

Developing Self-Advocacy: The Experience of College Students
in Structured Learning Disabilities Programs

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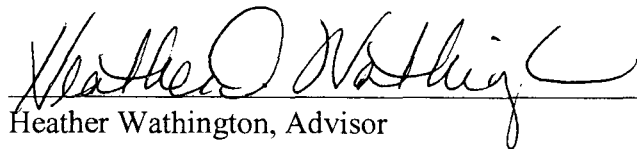
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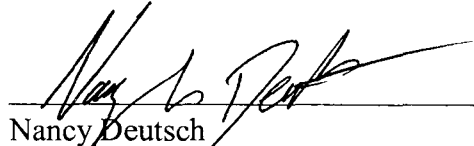
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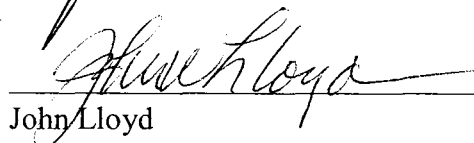
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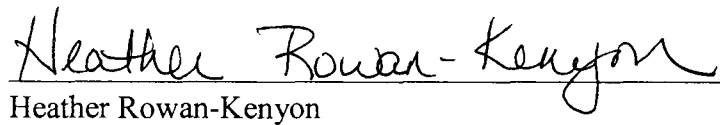
APPROVAL OF THE DISSERTATION

This dissertation, Self-Advocacy in Post-Secondary Students with Learning Disabilities, has been approved by the Graduate Faculty of the Curry School of Education in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.


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Abstract

The number of students with disabilities arriving on college and university campuses is increasing. Of those students reporting a disability, over half of them state they have a learning disability. Unlike high school, the burden is on the student in college to demonstrate the need for services and communicate this need to the institution in a timely manner. It is therefore essential that students possess adequate self-advocacy skills to receive the services they need to be successful. This study describes three U.S. institutions' structured learning disabilities programs. The theoretical framework was based on Chickering and Reisser's (1993) third vector of college student development which notes the importance of moving from a state of dependence through a position of autonomy to a state of interdependence; and Aune's Interactional Model of Disability which focuses on the importance of the context in which the individual lives and works. Students' academic experience is grounded in the environment of the learning disabilities program and the broader campus climate of the university. Interviews with students and university personnel confirmed that students in these programs do exhibit a sense of self-advocacy. Conversations with faculty, the original focus of this study, were considered a less important factor in students' development of communication skill than conversations with tutors. Self-efficacy and motivation emerged as essential foundational components of self-advocacy. However, students' development of interdependence did not occur in the way outlined by Chickering and Reisser's third vector. At all three institutions discussed, the atmosphere was one of acceptance and support rising from a long history

of disability services, reflecting the importance of Aune's Interactional Model of Disability. One of the most salient findings of this study is the construction of the Circle of Support by the learning disabilities program and other university personnel. This was found to be one of the most critical aspects of the programs' success and, coupled with the self-advocacy skills fostered by the communication skills developed in conversations with tutors, it helped to create an environment in which students with learning disabilities have the ability to thrive.

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The program directors at the three institutions opened their offices and cleared their calendars for my visits. They contacted potential participants, found space for me to conduct interviews, arranged for class observations, shared their publications, and allowed me to witness the day-to-day interactions of the learning disabilities' centers. Their warm welcome made these visits enjoyable as well as enlightening. Student participants openly and honestly shared their challenges and triumphs. I am honored to have heard their stories and appreciate their willingness to discuss their experiences with me.

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And finally, I am forever indebted to my husband, Scott Miller, and our daughters Audrey Catherine and Leah Faith. Their enduring patience gave me the time and space I needed to accomplish this goal. Without them, none of this would have been possible. I dedicate this work to them.

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my daughters, Audrey Catherine Miller and Leah Faith Miller, and to my husband, Scott Miller, in gratitude for their unwavering support and encouragement.

Chapter 1

Introduction

The number of students with disabilities arriving on college and university campuses is increasing. Of those students reporting a disability, over half of them state they have a learning disability – a “heterogeneous group of disorders” (NJCLD, 1999) affecting a variety of mental processes and academic skills throughout the lifespan. The fastest growing group of students with disabilities on college and university campuses is students with learning disabilities (Henderson, 2001). This increase in enrollment is attributed to a number of factors including secondary school focus on college preparation for students with disabilities, the publication of directories and handbooks for college-bound students with disabilities, a willingness among college admissions personnel to accept students with learning disabilities, and an increase in research and publications concerning adults with learning disabilities (Vogel, Leonard, & Scales, 1998).

With the rising number of students with disabilities in universities comes the need to address the related potential challenges facing these students as they make the transition from secondary to post-secondary education. In addition to the adjustment-to-college issues faced by all students, those with learning disabilities must also navigate a variety of disability-related issues and secure needed services.

To begin a discussion of learning disabilities, it is first crucial to define the term - definitions of learning disabilities have been written and argued throughout the history of the concept. These definitions form the structure upon which learning disability policies, services, and research are built. The term “learning disability” has been attributed to Samuel Kirk in the 1960s. Kirk, a psychologist who worked with issues such as mental

retardation and language deficiencies in children, came to understand this phenomenon as “a retardation, disorder, or delayed development in one or more of the processes of speech, language, reading, spelling, writing or arithmetic resulting from a possible cerebral dysfunction and/or emotional or behavioral disturbance and not from mental retardation, sensory deprivation, or cultural or instructional factors” (Kirk, 1962, p. 263). Since this definition was put forward in 1962, a number of other scholars, educators, legislators, and advocacy groups have attempted to compose a comprehensive definition of learning disabilities to aid in understanding and educating these students. Barbara Bateman was the first to suggest a discrepancy between an individual’s intellect and academic performance. A student’s intelligence, measured by a standard I.Q. assessment, was compared to scores on achievement tests. High intelligence and low achievement were considered indicators of a learning disability. The acceptance of this concept has had a significant impact on the way individuals are diagnosed as having a learning disability (Vogel & Reder, 1998).

The definition most often used by teachers and other school personnel was included in the Education for All Handicapped Children Act in 1977 stating,

The term ‘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 may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, speak, read, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations (Education of All Handicapped Students Act, 1977).

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) updated the 1977 definition and includes specific measures for providing appropriate educational opportunities for children with disabilities.

One of the most widely-accepted definitions among disability scholars and service providers is the one published by the National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities (NJCLD), an advisory group who penned a statement in 1989 as a response to the gaps the organization identified in the federal definition. Defining a learning disability as a “heterogeneous group of disorders” (p. 2), this organization acknowledges the significant variation among individuals with disabilities. This definition also addresses the co-morbidity, or simultaneous occurrence, of disabilities with other conditions, but asserts that the learning disability is a separate disorder. Crucial to the discussion of post-secondary students with learning disabilities, the NJCLD definition states that such disabilities “may occur across the lifespan” (NJCLD, 1999). Similarly, the Association for Children with Learning Disabilities in its 1986 definition noted the lifelong impact of learning disabilities. This group, now known as the Learning Disabilities Association, also included the impact of these disabilities on areas other than academics, stating that “the condition can affect self-esteem, education, vocation, socialization and/or daily living activities” (quoted in Kavale & Forness, 2000, p. 444).

From the earliest to the most recent, these definitions have some important common features. All acknowledge that learning disabilities are distinct disorders affecting mental processing. According to these definitions, the impairment of individuals with learning disabilities cannot be attributed to mental retardation, environmental deprivation, or emotional disturbance. Vogel and Reder (1998) assert:

it is important to state clearly that *learning disability* is not synonymous with *mental retardation*. In fact, there is good evidence that reading disabilities occur in individuals of average and above-average intelligence, as well as in those who are intellectually gifted (p. 17, emphasis in original).

These words echo Kirk's earliest definition in which he differentiated mental retardation from learning disability.

Several of the definitions include a presumption of cause, indicating that the disorders are likely the result of neuroprocessing deficiencies or a dysfunction of the central nervous system. In an embattled arena where the existence of the disability has been questioned, firmly establishing a biological cause has been an important step in gaining acceptance. With the development of computerized brain imaging and recent advances in neurological research, the link between learning disabilities and brain function is becoming clearer (Richards, 2001).

Post-secondary Students with Learning Disabilities

Of the approximately nine percent of students with disabilities entering post-secondary education between 1991 and 1994, an increasing percentage of these students indicated learning disabilities as their primary disability (Henderson, 1995). The trend has continued throughout the last decade. In 1998, 16 percent of students with disabilities reported having a learning disability. Two years later, that had leapt to 40 percent (Henderson, 2001). Several reasons for this increase have been postulated including a willingness of private independent colleges to accept students who show

promise of success, the provision of additional support services throughout the educational experience, and an increase in the expectations and aspirations of students with learning disabilities (Vogel et al., 1998). Post-secondary institutions are responding to the rising tide of students with disabilities by providing services aimed at helping them succeed. Brinckerhoff, Shaw & McGuire (1996) outlined four concerns which affect a number of students with learning disabilities: 1) easing the transition between secondary and post-secondary education; 2) creating and understanding policies of eligibility and access; 3) determining academic services with the student as the central decision-making voice in the process; and 4) deciding upon appropriate accommodations. Finn (1999) conducted a qualitative study of students with learning disabilities at three institutions: a community college, a small independent college and a larger four-year institution. The students in her study indicated that coursework and testing accommodations such as extended time for assignments and the use of a private space for testing were beneficial to their academic success. In addition to these accommodations, services reported by students to be available included peer support groups, study groups, tutoring from other students or professionals, advising by program staff, and career guidance.

In 1999, the NJCLD issued a report regarding its position on college students with learning disabilities. This report links the matriculation of students with learning disabilities to the diversity initiatives prevalent in many institutions. Though the NJCLD acknowledges that students with learning disabilities must be held to the same high standards as other students, the group asserts that every opportunity should be given to ensure the success of these students. The report goes on to recommend that attention be paid to admission policies, documentation policies, appropriate accommodations, and

curriculum adjustments. The authors conclude by listing recommendations for creating an environment that will be responsive to the needs of students with disabilities (NJCLD, 1999).

In addition to the typical challenges and concerns facing all students, students with learning disabilities may find additional roadblocks to their success. Blalock (1996) states:

Youth with learning disabilities face the same challenges as their non-disabled peers in their movement toward adult life activities. These hurdles are physical and psychological "growing pains" that include psychological and physical separation from parents, economic struggles, serious decision-making about the future, evolution of a solid self-identity, and establishment of lasting relationships. . . [S]tudents without disabilities generally deal with those challenges with varying but adequate degrees of success; family and friends assume that these students will triumph and move forward, and this (typically unspoken) expectation seems to play an important role in spurring on the general adolescent population. The challenges are cultural rites of passage that everyone is expected to meet and surpass.

In contrast, the presence of learning disabilities may hinder significant others in the student's life from solidly communicating those same expectations of ultimate success and, as a result, may impede the individual's actual triumphs." (p. 25)

The most significant challenge facing students with learning disabilities is the profound paradigm shift that occurs between secondary and post-secondary education. This shift is not only present in the environmental differences and expectations of the college experience but also in the laws governing the treatment of students with learning disabilities.

In their study of transition between high school and college for students with learning disabilities, Janiga and Costenbader (2002) note the differences in academic structure between high school and college. College classes are generally larger and meet less frequently, requiring students to work independently. In comparison to high school assignments, school work in college tends to be project-based and necessitate longer-term planning. Students in post-secondary education are given much more flexibility in scheduling and often have more unstructured time. For many students with disabilities, adequately planning and preparing for academic success in such an unstructured environment is difficult.

In addition to these structural differences, there is also an attitudinal difference between secondary and post-secondary education. Students must see themselves as "smart enough to go to college" (Janiga & Costenbader, 2002, p. 463). Vogel and Reder (1998) noted that a lack of self-confidence and a tendency to externalize their success (e.g. attribute an accomplishment to "luck") often prevent individuals with disabilities from accepting credit and responsibility for their achievement. The development of a sense of self-efficacy provides an important foundation for academic success.

The biggest paradigmatic change for students with disabilities entering higher education is the result of the laws governing secondary and post-secondary institutions.

Elementary and secondary institutions primarily develop their policies and services under the auspices of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and the federal regulations supporting this statute (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Amendments, 1997). This law, enacted first in 1975 as the Education for All Handicapped Children Act, guarantees a “free appropriate public education” in the “least restrictive environment” to all children regardless of disability (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Amendments, 1997, p. 1). The central purpose of this law is to maximize the educational opportunity for each student. To this end, schools are required to determine which students are eligible for services, determine an educational plan for each individual student, provide the necessary academic support to best serve each student, and make available related services as needed. These related services include transportation, occupational or physical therapy, speech and language therapy, and counseling and psychological services. IDEA places the responsibility for students’ diagnosis, education, and support squarely on the local education agency for the years the student is enrolled in public elementary or secondary school.

By contrast, institutions of higher education form policies and procedures based on the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. These laws are concerned with equalizing access to education for students with disabilities, not in maximizing the educational opportunity. “[T]he goal of the ADA, unlike that of IDEA, is to provide equal access to programs, services, and facilities, not to ensure entitlement to academic success” (Gordon, Lewandowski, & Murphy, 2002, p. 361). Whereas the schools were primarily responsible for identifying and supporting students with disabilities under IDEA, ADA

and Section 504 place that responsibility on the student. Institutions receiving federal funds are required to make reasonable academic and physical accommodations for students with disabilities when requested by the student to do so. The burden is on the student to demonstrate the need for services and communicate this need to the institution in a timely manner. Hadley (2006) states, "students with learning disabilities shift from a high-school environment that allows them to be relatively 'passive' to a college environment that expects them to be relatively 'active' regarding their learning disabilities" (p. 10). It is therefore essential that students possess adequate self-advocacy skills to receive the services they need to be successful (Hartman, 1993; Rothstein, 1998; Smith, English, & Vasek, 2002).

In elementary or secondary schools, disability services are mandated by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Amendments, 1997), a federal law which ensures students with disabilities will be sought and provided a "free appropriate public education" (IDEA, 1997, p. 1). The schools are required to identify students who should be tested and provide assessments for those students. Once the assessments are completed, the school is responsible for making certain that the student is given the accommodations and arrangements needed for that student to attain an education.

By contrast, students with disabilities in post-secondary education are granted rights by the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act (Americans With Disabilities Act, 1990; Rehabilitation Act, 1973). These laws are civil rights laws, guaranteeing a student will not face discrimination on the basis of disability. As civil rights laws, they ensure access to educational opportunities. They do not contain

provisions to enhance or provide mandatory free, appropriate educational opportunities. This creates an entirely new paradigm for students with disabilities. Where once the school was charged with identifying, evaluating, and providing services for the students, now the college student has full responsibility for his/her education (Scott, 1991).

This legal shift requires the student to advocate for herself, possibly for the first time. Often secondary education special education services have not involved the student in developing the Individualized Education Plan nor do they encourage the student to develop strategies to foster independence (Field et al., 2003). For students who have had their educational accommodations managed by a committee of concerned adults, suddenly being required to manage their own needs can be quite difficult.

Self-Advocacy

Several definitions of self-advocacy have been posited. Hartman's (1993) definition states "that the student understands his/her disability, is aware of the strengths and the weaknesses resulting from the functional limitation imposed by the disability, and is able to articulate reasonable need for academic or physical accommodation" (p. 40). Van Belle et al. (2006) define self-advocacy as, "the ability to *act* on what the individual knows about his or her needs, even though people may not offer the individual a clear choice or ask the individual to state his or her needs" (p. 40). Smith, English & Vasek (2002) consider the student's role in the identification of disability and securing accommodations. Within each of these definitions, two key components of self-advocacy, metacognition and communication, emerge. Students with disabilities must

first recognize their unique set of strengths and weaknesses and then must be able to communicate their needs to faculty and others in positions to provide assistance.

Dependence, Autonomy and Interdependence

Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) declare, "no psychosocial theorist has had more influence on the research on college student development or administrative efforts to promote it than Arthur Chickering" (p. 21). In *Education and Identity* published in 1969 and revised with Linda Reisser in 1993, Chickering delineated seven vectors of college student development. The third vector in their model forms the basis for the theoretical framework for this study - it stresses the importance of moving from a state of dependence through a position of autonomy to a state of interdependence. Students successfully negotiating this transition develop a sense of self-sufficiency and an appreciation for relationships with others. For students with learning disabilities, this transition is crucial. The development of self-advocacy is an important part of the shift from secondary to post-secondary education. Students must develop metacognitive skills and cultivate the ability to clearly communicate their unique learning needs.

Structured Programs for Students with Disabilities

As the number of students with disabilities began increasing during the 1980s, some institutions established formal, institutional policies for supporting students with learning disabilities. These programs vary in the level of service they provide to students with disabilities (Kravets & Wax, 2005). The most comprehensive and prescriptive of these programs provide individualized services with specialized professionals trained to

work with students with disabilities. These structured programs offer a similar, familiar framework that many students, especially those with severe learning disabilities, may find comforting and supportive. Students in structured learning disabilities programs will be the focus of this study. Using the dual definition of self-advocacy as involving metacognition and communication and Chickering and Reisser's (1993) third vector as a conceptual framework, the development of self-advocacy will be explored. The specific questions guiding this study are: Do students involved in structured learning disabilities programs develop self-advocacy, defined as an ability to understand one's unique abilities and needs and to communicate those needs to faculty and others? If so, how do students in these programs develop self-advocacy?

Scope and Purpose of the Study

This study uses a qualitative case study approach and is based on a series of visits to three universities, Montgomery University, University of Hillsville, and the University of Greenburg. These three-day site visits occurred in January and February 2008 and involved observation of the learning disability center and campus and interviews with students, faculty, and staff. A second visit to Montgomery University was added after the first trip had to be shortened due to inclement weather. To supplement the field experiences, documents such as newsletters, handbooks, flyers, and educational handouts were analyzed. Fourteen students and 23 faculty and staff members participated in interviews lasting up to one hour. Two staff participants were recent graduates of the learning disability program at their institution and were interviewed using both student and faculty protocols.

The three universities in this study are quite different. Two are private institutions with a historical relationship with protestant churches while the third is a state institution. They are located in diverse regions - one in a very rural area, another in a mid-sized city and the third in a large metropolitan area. Two of the universities have graduate programs, granting doctorates and supporting research endeavors, contrasting with the small, liberal arts undergraduate institution. In spite of the differences in the institutions, the structured learning disabilities programs housed within them are remarkably similar. All three offer comprehensive services for students with documented learning disabilities. Services provided include student assessment, academic coordination, tutoring, supplemental academic advising, classes and workshops, and peer support networks. The similarities among the programs allow participants to be considered collectively.

Extensive research has been conducted on college student development and learning disabilities, but scholarship focused exclusively on students in specific types of learning disabilities programs has been very limited. Program administrators find little research upon which to base informed choices about students' experiences in these types of programs. Universities considering establishing or enhancing a structured learning disabilities program need information to determine the best fit between institution and program. This study aims to fill that void by examining the experiences of college students in structured learning disabilities programs, focusing particularly on the critical concept of self-advocacy development and how it fosters its academic success as students.

The next chapter includes a discussion of the literature, forming the catalyst for the current study. Following the literature review, the third chapter describes in detail the

methodology employed. Chapters 4 through 6 are dedicated to the findings of the study, focusing on institutional environments, contextual-based themes, and student-centered conclusions respectively. The final chapter includes a summary of these findings and considers the limitations of the study and areas for further research.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

“The bulk of the research in the field of learning disabilities has concentrated on children and adolescents, with comparatively little research involving adults” (Rath & Royer, 2002, p. 354). As more students arrive on college campuses and seek services to ensure success, this gap in research becomes more apparent. Based on the work of Chickering and Reisser (1993) and the interactional model of learning disabilities posited by Asch (1984), this study seeks to examine self-advocacy development among students in structured learning disabilities programs. This chapter will begin with an overview of pertinent literature related to college students with learning disabilities. The concept of self-advocacy will be explored with particular attention paid to metacognitive and communicative aspects. Attention will then turn to the types of programs in which study participants are enrolled. Finally, the theoretical framework of the study will be examined.

Post-secondary Students with Learning Disabilities

To begin a discussion of learning disabilities, it is crucial initially to define the term. Definitions of learning disabilities have been written and argued throughout the history of the concept. These definitions form the structure upon which learning disability policy, services, and research are built. The term “learning disability” has been attributed to Samuel Kirk in the 1960s. Kirk, a psychologist whose work centered on language deficiencies in children, came to understand this phenomenon as “a retardation, disorder, or delayed development in one or more of the processes of speech, language,

reading, spelling, writing or arithmetic resulting from a possible cerebral dysfunction and/or emotional or behavioral disturbance and not from mental retardation, sensory deprivation, or cultural or instructional factors” (Kirk, 1962, p. 263). Since this definition was put forward by Kirk in 1962, a number of other scholars, educators, legislators, and advocacy groups have attempted to compose a comprehensive definition of learning disabilities to aid in understanding and educating these students. Barbara Bateman’s 1965 definition was the first to suggest a discrepancy between an individual’s intellectual potential and academic performance. A student’s intelligence, measured by a standard I.Q. assessment, was compared to scores on achievement tests. High intelligence and low achievement were considered indicators of a learning disability. The general acceptance of this concept has had significant influence on the way individuals are diagnosed as having a learning disability (Vogel & Reder, 1998).

The guiding definition for teachers and others providing assistance to elementary and secondary students with learning disabilities is the one first delineated in the Education for All Handicapped Children Act in 1977 stating,

The term ‘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 may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, speak, read, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations (Education of All Handicapped Students Act, 1977).

The updated version of this statute, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), maintains the 1977 definition and includes specific procedures for providing optimal education for children with disabilities (IDEA, 2004).

In 1990, the National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities (NJCLD) published a definition in response to perceived gaps in the federal definition. Considering a learning disability as a “heterogeneous group of disorders” (p.2), the organization emphasized the significant variation among individuals with disabilities. The NJCLD definition states that such disabilities “may occur across the lifespan” (NJCLD, 1991, p.2), a concept of particular importance when considering post-secondary students. The Association for Children with Learning Disabilities also noted the lifelong impact of learning disabilities in its 1986 definition. This group, now known as the Learning Disabilities Association, included the effect of these disabilities on areas other than academics, stating that “the condition can affect self-esteem, education, vocation, socialization and/or daily living activities” (quoted in Kavale & Forness, 2000, p. 444).

Each of these definitions has some significant common features. All recognize that learning disabilities are distinct disorders and that the impairment of individuals with learning disabilities cannot be attributed to mental retardation, environmental deprivation, or emotional disturbance. Kirk’s earliest definition also differentiated mental retardation from learning disability.

Self-Advocacy

Hartman (1993) defines self-advocacy to mean “that the student understands his/her disability, is aware of the strengths and the weaknesses resulting from the functional limitation imposed by the disability, and is able to articulate reasonable need for academic or physical accommodation” (p. 40). Van Belle et al. (2006) define self-advocacy as, “the ability to *act* on what the individual knows about his or her needs, even

though people may not offer the individual a clear choice or ask the individual to state his or her needs" (p. 40). Smith, English & Vasek (2002) state, "Self-advocacy is carried out by the student taking the primary active role of identifying him/herself as having a disability, requesting specific and appropriate accommodations, and participating in providing those accommodations" (p. 496).

Imbedded in each of these definitions are two major components of self-advocacy: metacognition and communication. Students' understanding of their specific disabilities and the ways these disabilities influence their learning must be shared with instructors for students to receive appropriate accommodations (Hadley, 2006). Lee (1992) emphasizes, "The students must understand their unique learning abilities completely in order to approach teachers with confidence" (p. 155). What follows is an exploration into these two critical elements of self-advocacy: metacognition and communication.

Metacognition

Nelson (1996) points to the combined efforts of psychology and philosophy to understand the phenomenon of human consciousness and metacognition. He reviews the history of the study of consciousness in psychology and considers this history evidence of the joint contribution of psychology and philosophy. Both philosophers and psychologists played a major role in the understanding of metacognition.

Psychologists in the 19th century tended to consider the subject as the observer of his/her own consciousness and the researcher's job was to "manipulate the external conditions and to record the participants' verbal reports of their introspections" (Nelson,

1996, p. 102). One problem with this method is that, because introspections are likely unreliable and subjective, the results were often unreliable. Psychologists began training their subjects to improve reliability, but even the most extensive training had little or no effect on the reliability of the subject's reports.

The trend in psychology then moved to behaviorism and the reliance on observable action as the data for psychological study. This increased the reliability of the studies but removed the first-person observation and moved psychology away from the study of consciousness to the study of behavior. Behaviorism became the primary focus of psychological research for the next half-century (Nelson, 1996).

In the latter part of the 20th century, "both philosophers and psychologists agreed that introspection should again play a role in investigations of consciousness." (Nelson, 1996, p. 103). Nelson credits the philosopher Alfred Tarski with the creation of the meta-concept, disentangling into distinct levels the basic (object) level and the higher (meta) level. This had the effect of making the meta-level in some sense separable from the object level to which it refers. When considering metacognition, then, the object is cognition – the thoughts, ideas, and beliefs of an individual. The meta-level involves the individual's consideration of those thoughts, ideas, and beliefs. In this way, metacognition is both part of and yet separate from its object level, cognition. Tarski's concept allowed psychologists then to consider an individual's thoughts about thoughts as separate from the thoughts themselves. Researchers again began asking participants to recount their thought processes as part of psychological research. "Accordingly, introspective reports from the participant are not bankrupt of scientific value, even as assessed by the radical behaviorists' criterion of the prediction and control of behavior.

Rather, the participants' introspective reports only have to play a different role than the one envisioned by turn-of-the century psychologists" (Nelson, 1996, p. 103). These reports on processes are not required to be completely subjective. Nelson (1996) notes, "A person's metacognitive monitoring does not have to be perfectly accurate to be useful" (p. 114). Instead these reflections can be considered an important piece of the broader understanding of the individual's cognitive and metacognitive processes.

John Flavell is credited with initiating research in metacognition with his work on metamemory (Weinert & Kluwe, 1987). Flavell (1976) was the first to use the term metacognition referring

to one's knowledge concerning one's own cognitive processes and products or anything related to them, e.g. the learning-relevant properties of information or data. . . metacognition refers, among other things, to the active monitoring and consequent regulation and orchestration of these processes in relation to the cognitive objects or data on which they bear, usually in the service of some concrete goal or objective (p. 232).

Flavell's complex definition became the foundation upon which psychological and educational thought in metacognition developed. Martinez (2006) states, "Many teachers would describe metacognition, quite acceptably, as 'thinking about thinking.' But I would propose a more precise definition: metacognition is the monitoring and control of thought" (p. 696). Ann Brown (1987) states "[t]wo primary problems with the term [metacognition] are: it is often difficult to distinguish what is meta and what is cognitive; and there are many different historical roots from which this area of inquiry developed"

(p. 66). Ruth Garner (1987) suggests that precisely defining such a nebulous term is difficult. Her more complex definition states,

If cognition involves perceiving, understanding, remembering, and so forth, then metacognition involves thinking about one's own perceiving, understanding, and the rest. These various cognitions about cognition can be labeled 'metaperception', 'metacomprehension', and 'metamemory', with 'metacognition' remaining the superordinate term" (p. 16).

Contrary to Martinez, Garner differentiates between metacognition and executive control. Metacognition focuses on knowledge and understanding of one's own cognitive processes while executive control emphasizes the mental control individuals bring to a particular task. To sum up this complex concept in a simplified way, Lee (1992) advises students with disabilities, "to understand what's going on in your brain that's causing you to have problems in your schoolwork." (p. 152).

Differentiating between cognitive strategies and metacognition, Flavell (1987) notes that cognitive strategies are intended to aid an individual in reaching a particular cognitive goal. Metacognitive strategies, by contrast, involve the monitoring of one's learning and the selection of appropriate cognitive strategies to improve learning. For example, a student studying for a music theory exam realizes that he does not fully comprehend the use of direct modulation in classical composition. Recognizing this lapse is a metacognitive exercise in that the student has analyzed what he does not know. He then must choose a cognitive strategy to address the problem. Acknowledging his difficulty in decoding the textbook, he decides that rereading the text is unlikely to produce a more thorough understanding. Instead, he recognizes he is more likely to gain

an understanding of the concept by actually hearing a direct modulation in music. He selects a musical example in the textbook and plays the chord progression on the piano. In doing so, he has employed a metacognitive strategy (evaluating and understanding his own learning needs) to choose a cognitive strategy (playing the musical example from the textbook). Likewise, a student with dyslexia may realize that she is more likely to make reading errors when she is tired. This metacognitive realization involves an understanding of her particular learning disability and how it affects her reading performance. The cognitive strategy she employs is rising early and completing her reading when she is most rested.

Brown (1987) suggests that the complexity of metacognition lies in the use of the term in reference to two "distinct areas of research: knowledge about cognition and regulation of cognition" (p.67). Similarly, Campione (1987) asserts that "there are two distinct referents involved in [metacognition]: storable knowledge about the cognitive system and its contents; and the effective regulation and control of that system" (p. 119). The regulation of the cognitive system is an important part of choosing appropriate cognitive strategies, monitoring the effectiveness of those strategies and making adjustments as needed. The primary focus of this study, however, is in the first referent put forth by Campione, "storable knowledge about the cognitive system and its content" (p. 119).

Self-Efficacy and Motivation

Foundational to the development of self-advocacy skills are the concepts of motivation and self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is defined by Bandura (1997) as "beliefs in

one's capability to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments" (p. 3). The concept, as viewed in this study, is an affective concept formed and filtered through cognitive and metacognitive processes. Bandura describes the development of self-efficacy as constructed through four sources. The first of these, "enactive mastery experiences" (Bandura, 1997, p. 79) is the most influential in the individual's development and grows from a person's experience of success in overcoming barriers. When a student with disabilities, for example, masters a difficult concept (a cognitive experience) and attributes that mastery to her persistent efforts (a metacognitive experience), her sense of self-efficacy increases. The second source of developing self-efficacy occurs through "vicarious experiences" (Bandura, 1997, p. 87). Individuals who witness others with whom they identify performing successfully may believe that they, too, can accomplish what they have witnessed. In this way, the success of the group becomes a way to build self-efficacy of its members. Bandura's third source of self-efficacy development is social or verbal persuasion. Having significant others who express confidence in one's abilities encourages individuals to put forth greater effort on difficult tasks. Self-efficacy is developed through the social influence of those whose opinion is valued. It is important to note, however, that this influence applies best when success is attributed both to effort *and* ability. To focus solely on the hard work and effort expended devalues the innate talent or ability of the individual and may actually have a negative effect on the development of self-efficacy. The final source of self-efficacy development lies within the individual's physical and emotional state. Individuals use somatic cues such as responses to stress and overall mood to inform the perception of efficacy. A student who is relaxed and calm through a test is more likely to

report feeling a sense of self-efficacy on the task than the student who encounters excessive nervousness and physical symptoms of stress. Again, the interpretation is key. The affective experience is filtered through the cognitive and metacognitive processes.

Pintrich (1999) identified three categories of motivational beliefs that may be applicable to success in post-secondary education. The first of these, self-efficacy beliefs, are based on the work of Bandura. Pintrich reports that students who have high levels of self-efficacy are more likely to use cognitive strategies and remain motivated. The second of Pintrich's beliefs is the "task value belief" (p. 466) or the belief that the task under consideration holds some personal interest or salience for students' overall plans. The third category is an orientation toward reaching personal goals. Students who demonstrate these beliefs are more likely to self-regulate their learning, employing cognitive strategies to achieve academic success.

Students with learning disabilities do well to understand their own cognitive processes. Though this development of metacognition is likely to produce positive results in students' educational endeavors, gaining metacognitive understanding is only part of the task of self-advocacy. To be academically successful, students with learning disabilities must be able to explain their unique needs and request assistance from professors and other college personnel. In other words, communication skills play a vital role in student self-advocacy.

Communication

Just as the concept of metacognition is difficult to describe, communication is a concept that defies simple definition. Communication can be understood as a process of

exchanging verbal and non-verbal messages to convey thoughts, feelings, and meanings (Brooks & Heath, 1993). Hargie & Dickson (2004) highlight two central themes of interpersonal communication. The first is intersubjectivity which involves understanding others and attempting to make oneself understood. The second theme is impact, or "the extent to which a message brings about a change in thoughts, feelings, or behavior" (p. 13). Both of these themes are of critical importance for students with disabilities.

To be successful, students must share the nature of their disability and seek additional support for their academic endeavors. McCrosky, Larson and Knapp (1971) maintain that

much has been said and written about 'how to communicate effectively.' Too frequently 'effective communication' is regarded as a single-faceted phenomenon. Effective communication, however, is one of those phrases that is misleading in its simplicity. There is a wide range of outcomes, any one of which might warrant the judgment that communication between two people has been 'effective' (p. 15).

For the purposes of this study, communication between the student and faculty member will be regarded as effective if both parties arrive at a consensus of understanding the student's unique academic needs.

Research in the field of communication has resulted in a number of models of interpersonal communication (Borman, et. al., 1969; McCrosky, Larson & Knapp, 1971; Hargie & Dickson, 2004). Common to these models is the idea that the source or initiator creates and encodes a message he or she intends to communicate. This message is conveyed by means of a channel to the receiver. For the current study, it is assumed the

student is the source and the message is information regarding the student's metacognitive understanding of his/her disability. The student attempts to communicate this message to the receiver, a faculty or staff member. The channels used to convey this message may be face-to-face interaction, telephone conversation, e-mail or other written communication. The encoding of the message is the student's attempt to put into words his/her metacognitive knowledge. At the opposite end of the communication process, the faculty member must decode the message in an effort to understand its meaning.

McCrosky et al. (1971) emphasize that "the important thing to remember here is that messages do not contain meaning. Meanings are in people, not in messages." (p.2) The effectiveness of the communication, then, is the responsibility of the individuals involved in the communicative act. Many opportunities exist for miscommunication to occur. The source, or student, may encode the message incorrectly by using incorrect or inappropriate language to describe his/her situation. The channel may be unreliable as, for example, the students' e-mail is lost in a filtering system. The receiver, or instructor, may decode information incorrectly if he/she does not have an understanding of what a learning disability entails. Careful consideration of the entire communication process is important as students and faculty seek to understand one another.

The social pragmatic model of talk was developed by Turnbull (2003) as a means of incorporating the best of conversational theories into a cohesive model. Turnbull suggests that individuals use talk to construct meaning together and that conversations are best analyzed by what they accomplish. The social pragmatic model states that talk is a social interaction, achieved by an orderly progression of turn-taking between speakers, is multifunctional as individuals negotiate meanings, and requires a certain level of trust.

For students with learning disabilities discussing learning needs with instructors, this model is particularly useful. Recognizing the social aspects and the outcome-based nature of interpersonal communication helps students to approach these important conversations as opportunities to accomplish a shared understanding. This is an important skill students will continue to develop and use. Hadley (2006) notes, "self-advocating helps students with learning disabilities to be successful in college by providing them with opportunities to improve communication with their professors as they obtain much-needed direction and accommodations in their classes" (p.16).

Of significant concern for post-secondary students is the concept of status and power in interpersonal communication (Hargie & Dickson, 2004). Lee describes the approach taken by a student with a learning disability:

The literature major used the approach we advised: in the privacy of the professor's office, she told him: 'I would like you to know that I have a learning disability. I don't anticipate that I will have any problems with this class, but I wanted you to know in case something comes up during the quarter that we might need to talk about (p. 162).

This student demonstrates the features Hargie and Dickson describe as common for individuals of inferior social status communicating with those who possess some power over them, including offering more self-disclosure and using politer forms of address. These power differences may make communication uncomfortable and awkward for students who are seeking to be understood and to affect change in their professors.

For students to effectively communicate their learning needs, a level of assertiveness is necessary. Cornett-DeVito and Worley (2005) assert that students with

disabilities "must become appropriately assertive in requesting and receiving accommodations, difficult though they may find it to adopt such behaviors" (p. 329). Much attention has been given to assertiveness in social interactions, reflecting the importance of this concept (McCampbell & Ruback, 1985; Hargie & Dickson, 2004; Elliot and Grambling, 1990; Hadley, 2006). Assertive individuals ensure that their personal rights are respected, make reasonable requests of others, avoid aggressive conflicts when possible, openly communicate their opinions and thoughts, and develop a sense of self-efficacy (Hargie and Dickson, 2004). McCampbell and Ruback (1985) noted that "assertive behavior has more objective effectiveness than do other response styles" (p. 68). Students who learn to communicate assertively develop skills that enhance their ability to engage in supportive relationships (Elliot & Grambling, 1990).

Hargie and Dickson (2004) outline seven stages of assertiveness. Students discussing learning needs with faculty members should follow these stages for effective, assertive communication. The first stage of assertiveness is self-focus. Individuals note their own behavior and the behavior of others. Without this focus, students may unintentionally approach conversations with the professor in an aggressive, obnoxious way or may be unaware that the student's needs are not being adequately addressed. The second stage is the knowledge of rights. For students with disabilities, an understanding of the laws governing disability accommodation and the responsibility of the instructor and institution in providing access provide the expectations for accommodation. Developing positive beliefs about assertion is the third stage in the model. This requires a significant element of self-esteem and self-confidence for students to believe that they can interact in an assertive manner with faculty members. The fourth and fifth stages

involve an assessment of the current situation, recognizing an infringement of rights and dissatisfaction with the present circumstances. Sixth, the student draws from the assertive responses in his or her repertoire to move to the seventh stage, choosing an evaluation approach most likely to achieve the desired result. In working through these seven preparatory stages, students prepare to engage in a dialogue that will involve standing up for oneself while considering the instructor's perspective.

Self-advocacy is a critical issue for the growing number of post-secondary students with learning disabilities. To be successful, students must have an understanding of their own cognitive processes and must be able to communicate this understanding effectively with faculty and staff. The development of these abilities occurs within the context of the college or university where the student has enrolled. Though all institutions are required to provide equal access to educational opportunities for all students, the level of services vary widely.

Programs for Students with Learning Disabilities

The primary role of disability service providers on college and university campuses must be to foster and encourage the development of self-advocacy (Smith et al., 2002). Field, Sarver and Shaw (2003) indicate a lack of emphasis on self-advocacy among post-secondary support personnel, noting that these professionals "have often been described as either advocates or gatekeepers," and "have often inadvertently adopted the dependence-provoking behaviors typical in many elementary and secondary programs." (p. 343)

Elementary and secondary institutions are required by law to provide all resources needed for a child to receive a free, appropriate public education (IDEA Amendments, 2004). By contrast, institutions of higher education are not expected to provide such a comprehensive level of service. Colleges and universities can set reasonable limits on the responsibility to accommodate students with disabilities to ensure that no undue financial or administrative burden is placed upon the institution and that the integrity of the academic program is maintained (NJCLD, 1999; Scott, 1990).

Many post-secondary institutions have responded to the needs of students with disabilities. Kravets and Wax (2003) group programs for students with learning disabilities into three categories: services, coordinated services, and structured programs. The first of these programs, services, is the least comprehensive of the three. Programs in this category are in compliance with federal regulations, offering appropriate accommodations to students presenting adequate documentation. These programs are ideal for students whose disabilities are not severe and who require minimal accommodations. In the second type of program, colleges and universities with coordinated services often have at least one professional with training and experience assisting students with learning disabilities available to help students to develop strategies for their individual circumstances. The third category, structured programs, contains the institutions offering the most comprehensive programs for students with learning disabilities. The program staff often holds certification in learning disability fields or related areas. Frequently, students self-identify prior to applying for admission and are assisted through the admissions process. The services provided are highly structured and individualized to meet the students' unique needs.

Because of its comprehensive nature and focus on meeting students' individual needs, programs in this third category must pay the closest attention to developing self-advocacy in students. Cullen, Shaw and McGuire (1996) note that "the prevailing model of service delivery at colleges and universities places primary emphasis on academic accommodations, assistance with basic skills, and tutorial support in courses most profoundly affected by students' disabilities" (p. 3). These priorities "do little to foster the skills that underlie effective self-advocacy" (p. 3). Instead of fostering dependency, programs should seek to guide students toward self-sufficiency and self-advocacy in an effort to promote student success (Aune, 2000; Brinckerhoff, Shaw, & McGuire, 1996).

Overall, the college environment has become more supportive of students with disabilities. More institutions are reporting the availability of specialized services beyond those mandated by law. For students accessing these services, the important question becomes what types of services are available and how these services will improve the students' academic progress. Rath & Royer (2002) state:

Students with learning disabilities are legally guaranteed equal educational access, but there is dissention in educational circles as to what constitutes such equality. Basically, there are two approaches that institutions take when addressing the question of equal access. One is to change the student so that he or she is fully capable of functioning in any educational environment, and the second is to change the educational environment so that the student can succeed despite his or her disability. (p. 359)

Examples of the first approach include counseling and therapy, strategy training, and specific-subject remediation (e.g. phonics training). Examples of the second include

modifications in the course of study, assistive technology and course tutoring. Most disability programs do not strictly adhere to one approach or the other, instead mixing the strategies employed for the benefit of participants (Rath & Royer, 2002).

Shaw (2005) suggests that learning disability support programs should foster self-determination and independence instead of creating a mindset of dependency. Program leaders must be willing to continually reexamine the program's goals and evaluate its progress in an effort to promote student success. Instead of focusing entirely on the individual student, the ideal program will pay particular attention to the environment in which that student works, thus abiding by the interactional model of disability (Aune, 2000). In addition to providing student support, these programs seek to educate faculty and staff on disability issues, have a voice in institutional policy decisions, and collaborate with professionals across campus (Shaw, 2002). Structured programs, as defined by Kravets and Wax (2005), are well-equipped to provide this supportive environment for the development of self-advocacy. However, it is also possible that such comprehensive services could mimic the elementary and secondary model of disability services, requiring little opportunity for students to develop metacognitive and communication skills. Currently, no studies exist to examine the development of self-advocacy in this type of structured environment. The research proposed here seeks to fill this void.

Autonomy and Interdependence

According to Pascarella and Terenzini (2005), "no psychosocial theorist has had more influence on the research on college student development or administrative efforts

to promote it than Arthur Chickering" (p. 21). In *Education and Identity* published in 1969 and revised with Linda Reisser in 1993, Chickering outlined seven vectors of college student development. The "original seven vectors were 1) developing competence, 2) managing emotions, 3) developing autonomy, 4) establishing identity, 5) freeing interpersonal relationships, 6) developing purpose, and 7) developing integrity" (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p.23).

In the updated edition of *Education and Identity*, Chickering and Reisser (1993) reordered the vectors to reflect recent research on gender and development. They note studies by Straub and Rodgers (1986) and Straub (1987) that found women completing the Freeing Interpersonal Relationships vector prior to the Autonomy vector. Further, the focus on autonomy in the original framework ignored the impact of interpersonal relationships in developing identity. The revised seven vectors are outlined below.

- 1.) Developing competence involves intellectual, physical, and interpersonal proficiency. Students increase in competence as they develop trust in their academic aptitude, relationships with others, and physical abilities.
- 2.) Managing emotions refers to students' increasing ability to channel emotions appropriately and to accept responsibility for their own feelings.
- 3.) Moving through autonomy toward interdependence comprises emotional independence, instrumental independence and the recognition that one relies on others for support and guidance. This vector is the foundation for the conceptual framework proposed here and is addressed in more detail below.
- 4.) Developing mature interpersonal relationships entails a respect for diversity and a capacity to develop and sustain intimate relationships.

- 5.) Establishing identity involves the emergence of a sense of self and a comfort with one's individuality. Within this vector is an examination and acceptance of one's ethnic and racial heritage, sexual orientation, gender, and personality.
- 6.) Developing purpose is the ability to establish realistic goals and make plans to accomplish those goals.
- 7.) Developing integrity is the solidifying of beliefs and values and the integration of these values into a sense of identity.

The development of self-advocacy skills is one way students with learning disabilities can move through autonomy to interdependence. Instrumental and emotional independence must precede the attainment of interdependence. Chickering and Reisser (1993) define instrumental independence as "the ability to carry on activities and solve problems in a self-directed manner and the freedom and confidence to be mobile in order to pursue opportunity or adventure" (p.132). Emotional independence involves separation from parents and an increased reliance on peers, authorities, and institutional support systems as well as a sense of confidence in one's own self-sufficiency. Without this independence and autonomy, advocating for oneself would be difficult.

The third vector in the Chickering and Reisser (1993) model stresses the importance of moving through autonomy to a state of interdependence. Students successfully navigating this transition emerge with a sense of self-sufficiency and an acceptance of the need for intimate relationships. For students with learning disabilities, this vector is of critical importance. Having been directed by teachers and educators throughout their elementary and secondary special education, many students with disabilities are in need of assistance in developing autonomy and interdependence. The

development of self-advocacy is a crucial component in the shift from secondary to post-secondary education. Students must demonstrate the development of metacognition, having a clear understanding of their diagnosis and the unique strengths and deficits they possess. They must also develop the ability to clearly communicate the nature of their disability and be able to request appropriate services to address their challenges.

Interactional Model of Disability

A standard approach to individuals with disabilities focuses on the diagnosis and limitations of the person rooted in the biological deficits he or she experiences. This biomedical model limits the power of the individual with a disability in favor of the expert power of doctors and other professionals. In this model, the disability exists entirely within the individual whose responsibility it is to manage the disability in a non-disabled world (Smart & Smart, 2006). On the surface, this view seems to encourage the autonomy emphasized by Chickering and Reisser (1993). Upon deeper examination, however, it becomes clear that the biomedical approach focuses on the individual so exclusively that it precludes the possibility of interdependence. The biomedical model is concerned with the otherness of a person's disability and the ways in which the individual is different from the norm. It is less concerned with how that individual develops the ability to interact and modify his/her environment to better meet educational and personal goals. Aune (2000) observes that "the traditional approach to disability has been from a medical (functional limitations) frame: something is wrong with the student and the expert's job is to return the individual to 'normalcy.' Normalcy, in the campus setting,

has been accomplished by 'remediating' the student to fit the campus environment. (p. 55).

Smart and Smart (2006) are clear that criticism of the biomedical model is not a criticism of the medical community. Disabilities require diagnoses and individualized consideration. The problem occurs when the awareness ends at this point without also considering the environment in which the individual lives and works. The medical community is moving away from the biomedical model and to a more inclusive ideal (Smart & Smart, 2006; Higbee, 2003).

In contrast to this biomedical model, the interactional approach to disability considers the societal and environmental factors that contribute to the definition of disability. This model regards disability as a socially constructed phenomenon and distinguishes between the biological diagnosis and the social environment surrounding the person with a disability (Jones, 1996). Smart and Smart (2006) illustrate this point by relating the story of men regarded as mentally impaired being called to action in World War II. When the need arose, the definition of disability shifted to include these men in the war effort. Following the war, many of the veterans returned to the long-term care residences where they had lived prior to active service. The individuals did not change but instead environmental factors caused a reexamination of what it means to have a disability.

The interactional model suggests that the environment must adjust to the individuals with disabilities as much as these individuals must adjust to their environment. In this model, "academic and social integration, not normalization, is what students need to be successful in college" (Aune, 2000, p. 56). Viewing disability as a

social construct, as the interactional model requires, is to consider the quality of experiences the person with a disability encounters as he/she interacts with the campus environment. This model requires that the experience of disabilities lies not only within the individual but includes everyone (Jones, 1996).

Adrienne Asch and William Roth are credited with bringing this social-constructivist approach to the forefront of psychological research (Asch, 1984; Jones, 1996). Asch notes that "the mere attempt to define the characteristic of disability or handicap and to measure its prevalence underscores that handicap is a social construct" (Asch, 1984, p. 529). Commonly, disability is defined by the ways in which the person is different than the social norm. By contrast, a social-constructivist approach considers disability in the context of environment and "shifts an analysis from one focusing primarily on the disability itself to one recognizing the intersection of individual and societal factors" (Jones, 1996). In the decades since this model was introduced, post-secondary institutions have begun to incorporate the model into the academic environment.

Universal Instructional Design

The recent interest in universal design as applied to higher education is evidence that this model is gaining influence. With foundations in architecture and industrial engineering, universal design is concerned with "the design of products and environments to be usable to the greatest extent possible by people of all ages and abilities" (Center for Universal Design, 1997). Designers seeking to implement requirements for increased access to public spaces determined that attempts to create segregated, ad hoc approaches

resulted in expensive and often unattractive design features. By contrast, incorporating these features within the overall design benefitted not only those with disabilities, but accommodated everyone. Universal design focuses on integrated approaches to serve the population at large instead of providing individualized assistance to a particular individual or group of individuals. For example, an entrance ramp aids individuals using wheelchairs and those pushing a child in a stroller. Scissors with spring action and large soft grips are easier for people with arthritis to use and are also more comfortable for people who use these tools for hours at a time. By changing the environment, the disabling condition is minimized.

This concept is gaining acceptance as a principle to be applied to educational endeavors (Scott, McGuire & Foley, 2003; Higbee, 2003). In 2003, the Association on Higher Education and Disability convened and hosted a group of disability and educational experts to form a think tank on the use of universal design in education. With the interactional model as their framework, this group suggested starting points for considering ways to increase accessibility of higher education to all individuals regardless of disability status. Universal Instructional Design (UID) allows "students with special needs access to the regular educational curricula" (Silver, Bourke and Strehorn, 1998). This approach emphasizes the integration of accessibility concerns in the design and development of the curriculum. By including UID in instructional planning, the emphasis on individual support structures declines. An example of this approach is the availability of class materials electronically so students with visual impairments may increase the font size for ease of reading. The purpose of UID is not to

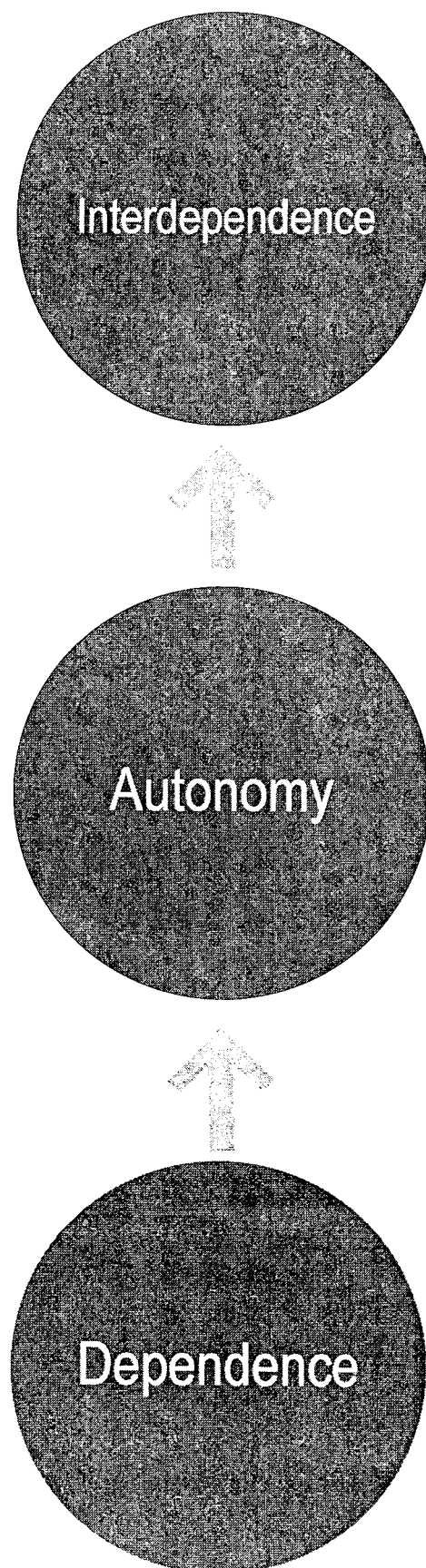
recreate the curriculum but to make it more broadly accessible to students with a variety of learning needs.

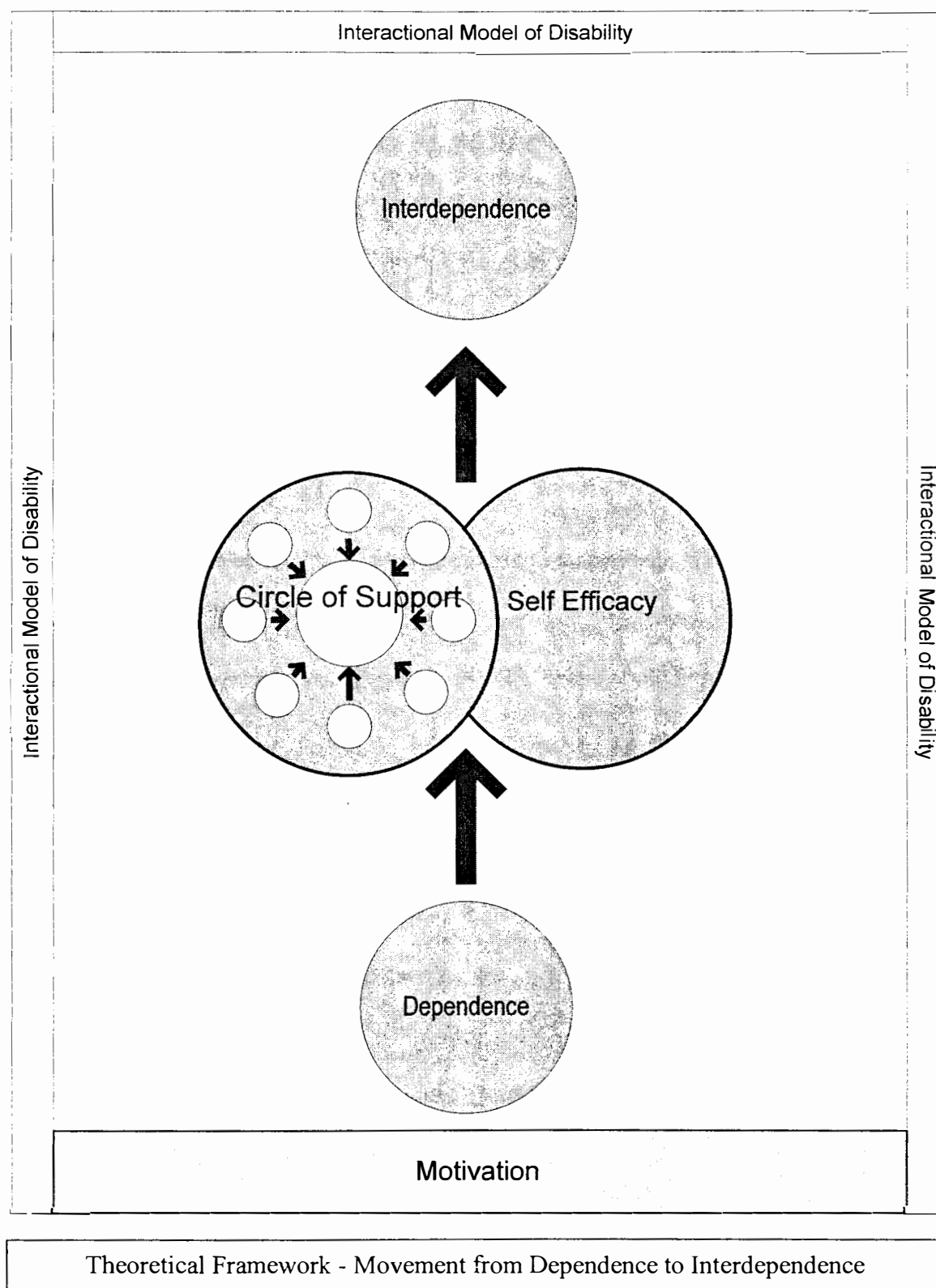
Using the interactional model of disability as the foundation and the dual definition of self-advocacy as involving metacognition and communication, this study will explore self-advocacy through the framework of Chickering and Reisser's (1993) third vector. The purpose of this study is to examine the development of self-advocacy among students in three structured learning disability programs. Though the scope of the study is limited to students within these three programs, similar institutions may find useful connections with these universities. The universities studied may discover opportunities for continued improvement and ways in which their students are becoming advocates for themselves.

Literature in the areas of metacognition, communication, student development, disabilities, and education form the foundation for the proposed study. The interplay of these various disciplines and domains inform the development of self-advocacy among students with disabilities. This development is considered in the context of the interactional model of disability in which the environment is a crucial component of the individual's experience. The interactions between the various components making up the theoretical framework for this study have been conceptualized into a dynamic model.

Chickering & Reisser's (1993)
Third Vector of
College Student Development

Movement from
Dependence through
Autonomy to
Interdependence





Chapter 3

Methodology

The consideration of self-advocacy for students with learning disabilities requires particular attention to be paid to a well-designed and deliberately planned study. The research question provides a foundation upon which the methodology is based. With the naturalistic paradigm as the basis for study, the process described here utilizes three phases of inquiry to examine the perspectives of students with disabilities and the staff and faculty who work with them.

Research Question

This study is not intended to generate broad theories applicable to the wider population of college students with disabilities. Instead, the intent is to examine the perspectives of students involved in structured programs at the three institutions studied. The focus of the inquiry is to answer the central question of the study: **In what ways, if any, do students involved in structured learning disabilities programs develop self-advocacy?** Self-advocacy is defined in this study as an ability to understand one's unique abilities and needs and to communicate those needs to faculty and others. Focusing on self-advocacy and student development demands a naturalistic approach. Students' development of self-advocacy influences and is influenced by the students' environment. Observing that environment, discussing the focal questions with students and others, and maintaining a flexible approach provided opportunities to explore the topic thoroughly. Other methods, such as surveys and written assessments, would not

provide the rich description needed to address the complex topic of self-advocacy development among students with learning disabilities.

Traditions of Inquiry

The Naturalistic Paradigm described by Lincoln and Guba (1985) forms the foundation for this study. The central focus of this paradigm is the existence of multiple realities, constructed by individuals. Individuals may agree on partial definitions of a concept but have considerably different perceptions of that concept depending upon their personal experiences. For example, students may share a common understanding of what the term "learning disability" means but may have completely different experiences, or constructions, based on people they have known who have a learning disability, their own experience with a disability, conversations with others on the topic, books they have read or television programs they have watched. The context in which the student lives will significantly influence his or her construction of the concept. Therefore, the naturalistic paradigm studies multiple realities holistically, taking into account the participants' lived experiences and the context in which he or she lives. It is impossible to separate the knower from the known and similarly impossible to remove the participant from the setting (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This study will take place on the college campuses where students are involved in learning disabilities programs. Interviews and observations will provide opportunities to explore students' own perspectives within their own contexts.

The aim of naturalistic inquiry is not the creation or discovery of "lawlike generalizations" (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p.42) but to more thoroughly understand the

interaction between the individual studied and the context of the study. The purpose of naturalistic inquiry is the creation of working hypotheses that may be relevant, or transferable, to similar circumstances and contexts. Thorough descriptions and rich narrative provide the reader with adequate evidence to determine similarities between the situation studied and context to which it may be applied. Qualitative methods are appropriate when asking questions regarding structures of organizations and meaning perspectives of individuals in their social context. Studies using these methods are seeking to discover "concrete universals" (Erickson, 1986, p. 130) grounded in the particular context. The naturalistic paradigm requires the use of qualitative methods to provide flexibility to the multiple realities presented. Inductive data analysis is employed to provide a full description of the context and content of the study so that transferability to other situations may be improved. Readers of this study will determine if their institutions and programs are similar enough to warrant an application of the findings to their own context. This study provides a framework for further study in other situations.

A hallmark of naturalistic inquiry is the use of emergent design. To maintain flexibility for unforeseen developments, many elements of the study are left open to evolve throughout the process. The focus of research for a naturalistic study is discovering the unknown through an open-ended approach. Data collection and analysis occur in concert throughout the research process. As discoveries are made through analysis, data collection methods are honed to reflect new insights and to address gaps in understanding. These studies "are virtually impossible to design in any definitive way before the study is actually undertaken. But naturalistic studies do have a characteristic pattern of flow or development" (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p. 187).

A focus on emergent design does not indicate an absence of a research plan. Prior planning is crucial to maintain the central focus of the study and to ensure logistical considerations are addressed. Maxwell (2005) underscores the importance of well-constructed research stating, "A good design, one in which the components work harmoniously together, promotes efficient and successful functioning; a flawed design leads to poor operation or failure" (p.2). Maxwell advocates a structured research plan built with enough interconnectivity and flexibility to maintain an emergent design paying particular attention to five elements; goals, conceptual framework, research questions, methods, and validity.

Providing more detail than Maxwell's five components, Lincoln and Guba (1985) outline eight elements of a well-designed research project, including the selection of a research focus, deciding upon the fit between focus and inquiry paradigm, determining the fit between this paradigm and the theory used to examine the problem, determining the site and participants, determining the phases of inquiry, determining instrumentation, planning data for collection, and planning data analysis. These eight elements form the foundation for the research design of this study.

Data collection – Data Sources

Traditional, quantitative research designs consider sampling a population in an effort to answer questions about that population. Subjects are recruited because of certain characteristics which link them to the overall population. As Babbie (1990) indicates, the purpose of this type of research is to create generalizations, applying the findings of the sample to the larger population. By contrast, in naturalistic inquiry the aim is not

generalization but an understanding of a particular group in a particular context.

Sampling in the traditional sense does not apply to this type of research.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that "purposive sampling" (p. 201) should guide the choice of participants in naturalistic inquiry. Again, the emphasis on emergent design is paramount. Purposive sampling requires continuous assessment and adjustment of the sample to provide as much data as possible. The objective is not to investigate similarities and develop generalizations but to describe the specific situation in a way that will "give the context its unique flavor" (p. 201).

Maxwell (2005) takes issue with Lincoln and Guba's terminology: "First, the term 'sampling' is problematic for qualitative research because it implies the purpose of 'representing' the population sampled" (p. 88). Qualitative studies are not designed to create broad generalizations to be applied to a larger population. Instead, the aim of the research is to provide a rich description of a phenomenon in a particular context so that a reader may discover similarities in his or her own context. Instead of speaking of "purposive sampling" (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p. 201), Maxwell prefers the term "purposeful selection" which he describes as "a strategy in which particular settings, persons, or activities are selected deliberately in order to provide information that can't be gotten as well from other choices" (p.88). This study considers Lincoln and Guba's admonishment to focus on specific details while borrowing from Maxwell's approach by selecting participants in a deliberate manner.

During the 1980s, some institutions established formal, institutional policies for supporting students with learning disabilities. These programs vary in the level of service they provide to students with disabilities (Kravets & Wax, 2005). The most

comprehensive and prescriptive of these programs provide individualized services with specialized professionals trained to work with students with disabilities. These structured programs offer a similar familiar framework that many students, especially those with severe learning disabilities, may find comforting and supportive. Students in these structured learning disabilities programs are the focus of this study. Attention was focused on four-year institutions that are not designated primarily for students with disabilities. Site selection was honed by the willingness of the program staff to welcome a researcher to their institutions. The three institutions chosen as research sites are quite different while the programs within these institutions are remarkably similar. The names used for these institutions in the study are pseudonyms.

Research Sites

Montgomery University is located in its state's second-largest city. With an enrollment of approximately 10,000 undergraduate and 4,000 graduate students, the university is one of eleven public institutions of higher education in the state. The university is accredited by the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools offering 23 associate, 44 baccalaureate, and 46 graduate programs. The university's disabilities services office provides services to approximately 150 students each semester which include assessment, note-taking, test accommodation, taped textbooks, readers, and tutoring. The office also provides comprehensive advising for students with disabilities.

The University of Greenburg is a private institution with an enrollment of approximately 5100 undergraduate and 5700 graduate students. Located in the state

capital, the campus is metropolitan. The university offers 65 undergraduate majors and 120 graduate programs of study and is accredited by the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools. The learning disabilities center offers comprehensive services including tutoring, writing support, time management, and study skills workshops as well as assisting with academic accommodations. Professional counselors provide academic and personal advising.

The University of Hillsville is located 100 miles from the state capital. With an enrollment of 622 students, the private university offers 27 undergraduate majors and is accredited by the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools. The learning center provides services to 85 students including tutoring, test accommodation, writing support, study skills workshops, and reading assistance. Advising and counseling services are provided to each of the program participants. The University of Hillsville has been a leader in providing services for students with learning disabilities.

Though varying in geographic region, size, and affiliation, these institutions have many commonalities in disability services. Each of these schools has been categorized as having a structured program for students with disabilities (Kravets & Wax, 2005). The additional fees students pay to become part of these programs assists the institutions in providing comprehensive, specialized services. All the programs are staffed with professionals with education and expertise in the area of student development, special education, counseling or disability services. Student progress is monitored throughout the students' time in the program with each school committed to providing services for students with disabilities. The learning disabilities programs are visible and highlighted on the university's website. Though there is no indication that the admissions officers in

these institutions specifically target and recruit students with disabilities, the effort made to highlight the disabilities programs ensures that prospective students are aware of the opportunities available at the institutions.

Students in these disabilities programs provide documentation of their disability and pay an additional fee for the services provided by the program. Many of these students have received accommodations in elementary or high school and are seeking continued support through college. Participants in this study were selected from this population and interviews with these students and program staff formed the foundation for the data collected. To provide insight into the context of students' experiences, interviews were conducted with instructional faculty and university administrators. In addition, the public spaces of the learning disabilities program, classrooms, and the university campus were more broadly observed. Concepts of the interactional model of disability were considered during the analysis of observational data.

Data Collection – Phases of Inquiry

Prior planning and preparation are crucial to the success of qualitative research. Even as data collection remains fluid and adaptable throughout the process, it is supported by a well-structured framework that provides stability and focus throughout the process. The three-phase data collection framework for this study was designed to maximize the richness of the findings.

First Phase of Inquiry – Initial Contact and Document Analysis

The first phase of inquiry for this study took place prior to the researcher's visit to each site. Initial contact with disability program staff provided a relational foundation for

the staff and researcher to work together in data collection. I explained the premise and research questions involved in this study and worked with the staff to formalize the logistics of the site visit, securing space, and seeking permissions as needed. During this phase, staff were provided with materials soliciting the involvement of students in this project. Because of regulations outlined in the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), institutional personnel must make the initial contact requesting student involvement (FERPA,1974).

Additionally, this first phase of inquiry involved document analysis of program brochures, institutional publications, and other materials related to the disability program at each college. Documents were examined for their content and the intended audience. Particular attention was paid to evidence that programs seek to help students develop self-advocacy skills (e.g. items suggesting that students are responsible for initiating contact with their professors, programs designed to improve metacognition and communication).

Second Phase of Inquiry – Site Visits

The second phase of inquiry involved visiting the colleges studied. Prior to the research visit, the program coordinators for each site were asked to recruit students, faculty, and staff to participate in the research study. All students enrolled in the program were eligible to take part in the study. Three-day site visits were scheduled for January and February 2008. A second visit to Montgomery University was necessary after the first visit was shortened due to inclement weather. Observations of the campus and the learning disabilities program focused on the ways students interacted with faculty and staff, with the environment, and with each other and will contextualize the data gathered

from student interviews. Particular attention was paid to the ways in which the interactional model of disability is evident in the campus environment. Following this initial observation period, faculty, staff and student interviews were conducted at each site using an interview guide (see appendices). Kvale (1996) recommends an interview guide be created in line with the type of research being conducted, more structured for a positivist or post-positivist research paradigm which considers a single reality and less structured for a naturalistic study such as the one presented here where participant construction of reality is central. Interview questions for this study were designed to be thematically and dynamically appropriate (Kvale, 1996). Thematically, the questions were derived from the topic of the interview and sought to solicit data to answer research questions. Dynamically, the questions were presented in a way that built the relationship between the researcher and participant. This relationship-building is crucial to achieve the level of trust and rapport necessary for honest sharing of ideas and experiences. Students were interviewed once for up to one hour and given a gift certificate as an expression of appreciation for their time.

Student participants, all undergraduates, ranged in age from 19-26. Five men and nine women in majors such as anthropology, math, business, graphic design, social work, and communications contributed their experiences. Faculty participants taught psychology, sociology, education, philosophy, art, German, and business. Program staff participants included directors and assistant directors, academic coordinators, tutors, and subject specialists from each of the three structured programs as well as staff members from the broader accommodations program available to all students with disabilities. The dean of students and a former associate academic dean from one institution also

participated, providing the perspective of administrators at Montgomery University. An admissions officer at the University of Greenburg shared the perspective of admissions staff at that institution.

Observation of the campus community and student experience continued throughout this second phase of inquiry as the interviews were conducted. Whereas the initial observations in this phase were designed to survey the context, ongoing observations provided a more in-depth perspective on events and settings. This type of observation allowed the development inferences that could not be drawn using interview data alone (Maxwell, 2005). The observations and interviews influenced each other. Observations provided fodder for deeper questions and interviews focused the researcher's attention during observations.

Third Phase of Inquiry – Ensuring Validity

The third phase of inquiry took place after the site visits by following up with study participants. Member-checking is an important element of the methodology outlined by Lincoln and Guba (1985). They state, "[t]hroughout the inquiry, but especially near the end, data and interpretations are continuously checked with respondents who have acted as sources, as well as with counterpart individuals; differences of opinion are negotiated until the outcomes are agreed upon or minority opinions are well understood and reflected" (p. 188-189). The use of member checking in assuring the validity of qualitative studies is common. Maxwell, however, cautions against putting too much emphasis on this phase of inquiry, stating "participants' feedback is no more inherently valid than their interview responses; both should be taken simply as *evidence* regarding the validity of [the researcher's] account" (p. 111). For this

study, member checking was expected to offer a second opportunity to communicate with participants and to gain insight from them. However, participant interaction in the phase was lacking. None of the student participants responded to e-mails sent following site visits. Follow-up interactions with staff participants served to reinforce the impressions and ideas formulated through observation and interviews at the research sites. These interactions were considered and analyzed as part of the data collected.

Validity

Eisenhart and Howe (1992) propose five standards of validity in educational research which "allow the economy of thought in designing and evaluating educational studies...provide the starting point for reflection on and improvement of the educational research enterprise" and, finally, "serve as a vehicle for communicating within and across research traditions and for orienting newcomers." (p. 657). These standards are to be used as guiding factors in the design and implementation of an educational research student.

The first of Eisenhart and Howe's standards is "the fit between research questions, data collection procedures and analysis techniques" (p. 657). It is crucial that the research design chosen be adequate to answer the question posed by the study. In the case of this study, much attention was paid to the choice of qualitative research methodologies to seek answers to a question about student development. Only through qualitative research would this type of question be addressed sufficiently. Students with disabilities cannot easily relate the totality of their experience in developing self-advocacy by answering a survey questionnaire or by participating in a psychological test:

instead, care must be taken to consider students' voices in the context of their experience to understand their perceptions and growth.

"The effective application of specific data collection and analysis techniques" (p. 658) is Eisenhart and Howe's second standard of validity. Preliminary research design is a crucial aspect of education research. Within that design, however, many opportunities arise for difficulty when data collection and analysis does not proceed properly. The use of interview protocols (Kvale, 1996) ensures that prior planning and consideration have been given to data collection. Triangulation of data sources and data collection sites ensured that the researcher gained a broader awareness of the phenomenon of self-advocacy development. Visiting multiple sites, interviewing a number of students as well as faculty and staff, and using observations to form the context provided a more complete picture of students' experiences. The use of analytic memos provided ample opportunities to engage thoughtfully and reflectively on the data analysis process. Central to this standard of validity is the use of a methodological journal which will follow the research process and ensure close attention is paid to the details of the research design.

Building on an existing theoretical foundation assures that the third standard of validity was addressed. "Alertness to and coherence of prior knowledge" (p. 659) calls for the researcher to situate the current study in the setting of prior research and thought. Additionally, the researcher must consider her own prior knowledge and experience with the topic. Both prior research and the researcher's perspective will influence the current study. Recognizing this influence and maintaining an awareness of how the study fits into the larger realm of knowledge strengthened the work. Continued reading of

disability and higher education literature assisted in maintaining this alertness to prior research.

Similarly, researchers bring a set of values to their work. The fourth standard, "Value constraints" (p. 660), considers both external and internal value. External value refers to the worth of the study for improving practice and adding to general knowledge. With the rising number of students entering post-secondary education (Henderson, 2001), research on this topic becomes timely and important as institutions of higher education seek to meet the needs of this growing population. Internal value considerations are more commonly referred to as research ethics. Throughout the design for this study, particular attention was paid to the respectful and fair treatment of research participants, the importance of confidentiality and the centrality of consent. Because this is a qualitative study using face-to-face interviews and observations to collect data, anonymity cannot be assured. Confidentiality, however, was a constant consideration throughout the data collection process. Recordings of interviews were used solely for transcription and were later destroyed. Participants and institutions were assigned a pseudonym and all identifying information was masked. Given the sensitive and personal nature of the research topic, close attention was paid to ensuring the confidentiality of all participants. Students and faculty were informed they may choose to withdraw from the study at any time with no penalty. However, none opted to withdraw. The information shared will be held in strict confidence.

"Comprehensiveness" (p. 661) represents the final standard of validity proposed by Eisenhart and Howe. This standard is the global consideration of the other four standards and connects the consideration of validity into a cohesive whole. None of these

standards occur in a vacuum and must be simultaneously weighed and contemplated.

Posting these standards on the first page of the methodological journal kept validity at the forefront of the research process.

Data Analysis

In this study, data analysis and collection were not discrete stages but occurred simultaneously throughout the research process. As soon as possible after data collection occasions, field notes were written and interviews transcribed. Analysis began immediately and informed data collection followed. Interview questions were reworded and reorganized, attention was redirected to additional observation opportunities, and additional information was sought through the gathering of documents and publications. Data analysis, a part of the research design, influences and is influenced by the overall design of the study (Maxwell, 2005). Analytic methods used for this study included coding, connecting strategies, and memos.

Coding, often considered analogous to data analysis, comprises only part of the data analysis strategy for this study. Coding strategies are used to categorize data in three ways (Maxwell, 2005). The first is organizational - organizational coding is the first attempt at data analysis and occurs before and just after initial observations have been conducted. The categories created in organizational coding are broad and general, providing an early understanding of the data collected. The second coding strategy is substantive and creates descriptive sub-categories for observation and interview data. Substantive codes are often derived from participants' own words and provide more depth of analysis than the initial organizational codes. Finally, theoretical coding

considers the data collected in a more holistic manner, relying on the researcher's understanding of the phenomenon as explained by the participants. Theoretical codes are more abstract and are usually in the researcher's words. These three coding strategies were incorporated in this study to categorize participants' experiences and perspectives.

By contrast, connecting strategies are used to draw associations and links between the segments of collected data (Maxwell, 2005). Similar comments or perspectives were analyzed and relationships between experiences were explored. Instead of following one particular participant to create a case study, a series of composite pictures may be drawn using the recollections and reflections of several participants, grouping experiences into broad categories or themes. Because the student interviews are fundamental to this study, these will provide the foundation upon which these connecting strategies are based. The document analysis, staff, and faculty interviews and observations served to contextualize the experiences related from student participants.

Memos are "an essential technique for qualitative analysis" (Maxwell, 2005, p. 96) providing opportunities for the development of insight and to facilitate thought about the data collected. Keeping a methodological journal comprised of analytic and reflective memos throughout this research process assisted in this analysis. Analytic memos written while analyzing documents provided a referral point for later analysis of interview data. When possible, specific time was set aside to write memos following each interview to capture the ephemeral perceptions and impressions of the encounter with the participant. Likewise, memos were written each evening and at the end of a site visit to summarize and encapsulate the overall experience at each institution. Analytical memos were used to guide the formation of connections between data during the process

of analysis. A methodological journal documented the process and progression of the study, offering insights into the ways the study design is informing evolution of the research. These analytical tools assisted in the organization of participants' responses and the researcher's observations. Additionally, they provided additional data for the recognition of emerging themes and insights.

Researcher as Instrument

As with all qualitative research, a human instrument is the central data-collecting tool in the qualitative student proposed. Lincoln and Guba (1985) list seven advantages to this approach: responsiveness, adaptability, holistic emphasis, knowledge base expansion, processual immediacy and opportunities for summarization, and clarification and opportunity for atypical and idiosyncratic responses. These advantages provide a foundation for the use of this researcher in the proposed study.

A human instrument is responsive and adaptive, paying attention to the context and non-verbal communication of participants and modifying accordingly. The researcher in this study is a certified counselor, having experience working with individuals and groups in therapeutic and psychoeducational settings. Responsiveness and adaptability are key traits for professional counselors and proved to be an asset in individual interviews. Similarly, processual immediacy and finding opportunities for summarization and clarification are important counseling tools as well as qualitative interview methods.

Keeping a holistic focus is crucial when examining programs in a post-secondary setting. Students in these settings are experiencing developmental challenges and periods

of growth (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Considering the context in which students live and work is crucial to understanding their experience. Atypical and idiosyncratic responses can add richness to the research when the researcher is attuned to the holistic experience of the participants.

I spent a decade working closely with post-secondary students, including a number of students with various disabilities, in an institution with informal supports for students with special needs. Though I do not have a disability myself, the experiences of these students have been enriching and meaningful. On several occasions, I had students with disabilities in my class. My role as counselor provided an intimate glimpse into the experience of students with disabilities. For a time, I served as an advisor to my institution's disability support staff and chaired the institution's disability committee. Witnessing interactions among students, staff, and faculty created an awareness of the need for self-advocacy. Some of the students with whom I worked were quite successful academically, socially, and personally while others were less successful in one or more of these areas.

Time spent in coursework toward my doctorate has focused on students with disabilities as well as the study of higher education. During my recent years of study, I have come to appreciate the principles of academic universal design. A core belief established through my experience working with students is echoed by Worley and Cornett-DeVito (2007): "one of the most persistent themes in the disability studies literature, people with disabilities are *people first*; they are not defined by their disability but by their humanity" (p. 29).

Because of my experience as counselor and educator, I feel comfortable talking with students about their experiences. I recognize that I may bring a bias toward these students in my research. I believe that otherwise qualified students with disabilities have the same potential for success and failure as students without disabilities. I also believe that educational institutions and the faculty and staff in those institutions have not only a legal obligation but the ethical responsibility to provide an environment in which all students have access to education. As a researcher, I strove to recognize these biases and remain cognizant of their influence on my work. The methodological journal was a key part of this ongoing critique.

Nickerson (1998) wrote of the pervasive nature of confirmation bias, the "in appropriate bolstering of hypotheses or beliefs whose truth is in question" (p. 175). Through the use of the methodological journal, I have sought to reduce confirmation bias in this study. Following an analysis of the data, I revisited the data focusing on confirmation bias and specifically sought evidence contradictory to the themes and premises I established during the initial analysis. Through this process, I became more confident that my initial assertions were trustworthy.

Strengths, Limitations and Implications

This study has a sound research design well-suited to the questions being addressed. The design has been drawn from a number of established methodologists, selecting features that are most applicable to this study. The work of Lincoln and Guba (1985) influenced the over-arching model and the phases of inquiry while Maxwell's (2005) work provided the foundation for purposeful selection. Interview protocols have

been developed based on Kvale's (1996) suggestions. The result is a design that is structured enough to provide a sturdy framework for the study and yet flexible enough to explore the research questions thoroughly.

Because participants were drawn from three similar yet distinct institutions, the perspectives they shared came from different contexts. The students and programs were similar enough to one another to draw some comparisons across cases. All participants were traditionally aged students with learning disabilities or staff/faculty members at institutions with structured programs. Yet, because learning disabilities are a "homogenous group of disorders" (NJCLD, 1999), their perspectives must also be considered individually. By considering students individually and collectively, this study sought to balance personal and corporate perspectives.

This study provides a glimpse of perspectives in a particular period in time to infer some ideas about the development of self-advocacy skills. Interviews with students were conducted at one discrete point in their educational experience. As such, the study relies on a participant's description of their history and experiences instead of witnessing these experiences directly. A longitudinal design might better address the developmental aspects of self-advocacy. However, it is the participants' perceptions and interpretations of this development that provide crucial information on the importance of particular opportunities for growth.

Qualitative research is not widely generalizable, nor is it intended to be. Instead, it provides an in-depth examination of a particular phenomenon in a particular context. For staff and faculty of the institutions studied, this study may inform policy, provide justification to continue certain endeavors, or give reason to reconsider others. Readers

from institutions with similar traits and contexts may find these findings a useful place to begin a discussion of these issues or a foundation for further study into these matters.

Chapter 4

Institutional and Program Characteristics

While the three research sites vary by enrollment, regional location, selectivity and history, the comprehensive disabilities programs have much in common. This chapter will highlight the similarities and differences among these institutions and programs. First, a discussion of institution-wide characteristics will be outlined. These include the ways the Interactional Model of Disability is reflected in the institution's history of disability services, the involvement of the faculty in disability services, and the ways in which Universal Instructional Design practices are incorporated by the teaching faculty. Second, services and features of the disabilities programs will be explored. Among these are the fee structure, student assessment and documentation, academic coordination, tutoring, advising, workshops and classes, and peer support.

The three institutions selected for this study have fee-based programs for students with learning disabilities. The support services provided in these programs are tailored to meet students' needs and exceed the requirements of law. Staff members in these programs have specialized training and education in disabilities or related areas. In a small number of cases, students are required to participate in these programs as a condition of admission. For these students, the admissions staff and disabilities program staff have determined a much higher level of support is needed for the student to be successful at the post-secondary level. These instances are rare, however, and most students participating in these programs choose to become involved in the program.

In addition to these optional structured, comprehensive programs for students with learning disabilities, the institutions also have a disabilities services program free to

all students who qualify for services. The two programs at each institution provide different levels of service to varying populations of students. The free programs serve students with a wide variety of disabilities including students with mobility, visual, and hearing disabilities. These programs are responsible for providing support and accommodations in accordance with federal standards. Though these programs often do provide support beyond the accommodations required by law, the free services offered for students with learning disabilities are not as extensive as the offerings in the comprehensive programs. The relationships between the two programs vary by institution but have some coordination between the two programs. Students may be involved with both programs receiving for example note-taking assistance or testing accommodations from the broader program while working with tutors and coordinators from the comprehensive program.

Interactional Model of Disability

The interactional approach to disability takes into account societal and environmental factors in considering the definition of disability. This model states that disability is a socially-constructed phenomenon, requiring the inclusion of interaction between the individual and the larger context (Jones, 1996). Within an accepting, inclusive environment, disability becomes less disabling. The universities in this study have created an atmosphere in which students with disabilities can find the support they need to be successful. This environment has been built over time, with disability services firmly rooted in the history of the institution. Faculty involvement and the adoption of Universal Instructional Design principles contribute to the experience of current students.

History of Disability Services

Each of the three institutions has a rich history of serving students with disabilities. This background has created an environment of acceptance of varying abilities among faculty, staff, and students. Montgomery University began serving students with physical disabilities years before it was commonplace to integrate students. Over time, services expanded to include students with learning disabilities. The Dean of Students at Montgomery University was an undergraduate at the university over 40 years ago and has been employed there for many years. His understanding of the history of the institution is evident in his description of the development of disabilities services:

Most of our colleges in [this state] are on the side of a hill, in areas that are difficult to get around. So, accordingly, most students who have mobility impairments have gone to school here at Montgomery. And then about 25 years ago, probably, the state department of rehab[ilitation] put a full-time counselor on this campus for the reason that, at that time, there were a lot of students under rehab sponsorship who were college students, most here. So, because we had a full-time rehab counselor, then it just grew. We developed a reputation for providing access and services. . . because of that we grew into having a statewide reputation for access for disabled students.

A well-respected professor took this reputation and foundation further by establishing the comprehensive learning disabilities program which joins several others in assisting students with particular disabilities. In addition to its reputation for students with

learning disabilities, the institution also has programs for students with autism spectrum disorders, hearing impairments, and other disabilities.

The disabilities services program at the University of Hillsville was founded by a pair of philanthropists who gave a significant gift to the university to be used to support students with learning disabilities. These individuals worked in the community and met two high-school students who indicated their learning disabilities made college attendance impossible for them. The professionals approached the university administration about starting a program to support these and other students with learning disabilities. From a modest beginning of working with a dozen students, the program has grown to serve approximately 200 students. At such a small university, this number of students represents approximately one-quarter of the student population.

The disabilities services program at the University of Greenburg has been in operation for 25 years. This longevity has created an environment of support and acceptance for students with learning disabilities. Thirteen years ago, the current program director took the helm. In the decade that followed, he has worked diligently to increase the visibility and acceptance of students with disabilities on campus.

In each of these institutions, the foundation laid by a historical emphasis on making the campus accessible to students with disabilities paved the way for comprehensive disabilities programs housed at universities. This foundation created an environment of acceptance and support for students with a variety of learning needs. Faculty and administrators at these universities are accustomed to having students with disabilities in their classrooms and are supported in their efforts to assist these students.

Faculty Involvement and Support

As the programs developed over the years, the services for students with learning disabilities expanded. Serving these students has become an integral part of the institutional culture at each university. During interviews, faculty members spoke of their interest and commitment to teaching students with disabilities. A strong relationship has developed between faculty and the program staff at all three institutions. For example, the University of Greenburg program director said of his work in building rapport with faculty, "we've developed a fair amount of trust, and faculty call us and rely on our judgment. It's a pretty good working relationship." This sentiment was echoed by the faculty members with whom I spoke. A business professor shared his experience in creating an environment of faculty support for students with disabilities as part of his faculty committee work:

I spoke up, and at my suggestion, they actually pursued [training on teaching effectiveness and innovation]. You know we seem to be having a growing number of [disabilities program] students in our classrooms, an important constituent. And I'm willing to bet others who are like me, don't know how to address their learning needs, but want to. Could we have some forums, trainings or discussions about what we need to do differently, or how can we do a better job?

Each of the three institutions offers opportunities for faculty to learn more about how to engage students with learning disabilities. Staff from the disability program often serve as facilitators for faculty development events. New faculty orientation sessions include a discussion of strategies for assisting students with disabilities. By addressing these

matters directly, faculty develop a sense of understanding and acceptance for varying student needs which culminates in a culture of support and acceptance. The director of the disability program at Montgomery University stated,

When I first started working here, I spent a lot of time on the phone explaining what it was like to have a learning disability and good college potential. Since we've been here so long, I feel like most of the faculty know what we're here for. . . The administration recognizes what we do and supports the program. They understand what our mission is. Without that, it would be easy to dismiss a situation when a student is struggling.

A sociology professor and former department chair at Montgomery University, Adam shared his experience regarding this environment of acceptance, support, and encouragement for students with learning disabilities.

We have faculty on our staff who are dyslexic and things like that. So if you have students who are dyslexic and they'll say "wow, I'm just really having trouble", you can say, "it can be overcome". We have people who have gone through their advanced degrees who are dyslexic. There are strategies and there are things you have to do to overcome that.

The experience was confirmed by students. Eric, a student at the University of Hillsville, spoke of instructors going beyond his expectations to help students with learning disabilities, "I've had a few [professors] who are so good that they'll even take a break from the regular class and come over [to the learning center] to check on [students taking the exam with accommodations]." He expressed his appreciation for instructors

who would make the extra effort to give additional attention to students with learning disabilities.

The level of understanding exhibited by the faculty is not limited to providing academic accommodations as outlined by disability program staff. The pervasive climate of acceptance expands to influence the development of course curricula and the design of instructional strategies. Faculty in these programs seek to ensure that students of varying academic needs have opportunities to be successful. Though there are no explicit incentives for faculty to engage in ongoing pedagogical development, the overall climate of the universities encourages faculty participation.

Universal Design Concepts

The Center for Universal Design at North Carolina State University defines Universal Design as "the design of products and environments to be usable to the greatest extent possible by people of all ages and abilities" (Center for Universal Design, 1997). Borrowed from architecture and industrial engineering, Universal Instructional Design (UID) seeks to make academic environments more beneficial to all students (Silver, Bourke, and Strehorn, 1998). The faculty interviewed in this study referenced this idea of accessibility. Most indicated a philosophy of working with students regardless of their disability status as shared by a professor at the University of Hillsville:

I think that they know that I'm going to make those accommodations regardless of whether they have a disability or not, and I do. So hopefully, that will enable them to be successful and - but if they do need to talk to me, obviously, I'll - I do that as well.

This sentiment was echoed by the business professor at the University of Greenburg who makes accommodations available to students regardless of disability status.

I always have a paragraph in my course syllabi about students with learning disabilities. And actually, it doesn't have to be any student that is specifically labeled as such, or has a diagnosis. But instead, anybody. It's open. If you have special learning needs, please let me know and I will do what I can to accommodate. So if somebody came to me who is not affiliated with the [disabilities] program, and said look, I find it distracting to take an exam when there are other students in the classroom. All right, let me see if I can work something out. You can either take it in my office. We'll get you a conference room. We'll work that out.

Providing accommodations is not the only way faculty members provide support to students in their classes but also extends to the ways in which professors provide instruction in the classroom. The education professor at the University of Hillsville shared that she is "very much an advocate for differentiated instruction." She has stated objectives for her courses but also allows students some leeway in how they may demonstrate competence. She stated, "so, yes, these are the goals of my course, but the way that we get it – it may vary from student to student." At the University of Greenburg, a student shared that her professor "had some PowerPoints. She did a lot of writing on the board, but she made it legible. And we had several quizzes in the class." Perhaps this professor was one of the ones the accommodations coordinator at the University of Greenburg referenced when she stated,

Some of the instructors who are quite new, or at least have a fresh way of looking at things, are starting to embrace universal design. [They say] "Just because this is the way I learned, this is the way I've always taught, doesn't mean that it's the best. I'm willing to try something new."

Universal Design is not an easy concept – its application is not simple for every situation as a humanities professor at the University of Hillsville acknowledged:

The danger of sort of objective universal classroom is that it doesn't exist - and it couldn't exist and really, I think it's very challenging if you've got 20 people versus if you have six. So the class size makes a huge difference. It just does because you can't talk to 25 people. Very often I will have students come up after a big class, say who do I need to talk about this? And so I need to interact individually with each of those people.

This instructor acknowledged that the reason he has chosen to teach at a small institution is to make this type of individuality and access available to all of his students.

Faculty at Montgomery University receive a handbook which provides helpful hints for working with students with disabilities. Many of these tips could be categorized as universal design:

How Professors Can Help

- Provide a syllabus with topics, requirements, due dates, and criteria for evaluation
- Provide a monthly assignment sheet with dates when assignments are due, etc
- Provide a study guide to aid in studying for tests
- Use multi-sensory teaching techniques (ex. when lecturing, write on board and show pictures to illustrate concept)
- Be concrete
- Encourage students to tape important lectures

- Break down the length of units for students with memory problems. (Give two shorter exams instead of one longer exam)
- Provide time extensions for students who work slowly

Within these supportive campus environments, the three structured learning disabilities programs have some common attributes. Among these are assessment, academic coordination, tutoring, advising, workshops and training, and peer support. Though the institutions differ in the way they emphasize and manage these components of the programs, these elements are integral parts of the program's offerings.

Fee Structure

Students involved in these structured disabilities programs pay a fee to access the services of the program. While most of the program management costs are administered through student fees, each of the programs has had benefactors who have given gifts to support program operations and to provide scholarships for students.

At Montgomery University, students pay a per-hour fee based on the number of tutoring hours they utilize. Other services, including use of the learning disabilities program technology, supplemental advising, and workshops, are incorporated into this fee. As a result, students who choose to use fewer tutoring sessions pay less per semester. The rate varies by residency status with in-state students paying \$325 per tutoring hour and out-of-state students paying \$525 per hour. Students average four tutoring hours per week. Accommodation support is shared between the structured disability program and the university's other disability programs. Most students choose to work with their tutors for testing accommodations but use note-takers assigned through the larger program.

The University of Greenburg and the University of Hillsville employ a flat-rate fee for participation in their program. At the University of Greenburg, students pay \$3000 per year for full access to the program resources including tutoring, weekly meetings with an assigned academic counselor, and classes or workshops. Accommodation support is managed through the university's larger disability program and is provided at no cost for qualified students.

The \$9000 per semester fee at the University of Hillsville is the highest of the three programs. This fee covers initial disability assessment, daily academic coordination meetings, daily tutoring sessions, use of the program's technology resources, and access to subject specialists. Though students may receive free academic accommodations through the federally-funded Student Support Services in a neighboring building on campus, most students choose to have the structured learning disabilities program manage accommodations.

Student Assessment

Most students participating in these programs arrive on campus having had a battery of psychological tests to diagnose learning disabilities and recommend appropriate accommodations. However, these assessments may be several years old or may not be as thorough as needed. The structured programs provide assessment services to furnish a current and complete picture of the students' particular needs. Assessment is completed by members of the program or university staff and is tailored to the kinds of evaluation the program and staff has determined to be useful. The assistant director at the University of Greenburg described the evaluation at her institution:

And we have the core set of what we assess. And then we kind of rotate in certain areas. But it gives us a good, you know, idea of, and good feedback because the students know what's working for them and what's not. So it's good to get that.

At the University of Hillsville, comprehensive assessment is an integral part of the admissions process for students entering the disability program. Robin, the program director, explained the rationale behind their extensive testing strategy.

We test these students for about a day and a half. Some people would say that might be overkill but we just think it's important to get to know them the best we can. And I always tell them, if they've been tested in the last year we may not do the whole two days, we may just do part of that. We still have them come for some testing and some interviews with us. It's so important to get to know that student. It's one thing to get a 10 on a subtest and be sitting here like this [leans back in chair and looks at ceiling with a bored expression] and it's another to get a 10 and the kid is like [leans forward eagerly] really trying so hard. It's so different to watch the attitude and the problem-solving. It's one thing to make a certain score on math and realize they have the concepts down but made careless errors or it's another thing to make that same score and that's all there was. So to me it helps the whole test analysis and item analysis.

These assessments provide a basis for the comprehensive support the student will receive at the University of Hillsville. Academic coordinators receive copies of the assessment results and plans for accommodations are based on these.

At Montgomery University, students are required to provide current assessment scores to document their learning disabilities. The program does not routinely provide assessment opportunities for students. Staff, however, will assist students in making arrangements to be tested locally if needed. Georgia, the staff member with expertise in assessment, reviews a student's documentation and writes individualized plans based on her analysis. These individualized plans become part of the students' files and are reviewed by the various tutors working with students to determine the accommodations and services student participants receive.

The emphasis on testing varies among institutions. The University of Hillsville program assesses all student participants to supplement the documentation provided by students upon their arrival. By contrast, Montgomery University and Greenburg University rely more heavily on prior testing results, supplementing only when the provided documentation is out of date or otherwise inadequate. All three programs depend on these assessments to build students' initial support profiles and employ staff members with special qualifications for learning disabilities assessment and review.

Academic Coordination

At each of the three institutions, staff formally track the progress of students. Professional staff meet regularly with students to follow their progress. The frequency and arrangement of these meetings vary. At the University of Hillsville, perhaps the most structured program of the three studied, students meet daily with their assigned coordinator. The coordinator and student review the day's assignments, the study plan for the day, accommodations needed for classes, and other concerns the student may

express. The student participants in the University of Greenburg program are expected to schedule and attend weekly half-hour meetings with their assigned program advisor to report the week's progress and work on problem areas. At Montgomery University, students' progress is followed by the graduate student tutors who maintain regular contact with students during tutoring sessions. The professional staff members meet with students several times per semester. In this program, the staff stay in close communication with tutors, providing support as needed. Sessions between professional staff and students are scheduled as needed. Students are not assigned to a particular staff member but instead meet with the individual best suited to address the particular problem. Many conversations between professional staff and students happen informally.

The coordinator's role at the University of Hillsville is the most extensive of the three programs. These academic coordinators meet daily with their students and direct most of the services the students receive. Close attention must be paid to the line between providing appropriate support and fostering a sense of dependency. The assistant director of the Greenburg program stated, "through the contact with their counselor and advisors they really can develop those skills. The flip side of that is there is a fine line and we all dance that fine line between supporting and enabling."

By contrast, academic coordination is less defined at Montgomery University than at the other two participating programs. Tutors are expected to maintain regular contact with students and assist with coordination of services. However, students may have several tutors and may work with a particular set of tutors for only a semester. The program staff sustain contact with students informally at Montgomery. No staff member maintains a caseload of students with whom he/she is expected to meet regularly and no

student has a particular staff member assigned to him/her for academic coordination. The University of Greenburg strikes a balance between these two contrasting perspectives. Students at the University of Greenburg meet weekly with their designated academic counselor. Coordination of services and accommodations is managed by other dedicated staff members (e.g. the testing coordinator), freeing time in weekly sessions for the student and academic counselor to focus on broader issues and forcing students to take responsibility for arranging their own accommodations.

Tutoring

Each of the programs provides comprehensive tutoring services for students involved in the programs. The University of Greenburg handbook provides confirmation of the centrality of tutoring as an important component of the program.

To meet the needs of students enrolled in various degree programs, the [disabilities program] offers discipline-specific tutorial support in addition to the services of the academic counselor. The tutorial staff of the [disabilities program] is composed of adjunct faculty, graduate students, and upper-division students who have demonstrated a solid mastery of their discipline. Regular tutoring is available weekly; additional tutoring times may be scheduled.

Carefully selected and trained to work with the unique needs of students with disabilities, tutors are advanced undergraduates, graduate students, or professional staff with demonstrated success in the subject they tutor. Tutoring at each institution is well-

organized and structured. The Assistant Director at the University of Greenburg provided an overview of the training process for tutors at her institution:

We have a training packet that goes - and that's what we train - our tutors with. And then each quarter, they are required to then do additional training. So they do one meeting with them with their discipline and then they do a second training. And that has varied in the past to where they have had four options. And then as a group, their discipline chooses which option would be the most beneficial to their group. Or we would have - if it's something like study strategies or whatnot where it's going to benefit everybody - everybody will attend that one.

This guidance goes beyond the initial training of tutors and continues through workshops and support provided as tutors work with their students. "We work with our tutors twice a month on teaching them strategies to work with the students," explains the Director of the Montgomery University program, "and also [we ask them to] let us know how Johnny's doing, if he's struggling let us know, if you need some extra strategies. It's a constant dialogue and communication really."

Student participants indicated they value tutoring services and take advantage of having tutoring available for their subjects. Eric, from the University of Hillsville, succinctly stated what other students conveyed in their interviews, "I get tutors for most of my classes because I know that through the tutors I can do better than I would have. I've had some classes where they didn't have a tutor for me or I didn't want one and I didn't do that well. And so I'm taking advantage of every tutor I can take." Jennifer, a

student at Montgomery University, also values her sessions with her tutors and credits them with much of her success:

Tutors are a big part of it. I've had my fair share of good tutors and my fair share of bad tutors. Depending on how much effort the tutor puts in, depends on how well I can do because I'm taking a biology class right now, and I'm not very much a big fan of biology, as an art major. And my tutors really put in the effort to help me understand the human body.

The profile of the tutor varies from one institution to another. At the University of Greenburg and Montgomery University, tutors are graduate students or part-time professionals with expertise in the subject they tutor. These individuals tend to be at least several years older than the student participants and have some experience in teaching or tutoring. As an undergraduate institution, the University of Hillsville relies on peer and staff tutors. Particular attention is paid to the selection, training, and supervision of these tutors, some of whom are also program participants. Professional reading, writing, and math specialists provide specific training and instruction in those areas.

Advising

Advising provided by staff members with expertise in disabilities issues is done in concert with and in addition to faculty academic advising. It is not meant to replace academic advising provided by faculty. Advising services help students with the selection of majors, the choice of courses and the daily schedule. Program staff have had experiences with many of the faculty and courses at the universities as well as having a thorough understanding of learning disabilities. These staff support academic advising,

helping students balance their academic load, choosing courses with instructors whose teaching strategies will benefit the particular student's needs, and scheduling courses to allow for testing accommodations and tutoring sessions. Susan, a coordinator at the University of Greenburg, describes the distinction between academic advising and the advising support provided by the program.

We do not serve as [faculty] advisors, we've been asked not to do that.

We don't know the curriculum and the students really need to form connections with their faculty advisor. We will help them look at their schedules, and say, "let's bunch your classes up so your meds will be effective" or "you really need a break". But first they have to go to their advisor and get their registration materials.

At the University of Hillsville, program staff work very closely with faculty advisors, discussing student needs and progress frequently. Students at the University of Hillsville must meet with both program staff and the faculty advisor prior to registration. The director of the program described the advisory role of the program coordinators.

Our coordinators also serve as secondary advisors. All of our kids have academic advisors but then they have their coordinator as well and the reason that works so well is because the coordinator really knows the student, the disability. We know what kinds of things are easy for them and what kinds of things are hard. We also know the classes. The academic advisor is going to know the ones in their area, but that's it. The coordinators, we basically know all the courses on campus, so we know which ones have tons of reading, we know which ones have lots of writing

and which professors are pickier about the writing than others. We know which ones have math in them that you can't tell from the title.

At this institution, the program staff serve as secondary advisors, supporting the academic advising of the faculty. The coordination between the faculty advisors and program staff creates a collaborative environment for academic advising.

At Montgomery University, the support for academic advising is less formal. The primary point of contact for students in the Montgomery program is the academic tutor. In most cases, these tutors are graduate students and may offer a student's perspective on course offerings and instructors. The professional staff often have close relationships with faculty and may offer advice to students in planning schedules and choosing instructors. These conversations, however, are not mandated by required meetings as they are at University of Hillsville, or folded into regularly-scheduled sessions with academic coordinators as at the University of Greenburg.

Advising support, whether structured or informal, is an important component of all three disability programs. Working with faculty advisors, the program staff provide an additional element of guidance in the selection of courses and instructors. This support is instrumental in ensuring the academic success of students.

The structured, formal approach for advising support requires that the faculty and program staff work together to provide a comprehensive advising experience. The potential problem with this arrangement is that the student may not take appropriate ownership of his/her academic experience, expecting the faculty advisor and program staff to arrange the details in the student's absence. Particular care must be taken to ensure that the student is involved in all conversations and decisions. An unstructured,

informal arrangement requires the student to coordinate with both the faculty advisor and the program staff, communicating the needs of one to the other. Students in this arrangement may get conflicting messages or may have some issues left unaddressed. For example, the faculty advisor may suggest that the student enroll in two particular classes requiring extensive reading of involved texts while the program staff may recognize that the student's dyslexia may make this arrangement difficult. A balance between coordination and student involvement benefits the student. A staff member at Greenburg outlined his approach to finding this balance, "reinforcing the resources that are available, and then teaching them how to use them. So I'll kind of parallel process that with them. And then allowing them - encouraging them to do it on their own."

Workshops and Classes

Individualized support and advising form the cornerstone for each of these programs. In addition to these one-on-one experiences, each of the programs provides opportunities for students to gather and learn collectively. Workshops and training opportunities offer students a chance to learn about such subjects as time management, organization strategies, and study skills. Though this is a common feature, it is addressed differently at each institution. Montgomery University offers a popular summer program designed to assist students with the transition to college and to provide remediation in areas of weakness. The program director feels this is one of the most valuable aspects of their program.

And what really distinguishes us from a lot of schools, we have the learning specialists that work on reading comprehension, reading rate,

spelling, language, and study skills and organizational skills [in the summer]. I think that students who have the remediation find that that can be really helpful as far as an encouraging adult saying that these are the things that we feel you need to do to be successful.

Students take a common study skills class together, enroll in up to three courses in remedial skills as needed and may register for one regular university course if schedules allow. The assistant director supervises the testing and determines which summer courses students should take.

We try to put everybody in that study skills class because it covers a wide range of advocacy, self-esteem, dealing with depression, what happens when you get overloaded, just a realm of things. We take the three areas we feel they need the most help in. We have some kids that have a specific learning disability in every area we offer but we can only do three [of these classes during a summer term]. So we pick the three we feel they need the most help in. We do offer tutoring for the academic class they're taking over on campus, but they spend three hours with us every afternoon Monday through Friday in intense remediation in their deficit areas that we have determined according to their testing.

At the University of Hillsville, a study skills class is offered to program students each semester. One of the academic coordinators teaches one or two sections of the course to small classes of students. Topics covered include time management, organization, note-taking, and reading strategies. I had an opportunity to observe the

class in one of their first meetings of the semester. My notes from that session included the following observation:

Dawn keeps the students moving from one activity to the next and literally moving around the room to complete different tasks. They don't have an opportunity to zone out or become distracted. The students seem to be genuinely interested in the subject matter and engaged with Dawn and one another. Today's session covered broad topics of prioritizing and positive reframing but also gave an opportunity for students to talk about their daily schedules, to-do lists, and organization strategies.

At the University of Greenburg, workshops provided the foundation upon which the program was built. The program handbook outlines this in the history, "[t]he [disabilities program] in 1983 had a limited role in supporting students with learning disabilities, primarily securing tutors and offering various study skills workshops." Currently, the program focus has shifted away from formal workshops and classes to as-needed consultations with students on topics such as organization, writing development, and time management. Student organizations provide opportunities for students to work together with a staff advisor and develop leadership skills.

Peer Support

An often intangible feature cited as important by students and staff is the camaraderie and support program that participants provide each other beyond the accommodation and academic support offerings of the programs. Students in all three programs have opportunities to participate in formal group activities such as field trips

and clubs as well as providing space for informal gatherings. These relationships provide an element of support for participants.

At the University of Greenburg, a central component of the program is the student group. Garrett, a tutor-coordinator and graduate of the program, was a student when the group was founded and shared his recollections, "I was actually studying abroad at the time and came back and basically it was sort of originally developed as kind of like a mentoring program for students sort of to help intergenerational groups. So help the new students come and integrate better." Now, however, the group has expanded to be an outreach tool for students with disabilities. During my visit, a group of students had just returned from a tour of local high schools where they shared with students their strategies for dealing with disabilities. Newly added is a mentoring component where students involved in the program may serve as mentors for others. The group has made students with disabilities more visible on campus. Garrett stated:

I think [the group] has helped put a new face on who program students are. Because we do have a diverse demographic here. We have everybody from physical disabilities to people with various LDs, dyslexia, ADHD, I mean it's impressive. . . students are a lot more active than they were when I was a student. There's this new involvement, civic engagement, I see. And I think there's a little bit more openness to LD issues because I think there are students who are in [the program] who are now in the senate. It was ground-breaking when I won a senate seat, for instance. There was someone who was openly LD sitting on the senate.

At Montgomery University, the student club sponsors fun outings such as tailgate parties and an annual ski trip. The club also provides members an opportunity to become involved in community services projects in the city where the university is located. As a student-led program, students also have a chance to hone leadership skills as executive officers or project leaders.

Beyond the formal programs, students meet in the hallways, form friendships during workshops and tutoring sessions. They report that their closest friends are within the program and that the program offices become a home away from home. At the University of Hillsville, Eric stated,

“Some do have friends outside the learning center but most have friends inside the learning center. Partly it’s because we’re always in the learning center so we always see each other.”

Peer support is an important component for all three learning disabilities programs. All three offer similar opportunities for students to develop peer interactions formally and informally. The organizational structure of the programs and the physical arrangement of their locations aid in fostering these connections. Each program has gathering spaces for conversation. At Montgomery University and the University of Hillsville, the programs are located in their own buildings with seating areas and tables available for student participants. The University of Greenburg program is located in the student center, giving access to communal spaces throughout the building.

The three institutions represented in this study vary by size, structure, region, and selectivity. In spite of these differences, there are striking similarities in the history and climate of support for students with varying abilities. Correspondingly, the three

programs within these institutions reflect the broader institution and have some differences. The similarities among the programs, however, are more salient than their differences. All three disability programs provide comprehensive tutoring, academic guidance, and opportunities for peer support.

Common university and program attributes contribute to an environment of support and encouragement at all three institutions. Through the involvement of faculty and administration, these universities have created a campus climate conducive to a broad range of student needs. The programs within these environments both benefit from and contribute to the campus climate. Students are accepted and understood by faculty who have participated in ongoing development through orientations and workshops. Students in these programs provide opportunities for their professors and peers to become aware of learning disabilities. Staff members in the disabilities programs serve as consultants and workshop instructors. Though differing in approach and emphasis among the three institutions, these common attributes provide a similar context for student participants in these programs.

University Attributes

	Montgomery University	University of Hillsville	University of Greenburg
Enrollment	14,000	650	11,500
Location	Mid-sized city in the Upper South	Rural in the South	Large city in the West
Public/Private	Public	Private	Private
Degrees	Undergraduate, Masters, Doctorate, Medical	Undergraduate, Liberal Arts	Undergraduate, Masters, Doctorate
Undergraduate Faculty/Student Ratio	19:1	11:1	9:1

Structured Learning Disabilities Program Attributes

	Montgomery University	University of Hillsville	University of Greenburg
Number of Students	200 undergraduate participants, also offers programs working with graduate and medical students	90 students	200 students, primarily undergraduate
Costs	Charged per tutoring hour - \$325 in-state; \$525 out-of-state - averaging 4 hours per week. Other services included within this fee	\$9,125 per semester	\$3000 per year
Student Assessment	Documentation provided by student and reviewed by staff member	Supplemental testing completed by the university testing specialist - all students entering the program are tested	Documentation provided by student and reviewed by staff member. If needed, student may be referred to student health and counseling services for additional testing
Academic Coordination	Provided by tutors, informal support by program staff	Students meet daily with academic coordinators. Coordinators also manage tutoring and testing accommodations	Students meet weekly with academic counselors
Tutoring	Tutors are primarily graduate students, some part-time professional tutors	Professional academic specialists in reading, writing and math provide extensive tutoring for those subjects. Peer tutors supplement in these subjects and provide tutoring for other subjects	Tutors are primarily part-time professionals and graduate students
Advising	Informal coordination between program staff and faculty advisors occurs as needed	Academic coordinators serve as secondary academic advisors, working closely with faculty academic advisors	Faculty advisors provide academic advising. Academic counselors provide suggestions for the student on scheduling after student has met with the faculty advisor
Workshops & Classes	Summer study skills and remediation program recommended for all student participants	Ongoing workshops and classes with program staff including a semester-long study skills class offered each term	Workshops on topics such as organizational skills provided periodically
Peer Support	Organized student club for social events and community service projects	No organized club but much informal contact between students fostered by daily visits to the learning center	Organized student club for social events, community service projects, and educational opportunities in university and larger community (panel discussion for university faculty, visit to local high school etc)

Chapter 5

Context-Specific Themes

Emergent themes gleaned from this study can be grouped into two broad categories, student-centered and context-specific. Student-centered themes are those in which the student has primary authority or control. These include gaining an understanding of one's disability, developing communication skills to convey needs and desires, and constructing a sense of motivation and self-efficacy. These student-centered themes will be explored in the next chapter. Context-specific themes relate to the environment, or context, in which the student lives and works. Students develop personally and academically within an environment that shapes the student's experience. Though the student does not directly control these aspects of his/her educational environment, each of these aspects influences and is influenced by the student. The themes explored here include parental involvement in the student's educational history, the nature of the support provided by the learning disability program, and the overall campus climate at the university.

Parental Involvement

The third vector in the Chickering and Reisser (1993) model stresses the development of interdependence, a state in which individuals recognize their need for support and assistance while primarily relying upon themselves for their academic success. Students who have emerged from this state are imbued with a sense of self-sufficiency and an understanding of their needs for intimate relationships. For students with learning disabilities, the development of interdependence is crucial for the

development of self-advocacy. Having achieved a sense of interdependence enables students to assess their needs and request support accordingly.

A significant part of Chickering and Reisser's model is the movement from a reliance on parents to a reliance on peers and other support systems. For students with disabilities, this task is made more challenging because of the level of involvement and assistance provided by their families from an early age. Parents of students with disabilities participate in individual education program planning meetings with teachers and special education specialists. They are included in all educational decisions made for their school-age children. This participation requires parents to devote considerable energy and time to managing the student's disability. An example of this finding is illustrated by Daniel's relationship with his mother. After Daniel suffered a head injury as a toddler, his mother made a significant vocational change. As Daniel healed from his injury and began working with speech pathologists, occupational therapists and special educators, his mother earned a degree in special education. He explained, "her career is based around me. Everything she did was to know how she could better help me – to use that with helping other families." She met the staff at the University of Hillsville at a professional conference and suggested that Daniel consider the school. Though her level of participation and career change were unique among the student parents I encountered, parents of students with disabilities are often involved with their child's education from the beginning and may continue this involvement more than is typical of parents with students without disabilities. Martha, one of the staff members at Montgomery, noted, "For the most part, our students have parents who have been such integral parts of their education from the time they were little. And they are more involved at the college level

than probably the traditional student.” For these parents and students, the transition from an expected high level of parental involvement to a more hands-off approach may be difficult. The staff members at the learning disabilities programs acknowledge the involvement of parents in students’ early education and constructively work with families to ease the transition. Kelli, the program director at Montgomery, stated,

I think that parents that have a child that have had learning problems through the years tend to be - especially the ones that get to the college level - have been so involved in their education and they want so much for their kids to succeed, they jump and don’t always step back a little bit and let the kids move forward.

To that end, the three programs in this study share information with parents on the importance of giving students the opportunity to move away from parental support. The staff reassure parents they will provide a high level of support to the student and give concrete advice on how parents can manage the transition. For example, the University of Greenburg provides a handbook to parents providing tips for relating to students as adults and encouraging parents to work through the student instead of contacting the counselor directly. The director of the University of Hillsville program meets with parents of prospective students and outlines expectations for parents and students.

However, not all parents are involved in their child’s education. A few students indicated their parents provided little support for their educational endeavors. In these cases, other adults stepped in to fill the role of advocating adult. Rebecca and Nancy, for example, each mentioned a teacher they looked to for advice and encouragement. These

were the adults who helped students choose a college. Both students have remained in close contact with these former teachers.

Bethany is a student participant at Montgomery University and the only undergraduate tutor employed there. She indicated her parents encouraged her to be self-sufficient from an early age and credited her father with pushing her to be successful on her own. Though the professional staff are often patient and understanding of parental desire to be involved, Bethany indicated she may be less tolerant of what she sees as parental interference.

The parents think that their kids are not capable sometimes of doing these things, which they're perfectly capable of doing. They've just been so sheltered by their parents their entire lives that they don't know how. And I think a lot of that - I always said that there are students who come into the program sometimes - there needs to be a difference between learning disabilities and just life skills. Life skills have to be developed and that's, I think, part of the sheltering that parents do for their children. The kids haven't really gotten out there to experience things on their own.

The involvement of parents and other supportive adults provides an important foundation for the development of a student's educational success. Students in this study reported that this support built a foundation upon which their own sense of self-efficacy was built. Bethany described her experience.

But the nice thing is, growing up, my parents always - there was never really anything that I couldn't try. They never said, "Oh no, you can't do that. You're going to get hurt," or "Oh no, you shouldn't do that." They

guided me along the way, I guess, in a way that wasn't - they weren't holding my hand too much, but they were right by my side if I needed them, and I think that helped a lot. So I was able to experience things on my own and do things on my own, I guess, and didn't have them like, "Well, I need to do that for you."

Though the transition from elementary and secondary levels of involvement to a more laissez-faire post-secondary approach is sometimes difficult, students whose families have negotiated this transition emerge with a strong base upon which to build academic success. Each of the programs focus attention on helping families with this transition. Student participants in this study indicated that their parents encouraged them to take responsibility for personal and academic accomplishments.

Parental Role of Program Staff

This high level of parental involvement in the student's primary and secondary schooling often means that students and families expect a more parental role for the disabilities program staff. Accustomed to having a parent's participation, the student looks to the program staff to fulfill this parental function. There is some difference of opinion regarding the nature of the relationship between staff members and program participants. Some programs and staff welcome and embrace this expectation and willingly become "second mothers" to students. It is important to note that the program staff identifying themselves in this way were, without exception, women of an age to be the parents of the students with whom they work. Other program staff resisted this parental role and assumed a more professional, formal approach. Students likewise were

divided on the appropriate role of the program staff. The relationship between staff and student vary by institution, forming a significant part of the program's culture. Two of the institutions frequently used familial language when describing the relationship between students and staff. The students referred to coordinators as "second mothers" and discussed the "family" at the learning center. In these cases, the overwhelming majority of the staff members were women. For some, there was no hesitation to indicate that this is a positive association. Eric, for example, confirmed that at the University of Hillsville

some people would even say that their coordinator is there for them as a second mom away from home. They're there and do things that their mom used to do, help them out with some of their studying, making sure that they have the right tools for their classes and stuff.

Likewise, at Montgomery, Erin appreciates the parental role of the staff, stating "They're mothers for students away from home who come from out of state, so it's always good to have that motherly figure." Georgia, one of the staff members at Montgomery, discusses her parental role as an affirmative quality. She consistently refers to the students as "kids" and references herself as a mother figure for them. She discussed joy and pride in seeing the students accomplish their goals.

We have the graduation ceremony, it's really, really very emotional for all of us that are involved with these kids. We've been through a lot with some of them - when they're really emotional, it's very emotional for us. We've been there. It's like we've been the parent, we've watched. We've seen the tears, the upset when they haven't passed a class or haven't gotten

a good grade on something they worked really, really hard on. But we've also watched them pick themselves up and move on when it didn't work out how they thought it would. They didn't let it get them down. It's a great thing, we enjoy it. We look forward to May every year.

Though the University of Hillsville was the institution where the parental culture seemed to be most prevalent, not all the student participants or program staff there felt this was the best arrangement. Some students and staff had mixed feelings about the parental role staff sometimes play. Justin acknowledged it may be considered negative to have the coordinator fulfilling a parental role, even as he sees this as a positive experience for himself.

And that's one good thing about my coordinator, she's amazing, it's like having a second Mom. And I know that might look like a bad thing, you might be cradled too much. Especially coming to school away from home and being right off on your own by yourself, it's kind of good to have someone to talk to, to vent to. It doesn't even have to deal with school, I mean, it deals with school, but not homework, directly. That's the one big thing that helps, she's there to say, "You can do this." . . . I have a second mom, I thank her for everything she's done for me. Especially me being away from home.

Other students were not so enthusiastic about a parent-child relationship between staff and students. For Mark, another mother was not at all what he wanted in an academic coordinator. He stated,

I had mother issues, so I didn't really want a mom. For the motherly types, they're a little overbearing, in my opinion. Oh, I think overall because I don't think it's good for any student to have one that's basically like a second mother. In my opinion, all that you're doing is fueling the beast that's already there.

Mark divided the staff into two categories, those who played the mother role and those who did not. Obviously having given this topic some thought prior to our conversation, he quickly described each staff member's inclination for filling a mothering role. He had worked with staff on both sides of this divide and found himself drawn to those he did not view as parental. Mark's assessment was in line with the language used by other students in the program. Those who considered the coordinator to be a mother figure were assigned to coordinators in Mark's first group.

In spite of their reputation, some coordinators in Mark's latter category found themselves unenthusiastically playing the role of parent for students. Caroline shared her experience with a student unwilling to have a conversation with a faculty member about his poor performance in class. She reluctantly accompanied the student to visit the faculty member as a last resort.

I had a student last semester who wasn't doing too well, and he and I both went to the professor and it was very uncomfortable for him, because he was a very independent type student, and he didn't like it at all. Because I was uncomfortable. I told him, "I'm uncomfortable doing this. I don't want to be your mom, sitting here and talking to you. You're 20 years old, and I'm going to talk to your teacher with you." And I said, "There was a

reason I did this, because it was the last straw, and we had to do something.”

Caroline's preference is for students to initiate these conversations themselves. Rather than allowing the student to fail for lack of communication with the professor, she arranged and led the meeting with the student and professor. In the end, this student decided not to re-enroll for the following semester, stating that he needed to take a semester off.

Some staff members, even those who value the parental role, consciously try to strike a balance between nurturing support and allowing students to make their own mistakes. The potential for students to develop an unhealthy dependence on the staff support drives this dedication to the balance. The assistant director at the University of Greenburg described it as, “a fine line and we all dance between supporting and enabling.” At Montgomery University, Georgia, in her self-proclaimed mother role, seeks to encourage students to be responsible for their own success.

I tell everybody it's like being mother to 200 kids sometimes. As much as I wanted sometimes for them, they have to take the fall before they realize they want it. Sometimes I just have to step back and let them make that fall. It's hard. . . So it's hard to sometimes step back and say, “alright, he's going to have to fall flat on his face.” But we do, it's hard but we do.

Georgia's colleague, Martha, shared her views on trying to achieve this balance. She spoke of her fellow program staff with parental tendencies as “nurturers.”

When you look at the staff, some are more nurturers than others. And it seems like the students who need to be nurtured kind of latch onto those

staff members who are the real nurturers, and I think I'm kind of in between. I nurture, but also try to make them accountable and responsible.

This familial and parental language that was prevalent at University of Hillsville and at Montgomery University was completely absent at the University of Greenburg. There, expectations and culture were entirely different from the other two institutions. The students compared the staff to therapists, teachers, friends, and mentors. No one suggested they could be considered parents. Likewise, the staff did not refer to themselves as nurturers and the climate was one of professionalism. The assistant director compared her relationship with students as similar to a doctor/patient relationship. She felt her students trusted her expertise and expected her to be caring and professional.

Each of the campuses studied here exuded a different atmosphere that was prevalent in the interactions between students and staff. Common language, shared expectations, and program structures served to create a climate in which program participants are more or less formal, more or less familial in their interactions. None of these ways of engagement emerged as better or more appropriate for students involved though participants often had opinions about what they believed best served students. In the final analysis, it seems that students choose programs best aligned with their needs and expectations and these programs served to reinforce those needs and expectations. Whether familial or formal, students experienced growth toward self-advocacy in their relationships with program staff. Alec related his experience,

The relationships I made and the confidence I was able to gain from those relationships really, I think, moved me into some of those leadership positions. . . I really changed and got the most out of my experience because of the people.

Circle of Support

Whether the role of the staff is primarily professional or parental, the common goal among all program staff is the creation of a supportive, encouraging environment for students. Staff help foster the skills needed for students to become their own advocates as they move through their education and into the workforce. All three institutions worked toward this goal by providing, in the words of one program director, a "Circle of Support" to enable the student to succeed academically.

In Chickering and Reisser's model, interdependency is developed by moving from a state of dependency through a period of focus on autonomy. Students are expected to shun assistance from others in an effort to establish a sense of self-sufficiency and independence. According to Chickering and Reisser, it is through this period of autonomy that students realize and accept the importance of relationships and emerge with an appreciation of the interconnectivity with others necessary for success (Chickering & Reisser, 1993).

The students in this study, however, did not seem to display this movement through autonomy as they transitioned from a state of dependence to interdependence. Instead, the shift from dependence to interdependence occurred as students came to accept a more central role in their own academic success. Students demonstrated they

achieved a level of "instrumental independence" defined by Chickering and Reisser (1993) as "the ability to carry on activities and solve problems in a self-directed manner and the freedom and confidence to be mobile in order to pursue opportunity or adventure" (p.132). They also demonstrated evidence of "emotional independence" which Chickering and Reisser consider "separation from parents and increased reliance on peers, authorities, and institutional support systems as well as a sense of confidence in one's self-sufficiency" (p. 133). Instrumental and emotional independence are precursors to interdependence and were evident in students' comments. However, they did not demonstrate a stage of autonomy as they developed interdependence.

The program director at the University of Hillsville described this concept of a gradual shift from dependence to interdependence using the phrase "Circle of Support", an apt description of a concept evidenced at all three institutions, "The way I explain it a lot of times, when we bring a student in I think of them being in a circle of support. We give them every kind of support they might possibly need." The circle of support moves from a staff-directed (fig. 1) to student-directed (fig. 2) pattern of interaction as students move to choosing the level and type of services they need.

Initially, support services are prearranged by counselors and coordinators based on the assessments and documentation of learning disabilities. The staff determine what accommodations and services students need and ensure that students use these services. In this early period, meeting schedules are set by the student's counselor, coordinator, or tutor and it is the staff member who directs the conversations in these sessions. At this early stage, students also look to the program staff to communicate with faculty. Each of the three programs has a standard letter for faculty, describing the students'

accommodations needs. Students in their first semesters often expect the program staff to convey their particular needs to the instructors, even requesting that the letter be sent directly to their professors. The circle of support is staff-directed at this point (fig. 1).

Justin, a student at the University of Hillsville, described the role of his academic coordinator as he made the transition from a staff-directed to student-directed circle of support.

I guess Kathy could be an intermediary for the whole thing, talking to the professor and then talking to you to make more ease there, so you're not dealing with the professor. But when you get older you kind of want to talk to the professor and let them know what's going on. But, yeah, definitely more freshman and sophomore. Because you're not - no one's taught you how to be ready for college and what teachers expect from you.

As students progress, the program staff become less directive and the student gradually takes charge of their own educational experiences. Students take the lead in conversations with program staff, making their own appointments and bringing the agenda for discussion with them. One coordinator described a student who had been "camped out" in her office early in his academic career. Commenting on his growth during the three years he has been with the program, she commented "I've noticed his growth has been tremendous. Now he comes and checks in, and he'll say, 'I'm canceling a tutor,' and I'll say, 'Well are you coming in Tuesday to work on that paper?' and he'll say, 'No I've already got it going.'" This student still checks in with the coordinator periodically and uses the services of the program as he feels he has need. This is a significant shift from the staff-directed approaches used earlier in his studies.

Lisa, a junior at the University of Greenburg, described her movement toward a student-directed approach in her first term and the resulting confidence she gained from this shift.

As I began the quarter, I was given very structured support. [The study skills specialist] would say I needed to take notes on this or that, begin working on something else, and organize all of these things in a binder -- and that she wanted to see the results next week. Then, I would do it. For some reason, just having someone actually tell me the things that needed to be done and the steps I needed to take to do them aided me tremendously. Over time, this structure tapered off a little as I developed my sense of self-advocacy, became more organized, and put the study skills I was learning to use. Currently, I am much more confident in my abilities as a student.

Students assess their own progress and choose what services would best fit their needs, as described by a third-year student at the University of Greenburg, "Like, I took a calculus class last quarter. And I was having a hard time with it. And I said, okay, well, what can I do? So I came to the center here and got tutoring services every two - one or two times a week." Students become the decision-makers in their own academic careers. At no point did students indicate they made a serious attempt to succeed without the help of the program staff. Eric, in his description of his experiences, uses the term "independent". His definition of independence, however, does not indicate that he is independent or autonomous in the traditional sense. Instead, his comment reflects an

interdependent mindset. He recognizes the importance of his relationships with his coordinator and tutors.

I still like reading things with her because she can help me get the full picture of it, and explain it. But each year it's very important to kind of take a step away from the coordinator, I think. Maybe get some separation, you know, so you can progress. Because, you're not going to have them there your whole life. Unless you get a great job and have a secretary that can write everything for you, I guess. You've got to be independent. I've noticed that I'm really independent. I'm coming to her to tell her everything that's going on, not her coming to me. You really just get what you want out of this school.

This movement from staff-directed to student-driven does not happen by chance. The steady progress toward interdependence is part of the program design. Staff members help and push students to take ownership of their education experience. Students are expected and encouraged to take responsibility for their educational success even as they are supported by the program staff. A professor at one institution described the work of the program staff at his institution:

I know that they really work on that at the learning center because they tried to scaffold it where they give more assistance at the beginning and then hopefully wean them away. And that's the way it should be because, at some point and time, they do have to take control and make choices for themselves.

Movement toward a student-centered interdependence is a primary goal of the program. The parent handbook for the University of Greenburg program states this explicitly: "The philosophy of the program emphasizes student responsibility, self-awareness, and self-advocacy. Through the services offered by the [Disabilities Services] Program, students are able to develop the skills needed to attain academic and personal success" (Handbook, p. 5). Recognizing that students will move beyond the university and the program provides the motivation to work toward students' interdependence. Robin, in her discussion of the Circle of Support, concluded,

I tell them our goal is you're not going to need us anymore. That may happen while you're still in college, that may happen when you leave us. They're in this circle of support, we pull back, they start having problems, we come back again. We want them to be standing without us. That's the goal for all of them. . . however that works for them.

This idea of having students standing without the staff seeps into the words of the students as well. As more advanced students contemplate life beyond the walls of the university, they shared their future plans and how living with their disabilities will affect them. The development of a sense of interdependence creates awareness that individuals with disabilities will always need support. Students come to realize they will be required to seek assistance in the next chapter of their lives. Justin, a senior, looks forward to his career and reflects on how he will manage his disability in that context.

One thing is never be afraid to ask a question. Wherever I'm at or company I'm working for, if I have a problem or something, I can just ask them a question. I think I could write any paper that a company needs -

I'm not going to need to call Kathy. But just how school is, I think a lot of people are like that. When it comes to school people aren't very good at being organized or being able to handle all of those classes they take, so they need some help, extra guidance. And I'm always going to need someone to help me take notes and stuff like that. But, now I'm not afraid of asking people for it.

Campus Climate

The circle of support provided by program staff is not an isolated experience but is found within a larger context of institutional support by the university as a whole. Students in programs contribute to and benefit from a context of support at all three institutions. The Interactional Model of Disability considers the context of the individual in describing and defining disability. The universities in this study provide an environment of support and encouragement, lessening the influence of the student's learning disability in their educational experience. A supportive campus climate is characterized by the recognition of disability in the admissions process, an acceptance of students with disabilities, and a commitment to equipping faculty with the necessary skills to teach students of varying abilities.

The three institutions differ in their management of the admissions process with regard to students with learning disabilities. Two institutions provide the learning center staff with a few open slots to admit students who may otherwise not qualify for university admission. At these institutions, the program and admissions staff work closely together

to determine which students are eligible for admission. Georgia, a staff member at Montgomery University, related,

Oh, we work very closely with admissions. We have an individual over in the admissions office - they grant us exceptions into the program. So if we accept them into the [learning disabilities] program, the admissions officer will call and say, 'this student is not going to get in on their own accord. Do you want to use them as an exception to let them into the university with the understanding that they're going to participate in the [learning disabilities] program? Or do you want them to go the route of the community and technical college? . . . Their scores or their GPA isn't warranting them to go straight into the university. If they are provisionally accepted to the university, they . . . work very closely with us.

If students are admitted provisionally, they must fully participate in the learning disabilities program and are required to meet certain goals to maintain their academic standing. Their progress is monitored by the program staff and their admission is reviewed at the end of their probationary period.

The third university does not reserve openings for students with disabilities and the program staff is not in any way involved in the admissions process. However, the admissions staff at this institution displays an understanding of disability issues. An admissions officer at this institution described the admission process:

If I happen to know they struggled with a learning disability or ADD or ADHD, and that's been highlighted in their application by not only

themselves, but a teacher or something, that's something I would take into consideration. Something that would encourage me to bring their name up [to my colleagues] and say . . . "They would, most likely, would be very successful."

On these borderline cases, the admissions staff meets to discuss whether the student will be accepted. The staff makes referrals for admitted students who may benefit from the services provided by the disability services program.

In all three institutions, the admissions staff has an appreciation for the challenges students with disabilities face when taking standardized tests and completing other admissions requirements. Thus, the student's first interaction with the university is met with an understanding of disability issues. This is an example of the Interactional Model of Disability at work – the social construction of disability is adjusted by the flexibility of admissions staff as they use a broader consideration of test scores.

The retention of these students is a concern shared by many at the universities. The majority of these students remain engaged in the institution and the learning disabilities program. Robin at the University of Hillsville attributes their positive retention rates to admission policies and comprehensive support. At Montgomery University, 88% of first-year students continued in the learning disabilities program through the first semester of their second year. Of the five who did not, two chose to participate in another university program focusing on a co-occurring disability. Two transferred to another institution, stating they wanted to be closer to their homes. The remaining student opted to continue his degree program without the comprehensive support provided by the learning disability program.

Each of these three institutions has a history of working with students who have a variety of disabilities. At all three campuses, it is not unusual to navigate the sidewalks with students in wheelchairs or have a sign language interpreter in the classroom. The universities have a reputation for acceptance of students with disabilities whether or not those disabilities are observable. A longtime staff member at one campus related:

I think Montgomery has always been a campus that has been receptive to disabled students. Because even years ago because of the layout of the campus, it is accessible to physically handicapped students. And at one time we had the largest number of physically handicapped students on the East Coast because of the accessibility of the campus which then kind of lays the groundwork for accepting all disabilities, even with the learning disability being a hidden handicap. And they look the same, and for the most part in the classroom until they take a test or turn in a written assignment, do the same.

Faculty members at these institutions express an understanding of disability issues and an appreciation for what the students with disabilities bring to the classroom. A philosophy professor suggested the students' learning disabilities may have enhanced their experience in his course.

I've had advanced philosophy students who are learning-center students who are in upper level courses. They weren't majors, per se, but who did really extremely well and sometimes because of their way of rerouting things, I guess, through their brain, they can do a lot better in terms of thinking analytically, thinking critically, than most of the average students.

So over the past several years, I know that two or three of my more advanced, you know, 100% type students in these big courses were reading a book a week and doing philosophical investigations. They have been learning center students.

Faculty members at these institutions are intrinsically involved in providing support for students with learning disabilities. The positive working relationship between the disabilities program staff and the faculty creates an encouraging environment in which students may succeed academically. Often, the program staff provide workshops or seminars to help faculty better reach their students with learning disabilities. Eager to expand his knowledge and pedagogical skills, one instructor shared his belief that all faculty should have opportunities for faculty development,

I believe if people are slated for an academic career, where teaching is going to be a big part of it, just like we say statistics is the language of research and we want people to know that. We ought to have some time where they spend learning about how do you disseminate knowledge, and how do you deal with different learning styles.

He went on to share how a workshop taught by the director of the disabilities services program gave him valuable information in teaching all his students, not just those with diagnosed disabilities.

Opportunities for encouragement and support are plentiful at these three universities and the learning disabilities programs. Students transitioning from their families of origin find encouragement and affirmation in these environments. This circle

of support allows students to make the gradual shift from having educational opportunities dictated by others to taking responsibility for their own educational success.

Through the foundation built with the involvement of parents and other adults and the support provided by the universities, the development of self-advocacy is supported. The way this self-advocacy develops, however, does not follow the model suggested by Chickering and Reisser's (1993) third vector. A stage of autonomy on the way to a sense of interdependence was lacking for these students. Students' relationships with the program staff, whether familial or professional, serve to help them gain skills toward becoming more interdependent and self-sufficient. The campus climate as influenced by the presence of the learning disabilities program becomes a supportive one to foster this growth.

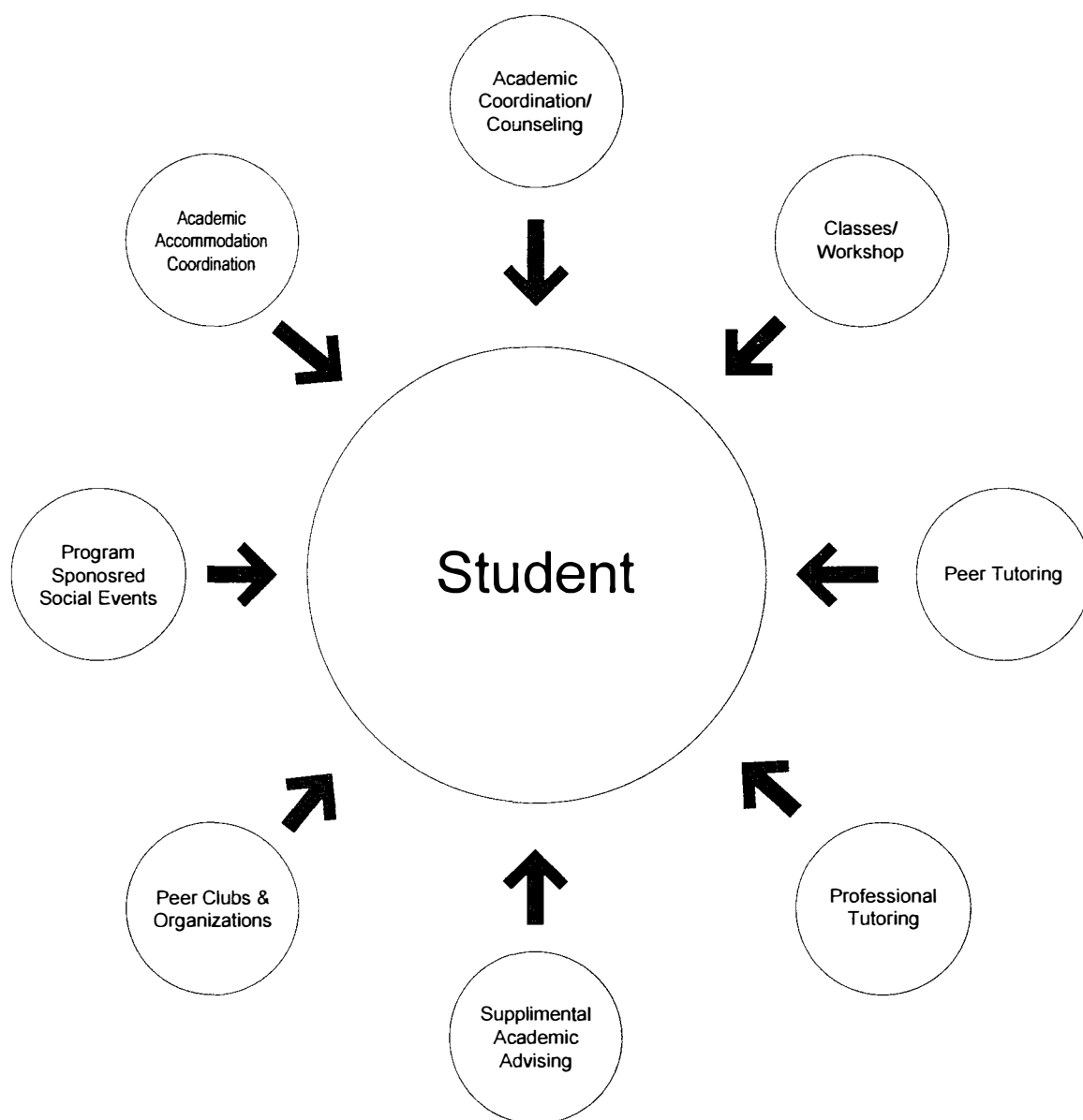


Fig. 1 - Circle of Support – Staff-Directed

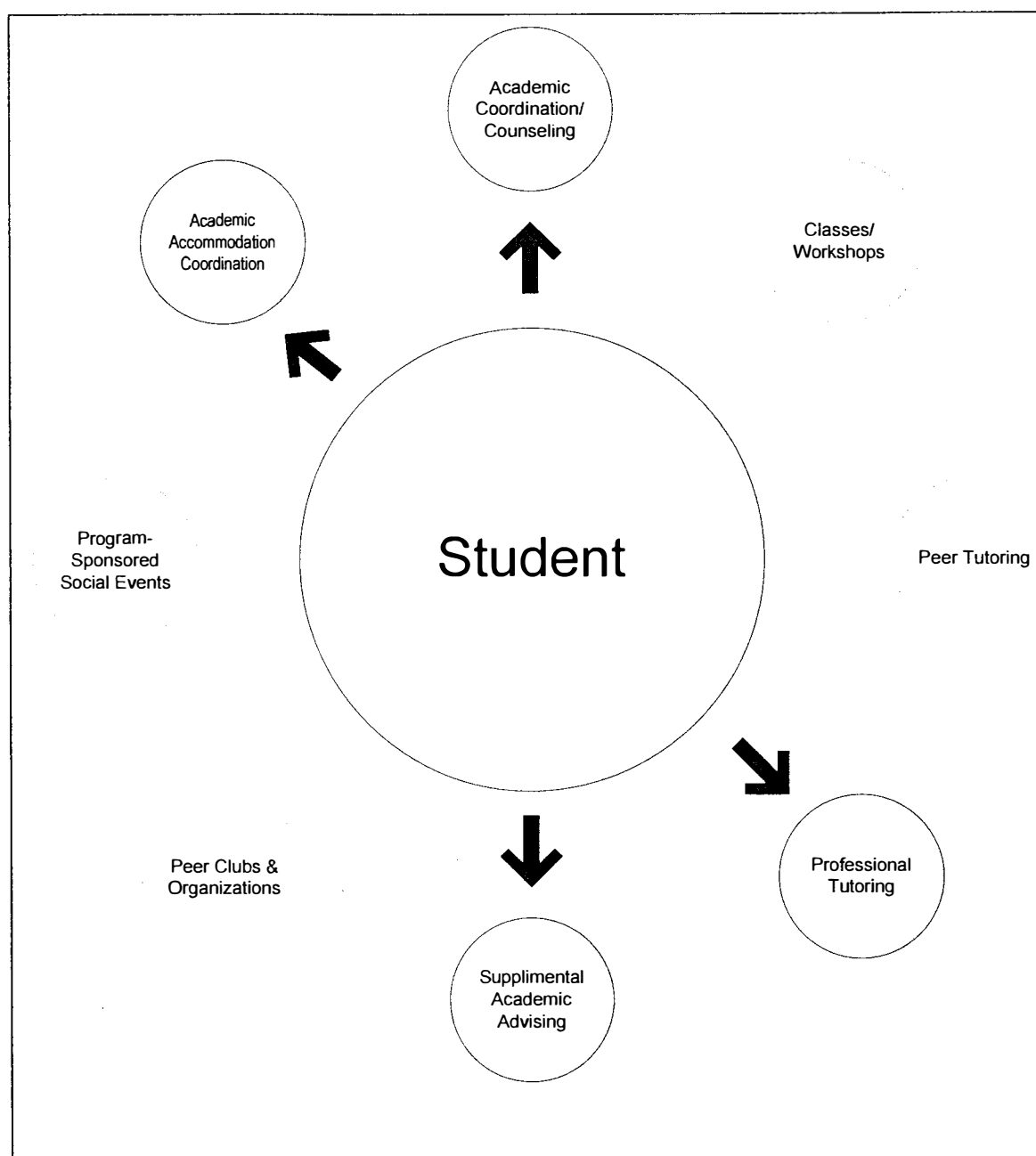


Fig. 2 – Circle of Support – Student-Centered

Chapter 6

Student-Centered Themes

The themes gleaned from an analysis of participant data can be organized into two general groups: context-specific and student-centered. Context-specific themes take into account the influence of the students' environments on their development. The context-specific themes explored in the previous chapter include: parental involvement in the student's education, the nature of the support provided by the learning disability program, and the overall climate for disability acceptance at the university. By contrast, student-centered themes are those which spring from the student's personal experience and over which the student has primary authority or control. These include constructing a sense of motivation and self-efficacy and the self-advocacy tasks of the understanding of one's disability and developing communication skills to express learning needs. The students in this study began the development of self-efficacy, motivation, and self-advocacy prior to arriving on the university campuses and continued to grow in these areas.

Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy was not part of the original theoretical frame for this study. However, interviews with students, faculty, and program staff led to an understanding of the centrality of this concept. A memo written during the first research site visit highlights the discovery of the importance of self-efficacy.

Originally, I considered self-efficacy to be foundational, but not part of, my research design. I argued that self-efficacy and motivation were *affective* states, not *cognitive* concepts. Because I am focused on

cognition and metacognition, the consideration of an affective concept such as self-efficacy didn't fit. I soon learned, though, that I was wrong. My first research trip introduced me to several students, staff, and faculty who showed me that efficacy does play a role. It does have a cognitive component. To *know* that you have the ability is part of the process.

(Memo dated 1.31.08)

Following this discovery, a deeper review of the literature revealed the cognitive and metacognitive dimensions of self-efficacy. Bandura (1997) defined self-efficacy as "beliefs in one's capability to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments" (p. 3). Students develop self-efficacy as they internally process their experiences and construct a set of beliefs that incorporate a sense of impending success. Using Bandura's definition as an underpinning for the concept, self-efficacy in this study is characterized as an affective concept formed and filtered through cognitive and metacognitive processes.

Bandura (1997) outlined four ways individuals develop a sense of self-efficacy: experiencing success, vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and interpretation of physical or emotional states. The first of these is the most influential in the individual's development of self-efficacy and is cultivated from an experience of success in overcoming difficulty. This was the most prevalent means by which students in this study developed self-efficacy. Justin, a senior at the University of Hillsville, reflected on his high school experience leading into his first year of college. His doubts of his abilities diminished and his sense of self-efficacy increased as he experienced success.

So, my freshman year, I started doing the school work and I started getting that confidence that I belong in college. Because at first I thought, I can't do that school work. I'm not ready for college. When in high school I was babied the whole time, like I didn't have to do anything. I went to a public school that was real relaxed, pretty easy. Didn't take a rocket scientist to graduate from there. The coming here, realizing the classes - these are legit classes and I can do the work. It just, I just started getting that confidence.

Nancy, a junior at Montgomery University, had a similar experience. Initially she doubted her ability to succeed at the college level, even indicating that she expected she would not be allowed to remain at the university. Her early success led to the development of a sense of efficacy and has fueled her current success.

So I just came, I wasn't expecting to be here after my first year. I thought I was going to get kicked out because I had my learning disability . . . then getting past my first year, and just like I like it up here, I want to do better . . . and my grades skyrocketed, actually stayed good.

For both of these students, experiencing success in their first years provided a foundation for a sense of self-efficacy that has encouraged continued academic success. Some students indicated their first experiences with success began earlier in their academic career. A sophomore at the University of Hillsville, Daniel described his success in high school. His early success at the university did not surprise him but instead built on the expectations he brought with him in his first year.

Bandura's (1997) second source of developing self-efficacy occurs through "vicarious experiences" (p. 87). Individuals who witness others whom they view as successful may believe that they, too, can experience success. In this way, the accomplishments of a peer group become a way to build self-efficacy of its members. Alec, an alumnus of the Greenburg University disability program currently serving as an admissions counselor, reflected on his experience as a student. The social components of the program were critically important to his development of self-efficacy.

The relationships I made and the confidence I was able to gain from those relationships really, I think, moved me into some of those leadership positions, which, in turn, allowed me to get these awards. I would definitely say that my experience was very productive and influential in the classroom but I would dare say it was probably more out of the classroom that I really changed it and got the most out of my experience because of the people, because of the things I was a part of.

Vicarious experiences may be, as they were for Alec, founded in relationships with peers. In other cases, students may identify with public figures who have similar disabilities. A bulletin board just inside the main entrance of the Montgomery University learning disabilities program building highlights prominent individuals who "Could Have Been in the [Disabilities] Program". Among these were actors, athletes, politicians, and inventors. Bethany referenced this display in describing her own development of self-efficacy, "[t]here's a poster in the hallway of all these people who were genius or borderline genius and had disabilities and were able to get through it. Why not? What's

stopping me?" Identifying with these individuals has given Bethany a sense of her own opportunities for success.

Third in Bandura's (1997) model is development of self-efficacy through social or verbal persuasion, stemming from the social influence of those whose opinions are valued. Parents and other supportive adults in the student's childhood experience often lay a foundation upon which students may build a sense of self-efficacy. Becoming involved in the learning disability programs, students form close relationships with program staff. Both at home and at school, these relationships may lead to the development of self-efficacy as these individuals assist students in understanding and reaching their potential. A student quoted in the graduation edition of the Montgomery University disability program newsletter encapsulated this thought, "I would like to thank my tutors, parents, and professors for getting me through all this and making me believe it was possible." Believing that success in college is possible is the essence of self-efficacy.

Finally, Bandura states self-efficacy may be developed through the individual's interpretation of his/her physical and emotional state. Students' experience of anxiety and discomfort during academic tasks may lead to a perpetuating cycle of anxiety and discouragement. Caroline, the math specialist and testing coordinator at the University of Hillsville, described her approach to helping students break this cycle by remaining calm as they work through math and test anxiety.

Even if they've had a horrible math past, no self-esteem in that area, terrible grades, a lot of times we can get through it. I tell them it doesn't matter what you did in the past - which it really doesn't - just try to start

with a clean slate. Usually it works. Part of my job is just to get through the math phobia. . . And then the testing works real well, actually it does, with the double class time. Because most of them do have some amount of test anxiety and they've got plenty of time. And then we hole up in [the testing room], and there's a refrigerator and I tell them they bring whatever they want. Some of them bring entire lunches, entire meals. They'll bring their tootsie roll pops, they'll lay all their candy out. Just whatever it takes. I have them come with their pajama bottoms and their fuzzy house shoes on. It works.

By focusing on creating a comfortable environment for students to learn and test, Caroline helps students break the cycle of anxiety and discouragement, building self-efficacy as students become more at ease in these academic tasks.

Evidence of students' self-efficacy was apparent at all three institutions. Students emphatically stated they saw themselves as intelligent and capable. Justin, the University of Hillsville senior, declared, "I can learn everything that everybody else can, it's just at a different pace or a different way, or a different style that teachers aren't used to doing. And that's the big thing, I think." His classmate, Daniel, echoed this sentiment, "I'm smart - it just takes me extra time." Rebecca, a junior at Montgomery University, credited her disability with making her stronger and smarter, leading to a sense of self-efficacy.

I've heard people say kids with disorders, like dyslexic and stuff like that, are a lot smarter than regular people. And I think the reason behind it is because we're faced with all these challenges, and we learn to become

more flexible than most people, and we learn that, "I can't do this" is not always the best answer.

Students often refined the language they used to describe disability. Phrases such as "learning difference", "neurological diversity", and "processing difficulties" replaced "learning disabilities" in some students' comments. These phrases suggest that students do not identify themselves as disabled but as having a different collection of needs and experiences than their peers.

Motivation

A sense of self-efficacy helps students develop the motivation to continue their studies in spite of the challenges their disabilities create. Like self-efficacy, motivation is an important factor in student self-advocacy that emerged as the study progressed. Robin, the program director at University of Hillsville, stressed the importance of this aspect of the student's experience.

And finally, I tell people this is the most important one, but it's the hardest to measure, is the level of motivation. They've got to be motivated. I tell parents, it's got to be [the student's] idea that they're here. It doesn't matter how much mom and dad want it and how much we want it for them, if they don't want it, it's not going to happen.

Motivation and self-efficacy are integrally related. Pintrich (1999) outlined three types of motivational beliefs essential for student success. The first of these is self-efficacy. As noted above, students developed a sense of self-efficacy as they came to believe in their

ability to be successful academically. This belief in one's ability to succeed is motivating for students.

The second type of belief is that the task under consideration holds some personal interest or salience for students' overall plans. Mark, a senior at the University of Hillsville, illustrated this as he described his conversation with himself as he attempts to connect his coursework with his personal interests.

And so in every course I take, I find something I like and I try to contribute that to, all right, so you're in econ course. You suck at econ and you don't like econ. Well how can you contribute something that you do like? Well, I like TV and the TV industry. Well, why not look at the economic side of that so you can enjoy economics somewhat?

For Mark finding relevance and value in coursework that initially holds little interest for him helps to motivate him to strive for success in his classes.

Pintrich's (1999) third belief, an orientation toward reaching personal goals, is related to the second. In this category, Pintrich takes a broader view of how students move toward a larger goal. Again, Mark provides his perspective on the importance of finding a larger purpose.

The disability wasn't the problem; it was my attitude. The disability sure as heck didn't help, but it was finding a reason to be successful, and I think that was key for me. And the way I look at it, I mean just differentiating people with learning disabilities and people without. A person without [a learning disability] can get by fairly easy without motivation. A person with a learning disability, a strong learning

disability like mine, where I have to sit there and go get stuff on tape and have to do this in order to be at least on the same playing field as all these other people, I have to at least have some motivation just to hit the par with those with no motivation.

For the students in this study, future goals motivated them to continue to work at the level required to be successful. Nancy, a junior at Montgomery University, plans to work in an elementary school when she graduates.

What motivates me? Not to go and tell a sad story, but what motivates me is, I go back to [my hometown], and I was nothing there. And when I see it, it brings back bad memories. When I come back up here, and I'm like I've got to get this together. I cannot fail. I have to make sure I'm going to be something. I want to work with kids. I feel like it's something I need to do. If I don't do this, then what am I going to do? What kind of job am I going to get?

By keeping her focus on her end goals – working in an elementary school and moving away from her hometown – harnesses her motivation to concentrate on her everyday academic tasks. This focus has seen her through remedial reading classes, long tutoring sessions, and conferences with program staff.

For the students in this study, a sense of self-efficacy served to make the negative comments of others a motivating force. Instead of believing and accepting the pessimistic outlooks of others, many participants found inspiration in the negativity of others. Rebecca, the Montgomery University anthropology major, related an experience with a teacher in high school:

I heard her talking to another teacher who was in the gifted program [saying]"I don't understand why they even let kids who have disabilities come to school. They don't go anywhere. They just sit there and do nothing. I mean, once they get out, they just work at a Wal-Mart or a McDonalds." And by the time I was a senior, I passed all five graduate exams and walked out of there with a regular diploma. I had, like, a 2.2 average, but I did it. I'm the first person in my high school to do it. They said I couldn't do it. I'm here. I just wanted to make them eat their words. And so my first year here, I got a 4.0.

For Rebecca, this experience overhearing a high school teacher helped to provide the motivation she needed to graduate from high school and be successful in college.

Bethany had a similar encounter with a professor at the university she attended before transferring to Montgomery.

The second quarter I took a biology course, and I was struggling. And I went to talk to my professor because I've always thought it was really important, especially if you have a learning disability, go get to know your professor and talk to him. Be your own advocate. Well, she told me that because of my disability that I should maybe reevaluate my life and what I want to do. Well, that was just completely unacceptable. Don't ever tell me I can't do something.

Bethany went on to describe a positive relationship with her art history professor, a Montgomery University alumnus, who encouraged her to transfer and take advantage of the learning disabilities program. Bethany is in her final semester of her undergraduate

career and has been accepted in a master's program. She credits her former professor's cynical outlook with giving her motivation for success, saying "I want to succeed and I want to prove to my biology teacher that I can do it."

Justin, the University of Hillsville senior, was more charitable in his assessment of others' negative views, attributing this to ignorance instead of malice. As early as middle school, he was discouraged from considering college. He related,

they said "oh you're not going to be able. You might want to plan on going to voc-tech schools." That's not me. That's not what I want to do.

I don't want to work at - be a mechanic or something. It's just not appealing.

He went on to describe how his teachers in middle and high school would attempt to help him with exams by making them easier.

It's just like they had a lack of understanding. I think a lot of teachers now are understanding learning center kids better but back then it was horrible. Instead of helping me they rendered my problem even more. If I took a test and there would be four answers to a question, multiple choice, they'd knock off two so it would be like 50-50, so it's like true or false.

So it made it even worse for me because I didn't study, I didn't do anything because the tests were so easy. It didn't help me expand or try to learn. Instead, they need to nurture you through it and bring you up, "hey you can do this stuff, we're not going to make it easy for you, but you can do this".

These three students exemplify how a sense of self-efficacy can help students develop a sense of motivation from negative comments of others. An underlying sense of self-efficacy caused them to reject the pessimism of these individuals and instead use this as a catalyst for continued success.

The participants in this study believed motivation to be a quality that students brought with them to their academic experience. Erin, a senior at Montgomery University, believes that motivation must come from within the student. "If they don't have [motivation], you can't teach it. Just like when you're hiring employees, you look for employees who have a smile. You can teach the talent, but you can't teach the smile." Similarly, program staff spoke of students who have not been successful in their programs, attributing much of the failure to a lack of motivation. Students in these anecdotes did not participate fully in tutoring sessions, opted not to communicate with faculty regarding accommodations, and declined other services the program provided. Program directors believed these students were capable of academic success but the students were not motivated to pursue success. Because these students were unavailable to become participants, it is beyond the scope of this study to explore how a lack of motivation may be related to their academic failure and if so which of Pintrich's types of belief was lacking. The speculation of the program staff that students lack motivation is the primary culprit underlying academic failure underscores the importance these individuals place on the concept of motivation.

Self-Advocacy

This study defines self-advocacy as comprised of two essential elements, metacognition and communication. Students must understand their learning needs and have the ability to share this information with others. Students in this study indicated they had developed both metacognitive and communication skills.

Metacognition

Pintrich (1999) connected the concepts of self-efficacy and motivation to the first of these elements considering the use of metacognitive strategies such as goal-setting for academic tasks, monitoring and evaluating progress, and developing tactics for test-taking. Students who have an underlying sense of self-efficacy and motivation use metacognitive strategies to help them succeed. Martinez (2006) defines metacognition as "the monitoring and control of thought" (p. 696). Most of the students in this study have had years to develop their skills in monitoring their thought processes and developing strategies for controlling these processes.

All but one of the students in the study were tested and identified as having a learning disability as young children. Lisa, the exception to the early documentation, was tested in her final year of high school. Her experience was quite different from her peers. She indicated the transition to college was difficult as she struggled to accept her learning disability. She recalled her first term at the University of Greenburg,

My diagnosis was still very new to me and I did not have a full understanding of what it was or what it meant. I also remember feeling very uncomfortable with applying the accommodations I had received

because I didn't really understand how to do that and I didn't have any study or organization skills to integrate my accommodations with.

Metacognitive awareness came later for Lisa than for other students in the study who had years to gain an understanding of their learning needs before college. During her first year, she was placed on academic probation and considered taking a break from college. An in-depth evaluation and explanation provided the information Lisa needed to begin to develop her understanding and acceptance of her disability.

Of the students assessed as children, Collin reported the oldest age of documentation. He was tested at age 11 while he was in sixth grade. The youngest to be diagnosed was Daniel. He was less than two years old when an accident caused a brain injury and the resulting learning disabilities were diagnosed soon after. Over half of student participants reported having been evaluated in first or second grade. These individuals grew up knowing of their disability and receiving accommodations throughout their elementary and secondary education. Metacognitive understanding has been an ongoing endeavor for students who have been aware of their disability since childhood. Daniel encapsulated these students' experiences when he stated, "I've known I've had issues my whole life, so this isn't new for me." The challenge of the college experience is to expand on this metacognitive knowledge and apply it to the new, more independent environment of the university. Gina, a first year student at the University of Greenburg, evaluated her learning needs and summarized one of her strategies for learning in this new environment.

I have to have extremely good time management. I like to be really busy because it helps me, like, get things in order. And so with having - in

college, I have to really prioritize what I do. And I have to give enough time to study because it takes me a lot longer to do things than other people. And I have to give a lot more time for my essays. I just need to prioritize time more because it takes me longer. And I have to be on top of things because I have to schedule when I'm going to take my tests.

Gina illustrates the use of metacognitive understanding as she is gaining a full understanding of her learning needs and developing strategies to ensure her academic success. These strategies seem to be beneficial for her.

I've also come up with ways to study things that work better for me for certain classes. College is very different from high school. Last quarter I was kind of a frantic, crazy person who was trying to figure everything out. This quarter I'm figuring it out."

As a first-year student, she is at the beginning of this academic journey. She indicated she is becoming more familiar with the services offered by the learning disabilities program and deciding which of these services best meet her needs. Gina's work with her academic counselor has focused on enhancing her understanding of her disability and how it affects her academically. They have worked together to expand her repertoire of cognitive strategies (e.g. organization plans, study skills) to help meet her immediate needs.

Justin, the senior at the University of Hillsville, also demonstrates his understanding of his learning needs and how they influence his academic work. In describing his disability, he prefaced his description by referencing his sense of self-efficacy.

I can learn everything that everybody else can. It's just at a different pace or a different way or a different style that teachers aren't used to doing. And that's the big thing, I think. My learning disability is in reading and writing. So, when I read, I can read fine, but to get it here [points to imaginary book] to here [points to head], to comprehend it, there's this line that just kind of separates and it's hard for me. Whenever I read, I'm like, wait what did I just read? And then I start daydreaming. Reading was one of the biggest things for me to do. I was always nervous to read out loud. And then my writing skills, same thing but backwards. I can say what I want to say, but to get my hand to write it out it just gets separated and gets into fragments – into little pieces. That's my biggest disability.

Justin developed some strategies for succeeding academically. As was the case with other participants, organizing his time and work has been instrumental in providing the structure he needs. In addition to his class schedule, tutoring sessions and meetings with his academic coordinator, he plays on a varsity athletic team and participates in an internship program. His to-do list and agenda reside in his pocket and he refers to them frequently. He schedules physical activity each day saying that this provides needed stress relief and gives him the ability to focus for longer periods of time.

Another academic strategy Justin employs is processing his assignments aloud. Analyzing his cognitive needs, he has found that hearing his texts read and having conversations about the material he studies helps him to retain information.

That's the thing, the reading. Hearing it out loud. Being able to discuss it out loud, talking is how my mind works. It's like a formula and I've got

to get it out. I'm such a visual learner. I love numbers and math. I've always been good at that. So I've never had a problem in those classes just because I can look at it and it all comes together, it makes sense. I need to have it set up like math equations. I love stuff on the board, watching it, seeing how it all comes together.

In tutoring sessions, Justin and his tutors illustrate concepts on the white boards in the study rooms. He has developed metacognitive skills to understand his disability and to determine what strategies work best for his particular learning needs. He demonstrates Campione's (1987) assertion that metacognition involves choosing cognitive strategies, monitoring the effectiveness of those strategies, and making adjustments to them as necessary.

Similarly, Mark described the reading system he and the University of Hillsville reading specialist are using to improve his speed and comprehension while reading. In this quote, he demonstrates not only his thorough understanding of his disability but his sense of self-efficacy.

And [the reading system] uses diphthongs and all this. Instead of learning the ABCs, you're learning ABC's 850 different ways, plus every combination of a sound that you can think of, it's sound-based instead of letter based and combination-based. Yeah, the way my brain works, it makes a lot of sense, and especially if you read words. So you have to sit there and look at the full words and decipher the full word, so you have to know every sound that those could possibly make. And then, if you have a huge vocabulary, like I'm gifted with, you're able to go through and like,

okay, it's this word. No, no, no, no. Yes, there it is. Okay, it's this word.

And admittedly, it takes me forever and a day to read a paper. But I can read the paper now, so I'm able to take it home and read it.

Mark's understanding of how dyslexia affects his reading abilities has helped him find a reading strategy that works for him.

Communication

Students' understanding of their learning needs is a crucial first step in self-advocacy. The second aspect of self-advocacy is the ability to communicate these needs to faculty and others who may provide assistance. In the original design of this study, emphasis was placed on students' communication with university faculty. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the comprehensive nature of the disability programs at the universities has created a supportive environment throughout the university. In a memo written in the midst of the second site visit, this idea was explored.

The presence of the disability program seems to make conversations with faculty either unnecessary or easier. Students sometimes feel that it's enough for them to state they're in the program or have the letter sent from the program. The professors know what to do from there with no need for them to initiate a conversation at all. Other times, students use their involvement in the program as a springboard for further conversation. In these cases, the presence of the program means that the faculty already have some notion of what the student expects and the student only has to communicate his/her particular needs.

Some students reported discussions with faculty but in most cases these were limited to the delivery of the documentation provided by the learning disability center and a request for accommodations such as the use of recording devices or extended test time. All three programs provide a memo outlining a summary of students' needs and offer a location and proctor for extended-time tests. Collin, a first year student at the University of Greenburg, stated he's "very comfortable" talking with his professors about his disability and reports that when he does, "I get a pretty positive response, and they're always accepting. Sometimes I will send them an email, or sometimes I'll just wait until after class to talk to them. Usually it's within the first week." Collin, like other participants, shares a memo from the learning center with his professors early in the term. Professors at these institutions are accustomed to receiving this information at the beginning of each term and further conversation is seldom required.

The initial interview protocol assumed students were having extended conversations with faculty regarding disability and accommodations. It soon became apparent that these conversations were happening with tutors and not with faculty. The protocol was amended to reflect this discovery (see appendix). The working relationship between tutors and students provided ample opportunity for students to explore and discuss their particular learning needs. Daniel, the University of Hillsville sophomore, described his conversations with his tutors.

I do [have conversations] with my tutors so they know, so they're not tutoring me in a way I know is not helpful and it's just wasting both of our times. Like, I know I need repetition, so we'll do something three times, at the beginning, middle, and more review at the end. I'm very visual, I

like the white boards and they write it and something. . . a creative idea that will help me remember it, I coordinate it with something else I know I'll remember. Then, they understand how I learn best.

The one-on-one interaction between students and tutors provides an ideal occasion for students to build their communication skills. Turnbull (2003) stresses the importance of trust as individuals construct meanings together through conversation. The relationships between students and tutors provide a foundation for trust to be built. Frequent opportunities to meet one-on-one and a shared goal of academic success help students and tutors to build trusting, supportive relationships.

Hargie and Dickson's (2004) two central themes of communication are evident in students' experiences of sharing information about their disability and learning needs with their tutors. The first of these themes is Intersubjectivity, the attempt to understand others and to make oneself understood. Erin illustrated this concept as she described how she worked with her tutor when they had difficulty communicating.

If I get flustered, then I'll be, like, you know, "I need to go get a drink of water." And when I come back, "Is there a possible way we can break it down further or get a different idea or way to show me?" Because if you tell me how to do something, I'm not going to see it. But if you show me how to do it, I will see it. So maybe showing instead of telling would work.

The second theme suggested by Hargie and Dickson is Impact or the degree to which communication is effective. Students evaluate whether their tutor has understood and made adjustments in the way they present information. Justin described working with a

tutor who, after conversations about his learning needs, developed skills and techniques to fit his preferences.

I like tutors that are really easy-going, relaxed, and don't feel like they're rushing me to get it done. They have some time to deal with me. Because I'll stand up, pace back and forth, come back, try to write it, let it all out. I have tutors for every class. One semester I had one tutor who did every class with me. We'd work together, just because she would work with me very well, listening to what I need, helping me get the stuff that I wanted to say out.

Students make judgments on the impact, or effectiveness, of their communication with tutors and revisit the first of Hargie and Dickson's themes, Intersubjectivity, as needed. They make sure their tutors understand their disability and the learning strategies they have learned work for them.

Students participating in this study demonstrated early development and continued growth in the areas of self-efficacy, motivation, and self-advocacy. Students used language that reflected on their beliefs in their abilities, declaring themselves to be as smart and capable as any other student. They reframed their disability in terms of areas of strength and used this strength-focus to enhance their sense of efficacy. Participants developed ways to maintain their sense of purpose and motivation. They spoke of future plans and of proving wrong those who suggested they would be less than successful. Self-advocacy skills were evident in students' statements. Metacognition, understanding of disability and learning needs, was apparent as students described their

disabilities in both formal terms and personal descriptions. They demonstrated their ability to communicate this understanding effectively in their conversations with tutors.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

Extending the extant research on self-advocacy and students with disabilities (see Cullen, Shaw & McGuire, 1996; Finn, 1999; Hadley, 2006; Janiga and Costenbader, 2002; Scott 1990; and Vogel & Reder, 1998), this study explored the experience of students in three structured learning disabilities programs, focusing on students' development of self-advocacy. This emphasis on students involved in a specific type of learning disabilities program represents a new direction for research in college students with learning disabilities. The rising number of post-secondary students with learning disabilities makes this a topic of relevance for colleges and universities. This chapter will review the themes and concepts arising from the analysis of participant data, provide suggestions for further research and propose implications for students, families, and universities. Two broad questions guided this study: Do students involved in structured learning disabilities programs develop self advocacy defined as an ability to understand one's unique abilities and needs and to communicate those needs to faculty and others? If so, how do students in these programs develop self-advocacy?

Summary of Findings

The central questions at the heart of this study sought to discover if and in what ways students involved in structured learning disabilities programs develop self-advocacy defined here as the development of metacognitive and communication skills to allow students to direct their own academic endeavors. *Interviews with students and university personnel confirmed that students in these programs do exhibit a sense of self-advocacy.*

While students' prior educational and personal experiences inform much of this development, the context of the disability program and the university campus also contribute to this development.

The students in this study showed evidence that self-advocacy skills had begun to develop prior to their arrival on university campuses. Having been tested at an early age, they grew up knowing about their disability and learning about their particular learning needs. The first tasks of metacognition, accepting one's disability and understanding one's own particular learning needs, began early for these students. They indicated they had supportive adults in earlier years to explain the disability and help develop early communication skills, fostering the development of self-advocacy. Additionally, these adults were given credit with helping to lay the underlying foundational beliefs of self-efficacy and motivation. Parents often filled this role, providing support for them throughout childhood and adolescence. Other adults, such as teachers or coaches, were also credited with providing support. The encouragement provided by these individuals helped students begin the development of self-advocacy. Development continued as they entered universities and worked toward completing their undergraduate programs of study. Students gave practical examples of specific challenges posed by their learning disabilities and discussed the cognitive strategies they had developed based on a metacognitive analysis of their needs.

Conversations with faculty, the original focus of this study, were not determined to be a salient factor in students' development of communication skills. Though students and faculty often had meaningful dialog regarding students' learning needs, the campus environment and the disability program procedures made these conversations optional.

Professors were well aware of disability issues and were accustomed to providing accommodations. They often incorporated elements of Universal Instructional Design in the classroom, making instruction more accessible to all students. By contrast, sessions with tutors afforded students opportunities to describe disability, discuss learning needs, and develop strategies. *Communication skills were developed primarily through these conversations with tutors, not professors.*

Self-efficacy and motivation emerged as essential foundational components of self advocacy development. Students brought a sense of self-efficacy and motivation with them to their undergraduate experience. Opportunities to experience success, receive encouragement from others, observe the efficacy of peers and others, and become more comfortable and relaxed in academic tasks helped them to continue the growth of their self-efficacious beliefs (Bandura, 1997). Students expressed this sense of self-efficacy in their declarations that they are capable and intelligent. Some of them had experienced negative judgments regarding their ability to succeed academically. Rather than discouraging them from pursuing higher education, these comments served as a motivating force for students. A sense of self-efficacy allowed them to reject negative comments and find motivation in them.

Closely tied to self-efficacy, motivation developed as students refined their choice of career and set academic goals. Focusing on their personal goals and seeking to find salience in their academic work provided students with the drive to succeed. Motivation was cited by students and program staff as one of the most important aspects of academic success. Stories about unsuccessful students who left the university often included references about their lack of motivation. Program directors addressed motivation in

orientation sessions and in conversations with prospective students and their families.

Motivation was perceived by participants as the foundation of academic success.

Students' development of interdependence did not occur in the way outlined by Chickering and Reisser's (1993) third vector. In the Chickering and Reisser model, students move from a state of dependence through a phase of autonomy before arriving at a point of interdependence. Student participants in this study did not indicate they experienced this middle state of autonomy. The circle of support provided by the program staff and services provided a structure in which students moved directly from dependence to interdependence. Initially, the structure of the program provided a high level of support to all students with program staff prescribing what students needed based on a review of their disability documentation. As students developed their metacognitive and communicative skills, they took on more responsibility for choosing the services and support they used. Students in this study did not indicate they ever wished or attempted to be fully autonomous in their academic endeavors. Instead, the focus gradually shifted from a staff-centered to a student-centered locus of control. For students in this study, this gradual shift seems to be a more beneficial progression than the one proposed by Chickering and Reisser. Though moving through a stage of autonomy may be advantageous in social and other non-academic aspects of students' lives, these students needed continuous, substantial academic support to be successful. Moving seamlessly between dependence and interdependence enhanced the students' academic experience.

The interactional model of disability emphasizes the importance of the context in which the individual lives and works. Students' academic experiences are grounded in the environment of the learning disabilities program and the broader campus climate of

the university. *At all three institutions in this study, the atmosphere was one of acceptance and support rising from a long history of disability services.* One key component in this supportive environment is the attention paid to Universal Instructional Design principles (Silver, Bourke, and Strehorn, 1998). Professors worked to make their course content available to students with a wide range of learning needs. Examples of this use of Universal Instructional Design include allowing alternate testing environments and extended test time for all students, use of a variety of instructional methods, offering differentiated assignments based on students' interests and skills, and providing class notes and lecture slides online.

Limitations

The results of this study are tempered by three limitations - the first considers the restrictions imposed by the short-term nature of the study. The design of this study involved a series of three-day visits to each site and single interviews with student, faculty, and staff participants. Evidence of students' development and prior experiences were gleaned from students' recollections and staff reflection, not from a direct observation of these experiences. What students and staff choose to remember and where they focus their attention are important considerations, providing insight into what they feel is significant and noteworthy. These recollections and reflections are highlighted in this research design. There is no opportunity, however, for the researcher to confirm or observe the participant's recollection of their experiences.

The second limitation lies in a possible selection bias regarding the students asked to participate in the study. Because of privacy concerns, the program staff could not

share lists of their students with outside parties, making direct recruitment of student participants impossible. Instead, program directors were asked to contact students to ask them to join the study. Though the initial invitation was extended to all students, follow-up was done in person. Those students with close ties to the learning disabilities program and the program staff were more likely to volunteer and were more likely to be reminded of the opportunity. Further, students who were unsuccessful academically and had to leave the university were not available to participate. Students for whom the structured learning disabilities program was not beneficial and had therefore chosen not to continue were similarly unavailable. The resulting profile of student participants includes only those who deemed the program beneficial, who utilized the services available, and who were successful academically.

The third limitation relates to the context in which these programs exist. One salient feature of the three institutions is the supportive environment found both within the learning disabilities program and on the campus overall. As suggested by the interactional model of disability, these institutions have adapted the environment to make students' learning disabilities less disabling. Students did exhibit self-advocacy development in this supportive context. This study did not examine students' experiences beyond these encouraging environments. Would self-advocacy be evident in a less accommodating environment? This study does not examine whether students are prepared to manage without the circle of support provided by the program services and staff. How participants fare in the workplace or graduate studies following their college experience is not included in this study.

Further Research

The study of specific types of learning disabilities programs has been lacking. As the number of students with learning disabilities increases and programs to assist these students become more common, a thorough examination of practices and efficacy of these programs becomes increasingly important. The examination of learning disabilities programs begun with this study should continue with further research to investigate these programs.

The purpose of qualitative research is not to construct universal theories applicable to a wide range of situations. Instead, this study focused on three specific programs within three different institutions of higher education. Additional opportunities for further research on this topic are plentiful. A longitudinal study would provide a broader perspective on students' experiences as observed by a researcher. A longitudinal research design which tracked study participants would also provide opportunities to learn from students who do not remain in the learning disabilities programs or at the universities while this study included only currently enrolled students.

Similarly, a study of alumni would afford an understanding of how students' experiences in the learning disabilities programs prepare them for their careers and other endeavors beyond their university experiences. Two alumni from the University of Greenburg program were participants in this study by virtue of their employment as university staff. Using the student interview protocol as well as the faculty/staff protocol with these participants gleaned a reflection on the earlier experiences of these two individuals. A more comprehensive examination of alumni experiences – both recollections of their time in the learning disability program and their experiences

following graduation – would expand the understanding of how these programs foster growth and development beyond the undergraduate experience.

This study focused on three similar programs in three institutions, considering all student participants as a cohesive group. Taking a different approach, a comparative study of programs with different classifications could yield a different interesting perspective. Students in Kravets and Wax's other categories, service or coordinated service programs, would have different experiences and may develop self-advocacy skills in different ways. Similarly, comparing students in a structured program with their peers who are not members of the structured program may glean different results. Each institution has at least one other program to provide services for students with learning disabilities. Students in the structured programs and the less-comprehensive programs attend classes together and therefore have the same broader campus experience. Comparing and contrasting students from these different programs may lead to an understanding of how the overall campus climate influences students' development.

A number of approaches for additional research are available. Further study of students with learning disabilities will enhance understanding of this growing population. Further insight through research may present students, families, and universities with practical suggestions for improving their academic experiences.

Practical Implications for Students and Families

Studies such as this one provide a glimpse into the experiences of college students with learning disabilities. Implications for this research may extend to students, parents, and university administrators, especially those administrators directing structured

learning disabilities programs. Though this study is not designed to provide broadly applicable conclusions, individuals in similar programs may find relevance in these findings.

Opportunities for children to develop an understanding of a student's particular disability lead to early development of metacognitive skills. Students in this study indicated an early awareness of their specific disability contributed to their continued development of self-advocacy. They easily defined their disability using specialized language as well as their own terms. Thoughtful comparisons between their earlier experiences in elementary and high school and their current circumstances suggested they had considered these matters previously. Students and parents can take definitive steps in developing metacognitive skills from an early age.

The foundations for self-efficacy and motivation often also begin in elementary and secondary education. Demonstrating self-efficacy, students defined their disability in terms of strengths as well as deficits. While they accepted the limitations imposed by their particular disability, such as difficulty with reading, writing, or organization, they were also emphatic that they viewed themselves as someone as smart as – or perhaps smarter than – their peers.

Program staff and students credit student motivation as one of the most important factors in student success. Seeking opportunities for academic success and goal-setting may help build a solid foundation upon which students may construct post-secondary achievement. The selection of a university and learning disability program is an important consideration for families of prospective students. The comprehensive services

provided by these structured learning disabilities programs are considered beneficial by students in this study.

Practical Implications for Institutions

In keeping with the interactional model of disability (Ashe, 1984), the overall environment at each of the three campuses was one of acceptance and accessibility. Faculty spoke of their willingness to accommodate students regardless of disability and eagerness to teach in a way which met the needs of a variety of students. Providing professors and graduate instructors the opportunity to develop teaching strategies that incorporate principles of Universal Instructional Design helps to create a supportive environment for all students, not just those with disabilities. Workshops for new and veteran instructors, such as the ones provided at the University of Greenburg, provide tools for faculty to enhance their teaching. Program students sometimes serve as panelists in these workshops to share their experiences with faculty and offer suggestions for instructional strategies to help students with disabilities. Instructors who are supported in developing pedagogical approaches beneficial to students with disabilities are more likely to foster academic growth and success in these students.

Increasing numbers of students with disabilities require that institutions be prepared to assist these students. Services and programs for students with learning or other disabilities are likely to multiply. Does it follow that more institutions should seek to implement structured learning disabilities programs? Participants in this study were overwhelmingly positive about their experiences, some indicating that involvement in the learning disabilities program was the only way they could have been successful in

college. Elizabeth, a junior at the University of Greenburg, stated, "every school should be required to have a program like this because it makes students who have disabilities adapt to college so much easier". Elizabeth suggests her experience is evidence that all students with disabilities need the level of support she does. However, these structured programs are not for all students or all institutions. Students with mild to moderate learning disabilities probably would find all the services they need in a less comprehensive program. Students with other disabilities in addition to learning disabilities may discover a program designed for the coexisting disorder will meet their learning needs more adequately. Two students at Montgomery University made this decision when they moved from the structured learning disabilities program to a support program specifically designed for students with Asperger's Syndrome. The three institutions housing these structured programs have a long history of providing services for students with disabilities. The programs grew from this history and exist in a campus environment of acceptance and support for students with learning disabilities. In universities without this larger environment of support, programs such as these would not be so effective.

Implications for Learning Disabilities Programs

Throughout each student's education, parents have been important allies and advocates. Each of the three programs addresses the transition from secondary to post-secondary education with families through sessions with parents at orientation or, in the case of the University of Greenburg, a comprehensive handbook for families. The importance of helping students and parents navigate this transition necessitates these

interactions. In some cases, program staff take on a parental, familial role in students' education. Participants used phrases such as "second mother" or "program family" to describe the relationships among students and staff. Some disagreement on the appropriateness of this familial role was found. For staff who identified themselves as substitute parents or students who considered their program staff to be quasi-parental, this familial tie was positive. They expressed appreciation for the close relationships they enjoyed. Others felt this was inappropriate and focused instead on a more professional, formal relationship between the student and program staff. And examination of how these roles influence the work of staff and the development of students may be an important consideration for the programs.

One of the most salient findings of this study is the construction of the Circle of Support by the learning disabilities program and other university personnel. The gradual, individualized shift from a staff-guided to a student-managed support structure is the hallmark of students' development of a sense of interdependence. As students develop the competency and ability to direct their academic endeavors, they must be given the responsibility and authority to do so. The progression from staff- to student-driven academic support is highly individual. Some students exhibit readiness to take on these responsibilities by the end of their first year while others may move more gradually toward interdependence. The close working relationships between program staff and students help determine an arrangement that works best for each individual. Students may, for example, work with program staff to determine which services are most beneficial for students' success and choose to focus on those services to the exclusion of others. Program staff may delegate responsibility of meeting agendas and scheduling to

students as they learn to determine what items are most salient for discussion.

Participants in this study reported that students were directing most, if not all, their academic support by the end of their undergraduate programs. This was not an unconscious progression; program staff noted how students moved from a passive to an active role and encouraged them to accept responsibility.

Each of the three programs has strengths which may inform the best practices of similar programs. Among these strengths are the training and support of tutors, the encouragement of student responsibility, formally recognized student organizations, remedial opportunities, a flexible fee structure, academic coordination, and learning disabilities assessment.

Tutors who are well trained are more likely to provide a high level of support for the students they tutor. Though the profile of tutor varies among the programs in this study, all three have formal training protocols in place for tutors. At University of Hillsville, where most tutors are undergraduates and many are program participants themselves, a high level of supervision and support is employed. At Montgomery University and the University of Greenburg, professional and graduate student tutors go through extended tutor orientation and training prior to beginning their employment. At Montgomery University, tutors also provide the academic coordination provided by the professional staff at the other two institutions. The findings of this study suggest that it is in tutoring sessions that students develop the skills to effectively communicate their learning needs.

At the University of Greenburg, a significant focus is placed on the empowerment of the student to accept responsibility for their academic success. Student responsibility

and self-advocacy are mentioned in most of their publications and on the website. Early in their first term, students are instructed how to use the online accommodations request system and are expected to use this system for all such requests. Though academic counselors followed students' progress and offered support, the responsibility ultimately lay with the student. At the other two institutions, the coordinator or tutor was more involved with arranging accommodations, leading to a slower transition of responsibility from the staff to the student in making these arrangements.

Montgomery University and the University of Greenburg have formally recognized student organizations for social and community service activities. These organizations are student-led and student-directed, providing opportunities for leadership development and peer support. The University of Greenburg organization offers an added chance for students to advocate for the larger population of individuals with disabilities through involvement in educational ventures. Students in the organization visit local high schools to talk about disabilities issues and serve as panelists to discuss learning needs with faculty.

Both the University of Hillsville and Montgomery University offer remedial classes for students who demonstrate specific deficits in a particular subject area. At Montgomery University, students participate in a summer program designed to ease the transition between high school and college. Students' academic records and disability documentation are reviewed prior to their arrival and students are placed in remedial courses in writing, reading, or mathematics as needed. Students at the University of Hillsville are offered remedial instruction in study skills, writing, reading and math taught by instructors employed by the learning disabilities program. In addition to these discrete

courses, supplemental lab sessions are offered for program students in university writing, math, and science courses. The offerings at the University of Greenburg are less comprehensive and focus primarily on providing individualized support for students experiencing difficulty in academic areas.

All three programs require a fee from each student to cover services. The fee structure at Montgomery University allows students to lessen their degree of involvement in the program while maintaining their membership in the program. Students may reduce the number of tutoring hours they utilize per week, reducing their overall fee. Other services remain available to them. This structure is beneficial to students as their self-advocacy increases and they determine what services they need. However, the beneficial fee structure is rooted in a less-beneficial aspect of the Montgomery University program, the role of academic coordination in the program.

At the University of Hillsville and University of Greenburg, thorough coordination structures enable students to form a close working relationship with a particular staff member. The coordinator provides a consistent basis throughout the student's education experiences. This staff member ensures students are aware of and have access to the comprehensive services available. Montgomery University's model of tutor-based services does not provide this constancy.

Though all three institutions provide a mechanism for students needing updated documentation to be tested, only University of Hillsville provides this service to all students within the learning disabilities program. Montgomery University and the University of Greenburg rely more heavily on prior assessments and work with other campus organizations to provide assessments only if the documentation provided by the

student is incomplete. The University of Hillsville's emphasis on initial assessment verifies that all students have documentation which is current and complete. In-house assessment also allows program staff to guarantee consistent testing protocols and to observe students' reactions to testing situations.

As the numbers of students with learning disabilities continues to increase on college and university campuses, opportunities for students to develop self-advocacy become more essential. Programs such as the ones in this study provide a context in which students gradually move from a state of dependence to interdependence, expanding their metacognitive and communicative skills in a supportive environment.

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Appendix A

Initial-Contact Letter

Dear Dr. _____:

I am a doctoral student in the Curry School of Education's Center for the Study of Higher Education at the University of Virginia. My research interest involves the development of self-advocacy among students in learning disabilities programs. I wonder if we could discuss the possibility of my visiting _____ for two or three days as part of the research I am conducting for my doctoral dissertation.

For this project, I am seeking to interview and observe students, faculty, and staff to learn more about the ways that students with disabilities manage the transition to higher education and learn to advocate for themselves. Student interviews would last less than an hour and would include questions about the nature of students' disabilities, the accommodations they have received in the past and are currently receiving, how they arrange for accommodations to be provided, and specific learning strategies they use. Interviews with faculty and staff would include questions about arranging and providing accommodations and how students communicate their needs. Of course, all information I gather will be treated with respect and will remain confidential. Before beginning, I would complete both the University of Virginia's IRB process and would seek IRB approval from your institution.

I appreciate your willingness to consider my request. I will contact you in a few days to follow-up with you. Please feel free to e-mail or call me if you have questions.

Sincerely,
Rachel Nottingham Miller
Doctoral Student
Curry School of Education
University of Virginia
rmiller@virginia.edu

Appendix B

Interview Protocol for Student Participants

Thank you for participating in this project. I am talking to some students involved with the learning disabilities program here at _____ University. Our conversation will take about an hour during which I'll ask questions about your experience in college. There are no right or wrong answers to the questions I'll ask. I am interested in learning about your experience from your perspective. If there are any questions you would prefer not to answer, just let me know and we'll move on to the next. You can stop this interview at any time. Just tell me if you'd like to stop.

I'd like to record our conversation today so I can be sure I have an accurate record of your thoughts. Of course, if you'd prefer I not use the recorder, I'll turn it off. At the conclusion of our session, the recordings will be transcribed into a word-for-word script of our conversation. At that time, I'll remove all personal references that may identify you and will assign you a name (you may choose your name if you like). Once the transcript is completed, I will destroy the recording. The transcripts, with your personal information removed, may be read by others.

There are no risks or benefits to you in participating in this project.

First, I'd like to know a bit about you.

Year in college

Age

Major

As I shared earlier, this project is seeking information about college students with learning disabilities. I'd like to ask you a few questions about your experience with this.

Will you describe your disability to me?

When did you learn you have a learning disability?

Did you receive special education services in elementary or high school? What services?

How does your learning disability affect you in class now? In your academic work?

Do you receive academic accommodations (extended time, note-taker, etc) in your classes now? How do you make arrangements to receive these accommodations?

Have you approached a faculty member regarding your disability? Will you describe that experience to me?

Have you spoken with a tutor regarding your disability? Will you describe that experience to me?

Have you approached a college administrator regarding your disability? Will you describe that experience to me? What tips or tricks have you learned about communicating about your disability?

Do you use specific cognitive strategies (thought processes, memory devices, etc.) to deal with your disability? Will you describe them to me? How did you develop these strategies?

Is there anything else you think I need to know about college for students with learning disabilities?

Thank you so much for your participation in this project. If you decide later that you would like me not to include this conversation, please contact me via e-mail. I really appreciate this hour from your busy schedule.

Appendix C

Interview Protocol for Faculty and Staff Participants

Thank you for participating in this project. I am talking to some faculty and staff involved with students with learning disabilities here at _____ University. Our conversation will take about an hour during which I'll ask questions about your experience with these students. There are no right or wrong answers to the questions I'll ask. I am interested in learning about your experience from your perspective. If there are any questions you would prefer not to answer, just let me know and we'll move on to the next. You can stop this interview at any time. Just tell me if you'd like to stop.

I'd like to record our conversation today so I can be sure I have an accurate record of your thoughts. Of course, if you'd prefer I not use the recorder, I'll turn it off. At the conclusion of our session, I'll be transcribing the recordings into a word-for-word script of our conversation. At that time, I'll remove all personal references that may identify you or your students and will assign names. Once I've completed the transcript, I will destroy the recording. No one will hear these tapes but me. The transcripts, with your personal information removed, may be read by others.

There are no risks or benefits to you in participating in this project.

First, I'd like to know a bit about you.

Professional Title

Age

How long have you been at _____ University?

At what other institutions have you taught/worked?

As I shared earlier, this project is seeking information about college students with learning disabilities. I'd like to ask you a few questions about your experience with this.

[For teaching and administrative staff]

What has been your experience teaching students with learning disabilities?

When students have a disability and require special accommodations, how do you learn of this request?

What types of accommodations are most often requested of you?

When students discuss their need for accommodations with you, do they usually share information about their particular disability? What has been your experience with students describing their disability (e.g. are they able to articulate the nature of their disability, can they describe how it affects their learning, do they suggest instructional strategies that would be helpful?)

Could you give me an example of a time a student did an exceptionally good job communicating disability information? Could you give me an example of a time a student did a particularly poor job?

[For disability program staff]

Please describe the process a student goes through to receive accommodations for his/her disability.

In your estimation, how well do your students understand their particular disability and how it affects their college experiences?

In your estimation, what kinds of cognitive strategies are most common amongst your students?

Are students expected to discuss their disability and need for accommodations with their faculty members? If so, how do you help prepare students for this conversation? If not, who makes the arrangements for students to receive accommodations?

What kinds of services do you offer to assist students in developing learning strategies? Communication skills?

Thank you so much for your participation in this project. If you decide later that you would like me not to include this conversation, please contact me via e-mail. I really appreciate this hour from your busy schedule.

Appendix D

Post-Visit E-mail to Participants

Thank you again for taking the time to talk with me earlier this year for my dissertation research project. To remind you, my study is examining the development of self-advocacy in college students with learning disabilities. I have been reading the transcriptions of my interviews and am discovering some interesting themes. I would like to share these with you and ask that you respond with your thoughts – do you find these consistent with your experience?

1. Many students with learning disabilities have experience advocating for themselves before they come to college. Through parents or high school teachers, they have had opportunities to learn about their particular learning needs and have communicated those needs to others.
2. Initially, I assumed that conversations between students and faculty would be the primary opportunity for students to communicate their learning needs. After speaking with you, though, I have concluded that faculty generally do not often engage students in these types of conversations beyond asking what specific accommodations are needed. The times when students share their own understanding of their particular challenges happen in conversations with tutors.
3. The theoretical model I used as a foundation for this study concluded that college students move from a state of dependence through a period of independence arriving at a final point of interdependence, understanding the need for others but maintaining autonomy. In my conversations with students, however, I have come to believe that students in structured learning disabilities programs do not experience that period of independence. Instead, they gradually move from a state of relative dependence on others (where others direct the student's educational experience) to interdependence (where the student directs the experience, but requests assistance as needed).
4. Finally, I have learned from you the importance of believing in oneself. Students must have a general positive outlook, a belief that they can achieve educational success.

Thank you again for your participation in my project. I really appreciate your time and expertise.

Appendix E

Student Participants

Name*	Institution*	Gender	Age	Major	Year in School	Age of Disability Documentation
Garrett	University of Greenburg	M		Religious Studies	Alumni	4
Elizabeth	University of Greenburg	F	20	Undeclared	3	7
Gina	University of Greenburg	F	19	Undeclared	1	7
Mary	University of Greenburg	F	19	Undeclared	3	7
Collin	University of Greenburg	M	19	Undeclared; Considering Business	1	11
Alec	University of Greenburg	M	29	Journalism	Alumni	
Lisa	University of Greenburg	F	20	Psychology	3	17
Nancy	Montgomery University	F	22	Counseling/Education	3	5
Sarah	Montgomery University	F	22	Social Work	4	6
Rebecca	Montgomery University	F	21	Archaeology- anthropology	3	6
Jennifer	Montgomery University	F	19	Graphics Design	2	6
Bethany	Montgomery University	F	23	Anthropology; Minor International Affairs	4	7
Erin	Montgomery University	F	22	Adult Fitness	4	7
Daniel	University of Hillsville	M	20	Math	2	2
Jason	University of Hillsville	M	22	Marketing	4	5
Mark	University of Hillsville	M	26	Communications	4	7
Elliott	University of Hillsville	M	22	Marketing; management	3	9

*All names are pseudonyms

Appendix F

Faculty & Staff Participants

Name*	Institution*	Role
Gregory	University of Greenburg	Director, University Learning Disabilities Programs
Amy	University of Greenburg	Assistant Director, Structured Learning Disability Program
Allison	University of Greenburg	Academic Counselor
Garrett	University of Greenburg	Tutoring Coordinator
Zachary	University of Greenburg	Academic Counselor
Tim	University of Greenburg	Professor, Business
Aimee	University of Greenburg	Accommodations Director
Sana	University of Greenburg	Academic Counselor
Susan	University of Greenburg	Academic Counselor
Caroline	University of Hillsville	Academic Coordinator
Robin	University of Hillsville	Director, Structured Learning Disabilities Program
Dawn	University of Hillsville	Academic Coordinator
Alec	University of Greenburg	Admissions Officer
Kelli	Montgomery University	Director, Structured Learning Disabilities Program
Steven	Montgomery University	Professor, Psychology; Parent of a Student with a Disability
Adam	Montgomery University	Professor, Criminal Justice; Former Associate Academic Dean
Craig	Montgomery University	Dean of Students
Samuel	University of Hillsville	Professor, Philosophy, German, Art History
Gwen	University of Hillsville	Professor, Education
Teresa	University of Hillsville	Professor, Education
Martha	Montgomery University	Assistant Director, Learning Disability Program & Tutor Coordinator
Georgia	Montgomery University	Assistant Director, Learning Disability Program & Testing Coordinator
Karen	Montgomery University	Director, Disability Services

*All names are pseudonyms