

2007

# Students' Perceptions about Successfully Transitioning to Postsecondary Institutions

Dorothy Garrison-Wade

*University of Colorado Denver, dorothy.garrison-wade@ucdenver.edu*

Jean P. Lehmann

*Colorado State University - Fort Collins*

Follow this and additional works at: [http://source.ucdenver.edu/alps\\_publications](http://source.ucdenver.edu/alps_publications)

 Part of the [Disability and Equity in Education Commons](#), [Educational Leadership Commons](#), [Higher Education Commons](#), and the [Special Education and Teaching Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Garrison-Wade, D., & Lehmann, J.P. Students' perceptions about successfully transitioning into postsecondary institutions, *Review of Disability Studies: An International Journal*, 2(4), 37-49.

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Administrative Leadership and Policy Studies (ALPS) Faculty Scholarship at source. It has been accepted for inclusion in ALPS Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of source. For more information, please contact [kelly.ragland@ucdenver.edu](mailto:kelly.ragland@ucdenver.edu).

## Students' Perceptions about Successfully Transitioning to Postsecondary Institutions

Dorothy Garrison-Wade, Ph.D.  
University of Colorado at Denver and Health Sciences Center  
&  
Jean Lehmann, Ph.D.  
Colorado State University

**Abstract:** Through the auspices of federal legislation, students with disabilities are gaining access to higher education. Still for many students with disabilities, the paramount barriers facing them in their transition to postsecondary education are overwhelming. This paper reports the findings of a qualitative study of 59 postsecondary students with disabilities on factors students perceived to inhibit or contribute to their successful transition into college. The study examines support services and access to reasonable accommodations available to students with disabilities. Students reported the major barriers to accessing college and succeeding in college were societal attitudes, lack of preparation, and financial constraints. The students also identified self-determination and families as necessary supports that propelled their transition into postsecondary education. Recommendations and suggestions for teachers, students, and families are presented by the study's participants to support students' with disabilities access and retention in postsecondary institutions.

**Key Words:** transition, postsecondary education, supports

\* Editor's Note: This article was anonymously peer reviewed.

Access to postsecondary education for students with disabilities is supported through Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 Subpart E (34 C.F.R.) and the Americans with Disabilities Act (PL 101-336, July 1990). Harvey (2001) credits the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Section 504, as providing support, services, and inclusion opportunities for individuals with disabilities over the past several years. As a requirement of this mandate, secondary and postsecondary institutions had to make reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities (Sitlington, Clark, & Kolstoe, 2000).

The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 further protects civil liberties for individuals with disabilities across education, employment, public services, public accommodations, transportation, and telecommunications. The Act mandates that employers and educational institutions make reasonable accommodations for individuals with disabilities to existing facilities. This law extends Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 to the private sector by requiring access to reasonable accommodations in employment, schools, and community facilities (Sitlington, et al, 2000). Under the Act, educational institutions, including postsecondary institutions, are "required by law to provide any reasonable accommodation necessary for those persons with disabilities to have equal access to educational opportunities and services available to non-disabled peers, if requested" (Pierangelo & Crane, 1997, p. 156).

Although the emphasis on legislation has significantly impacted students' with disabilities transition to work and postsecondary institutions, outcomes for these students remain challenging. The National Council on Disability (NCD) (2000) concludes post-school outcomes for many youths with disabilities remain poor. These students are faced with many problems that

contribute to: “(a) poor graduation rates from high school; (b) low employment rates after high school; (c) low postsecondary education participation; and (d) an increasing number of youths receiving Social Security benefits and not leaving the benefit rolls” (p.3).

Many concerns and issues exist that inhibit the success of these students (Cavin, Alper, Sinclair, & Sitlington, 2001; Horn & Berkold, 1999). For example, many students arrive at college unprepared to advocate for the services they need. They are unaware of the new responsibilities they have relating to self-disclosure about their disability, providing the institution with appropriate documentation, and being able to articulate their needs for assistance (Lehmann, Davies, & Laurin, 2000).

Sitlington and her colleagues (2000) found factors such as students’ successful completion of high school academic courses, appropriateness of social skills, and engagement in transition planning to be predictive of students’ interest in gaining a postsecondary education. Postsecondary survival seems to be related to students’ ability to exert control over their lives by becoming aware of their strengths and weaknesses, to make decisions based upon this knowledge, and to communicate their understanding to others (Field, Martin, Miller, Ward, & Wehmeyer, 1998; Stodden, 2001).

Teachers are prominent players in raising students’ expectations for college and preparing them for it. According to Reiff, Gerber, and Ginsberg (1997), “The influence teachers exert can have either profound negative or positive impacts” on students with disabilities (p.159). In other words, teachers are instrumental in motivating students to either excel or to surrender. Teachers who set high expectations for students and provide necessary academic grounding prepare students for postsecondary environments, particularly college (Hart, Zaft, & Zimbrich, 2001). Additionally, students transitioning into postsecondary education need parental support (Brotherson, Berdine, & Sartini, 1993; Benz & Halpern, 1987). Parents’ efforts to support their children and their expectations for their children’s futures are central to charting the course towards productive citizenry (Tobin, 2003). Their involvement in their child’s high school education facilitates a successful transition from school to adult life (NCD, 1989).

Postsecondary institutions may also inhibit students’ entrance to college by inadvertently conveying the message that students with disabilities are not welcome. As noted by Stodden and Whelley (2004), these institutions may not have an opportunity to evaluate the need for systemic change “created by lack of coordination of educational and related services” (p.13). As a result, instructors may demonstrate a lack of understanding about issues related to students with disabilities (Lehmann, et. al., 2000). Furthermore, various rules and regulations may have unintended consequences of prohibiting students from attending postsecondary schooling, particularly in the areas of financial assistance (Burgstahler, Crawford, & Acosta, 2001).

For many students with disabilities, the barriers facing them in their transition to postsecondary education can be overwhelming. Advocating the appropriate supports to overcome these barriers is daunting at best, but more likely to be completely baffling. Consequently, the purpose of this research study was to determine what factors postsecondary students with disabilities perceived as inhibiting and contributing to their successful transition into higher education institutions.

## Method

This qualitative research is part of a larger mixed-methods study conducted by Garrison-Wade (2004) through the *Exceeding Expectations Model Demonstration Project* (EEP) (CFDA

84.32M). The EEP was funded through the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS) to address problems facing students with disabilities during their transition to adulthood. The project implemented a demonstration model for increasing access to and retention of students with disabilities at postsecondary institutions in five states: Colorado, Idaho, Iowa, South Dakota, and Wyoming (Lehmann & Davies, 2001). The philosophical foundation of the EEP was

(a) providing multiple opportunities for collaboration between diverse groups, (b) promoting change via the self-determination of all participants through training and by allowing participants to choose how to best implement the model based upon their site needs, and (c) recognizing the societal and community values of successfully including persons with disabilities in postsecondary education (Lehmann & Davies, 2001, p. 14).

The major goals of the project were to assure individual sites create processes that welcome and facilitate student success, provide essential information to students, parents and educators to prepare for postsecondary education, and to foster service providers' understanding of their responsibilities for serving students with disabilities. The project implemented its goals through various modes: summer institutions, utility of products, and dissemination of resources. The EEP's main purpose was to "validate a transition model to increase student access and retention in postsecondary education" (Lehmann & Davies, 2001, p. 1). The EEP was unique in that it built upon the experiences of its consumers by listening to them and developing collaborative partnerships (Lehmann & Davies, 2001).

## Participants and Sites

Participants were sought from three public state universities and five junior colleges/community colleges in one of five states taking part in the EEP (i.e., Colorado, Idaho, Wyoming, South Dakota, and Iowa). Seven of the eight universities/colleges participated in this study. Coordinators in the disability resources services offices identified potential participants and invited them to participate in focus groups. Fifty-nine postsecondary participants with various types of self-identified disabilities (learning disability, physical disability, speech and language impairment, traumatic brain injury, emotional disturbance, and multiple disabilities) between the ages of 18 to 56 agreed to participate. The participants were almost evenly divided between males ( $n = 29$ ) and females ( $n = 30$ ). All study participants were enrolled in postsecondary education and received services from their institution's disability resources services office. Although no additional demographic information was sought, the researcher noted during visits that focus group participants were a fair representation of the institution's larger student body. Therefore, the majority of participants were Caucasian and from middle class socio-economic backgrounds.

## Focus Groups

Over the course of nine months (i.e., July 2003 to April 2004), nine focus group discussions were conducted at seven postsecondary sites. Participants who volunteered for the study completed consent forms outlining the scope of the project and their rights as participants.

Group size ranged from three to eleven participants. Each participant was limited to participation in only one focus group. The first author facilitated all the focus groups using a semi-structured format. The discussions took place at the participants' postsecondary sites. All the focus groups were audiotaped.

Students were asked to respond to questions about their transition from high school to postsecondary institutions. Twelve major questions aligned with the EEP goals were asked, followed by probing questions to obtain a more in-depth description and response from participants. More specifically, students were asked to discuss factors and/or individuals that influenced them to pursue postsecondary opportunities, including (a) services/accommodations received prior to coming to college, (b) barriers to their success, and (c) support services/assistance needed for their success. Additionally, students were encouraged to talk about services and/or individuals helpful in their successful transition to postsecondary institutions. Guidelines were provided to help the interview process flow more freely. Table 1 presents the focus group questions.

---

Insert Table 1 about Here

---

## Data Analysis

Data analysis involved coding transcriptions line-by-line using constant comparative analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The constant comparative analysis process included "opening coding," "axial coding," and "selective coding" units of examination (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This approach was inductive in that no prior codes were assigned, but "induced" from the data. The researcher thoroughly read the data several times to get a sense of the information, in order to put together segments of information that were alike across focus groups. The focus group questions provided the organizational framework for initial or open coding. Various Microsoft Word tools (highlighting, comment bar, theme format) were used to manage and analyze the data. Open codes were grouped into themes. Further, an inductive approach was used to identify codes for remarks made that did not fit into initial categories. Axial coding involved linking various codes by placing them into conceptual categories. In the final step, selective coding, the researcher explicated themes and used them to form stories from the data. From the themes, the researcher selected key quotes to present the participants' stories.

Throughout the data collection and analysis process, the researcher employed several steps to increase the study's trustworthiness and transparency. Specifically, the researcher reviewed transcripts to assure their accuracy and maintained a journal with notes about the data collection process, thoughts and insights about student data, and observations about all aspects of the individual sites.

## Findings

### Barriers

Students painted a dour picture about their transition from high school to postsecondary education. This feeling was epitomized by the comment of one student, "There was nothing to help me transition into college and I had to kind of feel myself around blindly, trying to figure it

out.” Students identified a myriad of barriers that presented themselves during their transition. Three themes emerged: 1) attitudes; 2) student preparedness, and 3) financial constraints. These factors inhibit students’ interest in postsecondary educational opportunities and decrease their ability to succeed.

---

Insert Table 2 about Here

---

### *Attitudes*

Beliefs of educators and peers created doubt or fear within students about the possibility of attaining a postsecondary education. The attitudes that seemed to be the most difficult for students to overcome were secondary educators’ low expectations for them, and the treatment students received from peers in high school. The attitudes described appeared to have the effect of diminishing students’ confidence about their ability to succeed in new environments.

For example, teachers did not perceive that students could succeed. According to one student:

“My teachers let me slide through classes. I had some teachers who wanted me to succeed, go on and make it through college and they were more than willing to give me oral exams or give me extra time on tests. But I also had teachers who would say not to worry about the test. Then there were others who said not to bother because I wasn’t going to make it.”

Other people often have unrealistic notions about what it means to have a disability; that a disability is temporary:

“Whenever I tell people my disability, brain injury, they always immediately assume it’s like a broken leg where you can just work around it. You can work around it, but it’s always going to be there.”

Further, implications that the disability was a liability precluded any possible success:

“All of my teachers told me in high school, college is a lot of reading. And that was one of the fears that I had, but it wasn’t enough to stop me from coming.”

Educators’ lack of knowledge or understanding about the realities of having a disability led them to have lowered expectations for students and may have contributed to not addressing the attitudes of other students. Students openly discussed teasing they received from high school peers. One student said:

“My peers were mean and called me retarded. High school was really hard. I didn’t want to go and I hated it, but during my junior year, I didn’t care. I knew they didn’t know what they were talking about. It took a while to get over it. They were really mean to me. My parents told me not to listen to them but it was hard not to.”

These taunts left students feeling unsure about entering into new settings such as college, fueling their fears and self doubts as evidenced by this student's response, "The biggest problem was that I was afraid I couldn't achieve." This fear was acknowledged by most of the students as shown in this quote: "To me, there was definitely a fear of having to drop out for health reasons or falling behind in classes because of some sort of cognitive problem."

As students deliberated about applying for college they expressed insecurities about all aspects of college: "To start, I was intimidated by postsecondary education." Poor high school experiences translated into concerns about being able to acquire friends: "I had some fears of making new friends. It was kind of nerve racking..." Their concerns regarding their academic preparation also became more realistic as they started college coursework.

### *Student Preparedness*

Students reported they were not prepared for the rigors of college classes. Said one student, "I wasn't prepared. I expected to fail. In fact, I'm very surprised I haven't." When asked to rank their level of skills, many students indicated they were not adequately skilled in mathematics or English prior to coming to college. The major concern they raised was that by being placed in lower level high school math and English courses, they were at a disadvantage for having a successful college experience. Specifically, math classes were described as:

"Dumb, dumb math is for people who choose after three years of high school math that they don't want to take pre-calculus or trigonometry or algebra II. So a lot of people would take consumer math, which is dividend, interest, and compound interest, simple stuff you should have learned back in algebra I or geometry. It's very easy and an easy A."

The consequences of not taking college-bound math courses in high school were that students had to take additional prerequisite courses to develop basic mathematical skills. For example, one student had to take the entry-level math course four times before passing it. According to another student, "... When I came here, I needed the basic levels."

Math was not the only problem, as highlighted in one student's comments. English classes also did not prepare students for the rigors of college. According to one student, "During my junior and senior years in high school, my English classes were pretty much jokes. There weren't any writing classes." Ultimately, the need for additional courses increased students' time at the postsecondary institution and limited their eligibility for financial support.

### *Financial Constraints*

Students identified obtaining financial assistance as a major obstacle for attending college. As noted by one focus group respondent, "Money is a barrier because I think I'll be here more than four years. It's expensive." The difficulties of funding college are compounded by financial obligations related to health insurance.

"It's not tuition only. If I want insurance, it's \$800 plus for this year. That doesn't cover any prescriptions. There is a \$1500 deductible before they cover a lot of

things. There's not necessarily help for that. If I were a TA, they'd cover a certain amount."

But, there were not many opportunities for students to receive teaching assistant (TA) positions. Students lagging behind their classmates in terms of academic preparations found themselves needing more time to study and having less time for work. One student lucky enough to be offered a campus job reported that glitches within the financial system limited the amount of funds they could earn: "I found out that whatever I would get paid there would automatically come off my financial aid, so I would have to have another job to support having that job."

As noted by another student, the complexity of the financial assistance situation was magnified by the number of other support systems in which students were engaged:

"I needed a lot of help to try to figure out supplemental security income, supplemental disability income, vocational rehab, Medicare, Medicaid and what each one pays for. The paperwork you have to fill out is like an essay. I wish it could be more centralized in that capacity."

## Supports

Students did not dwell on barriers. They also talked about qualities within themselves that propelled them forward during their transition into postsecondary education and about individuals who influenced their decision to enter college. As shown in Table 3, themes emerged in two categories: The internalized strengths that drove them to tackle seemingly negative events, and the role of their families in helping them to pursue goals. Specifically, the two most overarching themes were the need for students to be self-determined and the importance of parental support.

---

Insert Table 3 about Here

---

## *Self-Determination*

Participants described their own fortitude and persistence as being driving forces in their quest to enter into postsecondary education. Self-confidence and self-reliance were seen as inner strengths that propelled them forward and helped them to ignore perceived obstacles to attending college. Several students mentioned that their reaction to others' lowered expectations for them was to approach life as a series of challenges. A common refrain relating to their persistence is illustrated by this student's comment:

"When someone tells me I can't do it, that motivates me even more to prove to them that I can do it and I not only can but I will succeed. No matter what they say, I will do it. It might take longer than most but I will do it."

Students' tenacity was evident in one student's reflection on what it took for them to achieve their educational goals: "I just think over the years I've always had to struggle but I've



always made it. If I put my mind to something, I know I can do it.” Students’ persistence carried them through their initial considerations about attending college:

“I’m stubborn and I refuse to let the chronic fatigue dictate what I do. I’ve had a lot of problems but I’ve decided that’s what I want to do [sic college] and I’m going to find a way to do it.”

Persistence also facilitated their entrance into a system for which most had not been prepared and stood as a reminder of their dreary high school social experiences:

“I sat down and I thought, well, is this (college) going to work for me? Am I going to be able to get through this? Am I going to be able to get all of this work done? I got down on myself the other day thinking about it, and I thought to myself that I don’t know if I’m ever going to be able to do this. I then looked at myself and said, you know what, you can do it.”

Students also reported that self-reliance, counting on yourself to figure out how to overcome potential obstacles, was another useful tool in their quest to be included in postsecondary education. For example, “I’ve learned that you have to rely on yourself before you learn to rely on others. You learn how to do things by yourself first...” The mantra of these students was similar to the one articulated by this student who said:

“I’ve known for most of my life that when I have to do things by myself, I have to believe in myself and actually do what I want to do... Just follow your dreams.”

Students’ belief in themselves even helped them to cope with the teasing they experienced:

“I’ve gotten a lot better over time, other people’s perceptions of me used to bother me a lot but now I’ve learned not to care because it’s not their life, it’s mine. If they don’t understand me, it’s their loss, not mine.”

### *Families*

Students attributed their self-confidence and persistence to their families’ positive influence. Families conveyed their confidence in their children. One student said, “I grew up believing I could do anything. My parents said that I could do anything I want to do.” Parents offered more specific guidance helping students to realize that college was a viable option:

“...My parents were the first to support me. They were the first to say, it’s really important for you to go to college. They explained to me what might happen if I didn’t go to college opposed to what might happen if I did go to college.”

Parents taught their children to be self-reliant, for instance, “They (my parents) didn’t want me to rely on others; they never gave me any other option.” In addition, parents promoted

confidence. According to one student, “My father really helped me a lot. He taught me that the only way to know how to do something is to believe that you can do it.”

## Student Recommendations

Students offered recommendations and suggestions about how to support access to and retention in postsecondary institutions. Students’ quotes illustrate how their personal reflections upon situations occurring as they applied for and entered into postsecondary education helped them to reframe their experiences into the context of lessons learned that could be beneficial to others like themselves. These recommendations are intended for other students, high school teachers, and families.

Students recommend:

- Recognize that students with disabilities are “just as smart as anybody else.”
- Don’t characterize and generalize students’ needs because their needs may vary.
- Don’t discourage students.
- Establish high expectations for students and collaborate with parents to support students’ successful transition to college: “Try to treat us as you treat any other student.”
- Provide intensive transitional guidance to students pursuing postsecondary education, during and after the time they enter a postsecondary setting.
- Prior to starting college, show students the services that are available at the college and assign a contact person before they arrive on campus.
- High School counselors should help students transition by assisting with the paperwork, filling out scholarship forms, providing contact information on college and university services and accommodations, and arranging a trip to tour the college campus prior to leaving high school.
- Students should learn to write better and take more college prep English and Math classes.
- Students should be patient, realizing that they have a problem and that there are accommodations to help them.
- Parents shouldn’t be afraid to be over aggressive in making sure that their “kids” get what they need: “Be willing to stand up for your kids but at the same time, make sure they can handle things on their own.”
- Teach your child to be independent while in high school, it will help them learn responsibilities before they get to college: “Be extra supportive.”

These suggestions mirror students’ concerns in all areas except the area of financial constraints. The majority of the quotes are about helping students to better prepare for postsecondary education. More specifically, students asked that high school teachers encourage them to establish and achieve high expectations. They wanted to be acknowledged: “Basically, if I ask for something, listen.” They wanted the bar to be set high, because, “when you have people pushing you, and telling you to do things, you tend to do it better.” Participants repeatedly requested that they be held to the same standards as their non-disabled peers, that expectations need to be the same.

Students offered details about useful strategies for helping them to gain entrance into higher education. They recommended that familiarity with services and campuses be encouraged through tours of colleges and meetings with relevant college officials. They noted that students are "...really in need of intense transitional guidance, before they enter the postsecondary setting, during the process of entering it, and after they enter..." Ideas related to encouraging students to consider college as an option included having current college students with disabilities speak to high school classes to spark interest in the notion of going to college and to discuss how to best bridge the gap between high school and higher education.

Respondents also counseled high school students to take responsibility and accept the challenge of attending college. They suggested learning how to advocate for yourself: "You have to look for help and you have to ask for help." They also identified strategies to better prepare students for rigorous postsecondary academic requirements: "Learn to write. Take more English and Math courses."

The complicated nature of families' roles is evident in students' reflective statements. Students were grateful for their families' perseverance on their behalf, saying, "Thankfully, over the years my mom has learned to not let go of the problem until it is solved." Conversely, students were aware that their parents needed to foster student emancipation: "Let your child be independent when they are in high school and help them to learn responsibilities..." Students clearly wanted to learn how to take control of their lives:

"Another personal area with me, the one I feel very strongly about, is to try to make sure we're empowering students and not enabling them. That's kind of a fine line, but we should always try to work on empowerment."

## Discussion

The findings in this study were consistent with those of previous research. Many students with disabilities are not expected to attend college. Many parents and educators view college as a difficult transition for students with disabilities. Ultimately, they may not encourage students with disabilities to pursue college as an option. Inadvertently, they may limit students' potential for going to college by not challenging them to learn how to write, or to enroll in advanced math courses. Consequently, as students in this study illuminated, students with disabilities lag behind their non-disabled peers in terms of postsecondary academic preparedness (NCD, 2003).

There are many reasons for the lack of preparedness enumerated in this study and confirmed in the existing research knowledge base. As students in our study implied and Henderson (1999) concludes, students with disabilities do not receive the same kinds of preparation for postsecondary education as their non-disabled peers. For example, as noted by Rattin (2001), "... Students with learning disabilities have entered college unprepared to handle the academic expectations of their college instructors" (p.30). Therefore, these students have extreme difficulties reading college textbooks (Hart, et al, 2001). Furthermore, college requirements for them are particularly problematic given their poor study skills, negative self-concept, dependency on others, and various negative behaviors and feelings (Rattin, 2001). One solution recommended by Johnson, et al. (2002) is to establish high expectations for students with disabilities.

This study extends the existing body of knowledge by offering rich insights into students' perceptions regarding the supports necessary for successful access, retention, and completion of postsecondary degrees. Students are aware that they are not being prepared adequately to meet the demands of college, and they feel cheated. They want secondary teachers to treat them like other students. They demand respect and want to be heard.

Students highlighted the problems associated with paying for a college education. The prospect of having a large tuition debt compounded by limited availability of financial support is disheartening. Many students reported not having the time to work because they had no free time. Their time was devoted to studying, just to keep up with classmates. Furthermore, students confirmed that taking fewer than the required amount of classes or having to take preparatory classes made them ineligible for many loans. It would seem there are policy issues surrounding institutional financial aid programs that need to be addressed if students with disabilities are to be recruited into postsecondary education.

Our research also uncovered some interesting dilemmas related to preparing students for postsecondary education. Clearly, the attitudes of teachers and peers jeopardize the confidence of students to apply for and enter into postsecondary education. Although students did not distinguish whether or not they were referring to special education or general education teachers, it is safe to assume that reflection with respect to serving students needs to occur in both groups.

High school special education teachers are usually responsible for advising students with disabilities about the courses they need to take. Judgments are made on the basis of several factors, including willingness of teachers to work with students with disabilities and the potential for success that the course offers the student. As a result, teachers may avoid recommending courses reserved for college-bound students. In another scenario, it is conceivable that general education teachers having little training about serving non-typical learners, who are focused on improving students' scores on high stakes tests, are more willing to send students with learning or behavior difficulties to resource teachers. Resource teachers are generally trained to be pedagogy experts and may not have advanced content knowledge in areas such as calculus or 19<sup>th</sup> Century English literature. Teachers with the best of intentions and under systemically-induced duress make choices for students with disabilities that inhibit students' ability to move forward into postsecondary education. The dilemma is twofold: How can teachers enroll students who, by virtue of their label may have problems that interfere with learning, into advanced pre-college classes? Also, is the use of a resource setting the most efficient way to address students' remedial problems in secondary education?

The teasing reported by students cannot be overlooked. Teasing is mean-spirited. Students are looking towards engaging in future environments in which offending peers may well be present. Students tormented in high school may anticipate the same treatment in college and therefore decide not to apply. Somehow, the high school ethos or culture must reinforce respectful behaviors and promote dignity for all of its community members.

This research clarifies another aspect of the transition puzzle. Collaboration is needed to support students' progress towards college. Teachers, families, and students all have a responsibility to contribute to the postsecondary educational success of students. Students are in need of self-determination skills so they can communicate their needs and learn about effective study strategies. Families can help by reminding students that the "sky is the limit." Teachers, both special educators and general educators, pave the way by maintaining high expectations for all students. This study provides insight into a direction for conducting future research. More

information is needed about the students' high school course schedules and the extent to which courses taken are associated with postsecondary educational success.

**Dorothy F. Garrison-Wade**, Ph.D., is an Assistant Professor of Administrative Leadership and Policy Studies at the University of Colorado at Denver and Health Sciences Center. Dorothy's research agenda focuses on inclusion: (1) culturally responsive research that promotes culturally proficient leadership and teaching, and (2) social justice research that encompasses fair and equitable treatment of all people regardless of race, disability, gender, or social status. She can be contacted at: University of Colorado at Denver and Health Sciences Center, Campus Box 106, P.O. Box 173364, Denver, CO, TEL: (303)352-3862 or through email at dorothy.garrison-wade@cudenver.edu

**Jean Lehmann**, Ph.D. is a Professor and Interim Director of the School of Education at Colorado State University. Dr. Lehmann has been the principal investigator on federally funded projects addressing issues of self determination, transition-related educator preparation, and models for increasing the postsecondary success of students with disabilities. She can be contacted at: Colorado State University, ED111A Education, Fort Collins, CO 80523 or through email at lehmann@cahs.colostate.edu

#### References

American with Disabilities Act of 1990. (1990). 42 U.S.C., 12101.(PL101-336).

An institutional perspective on students with disabilities in postsecondary education. (1999). Washington, DC: *National Center for Educational Statistics*, U.S. Department of Education.

Benz, M., Doren, B., & Yovanoff, P. (1998). Crossing the great divide: Predicting productive engagement for young women with disabilities. *Career Development for Exceptional Individuals*, 21(1), 3-16.

Brotherson, M. J., Berdine, W. H., & Sartini, V. (1993). Transition to adult services: Support for ongoing parent participation. *Remedial and Special Education*, 14(4), 44-51.

Burgstahler, S., Crawford, L., & Acosta, J. (2001). Transition from two-year institutions for students with disabilities. *Disability Studies Quarterly*, 21(1), 25-37.

Carvin, M., Alper, S., Sinclair, T., & Sitlington, P. L. (2001). School to adult life: An analysis of transition programs serving youth with disabilities between 1986 and 1999. *The Journal for Vocational Special Needs Education*, 23(3), 3-14.

Field, S., Martin, J., Miller, R., Ward, M., & Wehmeyer, M. (1998). *A practical guide for teaching self-determination*. Reston, VA: Council for Exceptional Children.

- Garrison-Wade, D. F. (2004). *Exceeding expectations projection: A case study on students' with disabilities transition to postsecondary institutions*. ProQuest, UMI Number: 3143824. Colorado State University, Fort Collins.
- Hart, D., Zafft, C., & Zimbrich, K. (2001). Creating access to college for all students. *The Journal for Vocational Special Needs Education*, 23(2), 19-31.
- Harvey, M. W. (2001). Enrollment trends for students with disabilities in Pennsylvania's center and technical education: What policy makers should know. *The Journal for Vocational Special Needs Education*, 23(3), 33-45.
- Henderson, C. (1999). *1999 college freshmen with disabilities: A biennial statistical profile*. Washington, DC: American Council on Education.
- Horn, L., & Berkold, J. (1999). *Students with disabilities in postsecondary education: A profile of preparation, participation, and outcomes*. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education.
- Johnson, D. R., Stodden, R. A., Emanuel, E. J., Luecking, R., & Mack, M. (2002). Current challenges facing secondary education and transition services: What research tells us. *Council for Exceptional Children*, 68(4), 519-531.
- Lehmann, J. P., Davies, T. G., & Laurin, K. (2000). Listening to student voices about postsecondary education. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 32(5), 60-65.
- Lehmann, J. P., & Davies, T. (2001). *Exceeding expectations: A model demonstration project 2001-2005* (No. CFDA 84.324M). Unpublished manuscript. Colorado State University, Fort Collins.
- National Council on Disability. (2003, September). *People with disabilities and postsecondary education*. Retrieved November 22, 2003, from, <http://www.unr.edu/sapd/udr/document.html>
- National Council on Disability. (2000, November). *Transition and post-school outcomes for youth with disabilities: Closing the gaps to post-secondary education and employment*. Washington, DC: Author.
- National Council on Disability (NCD). (1989). *The education of students with disabilities: Where do we stand?* Washington, DC: Author.
- Pierangelo, R., & Crane, R. (1997). *Complete guide to special education transition services*. West Nyack, NY: The Center for Applied Research in Education.
- Rattin, S. E. (2001). *An investigation of factors associated with academic success, persistence, and satisfaction of community college students with learning disabilities*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Rehabilitation Act of 1973. (1973). PL 93-112 87 Stat 355.

Reiff, H. B., Gerber, P. J., & Ginsberg, R. (1997). *Exceeding expectations: Successful adults with learning disabilities*. Austin, TX: PRO-ED, Inc.

Sitlington, P. L., Clark, G. M., & Kolstoe, O. P. (2000). *Transition education and services for adolescents with disabilities* (3rd ed.). Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Stodden, R. A. (2001). Postsecondary education supports for students with disabilities: A review and response. *The Journal for Vocational Special Needs Education*, 23(2), 4-11.

Stodden, R. A., & Whelley, T. (2004). Postsecondary education and persons with intellectual disabilities: An introduction. *Education and Training in Developmental Disabilities*, 39(1), 6-15.

Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1998). *Basics of qualitative research techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory*. London: Sage Publications.

Tobin, R. (2003). *Transition to adulthood: Experiences of parents of young adults with developmental disabilities*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Colorado State University, School of Education, Fort Collins.

Wehmeyer, M. L., Agran, M., & Hughes, C. (1998). *Teaching self-determination to students with disabilities*. Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co.

Table 1  
*Focus Group Questions*

<b>Questions</b>	<b>Detail Probes or Expanders</b>
1. Who helped you decide to apply for college?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Did your family or friends encourage you?</li></ul>
2. What barriers did you encounter in applying for college?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What made it difficult for you?</li></ul>
3. What high school experiences, and or resources prepared you for college?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Any special programs or resource teachers?</li></ul>
4. How could your high school have helped you to better prepare for college?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Study Skills assistance, tutoring...</li></ul>
5. What skills and training do you think students need prior to entering college to be successful in college?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Please be specific.</li><li>• How about your reading, math, and study skills?</li></ul>
6. What do you know about the services on your campus which provide accommodations to students with disabilities?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Tell me more about these services.</li><li>• What types of accommodations are provided?</li></ul>
7. Discuss your level of satisfaction with these services.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 indicating low satisfaction and 5 indicating the</li></ul>

	highest satisfaction. Explain your rating.
8. What has been the most important help you have received thus far in college?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• For example, academic, counselor, special accommodations, financial assistance, tutoring, encouragement, etc.</li> </ul>
9. Which support and/or resources have been the most helpful?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Describe your level of satisfaction with these support services/resources.</li> </ul>
10. What barriers have you encountered in completing your postsecondary (college) program?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Academic, social, family, etc...</li> </ul>
11. Tell me about specific experiences, positive and/or negative, you have had regarding disability-related access issues with faculty and staff in high school and/or college.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How did these experiences make you feel?</li> </ul>
12. Share any information you think could be helpful to faculty and staff, students, and Exceeding Expectations project to better provide services and activities to assist students with disabilities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Anything you can tell us will help others.</li> <li>• How does that affect other students?</li> </ul>

Table 2  
*Students' Perceptions about Barriers*

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Elements</b>
Attitudes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Secondary and Postsecondary Teachers' lack of understanding</li> <li>• Secondary and Postsecondary Teachers' lack of knowledge</li> <li>• Secondary and Postsecondary Teachers' lowered expectations</li> <li>• Peer teasing</li> </ul>
Student Preparedness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of participation in advanced math and English classes</li> </ul>
Financial Constraints	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cost of college</li> <li>• Disability-related financial obligations</li> <li>• Limited financial assistance options</li> <li>• Complicated financial regulations</li> </ul>

Table 3



*Students' Perceptions of Support*

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Elements</b>
Student Self determination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Be persistent</li><li>• Rely on self</li></ul>
Family Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Build confidence</li><li>• Provide guidance</li></ul>