stated that an in-person meeting with staff is required as part of the services requesting process (77.8%). Most websites also had an informational page for faculty (55.6%) and exactly half of 4-year private schools gave examples of the accommodations and services that are offered (50%).
Most of the 4-year private schools’ centers’ websites did not include their hours of operation (66.7%), have separate tabs for new and current students (72.2%), or offer recommendations for students who have not yet been diagnosed with a disability (88.9%). Most schools also did not give specific guidelines for requesting accommodations or providing documentation based on specific disabilities (61.1%).

In terms of documentation, all of the 4-year private schools’ websites provided requirements or guidelines for disability documentation (100%). Most did not provide a disability verification form to be filled out as documentation (83.3%) or state that there was a requirement of how recent documentation had to be (72.2%). IEPs (55.6%) and 504-Plans (55.6%) were stated by most websites to not be accepted as sufficient documentation of a disability and none of the 4-year private schools stated that a Summary of Performance would be accepted as sufficient documentation (0%). However, most schools did state that formal diagnostic testing results were accepted with additional documentation as sufficient (44.4%).

**Discussion**

The guiding purpose of this study was to report on the status of information available to college students with disabilities on the websites of New England colleges’ centers for students with disabilities and, in turn, inform students with disabilities as they are preparing to apply for accommodations and services at colleges and universities. Documentation was the most common topic of discussion on the websites, with almost all of the websites including requirements for documentation. Most websites stated that IEPs and 504-Plans would not be sufficient and that results of formal diagnostic testing...
would also not be sufficient unless they were submitted with additional documents. Most websites also did not provide a disability verification form for the student’s doctor to complete in place of formal diagnostic testing. Therefore, it is recommended that students who plan to apply for accommodations and services go to their school’s disability center’s website to find out what requirements or guidelines the center has for documentation so that they know what forms are considered sufficient for documentation and can have those documents prepared ahead of time.

Students with disabilities should also expect to be able to find a point of contact on their school’s center website in case they have any questions about the application process. They should also expect to meet with a staff member from their schools’ center for students with disabilities as part of the application process for accommodations and services, given that most schools in the study included that as part of their process.

At 2-year schools, specifically, examples of services that were offered and documentation guidelines were commonly listed on their center for students with disabilities website. However, most schools did not have a registration or application for students to fill out in order to begin the accommodations request process. Therefore, it is recommended that students with disabilities at 2-year schools contact a staff member at their center for students with disabilities by phone or email after looking over examples of accommodations on their website and having some idea of which ones may be most helpful to them, as well as preparing the necessary documentation.

Students with disabilities at 4-year public schools may find specific directions for requesting services or providing documentation based on their diagnosed disability on
accommodation information on college websites. They should fill out an application or registration form on the website to begin their request process and plan to meet with a staff member in person. Students with disabilities should do their best to prepare documentation ahead of time. Results from formal diagnostic tests may be helpful, but students should reference the website’s guidelines to discover which additional documents should be included with them.

4-year private schools typically provided students with an application for accommodations and services on their center for students with disabilities website. In addition, students should be able to find guidelines for disability documentation on the website. Although IEPs and 504-Plans are typically not stated to be sufficient as documentation, 4-year private schools are the most likely school type to accept them. So students with disabilities at these schools should check their center for students with disabilities websites to see if these documents are accepted before obtaining other forms of documentation. Regardless, students should plan to fill out an application online and meet with staff from their school’s center in person to discuss the services that they need.

limitations

The study is limited in that not all states were equally represented. Rhode Island, in particular, only has two 2-year schools and two 4-year public schools. In addition, Landmark College in Putney, Vermont was included in the study as a 2-year school. However, Landmark is unique in that it is a school that specifically enrolls only students with learning disabilities, attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder, and/or autism spectrum
disorder. Rather than specifically looking at the website for their center for students with disabilities, their entire website had to be searched in order to find the information for the survey. Also, when using the survey to collect data on what types of documentation are accepted, some schools who did not explicitly state that the IEPs, 504-Plans, or Summaries of Performance documents are sufficient may still accept them as documentation of a disability. However, for the sake of consistency, schools were only said to accept the document if they explicitly stated that they did. Finally, while there was sufficient interrater reliability for the data to be used, there is something to be said about the fact that two individuals using the same survey were not always in agreement about what the websites provided. Therefore, some of the websites may provide information that is not clear.

**Areas for Future Research**

In the future, I would be intrigued to see if similar results would be found in other regions of the United States as were found in this study and if the patterns observed in 2-year, 4-year public, and 4-year private schools would be similar. In addition, it may be interesting to investigate if the amount of information given on a school’s center for students with disabilities website has any correlation with how many students take advantage of those services.

These findings suggest that colleges and universities in New England vary in what information they provide on their center for students with disabilities websites as well as in their processes for requesting accommodations and services. It is important that students with disabilities who are attending a postsecondary institution review their
school’s center for students with disabilities website in order to be informed about the services request process and documentation guidelines. With this information, students with disabilities should be prepared to request accommodations and have equal access to instruction during their postsecondary education.

**Conclusions**

Given these findings, students with disabilities and their families should carefully consider if postsecondary education is suited for them. Unlike elementary and secondary school, most students with disabilities will have to navigate postsecondary education on their own and self-advocate for the accommodations and services that they need in order to access instruction equally to their peers. Every school has their own unique process for accessing those accommodations. Therefore, once a student has made an informed decision about where they will be attending school, they should prepare, with the help of their family, for the process of requesting services by using the website for their school’s center for students with disabilities as a resource. This preparation should include gathering sufficient forms of documentation, considering which accommodations and services would benefit the student, and submitting an application form if necessary. The findings from this study should help families know what types of information regarding the accommodations requesting process they should expect to find on their school’s website. For information that isn’t available on the school’s website, students and families should contact their school’s center for students with disabilities directly by phone or email.
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Appendix A: Instrument

Official Thesis Checklist

What is the status of information available online for students with disabilities on college campuses in New England regarding accommodations and services? (Search: school name + students with disabilities)

* Required

School Name *

Your answer

Center for Students with Disabilities’ Website *

Your answer

Type of School *

- 2-Year
- 4-Year Public
- 4-Year Private

State *

- Connecticut
- New Hampshire
- Maine
- Massachusetts
- Rhode Island
- Vermont

What information is available on their website?

Does the website include a phone number or e-mail address for a point of contact? *

- Yes
- No

Does the website include the hours of operation for the center for students with disabilities? *

- Yes
- No

Does the website include examples of accommodations or services offered? *

- Yes
- No

Does the website have separate tabs or sections for new students and current students? *

- Yes
- No

Does the website offer recommendations for students who are not yet diagnosed with a disability? *

- Yes
- No
Does the website explicitly state that a 504-Plan is accepted as sufficient documentation? *

- 0
- 1
- 2

Does the website explicitly state that a Summary of Performance is accepted as sufficient documentation? *

- 0
- 1
- 2

Does the website explicitly state that results from formal diagnostic testing are accepted as sufficient documentation? *

- 0
- 1
- 2

Notes

Your answer