PERSONAL EXPERIENCES OF COLLEGE STUDENTS WITH LEARNING

DISABILITIES IN TRANSITIONING FROM HIGH SCHOOL TO COLLEGE:

QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

by

Phyllis Aaron Cowman

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As members of the Dissertation Committee, we certify that we have read the dissertation prepared by Phyllis Aaron Cowman
entitled Personal Experiences of College Students with Learning Disabilities in Transitioning from High School to College: Qualitative Analysis
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DEDICATION

This dissertation is lovingly dedicated to my parents, Alfred and Bernice Aaron. They

always believed that I could do whatever I wanted to do.

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ABSTRACT

Open-ended interview questions were asked to ten college freshmen with learning

disabilities (LD) to provide the primary source of data in this qualitative study that was

done to explore personal experiences of these students in transitioning from high school

to a large university. Student participants were chosen based on meeting the criteria of

having a diagnosed specific learning disability, having qualified and received special

education services in high school, and at the time of the study were receiving

accommodations through the Disability Resource Center (DRC) at the University of

Arizona (UA). Students were further identified as members of a "successful" group with

a first semester grade point average (GPA) of 3.0 or higher, or members of a "jeopardy"

group with a first semester GPA of below 2.0 and the academic status of probation. This

was done in order to ensure that I included the perceptions of students at the high and low

range of academic status levels in this sample, not to compare or contrast the two groups.

Interviews yielded information about student perceptions of barriers, attitudes, resources

and assistive factors in the transition process. Data were analyzed to determine themes

related to student success and difficulties. Suggestions for further research and

information for future practice are offered.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Transition issues of high school students with learning disabilities (LD) who enter four-year postsecondary institutions are a major concern for professionals and students in K-12 and higher education. This study was designed to investigate the factors associated with transition experiences among students with LD who attend the University of Arizona (UA). I used a qualitative research design to examine the experiences of college freshmen who identified themselves as students with LD. My purpose was to analyze the students' perceptions as to what barriers and challenges they faced in transitioning to college, and what supports were in place for this process.

I used a first person narrative style. I reviewed several recent qualitative studies in peer reviewed journals and noted that about half of them were written in first person. Meloy (2002) described the use of first person as "calling for educational research to be written in a human voice" (p.21). She also referred to another dissertation writer, who "had to learn how to write in the first person…and how to make my voice a part of the writing" (p. 120).

Statement of the Problem

I began this study with an exhaustive review of recent professional literature to investigate current transition issues. This review demonstrated that research on supports in the college setting for students with LD existed, but it also suggested that there was a dearth of research on the impact that actual transition experiences, including formal transition services, have had on students who were presently attending college.

Conducting such research and filling this gap was the significance of this study. The construct of "college success" has been defined as students who are in good academic standing, as indicated by cumulative grade point averages (GPA) of 3.0 or higher. I interviewed five members of this group, as well as interviewing five students who were on academic probation, with cumulative GPAs of less than 2.0, in order to ensure that I included the perceptions of freshmen with the highest and lowest ranges of GPAs at this stage of transition. Ingersoll (2000) wrote a qualitative dissertation about students with LD at a large university. She also identified students as "successful" if their cumulative GPA was 3.0 or higher, and she considered them to be "in jeopardy" if their cumulative GPA was below 2.0, because the status of academic probation caused them to be in jeopardy of being academically disqualified from the university. Her study involved comparing the groups, which is not the intent of my study. As stated, I chose students in both academic ranges to ensure that I included perceptions of both groups in my sample.

According to a review of recent professional literature, issues related to a smooth transition from high school to college have appeared to center around at least seven major areas. These have included concerns about high school teacher preparation, student autonomy and self advocacy skills, student knowledge of disability laws and their rights, parent involvement and expectations, high school teachers' attitudes and expectations for students with LD, students' psychological factors related to adjustment to college, and appropriateness of the content of secondary school curricula. The intention of this research study was to uncover themes that are represented in the participants' experiences.

Research Question

This study was designed to answer the question: What were the personal experiences of college students with LD during the transition process from high school and how did these experiences enhance or inhibit their transition into and progress in college? Answering this question could inform and drive effective programs that facilitate a smooth transition process for students with LD.

Wolanin and Steele (2004) reported that many high school special education students have received substandard secondary curricula content in special education classrooms. In addition, much of special education instruction has been individualized. Students have not easily generalized this learning to large groups. This has impacted their transition to college classes that are often extremely large. Accessibility to instructors is often limited to office hours in college, as compared to the ability to interact personally with teachers during class in high school.

High school teachers' concerns have included inadequate professional development for accommodating students with LD and insufficient training on technology (Edgar, 2005; Leake & Cholymay, 2004; Sitlington, 2003). General education teachers have also reported a lack of training on curriculum modifications and learning strategies. Teacher preparation programs have not generally included alternative instruction and assessment practices (Stodden, Galloway & Stodden, 2003). Without such instruction, teachers are required to effectively present materials to students with LD who may be not be able to fully access the curricula as it is designed, resulting in a lack of

mastery of concepts and basic knowledge that serve as prerequisites for required college courses.

According to Stodden and Jones (2002), the rights, responsibilities, and roles of various stakeholders shift as students with disabilities move across educational environments. Students have not been fully prepared in terms of the self advocacy skills needed to take control of their new situation. Concepts such as a free and appropriate public education do not apply to postsecondary education. The Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act (IDEA) is a national law that works to improve educational results for pre-school to twelfth grade students with disabilities. Without the mandates of IDEA, no individualized planning process exists in college settings. Under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), which does apply to college settings, it is the responsibility of the student to self identify, request assistance, and provide documentation of disability in order to be eligible for accommodations and disability services. Blackorby and Wagner (1996) reported that many college students with disabilities were unprepared to become autonomous with the self advocacy tasks required for college and they found their new role overwhelming and impossible, resulting in reduced course loads and lower college retention rates.

Rationale for Study

The rationale for conducting the current study was to examine the earlier experiences of transition from high school to college for students with LD, in order to uncover how these experiences may have enhanced or inhibited their progress in college. Qualitative analysis was used because it is explicitly emergent. Qualitative research does

not test a hypothesis; instead it attempts to find what theory accounts for the research situation as it is. In this respect it is like action research with a goal of understanding the research situation. The theory emerges implicitly from the data (Glaser, 1992). According to Zambo (2004), traditional educational practices tend to use quantitative measures to better serve the researchers, who study students with disabilities and often focus on a deficit model that quantifies just how far a person is from the norm. This reductionist view of a disability is most likely different from the lived experience of the person with the disability. Qualitative methods can discover an individual's words, interactions, and the context within which one's disability resides. For my study as well, qualitative methods did unpack the perceived transition experiences of students with LD.

According to Strauss and Corbin (1990):

The definition of qualitative research is: Any kind of research that produces findings not arrived by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification. It can refer to research about people's lives, stories, behaviors, but also about organizational functioning, social movements, or interaction relationships (p. 17).

Reid (1997) described the benefits of qualitative research as including the flexibility of design, the interview method, the ability of the researcher to participate in most aspects of the study, and the influence of the study on theory development. He described the theoretical basis for the method of qualitative analysis used in his research on high-functioning cocaine abusers as *grounded theory*. This method can be inductively derived by studying the phenomenon it represents. According to Strauss and Corbin

(1990), "One does not begin with a theory, then prove it. Rather, one begins with an area of study and what is relevant to that area is allowed to emerge" (p. 23). This applies to my dissertation as well, in that this study was not driven by a hypothesis; instead, the explanations emerged gradually from the data as the study proceeded. The theory emerged from the data, from the informants. In the early stages it consisted primarily of themes. These became more elaborated as the study developed (Dick, 2005).

Definition of Terms

The following terms were used in this study and have been defined for the purposes of the dissertation.

Transition services means a coordinated set of activities for a child with a disability that -

(A) Is designed to be within a results-oriented process, that is focused on improving the academic and functional achievement of the child with a disability to facilitate the child's movement from school to post-school activities, including postsecondary education; vocational education; integrated employment (including supported employment); adult services; independent living or community participation;

(B) Is based on the individual child's needs, taking into account the child's strengths, preferences and interests; and

(C) Includes instruction, related services, community experiences, the development of employment and other post-school adult living objectives and,

when appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation (IDEA, 2004, p. 118)

Special education means specially designed instruction, at no cost to parents, to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability, including –

(A) Instruction conducted in the classroom, in the home, in hospitals and institutions, and in other settings; and

(B) Instruction in physical education (IDEA, 2004, p. 118)

Specific learning disability means a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, which disorder may manifest itself in the imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations.

(B) DISORDERS INCLUDED- Such term includes such conditions as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia.

(C) DISORDERS NOT INCLUDED- Such term does not include a learning problem that is primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor disabilities, of mental retardation, of emotional disturbance, or of environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage (IDEA, 2004, p. 118).

Limitations of Study

There were a number of limitations to this study. The research was limited to a sample of college freshmen receiving accommodations through the Disability Resource Center at the University of Arizona and who also received special education services in

high school. The group was quite homogeneous, with all participants having a primary diagnosis of LD, all being Caucasian, and they were all 18 or 19 years old. No international students were interviewed. All had English as their primary language and a review of personal information indicated that all participants came from middle to upper class backgrounds and had at least one parent who graduated from college. This small sample does not lend itself to a replication of the study, and a sample of students all attending UA is too homogeneous to generalize to other populations. With only ten participants in the study, wide demographic representation was not possible. However, as with any qualitative study, the goal is not to replicate but to create a theory.

Inversely, the lack of homogeneity of the LD diagnosis is a limitation. For instance, some students had reading disabilities and others had writing or math disabilities. Five students had the co-current disability of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). Two were co-currently diagnosed with mild Tourette Syndrome (TS). Four of the students had learning disabilities that were considered non-verbal LD (NVLD), which can have a significant impact on social skills and overall adjustment to life situations. Students' overall intellectual abilities varied widely from one borderline full scale intelligence quotient (FSIQ) of 77 to intelligence quotients (IQs) in the high average (FSIQ = 109+) range. There is no concise agreement on eligibility for DRC services and severity of the LD diagnosis. There was no apparent connection between IQ and academic status in school. The one student with a borderline IQ was in the success group and the three with the highest measured IQs (106-109) were in both groups. I included diagnostic information in order to clearly define all aspects of the disability, and

investigated how limitations due to disabilities may also contribute to perceptions of the transition experience.

Analysis of data from two distinct students, a noncontinuous sample, is a limitation to my study, in that I did not include the perceptions of students who had mid-range GPAs of 2.0-2.9. Use of a noncontinuous sample makes this study difficult to replicate. This unique sample was chosen to explore the perceptions of students experiencing academic success or academic jeopardy after just one semester in college.

The validity of survey data is a concern if respondents are not honest due to self consciousness or stigma of disability. The study depended on self reports of the participants. A limitation could also be how accurately students recalled information from previous years. It is not possible to confirm the information that they give in an interview.

Limitations of this study also relate to the nature of qualitative research designs. As the researcher, I was essentially the instrument used for collecting data; and the unique characteristics that I brought to the study helped determine the type of data collected by interview. It is difficult to rule out the possibility that data collection might differ with a different researcher. As a former high school special education teacher and current university access consultant, I had prior experience working with students on both sides of college transition (high school seniors and college freshmen) and this experience influenced my observations and interpretation of the data.

Finally, the nondisabled status of myself as the interviewer may be perceived as a limitation, in that I am an "outsider" among the participants. I am not a college student with LD. My biases about gaps in the transition process come from my professional

experiences as a high school special education teacher and as a college disability access consultant, working with both high school and university students with LD and interacting with many students who have had difficulty with the transition process for many reasons.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The review of literature relevant to this study is presented in two sections. The first section examines the limited research about the transition experiences from high school to college of students with learning disabilities. The second section focuses on the use of a qualitative research design, particularly as it applies to this population.

Transition from High School to College

The disability experiences of high school students impact all aspects of their lives. Yet other characteristics impact their lives, too, and the personal experiences of transition from high school to college can be enhanced or restricted by what all students bring to the transition process and to a complex interaction of what has occurred to them and traits such as physical, psychological and intellectual properties. Examining these interactions as told by current college students with LD was the purpose of this study.

Assisting students with LD in mastering rigorous academic content required for eligibility for college admission is a complex issue. High school teachers' concerns include inadequate professional development for accommodating these students and insufficient training in technology (Stodden, Galloway & Stodden, 2003). Many special education students receive substandard secondary curricula content in special education classrooms. Additionally, much of special education instruction is individualized and students cannot easily generalize this learning to the process of learning in large groups (Wolanin & Steele, 2004). Wolanin and Steele (2004) also concluded that universities prepare special education teachers to work almost exclusively with people with

disabilities. Relatively few teacher training programs have attempted to merge special education and general education and prepare future teachers to work in inclusive settings. Linton (1998) observed that the field of special education overemphasizes disability and the field of general education "underemphasizes and marginalizes the factor of disability. Usually neither group of teachers is adequately prepared to work in integrative classroom settings where disabled and non-disabled students work together" (p.81).

According to Leake and Cholymay (2004), there are a disproportionate number of poor students, students from single parent families, African American students and Hispanic students among high school students with LD than among the general population. Predicted negative outcomes have been associated with each of these demographic factors in relation to school success. Edgar (2005) stressed the need for educators to "arrange the schooling experience for all students" (p. 173). As stewards of the public schools, Edgar (2005) felt that special educators must be public educators first before being special educators, addressing larger issues such as poverty and racism that can affect all students, including those with LD. In an analysis of longitudinal research with persons with LD, Kavale and Forness (1996) associated childhood LD with a high risk of lasting deficits inherent to the disability, such as low self esteem, lower general IQ, and poor psychosocial adjustment. Consideration of these factors warrants the establishment of transition processes that foster independence and promote early linkages with postsecondary service providers.

Estrada, Dupoux, and Wolman (2006) noted that early studies on transition to college of students with LD focused on academic ability as a predictor of college

adjustment, but their research on locus of control of college students with LD suggested that psychological functioning may be as important as academic functioning in predicting psychological adjustment to college. Locus of control refers to one's attributional tendency regarding the cause or control of events (Rotter, 1954). Estrada, Dupoux and Wolman (2006) found that most students with LD that they studied had an external locus of control. Individuals with an external locus of control tend to believe that occurrences in their lives are the result of luck, fate, or the behaviors of powerful others rather than attributing their own efforts or abilities as causal factors of these events. The positive association they found between externality and social adjustment in college could indicate that external locus of control is an appropriate survival tool for the college environment. Interestingly, they considered that an expectancy that events are based on luck or on powerful others might permit students with LD to overcome obstacles to adaptation to college, by placing the responsibility of outcomes on factors outside of themselves. This was the only such study in a review of recent literature on transition that stated this point of view. Studies that emphasize the importance of self advocacy suggest that students must place the responsibility for positive outcomes in postsecondary school on themselves (Dalke & Schmitt, 1987; Eckes & Ochoa, 2005; Izzo & Lamb, 2002; Skinner, 2004).

Support from a significant other has been determined to be a key to successful adult adjustment and also correlated with college adjustment (Spekman, Goldberg & Herman, 1992). Mpofu and Wilson (2004) examined the roles of family, community and culture in the transition of students with disabilities from high school to employment

and/or to postsecondary education. These authors discovered that opportunity structures may be restricted or enhanced by others. Family members and significant others offer social, psychological and material support to students with disabilities. Their communication of expectations can influence the choices and opportunities that these students make.

Coming to a new environment may not be an easy transition for students with or without disabilities. Students may feel uncomfortable with new peers. All students in this study lived on the university campus in residence halls, living day in and day out in close proximity to new peers. This can enable opportunities to make new connections, but can also be overwhelming. Loneliness and fear are feelings that many encounter as they begin the transition to college. These emotions can keep students from getting out there and meeting people. These feelings are typical for many college students (NDSU, 2006). Entering college students are still adolescents and having friends is crucial for adolescents. Adolescents generally spend more time with peers than with family. Close friends are especially important because they provide acceptance, trust, intimacy, enjoyment, stability, respect and opportunities for spontaneity (Cole & Bradac, 1996; Oswald & Clark, 2003). Weissberg, Sofair-Fisch, and Fisher-McCanne (1978) investigated the importance of college friendships and the development of a relationship skills program for students who had difficulty meeting people and establishing friendships. Sessions dealt with helping participants become aware of their avoidance, anxiety and ineffective behaviors. On completing the program, participants rated

themselves higher in their tolerance of receiving warmth and affection and noted increases in self esteem and peace of mind.

Chickering's (1969) psychosocial theory on the seven vectors of development attempted to explain how college students develop through the course of their college experience. The vectors include developing confidence, managing emotions, moving to autonomy through independence, developing mature interpersonal relationships, establishing identity, developing a sense of purpose, and developing integrity. This theory emphasizes interdependence: the recognition that people can achieve emotional and instrumental autonomy and still rely on one another for support.

Bryan and Burnstein (2004) described how parent involvement is a predictor of school success and that parents of students with disabilities tend to be more involved than parents of students without disabilities in their children's education, but parents' involvement can also limit students' abilities to develop self-advocacy skills. Smith, English and Vasek (2002) concurred with this opinion.

> Parents can unknowingly contribute to an unsuccessful transition for their child who has a learning disability. As nurturing caretakers, they sometimes fail to prepare adequately the LD child to be his/her own self-advocate, especially in stressful situations. The [school transition] team needs to guard against perpetuating this image of powerlessness by thoroughly explaining the strengths and weaknesses of the young adult as well as the implications of the disability in different situations (p. 494).

Eckes and Ochoa (2005) discussed how disability laws prohibit institutions of higher education from seeking information on disability status, resulting in a transfer of responsibility from the school to the student with regards to seeking supportive academic services. Students usually enter college without knowledge of the change in laws that apply to their education and without knowledge of how to advocate for themselves. Parents have not assisted in this process because they have typically advocated for their children. This advocacy has often resulted in meeting the needs of their children but has not fostered independence.

Additionally, the attitudes of high school faculty are not always accepting toward students with LD. These students can be subject to residual opinions and practices that do not welcome them as legitimate participants in the full educational process. High school teachers may not refer them for scholarships, valuable internships, or other experiences that help with college admission. Some secondary teachers openly admit that accepting pupils with disabilities adds another burden to their workload. A view of special education teachers as more qualified to handle students with disabilities in pullout programs or self-contained classes is prevalent among high school teachers in some instances (Blackorby & Wagner, 1996; Clark, 1997; Dupoux, Wolman & Estrada, 2005; Wolanin & Steele, 2004). Boe, Bobbit and Cook (1997) studied teacher attitudes toward students with LD and concluded that burnout is higher among special education teachers than among general education teachers and that some teachers respond to increased experience with students with disabilities with cynicism and unfavorable attitudes toward the students.

The presence of comprehensive and well-written transition goals appears to have a positive influence in students with LD enrolling in college. According to the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2) conducted by the U.S. Department of Education from 1987 to 2003, the post-school outcomes of students with disabilities reflected their transition goals. Twelfth graders who had a goal related to postsecondary education were significantly more likely to enroll in postsecondary schools (OSEP, 2005). Ensuring that students participate in the IEP process to create such goals, and that they understand the pragmatic differences between high school and college, have been encouraged as a keys to successful transition. High school special education students have often been observed as non-participants or observers of the process and yet they are required later in college to be initiators and managers of their own accommodations (Izzo & Lamb, 2002; Stodden & Jones, 2002).

Documentation of disability for postsecondary institutions can be more extensive than the assessment information needed at the secondary level for special education services or 504 accommodations (Sitlington & Payne, 2004). In 1997, the Association of Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD) recommended specific guidelines for documenting learning disabilities for purposes of receiving accommodations at postsecondary institutions. The guidelines have been adopted by many U.S. colleges and universities as requirements for eligibility for disability services. AHEAD suggested five components for substantiating a learning disability: a diagnostic interview; a comprehensive formal educational assessment including data about aptitude, academic achievement and information processing skills; a specific diagnosis; test scores in

standard form; and a clinical summary. A prior history of accommodations does not ensure the provision of similar accommodations (AHEAD, 1997; Sitlington & Payne, 2004).

Changes in the administration of special education programs under the IDEA amendments of 1997 and 2004 have created some new obstacles in the transition of students with disabilities into postsecondary schools, essentially creating a mismatch between available assessment data provided by high schools and required assessment data needed for accommodations in college (Gormley, Hughes, Block & Lendmann, 2005; Kincaid, 1997; Sitlington, 2003; Sitlington, Clark & Kolstoe, 2000; Sitlington & Payne, 2004). First, school districts are no longer obligated to conduct triennial evaluations of students presently receiving special education services. Colleges have required current assessment data in the form of standardized testing, but the data collection required to continue services in high school might be of an informal nature. Second, special education policies in many districts have been moving away from an emphasis on standardized assessments and toward the use of curriculum-based assessments (CBA). These assessments might not fulfill current requirements for eligibility for college disability services because they are not uniform, and because interpretation of CBA is based on the student's present learning environment. The design of the learning environment differentially impacts students with LD. With the change from a high school to a college environment, the results of the CBA may no longer apply.

Finally, some states' departments of education have been moving away from the use of specific disability labels toward more generic terms such as "student in need of

services," terms which do not constitute the diagnostic statements required for eligibility for disability services in college. Inconsistencies between the information provided by the secondary schools and the requirements of postsecondary schools may force students and their families to find alternative, often private, methods of assessment, which can be expensive. This has not been a reasonable alternative for many students, leading to inequities in accessing accommodations in college – possibly a deterrent to even applying to college. Without the full assessment completed, many postsecondary institutions have not allowed a grace period in which new students may receive class or exam accommodations (Gormley, et al., 2005).

Sitlington and Payne (2004) proposed new approaches to determining student eligibility for postsecondary disability services that include the following:

1. Summarize information from the IEP that documents why the student was "in need of special education services," including why the student's disability "substantially limits" his/her learning.

2. Report the results of any curriculum-based measurements, in which the student is compared to a district or school norm group.

3. Include the results of the statewide and districtwide assessments, which compare how the student performed in comparison to all students in the state or district.

4. Summarize information from the student's IEP that compares the student's performance to the standards and benchmarks of the district.

5. Include the results of any applicable formal psychometric tests, which may

have been given as part of the transition assessment process.

6. Arrange to have a certified or licensed professional from a local educational agency provide a review and evaluation of previous disability documentation and current data on the impact of the disability on the academic achievement and functional performance. This review would include recommendations on how to assist the student in meeting his or her postsecondary goals (pp. 10 & 11).

The reauthorization of IDEA in 2004 included a proposal that high school educators be required to complete a Summary of Performance (SOP) for students with disabilities upon the students' exit from high school. The intention of the SOP has been to establish student eligibility for accommodations and supports in postsecondary settings. Section 614 of IDEA 2004 requires the SOP for students exiting the K-12 special education system but does not specify what is needed in the document. Postsecondary education is not subject to this legislation; however, it may be impacted by it (IDEA, 2004). Apprehensive disability service providers at postsecondary institutions have criticized the development of the SOP template by AHEAD, stating that it allows high school special educators to dictate what services and levels of support students will receive when they get to college (Jarrow, 2005). Concerns have included making recommendations for "modifications" that cannot be reasonably provided in college settings, and noting supports needed for "success" in a postsecondary environment. IDEA attempts to ensure student "success" due to its entitlement aspect, but ADA can only provide for student "access" to services and programs. Colleges and universities have continued to have the right to request additional documentation to establish eligibility for

disability services, but the SOP has appeared to blur this by implying that it is the only documentation required.

Universities that have developed summer transition programs for students with disabilities include St. Ambrose University in Davenport, Iowa, and Arizona State University (ASU) in Tempe, Arizona. St. Ambrose University's four-week Summer Transition Program is designed to help students with LD develop skills for a successful college career and to help them adjust to the many academic and personal challenges of college. Students are encouraged to live on campus in one of the university's residence halls. Admission requirements are completion of junior year of high school, existence of a documented learning disability, a strong desire to be successful in college, and completion of an application form. Participants do not need to be admitted to St. Ambrose University to participate in this program. Completion of the program does not guarantee admission to St. Ambrose University. Academic credits earned may be transferred to other institutions (St. Ambrose University, 2006).

ASU has also administered a student transition program for students with disabilities for the past five years. Their GATE (Get A Transition Experience) Program is a five-week, grant-funded summer program with free room and board for incoming freshmen with disabilities. The GATE Program offers participants the opportunity to earn up to seven college credits; receive individual and group tutoring by trained peer tutors; learn how to access services at the Disability Resource Center, including extensive training on assistive technology; and create personal relationships via residential life and planned social activities (Arizona State University, 2006).

Transition to postsecondary education is an important topic legally and socially, yet the literature that addresses the personal experiences of students with LD in making the transition is limited. Additionally, most studies are quantitative and measure academic outcomes but do not examine the thoughts, feelings and actual experiences of the participants.

The Use of Qualitative Research

.   A significant lack of information in the professional literature has existed about the personal quality of lives of young adults, both with and without disabilities. Edgar (2005) stated, "We measure employment status and college attendance as keys to post-school success, rather than the more difficult analysis of quality of life and productive citizenship." Qualitative research has served to analyze the perceptions of research subjects with disabilities in a manner that fully includes the participants.

Parker and Bolton (2005) thought that rehabilitation practitioners might relate to the qualitative model more readily than to the quantitative model of research. Through a nonnumerical, experiential approach, a researcher can gather verbal data and develop abstract conceptualizations that reflect higher level meaning, providing insight into what is being studied. Additionally, the emancipatory qualitative researcher believes that the multiple realities that emerge with the process of research are shaped by disability, gender, ethnic, political, economic, and cultural values. Parker and Bolton (2005) further stated,

Often qualitative research, particularly emancipatory research, focuses on gender, culture, and marginalized groups – topics that are emotion laden, close to people,

and practical. The researcher asks open-ended questions that may change during the research process, leading to a progressively greater understanding of the problem (p. 336).

Mercer (2002) noted that persons with LD have historically been used as passive subjects of research, as opposed to being active and consenting participants. In many cases, they have been observed, analyzed, tested and sometimes pathologized but not asked for their perceptions or points of view. It has only been during very recent times that persons with disabilities have become recognized as reliable informants who are the best authorities on their own lives, experiences, and views. Participatory research can allow the subjects of research to become equals in the process. Researchers must become innovative and find ways to allow people to express their opinion on the research and to accommodate disabled participants so that they can fully participate without compromising the integrity of the research. For example, speech output assistive technology programs can be used to read a survey aloud, privately, to a participant with a reading disability.

In his 1996 text, *Understanding Disability from Theory to Practice*, Oliver described how he read research articles about the experiences of persons with disabilities written by people without disabilities and felt that they related very little to his own understanding of disability, and that these articles "portrayed inaccurate and distorted accounts of the experiences of people with disabilities" (p.9). Oliver (1996) also stated that "disability can isolate people, and that most people with disabilities only encounter

disability in individual terms" (p. 122). These are important reasons for conducting qualitative, phenomenological research with this population.

Miller and Millington (2002) suggested that an inclusive community, truly integrated with regard to persons with and without disabilities, has not yet been realized. Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall considered that the disparity of rights and considerations allowed to persons without disabilities as compared to that of persons with disabilities "amounts to a sanctioned segregation that in its virulence and bigotry [has] rivaled, and indeed paralleled, the worse excesses of Jim Crow" (ACLU, 1999). Miller and Millington (2002) cited data from President George Bush's "New Freedom Initiative" (February, 2001) and the American Civil Liberties Union (1999) that further illustrate the oppression of persons with disabilities as follows:

> *With respect to income*, 13.3% of the general population, ages 22-64, live in poverty. Among people with disabilities, 19.3% live in poverty. Among people with severe disabilities the poverty rate jumps to 42.4%....only 10% of people with disabilities own their own homes, compared to 71% home ownership in the general population...*With respect to education*, national graduation rates for [special education] students remains stable at 27%, compared to a 75% graduation rate for students who do not rely on special education....In 1995, less than 10% of people with disabilities had completed college, one-third of the rate of people without disabilities…*With respect to political participation*, people with disabilities vote at a rate 20% lower than voters without disabilities…*With*

respect to employment, in 1995, two-thirds of Americans with disabilities, ages 16-64, were unemployed (pp. 284-285).

Linton (1998) noted that the field of disability studies has integrated many other fields of study, such as anthropology, political science, art, and history. A major limitation in the field of anthropology has been the absence of the active voices of people with disabilities as researchers and as subjects. Even studies which have examined how people with disabilities have been treated in various diverse cultures have evaluated the dominant, nondisabled majority's perspectives and behaviors. One interpretation of this is that persons with disabilities have been marginalized in most societies; most importantly, the society from which the researchers have come. Reasons for excluding people with disabilities from research about them have included "limited education, discrimination in hiring and promotion, and inadequate support for disability research" (p. 73). Additionally, accommodations that facilitate participation in research have not usually been provided for participants who are disabled.

Linton (1998) questioned whether the quality of data obtained in disability research was a result of prevailing research methods or whether the choice of methodology is determined by attitudes toward disability. She asked,

Has empiricism's reductive tendencies forced us to examine impairments and functional limitations over the more complex and nuanced experience that disabled people describe as the texture of their lives? Or have ideas about disability, such as deterministic beliefs, the medicalization of disability, or the

objectification of disabled people, led researchers to employ quantitative rather

than qualitative, historical, or interpretive methods? (p.74).

Disability scholars such as Linton have forced researchers to examine traditional

approaches to data collection and methodology. My study examined issues, discovered

by reviewing the literature, as the analysis of participants' perceptions and recollections

of their transition experiences upon leaving high school and entering college unfolded.

Ingersoll's (2000) study of LD college students and their use of support services

also considered students in order of achieved cumulative hours, reasoning that "students

who accumulated more units demonstrated a longer history of achieving at the success

standard" (p. 71). She used such a list to contact students and invited them to participate

in her research. Her study's participants were at all undergraduate academic levels, and

included students whose academic histories were several semesters or even years long.

I modeled my interview instrument after a semi-structured interview instrument

used by Skinner (2004), who conducted a qualitative study of the academic experiences

of twenty college graduates with learning disabilities (see Table 3.1). The interview

instrument for my research study used a similar structure and similar questions that

pertain to the specific experiences of transition into college (see Table 3.2).

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This study attempted to answer the following research question: What were the personal experiences of college students with LD during the transition process from high school and how did these experiences enhance or inhibit their transition into and early progress in college? I focused on the progress that these students perceived as having achieved in college, in relation to their transition experiences.

In order to answer this question, I conducted a qualitative research study. Barnes (2003) argued that quantitative analysis does not fully capture the extent and complexity of the oppression encountered by persons with disabilities. He considered that using information about the experiences of people with disabilities was empowering for the individuals, and that including participants' narratives was needed to clearly illustrate the social context in which research has been conducted. This chapter's purpose is to describe the subjects, the setting, and the research methodology.

Description of Subjects

The subjects in this study were ten college freshmen: five women and five men. All ten freshmen were, at the time of their interview, students who (1) received accommodations through the Disability Resource Center (DRC) at the University of Arizona (UA), (2) received special education services in high school, including some level of transition services, and (3) had a primary disability diagnosis of Specific Learning Disability (LD) as indicated by documentation of disability presented to DRC. Five of my participants were considered "successful," with cumulative GPAs of 3.0 or

higher, and five participants were in the "jeopardy" group, as indicated by GPAs of less than 2.0 and academic probation status. The inclusion of an equal number of students in each group was done to examine the transition experiences of a broad range of freshmen students, not for purposes of comparing the groups. I used purposive sampling in choosing only students who met these criteria. Sampling in qualitative research is usually purposive because the general goal is to select information-rich cases (Glaser, 1992; Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

My participants were all freshmen. As indicated earlier, I chose students who were academically successful and academically at risk, not to compare the groups, but to examine freshmen with the highest and lowest ranges of GPAs to explore the possibility of differences in perceptions of the transition process between groups. There were no substantive differences in their perceptions.

Description of Setting

The University of Arizona (UA), located in Tucson, Arizona, is one of the nation's top twenty public research institutions. 34,447 students attended UA full time in 2004 (UA Fact Book, 2004-05). 1312 students were identified as eligible for accommodations at DRC at the end of the spring 2004 semester, according to internal records kept on the data base at DRC. 579 of these students had a primary diagnosis of LD as indicated by the documentation of disability they presented to DRC.

Research Procedure

Recruiting students for this study began with the creation of a flyer descriptive of the study, which was then posted around campus, distributed to DRC access consultants

to discuss with students, and sent to the DRC listserv (see Appendix A). Requirements for participation in the study were:

- Freshman status at UA

- Active status and use of services at DRC

- Prior diagnosis of LD

- Age 18 or over

- GPA requirements of either 3.0 or above, or below 2.0

Students who responded were then asked questions via phone calls regarding their diagnosis of LD, use of services at DRC, qualification for and use of special education services in high school, and college GPA to assure that they met the criteria for the study. For purposes of screening the applicants into the study, confidentiality was discussed and ensured on the phone, in that names of participants and identifying features about them would not be included in the written study. Applicants were also advised as to how much time would be involved: up to one hour for the interview, and potential follow up phone calls of up to ten minutes. Students who met the criteria for the study were asked to attend an appointment for an interview.

Universal design for this study was achieved by means of use of flexible materials and activities that provided alternatives for students with differing abilities. Face-to-face interviews of 45 minutes to one hour were conducted on campus at the DRC facility due to its accessible location, and included universal instructional design (UID) techniques and accommodations for interviews. The confidentiality agreement (see Appendix B) was discussed in detail again, as it had been during the initial screening phone call.

Participants were advised that the interview would be conducted in private, with answers tape recorded and transcribed. Participants were also asked to allow me to have access to their DRC records for research purposes. I agreed to keep all information obtained through the interview, follow up calls, and DRC records confidential. I agreed to keep all transcripts and tapes locked in a cabinet in my office at DRC, and told participants that I would destroy all tapes, transcripts and linked data following completion and defense of the dissertation. I told them that results would be shared with DRC for use in improving the program but that they would not be identified by name. I assured all participants that accommodations received through DRC were not in any way contingent on their participation. Additionally, I offered to provide consult regarding academic strategies for students in the "jeopardy" group, following their participation in the study, in individual sessions, at their request and convenience. I obtained participants' written consent: (1) to record and transcribe their answers to my interview questions, (2) to have access to their student files at DRC in order to obtain demographic information, and (3) to confirm disability diagnoses and placement in high school special education programs.

I modeled my research after that of Skinner (2004), who conducted a study of twenty recent college graduates with LD to identify variables that facilitated their academic success throughout college, leading to the earning of a degree. Like Skinner (2004), I looked for variables that led to academic success with a similar sample; although my study explored variables that led to successful *transition* experiences, as well as uncovering transition experiences that participants felt were not successful. The qualitative nature of Skinner's (2004) study included a research design that I felt would

be appropriate for the sample that I chose to study as well. I based the interview

instrument for my study on Skinner's (2004) research instrument (see Table 3.1). I

included open-ended questions similar to those used in his study but modified them to

elicit the answers I sought in my study (see Table 3.2), along with including prompts to

elicit more information as needed. Prompts to accompany the open-ended questions were

used to elicit more information than a participant might have initially disclosed. Some

participants benefited from a repetition of questions or from viewing the written

questions as they were being asked. One participant needed frequent breaks.

I did not have to ask specific questions about demographics, such as age,

functional limitations of the disability, or ethnicity, as this information was available on

the DRC data base (See Table 3.3). I obtained written consent from participants to access

this information for the study before examining the records to learn about student

demographics (See Appendix B).

Each interview was conducted in private and tape recorded with permission

provided at the start of the interview. One interview of 45 minutes to an hour in length

per participant was conducted, and no follow up calls were required. Tapes were then

transcribed for purposes of analyses. Tapes and transcripts were provided for

participants' review and feedback at all points during the research process. I have offered

to share my work with them during and after publication. I also completed a self

interview (see Appendix D) in order to reflect on what I was asking the students, and to

better allow me to frame their experiences.

Data Analysis

I systematically reviewed the relevant data and compared them with others in my data set that could be similar or different, in order to develop conceptualizations of the possible relations between various pieces of data, following recommended qualitative strategies for analyzing interview data (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003; Richards, 2005). I analyzed the transcripts of the interviews for themes, using open and axial coding. Open coding involved developing categories based on patterns of responses that were common to most participants, without making any assumptions about what was emerging. Axial coding built connections within categories. Common themes were identified when the majority of participants showed similar patterns of response, and themes were refined during multiple readings (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003; Richards, 2005; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Participants were informed about findings throughout the process and asked for feedback (member checking).

During the process of conducting and transcribing the interviews, I read and reread the data, sorted them by relevant text, coded, searched for common themes, refined and recoded. I attempted to identify themes that were pertinent to smooth or difficult transition experiences. I sorted the categories for analysis that would explain the findings. Each theme was uncovered as a topic discussed by a majority of at least seven of ten participants. From this, I concluded that each theme was an important aspect of a participant's experience. The themes together represent a wide range of experiences that constitute the personal aspects of the transition process as experienced by these students.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS OF THE STUDY

Participants

This study was designed to answer the question: What were the personal experiences of college students with LD during the transition process from high school and how did these experiences enhance or inhibit their transition into and early progress in college? Ten students were interviewed during the second semester of their freshman year of college. I included five students who were making satisfactory academic progress and five who were in academic jeopardy, not to study two groups to contrast or compare the experiences of the groups, but in order to include a range of freshmen students with LD with high and low GPAs at this stage of transition into college.

Of the five students who were in academic jeopardy at that time, four continued at UA for their second year. The one who left was disqualified from his college and elected to attend community college in an effort to earn an appropriate GPA to return to the university. Three of the four who remained elevated their grades to the extent that they were no longer on probation at the end of their first year. The other student in this group elevated his grades second semester as well, but not high enough to lift the probationary status, so he continued to be in academic jeopardy as he entered his second year.

Of the five students who were making successful academic progress at the middle of their first year, they all maintained high (over 3.0) GPAs in their second semesters as well. However, two of them elected to transfer to other universities. In both cases, they

were students from the East Coast and they wanted to go to schools closer to their homes. The other three remained at UA.

A review of the data from the interviews revealed that students of both groups shared common concerns and experiences. There were no substantive differences between groups. Interviews with participants resulted in the emergence of six themes that relate to these experiences, each of which is explained and examples of student responses given. Not all themes were applicable to each interviewee, but all were applicable to the research question.

Common Themes

The experiences that students shared with me varied in terms of their perceptions of their success or lack thereof in transitioning to college, perceptions of the limitations of their disabilities, and perceptions of their expectations. Themes which emerged from the analysis of the interviews were:

1. Students' expectations of going to college

2. Barriers encountered during transition

    a. Moving out and into a new environment

    b. Acquiring independent living skills

    c. Peer relationship issues

3. Events that facilitated the transition process

    a. Peer support

    b. Disability support services

4. Perceptions of disability

      a.   Students' self perceptions

      b.   Others' perceptions of interviewees' disabilities

5.   Differential use of accommodations in high school and college

      a.   High school learning specialist accommodation

      b.   College accommodations / note taking

6.   Student suggestions for improving the transition process

      a.   Experiential transition activities

      b.   Smaller classes for freshmen

A variety of experiences were related by the student participants. Yet the basic themes that emerged from the analysis of the interview data were repeated in many interviews. Themes were consistent across jeopardy and successful participants. No substantive differences in patterns of these students' responses were observed. These common themes are discussed in the following sections, including excerpts taken from student interviews. Each theme is described and examined, and discussed as general experiences that were common to the research sample regardless of their academic status.

1. Students' Expectations of Going to College

In asking participants when they first knew they would go to college, there was nearly a consensus that they "always knew" they would go to college. Eight of ten respondents responded as such, four from each student group. One student's answers were consistently quite passive, suggesting that others made the plans for her. She never was very specific about what she wanted or how she made it happen. She has a non-

verbal LD (NVLD) and has had difficulty with both academics and peer relationships and she never appeared to know how problems occurred and what her role was.

I asked her, "What were your goals during high school for life after high school?"

She replied, "To go to college."

I asked, "Okay. Any specific college?"

She said, "No, not actually."

I asked, "You just knew that you wanted to go?"

She replied, "Yeah."

She continued, "It's always just been kind of, that's what you do. So that was what I planned on." Her responses were passive. The student is essentially a passive person and her NVLD may cause some naivety and immaturity. She has appeared to allow things to happen to her and doesn't take control of situations.

Another female student described her expectation as follows:

I definitely wanted to go to college. That was not any, like, there was no, I always just wanted to go to college. My parents both went to college and it just was kind of, always thought, they always, like, made, like, okay, you're going to go to college. Just because you have a learning disability doesn't mean you can't do it.

One young man also assumed he would always go to college because his parents did. He said,

It wasn't even like, like, if I wanted to do it, it was like I was going. Like, yeah, because my parents, like they went, so it wasn't even really an option. I knew I

was going and that was like my whole life…It was not, like, that I wanted to go. It

was just, like, you've got to go. You go to high school, you graduate, and then

you go to college. It's just the community; it's like in the environment I grew up

in. It wasn't, like, a choice… like that's where you go and you wear sweatshirts,

and like, that's where everybody goes.

Again, community and parent expectations were that you go to college – no

exception. For these students, planning to go to college was automatic and in their

schools and communities, "everyone goes," so there was an assumption that they would

also go to college.

2. Barriers Encountered During Transition

Participants were asked directly about barriers or road blocks they encountered

when leaving high school and entering college. Sub-themes about such road blocks

included:

a. Moving out and into a new environment

b. Acquiring independent living skills

c. Peer relationship issues

a. Moving out and into a new environment.

Eight of the ten students interviewed came to UA from other states. They talked

of coping with leaving their hometowns and coming to a new environment. One young

man stated,

Well, I kind of had cold feet. Like, it kind of grew, California grew on me as time

went on, like, I got comfortable there…I really liked California and I didn't want

to leave…Like, this summer, like my kind of dream plan was to go to U of A and then transfer to, like, somewhere in California after a semester or a year.

A young woman tried to convince herself that she would adjust easily to the move but acknowledged that it was not as easy as she had expected by stating,

Well, before I left, I was, like, okay, it's going to be fine. Arizona, I'll be good. I'm independent. And then when I actually realized after my graduation party, I finally realized I was leaving and I was going across the country… I mean I was really excited, but then I think, reality, like, sunk in and I was just like, wow. I live in, like this little bubble of a town and I'm going to a big college and I don't know how I'm going to do it. I was kind of freaking out but when I got here, I was kind of, it felt right, and I was just, kind of like, okay, you know, it's a different chapter in my life, but you know, I'll be okay.

A male student also weighed in on the factor that he was in a school so far from his home. He said,

I wasn't sure I made the right decision because going from Connecticut to Arizona is pretty far. You don't think about it before you do it. But then after, like, the first couple of weeks, it doesn't matter. Once you're on campus, you're on campus.

This student did earn high grades his entire freshman year at UA but elected to transfer to a school closer to his home after the first year.

b. Acquiring independent living skills.

Students also discussed the difficulties of learning independent living skills such as budgeting, doing laundry, shopping, and other aspects of living independently for the first time. All ten participants in the study lived on campus in residence halls whether or not their parents were local residents.

One young woman did not like living in a dormitory with no easily available kitchen. She stated,

Yeah, definitely not having a kitchen. I didn't like that. I've always liked to, I've always liked to cook and I like home cooking. McDonald's doesn't do it for me… It was hard because it was different than in high school, like I said, I was in a little bubble. Like, we lived in a small town and they did everything for you and, like, I came to college and it was, like, all right, you're doing everything on your own. You're like, at first I was, like, kind of overwhelmed. But then once you get, like, acclimated with like, just like the school and what's expected of you, it's fine.

A male student expressed similar feelings by saying,

I mean, educationally, I've had a tough transition, obviously; but, like, lifestyle stuff – I guess there was a lot of learning. I've never done laundry. I've never made my bed. You know, I've never had to buy my own groceries, you know, feed myself, do things like that. So that part of it, like, took a couple of weeks to get used to. And I even still call my mom and say, you know how to wash my jeans and stuff like that.

Another male student said that he ate nothing but fast food on campus. He did not know how to cook or how to prepare food in his residence hall. He said,

I also didn't stay very healthy. That was a big thing, like, a lot of fast food. Like, people say you gain the freshman fifteen from drinking. Well, I'm not a heavy drinker. I gained it all from eating at the [student] union, eating McDonald's two or three times a day, and eating a lot of Chick Filet and Cactus Grill. So I gained, I think I gained about twenty pounds first semester. So I've got these thighs now.

College resources emphasize adjustment to academic life in college and they also offer assistance for adjustment to life in general when a student becomes independent. However, students often do not connect with these resources. As well as learning strategies for academic success such as time management, students must also learn how to stay physically well, how to manage finances and relationships, and how to conquer other basic life skills that were previously taken care of for them. In high school, they could usually count on parents and teachers to remind them about responsibilities and also to guide them with any concern. In college, they are faced with making moral and ethical decisions and setting priorities.

c. Peer relationship issues.

Students also expressed that a road block they encountered during transition was dealing with peers. They talked of the difficulty of making new friends on campus and one talked about peer relationships that were adversarial. One female student with NVLD had altercations with her roommate that led to her being evicted from her residence hall and to a code of conduct hearing.

Another young woman did not relate well to peers but there was no intense conflict. She stated, "Um, when I got here, I didn't like the people. I hated it. I felt all that mattered was Greek Life and a lot of them are, like, into themselves. I felt really left out. I felt really judged." She continued, "The classes are so big, you can't meet people. There's only freshmen living on campus, which just makes the situation even worse, too." Another female student reflected similar feelings when she remarked, "I had a lot of hard times, like making friends at first, because I'm really shy…at first …I felt like I didn't mesh with everybody here."

One young man was assigned a single dormitory room for disability reasons (Tourette Syndrome), which is not a typical freshman experience. He essentially chose to be more isolated than the students who complained of not easily making friends. This appeared to be beneficial to him. He said,

> Well, I have a single for a dorm room and that…really helped because… sometimes when I'm around…a roommate for a long time, that I've had, like, previous trips, it was just like, I can get really irritated and, like, people can get really irritated of me, like, really easily, I guess you would say. So it was really nice having my own room just to be able to, like, sit down and, like, do my work and get it done and study. So that was really convenient.

He reflected that having a roommate might be a source of irritation to himself or to the roommate. Most students at UA who request single dormitory rooms for reasons related to their disabilities do not get approval, due to the limited number of single rooms.

Students with disabilities such as Tourette Syndrome (TS), Asperger Syndrome (AS), or NVLD are more likely to have this accommodation.

Interviewees spoke about a variety of barriers or road blocks they faced when they moved out of their family homes and into residence halls. Issues appeared to involve this directly, or indirectly, often overlapping among sub-themes which included moving out and into a new environment, acquiring independent living skills, and/or peer relationship issues.

3. Events That Facilitated the Transition Process

   a. Peer support.

Students described the support they got from friends, both old friends at home and new ones on campus, as helping them feel comfortable in college. One male student stated, "I'd say helpful things were having a couple of kids here that I knew. So that was cool." Another student, a female, said, "Talking to my friends on the phone. That's really what helped." One interviewee liked meeting other students from her part of the country and remarked, "Another thing that helped probably was being in the dorm that had East Coast people with me. That was a big help."

Another female participant was comforted keeping in touch with high school friends going to other colleges across the United States. She said,

> All my friends were going through like the same thing, though; like, the transition
> and everything… at first we all lived together [in boarding school in high school]
> so it's like you're a family almost. And even though we got sick of each other, it's
> still, it was different, you know. And it was just really hard because it…doesn't

hit you till you're… back. So like hearing that from everyone I knew, it helps to

know that everyone's going through it.

Young adults share a distinctive history and particular social context. They seek

each other out in times of apprehension and crises. Building a peer support group in

college appears to relate to college success just as learning academic strategies does,

perhaps even more so for many individuals.

b. Disability support services.

Participants mentioned the disability services available, both the Disability

Resource Center and a fee-for-services support program, as helpful in facilitating the

transition to the university. One young woman reported,

I think when I saw the success [disability resources] gave me in high school, it

made me want to definitely have it at college because I knew that my grades had

significantly gone up because of it. And I felt also that it is a smaller community

that I could have gotten academic help with rather than just having my teachers.

So it was kind of a support system that I think was necessary.

Another young woman who was in the jeopardy group first semester was able to

improve her grades to satisfactory academic status second semester. This student took

advantage of disability resources more proactively after earning low grades first semester.

She stated,

I have to admit the DRC has helped my life a lot. My learning specialist…really

helped me…get the things I need. Last semester…I was just kind of lost…I'd

never been on my own and…I just didn't use my resources as well, but…this

semester, I come here all the time and he just really helps me a lot.

A female peer reported, "I would just say the one-on-one communication that you

guys [access consultants] give us is really helpful," and she discussed counting on her

access consultant to be available to answer questions and to guide her to campus

resources that were beneficial.

All participants mentioned disability resources in some regard in a positive sense.

They all used accommodations for tests and lecture classes (see Table 3.3). The majority

of interviewees reported not knowing specifically about university disability resources or

how to access them when they were in high school until attending an orientation at UA

after graduation. Most assumed that they could use accommodations in college but did

not understand the process or how to connect with DRC until getting the information at

college orientation. DRC makes an effort to educate parents and teachers of high school

students about its services but many attendees apparently do not get this information until

after acceptance to the university. In some cases, schools and parents may send the

required documentation of disability without including the student in the process, so

students do not understand that they are applying for DRC services along with taking care

of other aspects of coming to UA, such as applying for housing and parking.

4. Perceptions of Disability

    a. Students' self perceptions.

Students described their disabilities in terms of the impact that the disability had

on their educational progress. Their perceptions were predominantly a functional

understanding of LD. One young man described limitations with long term retrieval and attention span by saying,

> My education has been affected in the fact that I can retain information, but when it's time to reproduce that information, it vacates my brain, I guess…it provides for kind of easily distracted and harder to concentrate…it's not been anything extreme. Just kind of every now and then, a shiny object out of the sun, you know. I get easily distracted, I daydream, you know, or I get bored very easily.

A male peer discussed his processing disorder and how it led to his choice in long-term goals. He stated,

> Well, I have a visual processing problem so it affected my education mostly by graphical things, charts, anything I really have to line up visually. That's why I'm a political science major… you can select the actual classes you want to take. If you know something's - you're not going to be good at, don't take it.

A female student was able to describe the effect of her LD on academic endeavors quite specifically as well, when she said,

> Pretty much my learning disability, I need extended time and sometimes I can't write while a teacher is speaking. I won't understand, like I won't get what the class is being taught about… sometimes they can ask questions really weird and I won't understand what they're saying but I'll know the answer… I do better if things are read to me. I follow along, like understanding it. Or I do really well with, like, talking about things with a person. And I'm really bad at directions…

And people give me weird looks… I drift in and out, like I can't focus. But it's not like it's a problem. I just think about a whole bunch of things.

Her statement also reflected another view, that of others' perceiving her in a misassumptive manner, leading to another theme in the study; that of others' perceptions of participants' disabilities.

b. Others' perceptions of interviewees' disabilities.

Students also talked of how others perceived them on bases of disabilities. These perceptions were generally seen as negative and often as misconceptions of the students' abilities, efforts and other qualities. One student defined his disability by saying,

My learning disability is a non-verbal learning disorder: N-LD;   there's a hyphen, so it's not NVLD…it's been explained to me what it means, but I don't really remember everything… it's pretty rare and so it's been tough, because a lot of teachers don't necessarily know how to deal with it…some teachers I've had, especially growing up, have given me, like, the ADD [Attention Deficit Disorder] script. They just really label me and look down at me.

This student did not want to be associated with NVLD, although this is his diagnosis – he wanted to refer to it differently. He apparently felt that those who did not understand his disability looked down on him. He continued, "Well, a lot of people just perceive it as laziness. In fact, almost everybody does. But that's not the case." He also felt that his LD caused teachers to "close the door" on him; that he was graded on efforts that were not adequately accommodated. He continued,

I don't want to say I should have been graded leniently, but I definitely think that they should have taken that into account. I feel like a lot of teachers kind of closed the door on me, particularly in middle school.

A student with an expressive language disorder had more difficulty expressing how others viewed him, but his reflections did point to a negative outlook of others on students with disabilities. He remarked,

They want you to think it's different…like bright people don't have a learning disability, or that we're sort of different kids, but it's all the same stuff. Like people in a wheelchair are the same people, they're not, like, different. And so many people have learning disabilities. It's like a common thing now…And like all people can do whatever they want in some way.

His use of the term "different" suggested a construct of disability as not being a part of the general human experience, but he recognized that disabilities are common.

A young woman expressed her frustration at others not understanding why she struggled academically and at herself for not knowing how to sufficiently explain her disability. She stated,

A lot of times when I would say, 'I can't do it,' people would say to me, teachers and students, 'Yeah, you can. You just don't want to.' And it was just kind of like, that's the worst thing to hear. It's just kind of like, 'No, I really don't understand what you're saying. Like, I really don't get this.' … It's just like I could know so much but I could fail the test and it can make me look dumb. So you're going to base me on that? I get mad about that. I get mad about people

thinking…that I just think a lot of people don't know like what [a learning disability] is. And I don't even think I do.

The perceptions of others toward students with LD appear to be influenced by a lack of understanding of the hidden disability. There is often a misconception of laziness, unwillingness to perform, or lack of motivation. Students with LD often do not know how to describe the aspects of the disability that affect their educational performance and which allow them to adequately advocate for themselves.

5. Differential Use of Accommodations in High School and College

    a. High school learning specialist accommodation

Participants reported using different accommodations in high school than those used in college. Each of the students reported seeing a learning specialist or having a study period staffed by special education personnel in high school for intensive tutoring and coaching in some form. In lieu of this accommodation in college, they generally used more classroom accommodations, such as note takers for lectures.

One male student stated,

Every day after [high] school, I would spend one to two hours with my, uh, I guess it was more of a quiet study…He was a, he was, you know, a professional and what he did, he was a learning specialist. Um, and it was a very cool environment because it was just a tiny room like this and he had a computer. He would always have music playing. He'd bring snacks, food, donuts. He had a pizza for us one day. Just, you know, and then you'd go in there and do your work and have a good time.

This level of individual support is not available at a university and the student did not transition easily nor earn adequate grades for the entire first year he was in college.

Another student talked of seeing a high school learning specialist as though his own involvement was passive and the specialist was in charge, using the phrase, "They made me go there after school and tell him all the homework I had." This student also earned grades that reflected a lack of self direction when he left the high school and needed to be autonomous. He continued,

> I had a, I guess a learning sort of specialist, like, that helped me with tests and everything and tutoring. And they made me go there like after school and tell him all the homework I had and I had to do like thirty minutes of homework there. So that's what helped me also. If I ever had problems, I'd go there. And so did some other people.

A young woman described a similar high school accommodation,

During junior and senior year, I was in a class called Learning Strategies, which had me and my case manager and then, like, a few other students that were under her caseload in a class five days a week And we would work on homework… and some strategies. And we would use that time like to meet with, like go to the math lab or meet with a teacher …it was almost as if you had a free period to meet, like with a teacher who had the same free period.

This type of structured coaching in high school is replaced by accommodations in the general college environment and by professors using universal instructional design (UID) strategies.

b. College accommodations / note taking

Nine of the ten students interviewed were approved for the use of note takers as a disability related accommodation at the university. Notes are provided by a peer, solicited by the professor in most instances or by the teaching staff and may be online or accessible electronically. One young man described,

Having a note taker really kind of sets your mind on really paying attention to what the professor is saying. You don't have to worry about looking up at the board, taking notes, looking up at the board, taking notes… You can really kind of concentrate and listen….not worry about having to take them. I mean, I do take my own notes, don't get me wrong. I bring my computer to class and I type my notes, which has also been very helpful, you know, but I take my own. But it's still very good to have, to know that someone else is taking them for you so you can really kind of pay attention to what the teacher is saying.

A male peer stated, "And the note taking is the goodest (sic) thing ever. In some of these classes, I take notes for like, compare against another kid's notes is a lot better, and I have double the information." He appeared to recognize the benefit of note takers because of his own deficit in note taking, likely due to his auditory processing and processing speed issues as well as receptive and expressive language deficits.

A female student stated,

I do have a note taker for my big lectures, just because it's harder for me to understand things and write them down when they're going so fast. It just depends on the teacher. Some of the teachers do, which I think is great, they put their

slides online on the D2L website, which I think is very helpful. But some of them,

like, don't, and so it's kind of difficult for me. So I do use that as well.

The website she named is available to all students in the class, making notes online

available to all and reducing the need for this individual accommodation.

Only one student described the note taking accommodation as a hindrance,

because she reflected that she would rather get an outline and then add her own details

and process the information herself. Asked about accommodations used in college, she

said,

Well, extended time, and note taking, which I really don't like…. I think you

learn more, at least for me, if the teacher gives you her notes. And you can add on

things that you're listening to in class. And then if you have more questions, or

like some power points or something… more things you need to like focus on, go

to the teacher and, like, ask them and write it down. I mean, I don't think I want

just some random person giving notes to me… it's just I would rather have the

mistake than trusting someone else and learning from them.

Although approved for note taking, she did not use this resource after her first semester

and she continued to do very well academically. She focused more on the use of

strategies to be self-dependent in her learning than on accommodations she relied on

teachers to employ. She also counted on professors who were willing to use UID

techniques such as supplying the outline for a lecture. This is becoming a more common

practice at UA each semester.

6. Student Suggestions for Improving the Transition Process

  a. Experiential transition activities

  When asked what could be done to improve the process of transitioning from high school to college, student answers showed a pattern of students wanting a chance to experience college for themselves for a short or longer period of time before committing to one university. One student had that chance by going to a two-week readiness camp at UA. He reported, "I went to that Bear Down Camp and that was kind of a, I guess it was a good experience to be out of my comfort zone." He also had a chance to visit his sister at her university when he was in high school and felt that the visit allowed him to see what college entailed in terms of classes and the social setting. He continued,

> Well, I think the biggest thing that helped me was, like, seeing what college life was like. I flew out to Durham, North Carolina when my sister went to Duke…I spent the weekend with my sister and, like, went to bars… I went to class with her. I met some of the athletes, actually…So, I mean, I got to see what college is like… I took a visit, and, like, I saw a lot of, like, the independent stuff; and like, the work that my sister put in and it kind of got me a feel for college and what it would be like. And I think I was, like, a step ahead of what a lot of kids who maybe don't have, like, a sister or a brother who went away to school.

This student significantly improved his grades after the first year and made statements to the effect that he enjoyed his college experience. He pledged a fraternity, declared a major, and said he liked living in a residence hall.

  A young woman said that she wanted to have a similar experience but did not:

If we could only make our decision for college after being at a school for just a month. If you'd just stay at a school for a month, you could know so much more on what questions to ask and where you would really want to be placed. Because you'd know if you wanted to be in a city, or you knew if you didn't want to, you know, what academically: a small school or a big school. It's hard to make the decision when you really don't know anything about it.

This student did very well academically at UA but never really felt at home in Arizona. She transferred to a school closer to her East Coast home after the first year.

Another young woman described not really wanting to go to college until she got to experience visiting schools. Asked about taking steps to enter college, she said,

And I just never cared. And then I did some visiting schools, like I fell in love with one, and so I was just like, I want to go here. Like I had my heart set to stay up there…I hate changes, like big changes.

Her statement that she hates changes was supported by the fact that once she saw schools and was already experiencing changes, she was more comfortable and began to embrace the idea of leaving home.

b. Smaller classes for freshmen

Another repeating sentiment about easing the transition was that students wished that class sizes at the university were smaller. When asked what could have facilitated her transition to college, one young woman simply stated,

I think smaller classes for freshmen. That would make a huge difference… Small classes that I had here were definitely a help, a big help. I got to feel as though…

the teacher really knew who I was, I was able to kind of feel comfortable in the class. That was a big thing that got in the way was the big classes was hard for me.

A peer expressed that she felt the university instructors never got to know her in large classes by remarking, "Then coming…here…was like a big shock, like the way that the teachers…don't care. Like, if you're sick, like, you have to go to class. That's just what you're supposed to do."

A male student also found the large classes to be daunting. He said,

I guess it took a while getting used to the big lecture halls. That was the toughest transition because, kind of, there's just a guy reading out loud. If you're used to high school, and all the interaction, and like, I think it gets more complicated than it is in a lecture hall even though it's just what you learn, you've got to read the notes and figure out what to know for the tests. But at first, the first month or two was intimidating. That was really it. It wasn't that, nothing else was really that hard.

High school is interactive and teacher-centered, and in college, students attend lectures, listen and then read the notes and figure out on their own what is important to study. Students can use campus resources to find tutors, study groups and review sessions. They are not always aware of the variety of resources that exist or how to access them. Students who work with other students in small groups can often master the material taught in large lecture groups more easily than when they study on their own. Reponses to this question would suggest that freshmen want guidance on how to access

these resources. The overriding idea here, though, is that freshmen want smaller classes and feel more comfortable in small classes than in large lecture halls. A typical college courseload includes classes of both types.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary of Findings

This study was designed as a qualitative analysis of the personal experiences of

college freshmen with LD in relation to their transitioning from high school into

becoming students at the University of Arizona. The purpose of this research was to

identify what events facilitated this transition; to consider how these findings could be

used to improve transition services at both the high school and college levels; and to use

this knowledge to improve students' adjustment to college. I recruited ten students with

LD through the use of a flyer descriptive of the study, then obtained their informed

consent to interview them and to access their student records, and conducted face-to-face

interviews of 45 minutes to one hour in length with each participant at the Disability

Resource Center. I purposely used five students with first semester grade point averages

(GPAs) of 3.0 or higher, and five with GPAs below 2.0 in order to include students

experiencing a range of academic performance from being successful to being in

jeopardy of eventual disqualification from school. Interviews were recorded and

transcribed and were the primary source of data for this study. I also analyzed student

records that included documentation of LD such as psychoeducational evaluations, high

school Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), and records of accommodations at UA.

Throughout the process of conducting and transcribing the interviews, the data

were read, reread, sorted by relevant text, coded, searched for common themes, refined

and recoded. I attempted to identify themes that were pertinent to smooth or difficult

transition experiences. I referred to literature on handling qualitative data (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003; Richards, 2005) to sort categories for analysis that would explain the findings. Each theme was uncovered as a topic discussed by at least seven of ten participants. From this, I concluded that each theme was an important aspect of participants' experiences. The themes together represent the range of experiences that constitute the basic elements of the transition process as experienced by these students. Discussion for these findings and recommendations for further research are discussed in this chapter.

Data from the interviews suggested that the students shared common experiences in making the transition from high school to college. From these common experiences, six themes that were directly related to their personal transition experiences were developed. The six themes identified in this study were:

1. Students' expectations of going to college

2. Barriers encountered during transition

   a. Moving out and into a new environment

   b. Acquiring independent living skills

   c. Peer relationship issues

3. Events that facilitated the transition process

   a. Peer support

   b. Disability support services

4. Perceptions of disability

   a. Students' self perceptions

      b.   Others' perceptions of interviewees' disabilities

  5. Differential use of accommodations in high school and college

      a.   High school learning specialist accommodation

      b.   College accommodations / note taking

6. Student suggestions in improving the transition process

      a. Experiential transition activities

      b. Smaller classes for freshmen

Discussion

A recent literature review identified major themes affecting a student's transition experience as including concerns about high school teacher preparation, student autonomy and self advocacy skills, student knowledge of disability laws and their rights, parent involvement and expectations, high school teachers' attitudes and expectations for students with LD, students' psychological factors related to adjustment to college and appropriateness of the content of secondary school curricula. This study did not uncover issues directly related to high school teacher preparation, and students did not speak about disability laws at all (perhaps seen as an indication that they did not know about the laws); but students did address the ability to advocate for themselves and the fact that high school curricula did not adequately prepare them for college curricula. They also addressed parent and community expectations and other psychological factors related to their adjustment to transition.

Students with LD entering college face many of the same issues as their nondisabled peers: homesickness, a lack of understanding of the college bureaucracy and

helpful resources, difficulty with peer relationships, lack of ability to access support systems, and an overall lack of autonomy. Students' actual experiences when beginning college often fall short of their expectations. Any beginning college student would benefit from learning how to manage his or her time, become skilled at problem solving, create positive and supportive peer relationships, develop assertiveness skills, and learn effective study habits. Connections with significant adults and programs at a university make a difference in how easily a student makes the transition from high school, too. Students' usual sources of support at home were conveyed as no longer present to facilitate adjustment to an unfamiliar environment, but students can make new associations that provide similar support.

Many of the themes uncovered in this analysis supported the idea that students are not fully prepared for transition to college due to lack of autonomy at this stage, and they lack an understanding of what college responsibilities entail. Participants described lacking basic independent living skills such as managing money and time and even doing simple tasks such as laundry. These LD students described having specialists in high school who coached them on how to stay organized and plan for long-term assignments. Students said that they were overwhelmed at the university setting by the size of classes and the lack of ready availability of instructors to answer questions and assist with assignments. A discussion of each theme is detailed here.

1. Students' expectations of going to college

All ten students interviewed expected to go to college and community and parent expectations were that they would attend college. This is consistent with studies done by

Sandefur, Meier and Campbell (2006), who found that family resources have a strong relationship with college enrollment and that high levels of parental education greatly increase the probability that individuals will attend a four-year college, and greatly reduce the probability that individuals will not enroll in any postsecondary institution. This theme also relates to findings of Mpofu and Wilson (2004) regarding the roles of family, community and culture in the transition process in restricting or enhancing opportunity structures for students with LD. Family members and significant others' communication of expectations influence the choices and opportunities that students with disabilities make. Students whose parents expect them to go to college also hold these expectations for themselves.

2. *Barriers encountered during transition*

    a. *Moving out and into a new environment*

Eight of ten students interviewed came to UA from other states and they discussed moving far from home as a factor that inhibited their adjustment to college. Some talked about the familiarity of their homes and the foreignness of living in the desert, or living at a large university. Students cope with being homesick and adjusting to a new environment whether or not they have disabilities. They must consider who or what they miss and how to keep the connection with home while making many new connections. They may long for someone to listen to them as their parents did, or miss a role in high school as a student leader, athlete, or member of a certain social group. They may have trouble finding students with similar values or life experiences. As stated earlier, after one year, two of the eight out-of-state students did leave UA to return to

schools near their homes. This issue is not specifically addressed in the literature. Studies exist which explore the adjustment of freshmen to the college setting, but it is interesting that I did not find any studies that described the problems of moving far from home that these students shared.

b. *Acquiring independent living skills*

Taking care of personal responsibilities was a theme that seven of ten participants described in terms of learning how to manage time, eat healthy foods, do their laundry and manage the many things they needed to do in addition to studying in order to live independently. This theme has been highlighted in previous literature by the work of Leiman and Strasburger (1985), who described a major conflict between parents and their transitioning adolescents as an "independence vs. dependence" conflict. This is a situation where the typical adolescent [still living at home] wants to avoid restrictions or responsibilities and expects parents to take care of them in ways such as doing their laundry, cooking their dinner and providing an allowance. Parents' ambivalence can actually contribute to this conflict when they expect their children to choose a college or a career but do not allow them to make choices about spending money or purchasing clothes, for example (p.664).

This construct is also consistent with the works of Rice (1992) and Rice and Whaley (1994) who contended that students entering college must learn not only to adjust to the new demands of adult independence, but they must also cope with an environment that is very different from the one they have experienced in their high school years. A solution proposed by these authors is that parents can collaborate with graduating sons

and daughters to help them learn the nuances of independent living. I found this viewpoint to be of interest in regard to my findings, in that students did discuss enjoying new freedoms but also discussed feeling overwhelmed with the concurrent responsibilities that go along with this new sense of freedom. Students mentioned wishing they had learned how to better take care of themselves, and parents' ambivalence at teaching them did present a barrier in the transition process.

  c. *Peer relationship issues*

Seven of ten students interviewed expressed that they had difficulty making new friends, disliked some of the people they met at college, and/or missed their old friends. This could be expected, based on literature about transition (Cole & Bradac, 1996; Oswald & Clark, 2003; Weissberg, et al., 1978), identifying that close friends are especially important to adolescents, because they provide acceptance, trust, intimacy, enjoyment, stability, respect and opportunities for spontaneity. The students that I interviewed talked of being lonely and calling friends from home more than interacting with new friends during the first weeks of college. Two students talked about not liking peers in their residence hall and wishing they lived elsewhere. I did find literature that addressed this theme but I assumed that there would be more studies done on this aspect of transition to college, particularly as it relates to students with LD. These issues were often spoken of as being more overwhelming to my participants than academic difficulties.

3. *Events that facilitated the transition process*

a. *Peer support*

Along with peer issues, a theme of peer support emerged from the statements made by nine of ten participants during the interviews. Students remarked that support given to them by peers, both new friends at UA and old friends from home, was comforting as they adjusted to college. When asked about general concerns, students sometimes disclose peer issues rather than academic issues to disability access consultants. These peer issues often seem to be a larger source of anxiety and distress than academic issues, and conversely, students disclose how much peers assist them when they do encounter stressful situations. This is similar to literature about transition (Cole & Bradac, 1996; Oswald & Clark, 2003; Weissberg, et al., 1978). This theme is neither unique nor surprising, considering the impact of peer relationships on students at this age and particularly with students with LD.

b. *Disability support services*

All ten students interviewed mentioned their involvement with the DRC in positive terms. Each of them used accommodations for classes and/or exams. However, most also expressed that they did not know about disability support services offered in college while they were attending high school. Their responses to being asked how they got involved with DRC often reflected more involvement on the part of parents than on their own part. A review of the literature yielded information about disability support services' availability in postsecondary institutions and did address the lack of information that high school students appear to have about engaging these services (AHEAD, 1997;

Barnes, 2003; Gormley, et al., 2005; IDEA, 2004). At UA, there is a strong effort to recruit local students with disabilities, and materials are also sent to college information fairs in other cities. Frequently parents attend these events without their children who are applying to UA; or students do attend, bring the information home, and parents are the ones who follow through with the details of aligning support services. The literature does address the students' lack of information in enlisting support services, but does not offer specific solutions for this gap.

4. *Perceptions of disability*

   a. *Students' self perceptions*

All ten students interviewed either expressed the impact of their LD in terms of its effect on their education, or they described functional limitations such as processing deficits. Three of them expressed information about their disabilities in completely neutral terms, simply explaining the effects, but there was also mention of other people not understanding the disabilities of seven interviewees, which overlapped into another theme of "others' perceptions of interviewees' disabilities." Current literature appears to emphasize others' perceptions rather than self perceptions of transitioning students. What is interesting about this is the amount of recent literature in disability studies (Barnes, 2003; Linton, 1998; Mercer, 2002; Oliver, 1996) related to self perceptions of disability. However, there is no study that I could find about transitioning students' self perceptions of LD.

b. *Others' perceptions of interviewees' disabilities*

When asked about their LD, or about others who facilitated or were detrimental to their transition experiences, seven participants mentioned in some way how others viewed their disabilities. These perceptions tended to be negative. One student talked of teachers "closing the door on him." Others spoke about significant others who did not believe that the inability to comprehend concepts was truly a feature of the disability. Students talked of others seeing them as lazy or unmotivated. This perception of participants has some support in the literature. For example, Dupoux, Wolman and Estrada (2005) stated that some secondary teachers openly admit that accepting pupils with disabilities is a burden. General education teachers often regard special education teachers as being more qualified to handle students with disabilities in pullout programs or self-contained classes than general education teachers are in inclusive settings. This is also consistent with the work of Boe, Bobbit and Cook (1997) who studied teacher attitudes toward LD students and concluded that burnout is higher among special education teachers than among general education teachers and that some teachers respond to increased experience with students with disabilities with cynicism and unfavorable attitudes toward the students.

This unfavorable view towards students with LD apparently continues to exist many years after students with LD have been included in general instruction. It is unfortunate that the literature does not appear to address ideas about how to specifically change the negative view of disabilities that some school personnel continue to have. I

reviewed again the literature in disability studies (Barnes, 2003; Linton, 1998; Mercer, 2002; Oliver, 1996) to ensure that there was no such literature.

5. *Differential use of accommodations in high school and college*

   a. *High school learning specialist accommodation*

   All ten participants reported having a learning specialist or intensive tutoring and/or coaching in high school, generally in an individual setting. This is related to findings by Dalke and Schmitt (1987), who expressed that individual guidance in a controlled and structured high school setting may hamper the transition to a college environment. It is similar to the work of Wolanin and Steele (2004), who also reported that (1) many high school special education students receive substandard secondary curricula content in special education classrooms, and (2) instruction and learning are individualized. It is difficult to generalize this learning process to large group instruction. I found this of interest, in that high schools do recognize the standards of postsecondary programs by counseling students to prepare themselves for college and inviting college recruiters to visit students and families, but my research findings showed that this information is often not getting to students with LD.

   b. *College accommodations / note taking*

   When asked about accommodations used in college, nine of ten interviewees mentioned note taking. All ten were also approved for extended time for exams, but not as many students discussed this accommodation. Eight of the nine using note takers saw this accommodation as beneficial due to processing speed issues, inattention or trouble copying from visual presentations. One said she preferred to take her own notes although

she was approved for a note taking accommodation. None of the students had extensive experience with in-class accommodations such as note takers or extended time for tests in high school – they had the learning specialist role to assist with all academic tasks.

This theme related to note taking in college lecture classes as addressed in the works of Peverly (2006) who studied processing speed and working memory deficits that suggest the use of adjunct note takers as a reasonable accommodation for students with LD; and by Vanderhey, Marsh and Diekhoff (2005) who reported on the use of instructor-provided notes for all entry-level students. It is interesting that these authors acknowledge the gap between instructors' presentation of material and students' ability to process and record it, particularly if the students have deficits in processing skills as often indicated by LD.

6. *Student suggestions for improving the transition process*

   a. *Experiential transition activities*

All ten students suggested potential ways that the transition process could be improved. Eight of them mentioned seeking a hands-on experience to help them understand what college is like before committing to a specific school. Three students talked about visits with siblings or older friends in college. One student discussed his participation in a college transition program which allowed him to live on campus before enrolling as a freshman. Four other students said that they wished they had an opportunity to visit college for an extended period before attending as a freshman. This finding would support the need for summer transition programs similar to the programs at St. Ambrose University and Arizona State University (ASU), which allow students with

disabilities to experience college before they enter, to train them for the autonomy required to self advocate, use campus resources and access assistive technology.

b. *Smaller classes for freshmen*

Another suggestion for improving transition was the repeating theme of students wanting smaller classes as freshmen and feeling lost and overwhelmed in large lecture halls. Nine of my interviewees discussed this. Freshmen usually take a combination of small and large classes and participants remarked that they preferred classes of thirty or less students, where the professor got to know them and could answer questions during class. This relates to studies (AHEAD, 2004; Sitlington, 2003) that explore aspects of college classes that differ greatly from those in high school. Wolanin and Steele (2004) also addressed the issue of students in high school special education classes not being able to generalize the learning received in small group settings to the large classes in college. I found it regrettable that literature did not exist which could offer solutions to the negative student feelings about large class sizes, or provided results of studies that examined the effects of the larger classes on student progress.

I was surprised to discover that several things did not surface as findings, as indicated by reports of the majority of participants. Apparently connected to students' readiness for college are their abilities at goal setting: whether students actively engage in setting their own goals, allow parents and school personnel to set goals for them, or act collaboratively in the process. Formulating and orienting toward goals is an important dimension of the educational process because goals help to regulate human action, to define acceptable levels of performance, and to promote achievement (Carroll & Durkin,

1997). Students that I interviewed described their engagement in goal setting for college as ranging from passively allowing parents to take the lead to active participation in the process. There was no recurring theme, but their remarks were of interest to my investigation. According to Schneider and Stevenson (1999), "Teenagers with high ambitions but no clear life plan are misaligned; they are drifting dreamers who have limited knowledge about their chosen occupations, about educational requirements, or about future demand for these occupations." In my study, all of the students interviewed expected to go to college, but some of the interviewees discussed failing to set any long-term goals past high school.

Another related issue that was represented in interviewee remarks was that of the student allowing parents or school staff to take most of the responsibilities and not fully engaging in setting goals or getting ready to go to college on his or her own. Five interviewees gave the feeling that their parents orchestrated college visits and the application process and that they were essentially passive participants. Students were often vague about what they did to set goals – just earning good grades seemed to be enough to get into college for some. Some spoke of applying to UA "randomly," and asked what they meant by this, two students said that they did not feel they had a choice; that their parents made the decision. A different response was expressed by three of the ten interviewees as that of being active participants in the process.

Summation

In examining the gaps in the transition process presented by the data in this study, it would appear that barriers to the educational environment are at the root of many of

these gaps and that measures that incorporate the use of UID techniques in both high school and college would serve to overcome many academic barriers. Guidelines for UID techniques, according to the University of Guelph (2006) include considering the potential needs of all learners when designing and delivering instruction; identifying and eliminating unnecessary barriers to teaching and learning while maintaining academic rigor; creating conditions conducive to learning for all learners; and reducing the need for special accommodations for all learners; thereby contributing to a more equitable, inclusive environment while reducing time spent by students, instructors and staff to seek and support these accommodations. Replacing or supplanting learning specialist time in the high school with instruction and use of UID techniques may assist with easier acquisition of learning skills needed for lecture classes where these techniques are also in place.

In summary, themes that emerged from this research study related to students' experiences both in high school and in college. The influence of friends and significant others was accentuated by participants and not addressed specifically as it relates to transition in the literature. The acquisition of independent living skills was also given more attention by my participants than I found in the recent professional literature. Transition is not a seamless process and students' responses to my questions reflected an apparent desire on their part to make high school more like college and college more like high school.

Recommendations

The themes expressed by participants as barriers, supports, and ways to improve the transition to college suggest that universities use a more experiential approach in assisting students with LD in the transition from high school and that high schools take a more proactive approach to replication of college activities. Recommendations specific to programming include the following:

- Develop experiential transition programs for high school students with disabilities intending to go to college, such as the programs offered at St. Ambrose University and ASU.

- Conduct research on the efficacy of summer transition programs and their effect on student outcomes, such as retention statistics.

- Change the nature of high school special education programs from those that offer more individual support to replication of a college environment where accommodations must be asked for, and where UID techniques often replace individual programming. Additionally, programming done in the high schools can assist the transition to college more effectively than as has been reported by students who participated in this study. Replacing or supplanting learning specialist time in the high school with reasonable accommodations in classes and the use of UID techniques may assist with easier acquisition of learning skills needed for college lecture classes where these techniques are also in place. UID techniques such as allowing multiple means of assessing student knowledge, providing multi-modal presentations and using cooperative learning structures

may also enhance basic skills, build student confidence, and replicate instruction in college.

- Require high school experiences in "taking notes" by high school teachers giving lectures to students periodically rather than using only a discussion format. By doing so, students' note-taking skills can be evaluated and feedback given for improvement. Teachers can guide note-taking skills by initially providing an outline and later expecting students to write all the notes for a lecture or presentation. Students can review each others' notes using a checklist to determine that they covered all material.

- Provide assistive technology training in high school in order to help insure that students with disabilities have tools for accessing printed curricula. Many college freshmen do not know how to use assistive technology until they come to college and learn how to use the programs through disability resources.

- Enhance academic support programs in the freshman year of college, adding first-year seminars, refocusing orientation programs, and strengthening advising and mentoring (Schroeder, 2003). Programs do exist for college freshmen but students often do not intersect or engage in them. Improvements might be made in how they are designed or marketed, perhaps tapping into the communications media that students most often use, such as cell phones and the Internet.

Recommendations specific to research include the following:

- Conduct a study to replicate this study utilizing a more heterogeneous sample. This might provide richer data from broader cultural backgrounds. This study's

sample was representative of the population of DRC students at UA. However, some other four-year colleges have more culturally heterogeneous populations and studies done with these populations might include different findings.

- Conduct a similar research study with students nearing the end of their college careers to explore the long-term effects of transitioning to college and their first year experiences.

- Conduct a similar qualitative study including data collected from interviews with graduating high school students before they have started college.

- Conduct a similar research study using a larger sample with a continuous range of GPAs to explore the perceptions of transition on a wider range of students.

- Conduct a similar qualitative study including data collected from interviews with high school and college faculty members, college disability support providers, and parents and family members of students with LD who have made the transition to college to provide broader data from many perspectives.

- Conduct a similar qualitative study, adding a quantitative component such as a z-test for a study with a single sample. Codifying the frequency of responses could examine nonparametric measures of frequencies and proportions.

APPENDIX A

RECRUITMENT FLYER

Volunteers Needed for Interviews for Research Study

Are you a freshman receiving accommodations from the Disability Resource Center (DRC)? Did you have special education services in high school? If so, you might qualify to participate in a research study conducted by a doctoral student and disability access consultant (Phyllis Cowman) for her dissertation.

Requirements for this study:
- You must be a freshman at the University of Arizona
- You must be a student receiving services at DRC
- You must have been diagnosed with a Specific Learning Disability (LD)
- You must be at least 18 years old
- There are also GPA requirements (either 3.0 or above, or below 2.0) that will be discussed when you inquire about the study

If selected, you will participate in an interview that will be about one hour long. You may also be called after the interview to clarify things that you said, if needed. All interviews will take place in a private office at DRC. Your interview will be tape recorded and later transcribed. All information will be kept confidential. All participants will be compensated in cash upon completion of the one interview.

Benefits to you:
You will have the chance to participate in research that is intended to assist students with LD in transitioning from high school to college. You will be able to share what the researcher learns and assist her in formulating the actual study. You will be invited to learn helpful strategies for college success if you desire, following your interview. You will also earn a cash stipend for completing the interview.

Please contact:
Phyllis A. Cowman
(520) 621-1425 pcowman@u.arizona.edu

APPENDIX B

SUBJECT'S CONSENT FORM

Project Title: Personal Experiences of College Students with Learning Disabilities (LD) in Transitioning from High School to College: Qualitative Analysis

You are being asked to read the following material to ensure that you are informed of the nature of this research study and of how you will participate in it, if you consent to do so. Signing this form will indicate that you have been so informed and that you give your consent. Federal regulations require written informed consent prior to participation in this research study so that you can know the nature and risks of your participation and can decide to participate or not participate in a free and informed manner.

PURPOSE
You are being invited to participate voluntarily in the above-titled research project. The purpose of this project is to complete the dissertation requirements of the Ph.D. degree program for the Principal Investigator. The value of this research is intended to fill a gap in existing research about the personal experiences of students with LD in transitioning from secondary to postsecondary school, and to examine their experiences as reliable informants who are the best authorities on their own lives. Answering the research question could inform and drive effective programs that facilitate a smooth transition process for students with LD.

SELECTION CRITERIA
The Principal Investigator (PI) will discuss the requirements for participation in this study with you. To be eligible to participate, you must be a freshman who (1) receives accommodations through the Disability Resource Center (DRC) at the University of Arizona (UA), (2) received special education services in high school, including some level of transition services, (3) have a diagnosed Specific Learning Disability (LD), as indicated by documentation of such disability presented to DRC, and (4) is at least 18 years of age. Participants will also have to meet certain study-related criteria related to their Grade Point Averages (GPA). Five participants will need to have cumulative GPAs of 3.0 or higher, and five will need to have GPAs below 2.0. A total of ten individuals will be enrolled in this study overall.

PROCEDURE(S)
The following information describes your participation in this study which will last up to one semester. You will be interviewed by the PI in the privacy of her office at DRC. You will be asked open-ended questions about high school and college, and your transition to college. Your answers will be tape recorded and transcribed so that the PI may analyze all participants' answers. You may be called or contacted by email following the interview, if needed for clarification.

RISKS

The only potential risk is psychological. You will be asked about experiences that may have been difficult for you and may cause you to feel badly in recalling these experiences. If you disclose academic problems or stress related to this, the Principal Investigator will offer the opportunity to work with her to develop strategies for academic success if you choose. You will also be referred to your DRC access consultant for academic counseling if you choose.

BENEFITS

The benefit to you from your participation is increased knowledge of the transition process after the PI has analyzed the data, exposure to previously published literature about transition from high school to college for students with LD, and the offer of instruction in academic strategies if you choose. This can be done by appointment(s) with the PI, who can also provide written materials about these strategies. You may also have access to the findings of this study in writing and/or in a private meeting with the PI. The broader benefit of this research will be to inform and drive effective programs that facilitate a smooth transition process for students with LD.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The Principal Investigator will need access to your academic and DRC records for research purposes. Signing this consent form will allow her this access. She will keep this information confidential, for use only for this research study. Only the PI and the faculty advisor will have access to your name and the information that you provide. In order to maintain your confidentiality, your name will not be revealed in any reports that result from this project. Interview information will be locked in a cabinet in a secure place. All tapes, transcripts, and linked data will be destroyed following completion and defense of the dissertation. The results will be shared with the DRC to use in improving the program but you will not be identified by name.

PARTICIPATION COSTS AND SUBJECT COMPENSATION

There is no cost to you for participating except your time. The interview will take approximately one hour. Follow-up calls or emails will be very brief, probably less than ten minutes, if needed at all, simply to clarify specific questions. You will be compensated for your participation by being paid $10.00 upon completion of the interview. Your willingness to participate, or your declining to participate, will not impact the services or benefits you receive from DRC in any way.

CONTACTS

You can obtain further information from the principal investigator, Phyllis A. Cowman, M.S., Ph.D. Candidate, at (520)621-1425. If you have questions concerning your rights as a research subject, you may call the University of Arizona Human Subjects Protection Program office at (520) 626-6721. (If out of state use the toll-free number 1-866-278-1455.)

AUTHORIZATION

Before giving my consent by signing this form, the methods, inconveniences, risks, and benefits have been explained to me and my questions have been answered. I may ask questions at any time and I am free to withdraw from the project at any time without causing bad feelings or affecting my eligibility and services at DRC. My participation in this project may be ended by the investigator for reasons that would be explained. New information developed during the course of this study which may affect my willingness to continue in this research project will be given to me as it becomes available. This consent form will be filed in an area designated by the Human Subjects Committee with access restricted by the principal investigator, Phyllis A. Cowman, M.S., Ph.D. Candidate, at (520)621-1425 or authorized representative of the SERP Department. I do not give up any of my legal rights by signing this form. A copy of this signed consent form will be given to me.

_____   _____
Subject's Signature   Date

INVESTIGATOR'S AFFIDAVIT:
Either I have or my agent has carefully explained to the subject the nature of the above project. I hereby certify that to the best of my knowledge the person who signed this consent form was informed of the nature, demands, benefits, and risks involved in his/her participation.

_____   _____
Signature of Presenter   Date

_____   _____
Signature of Investigator   Date

APPENDIX C

SAMPLE: TRANSCRIPT OF ONE STUDENT INTERVIEW

3/8/06 – Male student in jeopardy group

PC: First of all, could you describe your learning disability and how it has affected your education?

Student: Well, my main learning disability is learning disabled. That's the main thing. And I don't think I have too many other side disabilities. Um, so I think that's just the main one is LD. And that has affected it by my needing more private schools, um, because I've never been in public. My mom always let… she found out when I was a kid that I was LD because that was one part was the reading and everything. So I started at private school. Private school just helped me and now I'm here. So that's how it affected me: not much.

PC: Do you think it's affected your college education at all… having a learning disability; do you think it's harder to study or your grades are lower?

Student: Not really because all the private schools helped me. So they brought me, like, through it.

PC: Okay, good. Can you discuss your high school years, including any special education classes or accommodations that you received during high school?

Student: Uh, high school years were, pretty, sort of easy. I didn't have any special education classes. But I had more of, I think I had, like unlimited test time. I think that was like with all students in most of the classes. So I didn't really get special accommodations, but I had this, uh, in my sophomore year and junior year in high school

I had a, I guess a learning sort of specialist, like, that helped me with tests and everything and tutoring. And they made me go there like after school and tell him all the homework I had and I had to do like thirty minutes of homework there. So that's what helped me also. If I ever had problems, I'd go there. And so did some other people.

PC: Okay, so you did make use of them and it sounds like they were helpful.

Student: Yeah.

PC: Did it help your grades in general?

Student: Yeah, yeah.

PC: Okay, and was there anything going on that wasn't helpful for you in high school, you know, that kind of got in your way?

Student: Um, not really.

PC: Okay. And when you were in high school, what were your goals for life after high school? What did you think you really wanted to do?

Student: I always wanted to do sports. Play. I was always in sports since I was like three. I was skiing when I was three. Always, always sports.

PC: You wanted to make your career involving sports?

Student: Yeah. Especially in the next…I'm trying to get an internship in the next summer. At Liberty, in the Garden. So I just want to be somewhere in sports, and if not that, probably a dentist, take over my dad's job.

PC: Okay.

Student: But definitely sports, I hope.

PC: Um, have you been involved in setting these goals yourself? Has anyone assisted you with that?

Student: My parents said just go be, like me. Not like "follow in my footsteps." My dad always wants me to be a dentist because it's a guaranteed job and money and guaranteed life… I guess that's true (laughs)… But I don't know if I'll be happy (laughs).

PC: So they're okay with you being happy and choosing another career?

Student: Yeah.

PC: When you first came here to college, back last August, what was that all about? How did you feel, what did you think when you arrived here?

Student: Truthfully, I didn't feel, I didn't have, like, I didn't feel any pressure. Which was so weird because all summer I was kind of excited but I thought towards like middle August I would get like, sort of scared. Like starting to move in and everything and seeing all the kids. Like, after a while, like, I knew two people coming and they're in my dorm, in high school. And I knew not a lot of people but I sort of knew a couple people from like, camp, and I like…but I just didn't feel scared at all. So it was like sort of easy.

PC: Yeah?

Student: It was kind of weird

PC: Yeah, because you were coming from such a long way away.

Student: Yeah, it was definitely weird because I didn't feel it. Whenever I go home, it feels like I never left. It's weird.

PC: So it feels comfortable?

Student: Yeah, it feels comfortable. That's the word: comfortable.

PC: When did you first know that you wanted to go to college? Was it during high school? Was it when you were little?

Student: It wasn't even like if I wanted to do it, it was like I was going. Like, yeah, because my parents, like they went, so it wasn't even really an option. I knew I was going and that was like my whole life. I always thought I was going to go to a small school though, because of my learning disability. I always thought I was going to one of like, two thousand people. I never knew I was going to end up here.

PC: And what made you decide to come to the U of A?

Student: Because I just wanted like a big, known school.

PC: You did want a big school?

Student: Yeah. [A fee-based support service] and DRC, and that's where my mom went. Campus, the weather, the classes seemed good. I needed a break from cold weather.

PC: You know, you're not the only student from a cold climate that's chosen the U of A

Student: Yeah, I know.

PC: When people were guiding you to going into college, like if you had counselors helping, teachers, or your parents, what kinds of things do you remember them saying to you? What kind of words of encouragement, warning, or anything?

Student: They said just keep doing what I…because I'm always a hard worker… so keep doing what you're doing and you'll be fine. And if not, you always have so many people who are like behind me that I can talk to. So that was always good to know.

PC: When did you actually start working on going to college? Like filling out applications or visiting schools?

Student: Oh, junior year of high school, definitely. That was the first thing to get in. It was all SATs. It was all like, all about college junior year and first semester senior year. But junior year it was throughout. Because you have to get like, A's and no B's, all A's, and you fill out all the applications for colleges. Plus I did like twelve applications because my mom wanted my options open so it was pretty crazy. And I had essays, essays for colleges…lots of work.

PC: It is lots of work. And thinking about your transition from high school to college…when you did get here, when you came from New York to Arizona, what things were helpful to you in this transition and what things were not helpful or got in your way?

Student: I'd say helpful was having a couple of kids here that I knew. So that was cool. And especially here, everyone is like really happy and nice, compared to New York City, where they're all like sort of not going to make an effort to help you. Here, everyone's nice. It's kind of weird to me. Also, in the classes, I would say actually that I thought it was going to be a lot different because I don't have twelve kids in my every class my whole life. Coming in is a couple of hundred. I guess I, not TV shows, but like seeing… I always wanted to go to campuses of colleges on big shows, like a lot of kids in every class. But here they have it and it hasn't really affected me.

PC: So it hasn't either been helpful or not helpful? Just a feature of being the U of A?

Student: Yeah, it's normal. Yeah, it hasn't got anything helpful or is anything bad.

PC: Was there anything that got in your way? You pledged a frat…

Student: Oh yeah, the frat. It was just time consuming.

PC: Anything else?

Student: No, not really. That's about it.

PC: Okay. So in general would you say your transition to college was easy or hard?

Student: Extremely easy, I'd say.

PC: And if there were any things to improve, what would you improve? In an ideal world…

Student: Well, last semester I would definitely improve my grades, that was not easy.

PC: How could you have improved those, do you think?

Student: I would have used [tutoring resources] and DRC a lot more. And studied more. Because I didn't take advantage, I was just so into college, I was just like, oh man, this is crazy. I didn't really study a lot. I didn't party but I just had like more of a social life, basketball, doing a lot of that kind of stuff. And, uh, that's about it.

PC: Okay. And any particular road blocks you encountered when you started college? Managing your time?

Student: Yeah, I'd say managing my time more. It's like a big thing.

PC: Anything else?

Student: Like go to bed early, especially in my dorm, Coronado. Everyone goes to bed around four on a weekday and I have classes at nine.

PC: So when you were going off to college, thinking again to all those steps of applying, getting admitted, visiting schools, parents' input, is there anything specific you want to say about those steps?

Student: Well, I had a college guidance counselor. So they helped me a lot. Because they like told me all the schools. They don't get everyone. You get like a meeting with them and like, whatever you want, they select. And they pick all the colleges that you would be good for. So in the beginning I wanted to go to like, U Mass for sports maybe, Indiana, Wisconsin, US Miami, like East Coast schools. Then, like, they told me like a couple of schools that help people with my learning disability and they said University of Arizona… [the fee-based support program] and I was like, "Oh, cool." I never realized I could go all the way out to Arizona. And then we came out here, and [the fee-based support service] was cool, basically. My mom knew all about it – she just knew all about it. And, uh, so the process was kind of crazy except in the last schools I think it was good up to this point.

PC: Now how and why did you become involved with the DRC?

Student: I think it was just part of the [fee-based service] thing. I didn't really know what it was till I came here. I had no idea what it was. I thought it was getting accommodations, I guess that's what it's for. But I think it's a lot better than [the fee-based service.].

PC: Okay, speaking of accommodations, what academic accommodations and course alternatives do you use here?

Student: I use note takers for some classes. Not like English or anything, because English is real easy. Um, I think I have time and a half on tests, and that's it for right now.

PC: And are these both helpful?

Student: Yeah. Yeah. Time and a half I, uh, time and a half doesn't really help me because I finish tests extremely fast. I try to take my time but, like, it just happens. I try, like, to read everything slower and use it, but I never end up using, like, more than the time needed. So that doesn't help, but it's good to have. And the note taking is the goodest thing ever. In some of these classes, I take notes for like, and compare to some other kid's notes and I have double the information.

PC: All right. Is there any other information that you think you'd like to share about your experiences as a student with a learning disability? Just what you'd say to wrap up or what you'd tell other students?

Student: If they want you to think it's different…like bright people don't have a learning disability, or that we're sort of different kids, but it's all the same stuff. Like people in a wheelchair are the same people, they're not, like, different. And so many people have learning disabilities. It's like a common thing now.

PC: It is.

Student: And like all people can do whatever they want in some way.

PC: Thank you.

APPENDIX D

SELF INTERVIEW

1. Describe your specific learning disability and how it has affected your education.

   PC: I do not have a learning disability.

2. Discuss your high school years, including special education classes or accommodations you received during high school.

   PC: I did not receive special education services. I went to a small parochial high school in Oklahoma City in the 1970's. I was not aware of any special education services at my high school. In the 1970's, I was not really aware of how special education services worked at all or who they served besides severely disabled students, who were sent to separate public schools.

   A. Were special education classes or accommodations in high school helpful? If so, how?

   PC: (Not applicable)

3. What were your goals during high school for life after high school? What was your involvement in setting these goals?

   PC: When I was in high school, I worked as a file clerk for a law firm. I thought I wanted to be an attorney until I was in eleventh or twelfth grade. After that, I thought I wanted to be a psychologist and I did major in psychology for two years in college, then changed my major to special education. I don't recall doing much active goal setting for college. I earned high grades in high school and earned a

high enough score on the ACT test to win a scholarship to the University of
Oklahoma (OU). It was always presumed that I would go to OU because that is
where most of my friends went and that is what my parents could afford. I entered
college as a psychology major, but when I enrolled, an advisor suggested I major
in English because of my high score in English on the ACT. I was not interested
in majoring in English and I declared psychology as my major and later changed
to special education.

A. Describe "going off to college."

PC: I remember being very excited to go to college in a town thirty miles from
my home, but when I actually began school, I was very homesick. I missed my
parents and sister and I called home daily and went home nearly every weekend
for the first semester. I did not bond with my roommate, who spent all her time
with her boyfriend. I changed roommates second semester and I began to stay at
school over the weekends and liked it a lot more.

B. When did you first know that you wanted to go to college?

PC: I don't remember ever not wanting to go. My parents went to college and
my family assumed that my sister and I would also go to college.

C. Who guided you and what did they say?

PC: My parents encouraged me to go to college and to do whatever I truly
wanted to do. They consistently validated my intelligence and skills and
provided unending encouragement whenever I experienced stress with school.

D. When did you start working on going to college?

PC: I recall applying for scholarships during senior year. I don't remember doing anything earlier than that, although I do recall a field trip to OU taken in sixth grade that was very inspiring and made me want to be a college student.

4. Discuss your transition from high school to college.

A. What helped?

PC: My parents provided so much love and support that it got me through the feelings of being homesick. It also helped to stay connected with my sister, who was in eleventh grade when I entered college, and her friends. I also made new friends at OU and began to like the school.

B. What got in the way?

PC: The dormitory that I lived in was a high-rise and very institutional looking. I did not like the atmosphere. The resident assistant did nothing to create a sense of community, so I did not get to know others on the floor easily. I also learned that it was harder to earn good grades in college than in high school. I always earned A's in high school, but my first semester in college, I had a C average.

C. Was the transition easy or hard, and in what ways?

PC: It was hard for the above-mentioned reasons. I did not suffer academically, although I was disappointed with my grades first semester. I did better after the first semester academically, too.

D. How could it have been improved?

PC: I could have joined a student organization or student government to meet other students and not gone home every weekend. Staying on campus some

weekends might have helped me meet others and I think I would have "bonded" with the university more.

E. What road blocks did you encounter when you started college?

PC: I didn't like living in the dorm, and I didn't realize how high the academic expectations really were. I had been an honor student in high school and it was easy for me to earn high grades without much effort. I learned that college required considerably more effort.

F. Discuss the process of going to college: applying, admission, visiting schools, and parents' input: what were the steps that you took?

PC: This is really hard to recall because it was over thirty years ago. There were no online application processes then. Every form had to be filled out by hand or on a typewriter and mailed in. I only visited OU and Oklahoma State University (OSU) and I chose OU because it was closer to home, had a reputation of being a better school than OSU, and I had friends who were also going to go to school there.

5. Describe how and why you became involved with the Disability Resource Center at UA.

(Not applicable)

6. Describe the academic accommodations and course alternatives for which you have qualified. Which of these were most helpful and why?

(Not applicable)

5. Is there any other information that you would like to share concerning your

experiences as a student with a learning disability?

(Not applicable)

TABLE 3.1

Questions Included on Semi-Structured Interview Instrument (Skinner, 2004)

_____

1. Describe your specific learning disability.

2. When was your learning disability formally identified? Describe this process.

3. What laws are you familiar with that apply to people with learning disabilities in college? To your knowledge, have you made use of any of these laws in high school or college?

4. Who was most instrumental in your decision to attend college? What did they do that influenced your decision?

5. Describe your search for a college and your experiences during the admissions process.

6. Describe how and why you became involved with the learning disabilities program at this college.

7. What was your major area of study? Describe the decision making process you went through to choose that major.

8. Describe the major factors (e.g., people, organizations, programs, etc.) that facilitated or were detrimental to your success in college.

9. Describe the academic accommodations and course alternatives for which you qualified. Which of these were most helpful and why?

10. Describe your experiences with faculty.

11. Describe your current professional and personal situation.

12. Is there any other information that you would like to share concerning your

   experiences as an adult college student with a learning disability? (pp. 99 & 100).

TABLE 3.2

Interview Instrument for my Qualitative Research Study

_____

1. Describe your specific learning disability and how it has affected your education.

2. Discuss your high school years, including special education classes or accommodations you received during high school.

   A. Were special education classes or accommodations in high school helpful? If so, how?

3. What were your goals during high school for life after high school? What was your involvement in setting these goals?

   A. Describe "going off to college."

   B. When did you first know that you wanted to go to college?

   C. Who guided you and what did they say?

   D. When did you start working on going to college?

4. Discuss your transition from high school to college.

   A. What helped?

   B. What got in the way?

   C. Was the transition easy or hard, and in what ways?

   D. How could it have been improved?

   E. What road blocks did you encounter when you started college?

   F. Discuss the process of going to college: applying, admission, visiting schools, and parents' input: what were the steps that you took?

5. Describe how and why you became involved with the Disability Resource Center at UA.

6. Describe the academic accommodations and course alternatives for which you have qualified. Which of these were most helpful and why?

7. Is there any other information that you would like to share concerning your experiences as a student with a learning disability?

TABLE 3.3

Student Demographic Characteristics

(Abbreviations follow table)

Student Age Gender	Home	GPA Fall 2005	GPA Spring 2006 & Cum GPA	Plans after first year, units earned	Disability diagnosis	Accoms.	Major
1 18, M	AZ	0.333	0.462 0.474 (college DQ)	To attend PCC, 6	LD & ADHD	1,2,3,4,5,6	History
2 19, F	NY	3.75	3.0 3.409	Transfer to U. Wisc, 30	LD	1,2,3,5	Psych-ology
3 19, M	NY	1.583	2.75 2.167 (off prob.)	Cont. at UA, 22	LD	1,3	Und.
4 19, F	MA	3.538	3.667 3.6	Cont. at UA, 25	LD & ADHD	1,2,3,7	Pre-bus.
5 19, F	IL	3.538	3.5 3.52	Cont. at UA, 25	NVLD, ADHD, Depression, Neurofibromato-sis	1,2,3,6,8,9	Pre-ed.
6 18, M	CA	1.462	2.0 1.72 (cont. prob.)	Cont. at UA, 25	NVLD & TS	1,3,6,8	Jour.
7 19, F	CA	1.0	2.4 2.0 (off prob.)	Cont. at UA, 25	NVLD, ADHD & Depression	1,3,7	Und.
8 18, M	AZ	3.231	3.75 3.48	Cont. at UA, 25	LD, ADHD & TS	1	Psych.
9 19, F	CT	1.545	3.143 2.44 (off prob.)	Cont. at UA, 23	Mobility (Spina Bifida) & LD	1,3	Und.
10 18, M	CT	3.0	3.667 3.286	Transfer to U. Del., 21	NVLD	1,3	Pol. Sci.

Abbreviations:
DQ = Disqualified from college
Prob. = Probationary status (academic jeopardy)
ADHD = Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
VIQ = Verbal Intelligence Quotient
PIQ = Performance Intelligence Quotient
FSIQ = Full Scale Intelligence Quotient
PCC = Pima Community College
UA = University of Arizona
U. Wisc. = University of Wisconsin
U. Del. = University of Delaware
LD = Specific Learning Disability
NVLD = Non-verbal Learning Disability
ADHD = Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
TS = Tourette Syndrome
Und. = Undeclared major
Pre-bus. = Pre-business
Pre-ed. = Pre-education
Jour. = Journalism
Psych. = Psychology
Pol. Sci. – Political Science

Accommodations:
1 – extended time
2 – minimal distraction
3 – note taking
4 – texts on tape or CD
5 - reader or taped exam
6 – use of computer for exams
7- assistance with Scantron forms
8 – subvocalization (use of private room)
9 – use of calculator for exams

Additional disability info:
1. LD – Math, ADHD / Inattentive type. Deficits in working memory, visual-motor integration, cognitive efficiency and processing speed. Takes Strattera for ADHD. VIQ = 95, PIQ = 94, FSIQ = 95

2. LD – Reading and Math. Deficits in short term memory & working memory. VIQ = 93, PIQ = 113, FSIQ = 102

3. LD – Reading. Deficits in language processing, phonological awareness, auditory discrimination, receptive and expressive language. VIQ = 100, PIQ = 92, FSIQ = 97

4. LD – Reading, ADHD / Primarily inattentive type. Deficits in associative memory, long term retrieval, processing speed, reading comprehension, auditory discrimination, word analysis and language development. VIQ = 105, PIQ = 113, FSIQ = 109

5. NVLD, Neurofibromatosis Type 1, ADHD, Depression. Impulsive, low tolerance for frustration, socially isolated. Deficits in visual-spatial skills, processing speed, auditory memory, short term memory, listening comprehension, perceptual organization, motor coordination skills, reading comprehension and written expression. VIQ = 106, PIQ = 75, FSIQ = 90

6. NVLD, TS. Deficits in motor coordination, fine motor skills, visual processing, sequencing tasks, writing fluency, inability to discern nonverbal cues, difficulty finding hidden meanings in language and social interactions, organizing work and task completion. VIQ = 111, PIQ = 106, FSIQ = 109.

7. NVLD, ADHD, Depression. Hyperactive and impulsive behavior. Deficits in word retrieval, following directions, sequencing tasks, visual processing, difficulty solving novel problems, understanding social interactions. VIQ = 97, PIQ = 81, FSIQ = 88

8. LD – Writing, TS, ADHD. Distractible, inattentive, hyperactive, impulsive. Deficits in written expression. No IQ scores available.

9. LD – NOS, Spina Bifida, hydrocephalus. Deficits in spatial relations, problem solving, abstract reasoning, perceptual organization, working memory, oral expression, listening comprehension, reading fluency, vocabulary skills, math reasoning and processing speed. VIQ = 92, PIQ = 86, FSIQ = 90

10. NVLD. Deficits in nonverbal visual reasoning, problem solving, attention, low frustration tolerance, problems with difficulty with authority, perceptual organization, processing speed, reading comprehension, written expression. VIQ = 102, PIQ = 55, FSIQ = 77

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