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Disability Accommodations in Postsecondary Education A Systematic Review

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Disability Accommodations in Postsecondary Education

A Systematic Review

by

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MSW Clinical Research Paper

Presented to the Faculty of the
School of Social Work
St. Catherine University and the University of St. Thomas
St. Paul, Minnesota
in Partial fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Social Work

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The Clinical Research Project is a graduation requirement for MSW students at St. Catherine University - University of St. Thomas School of Social Work in St. Paul, Minnesota and is conducted within a nine-month time frame to demonstrate facility with basic social research methods. Students must independently conceptualize a research problem, formulate a research design that is approved by a research committee and the university Institutional Review Board, implement the project, and publicly present the findings of the study. This project is neither a Master's thesis nor a dissertation.

Abstract

More students with disabilities, both visible and nonvisible, are attending postsecondary institutions. In order for these students to be successful, there needs to be collaboration between students, professors, and disability support services. Engaging students with disabilities and helping them succeed is an integral part of the postsecondary experience. Students with disabilities face challenges in postsecondary education that students without disabilities won't face. This systematic review aims to identify the best practices of accommodating students with disabilities. A total of 12 articles were reviewed, including both qualitative and quantitative studies. Some of the studies suggested that a caring environment and a positive relationship between the student and professor were important in the success of the students. A majority of the articles focused somewhat on barriers to success, which was also a focus of this systematic review. The results of this study indicate that attitudes around disability accommodations are integral to their utilization and that strong relationships between the professors, students, and disability support staff are also beneficial.

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Introduction

Students with disabilities represent an important yet underserved portion of the population in postsecondary education settings. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) during the 2011-12 school year students with disabilities represented 11.1 percent of the demographic (2014). Engaging students with disabilities and ensuring that their needs are met both academically and otherwise is indicative of a successful support program. Students with disabilities often face barriers or challenges that students without disabilities don't encounter during their educational experience. Students with disabilities are represented in postsecondary settings including those with physical disabilities, mental health conditions, learning disabilities, attention deficit disorder, and other disabilities (Anctil, Ishikawa, & Scott, 2008). The Council for Standards in Human Services Education (CSHSE) has established guidelines nationwide to support admission and retention for disadvantaged and underrepresented students that include policies for enrolling, advising, counseling, and assisting students with special needs (Lindstrom, Downey-McCarthy, Kerewsky, & Flannery, 2009; CSHSE, 2005). Obtaining a degree in higher education is often globally recognized as a means for young adults to avoid poverty and gain access to higher pay and more favorable occupations (Berggren, Rowan, Bergbäck, & Blomberg, 2016).

Since the passage and enactment of progressive legislation such as the Rehabilitation Act of 1998, the reauthorization of the Individuals With Disabilities Education in 2004, and the Americans With Disabilities Act in 1990, postsecondary access and opportunity for students with disabilities has increased (Anctil, Ishikawa, & Scott, 2008). According to the U.S. Department of Education, a key factor in fostering students with disabilities success in college is to have accurate knowledge about their civil rights (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). The attitudes

and self-advocacy skills of students with disabilities greatly impacts whether or not they are successful in a college setting (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). Some keys to success that are outlined in the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights guide include understanding their disabilities, accepting responsibility for their own success, learning time management skills, researching postsecondary education programs, and getting involved on campus (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). There are many factors that can impact whether or not a student with a disability is successful or not, and many of these factors depend on the school's setting or environment. Even factors such as having an elevator or accessible classrooms on campus can determine whether or not a student can succeed in a certain environment.

According to the research, the likelihood of a student to receive disability support services in a postsecondary education setting depended greatly on the nature of their disability (Newman & Madaus, 2015). Students with more apparent or obvious disabilities such as hearing, visual, or orthopedic impairments were found to receive supports at a higher rate than those students with less obvious disabilities such as learning disabilities (Newman & Madaus, 2015). An indicator of a student's success in postsecondary education related somewhat to their high school transition experiences where students at 2-year colleges who received high school transition planning exercises related favorably to the receipt of disability-specific accommodations (Newman & Madaus, 2015). However, even when found beneficial, not all high schools offer transition planning exercises or the opportunity to participate in college readiness programs. For students with learning disabilities in the transition from high school to college who found that it was necessary to continue using academic services (Hadley, 2007). Students with learning disabilities found that they were challenged by the expectations associated

with college and expressed dissatisfaction with the services that they were offered (Hadley, 2007). This trend of dissatisfaction with disability support services can limit the satisfaction that a student feels with their campus.

It is shown that positive classroom experiences in college settings are critical to the success and inclusion of students with disabilities where students' grade performance is often influenced by the comfort and satisfaction of a learning environment (Graham-Smith & Lafayette, 2004). This is indicative of a student's success in working with a disability support office on college campuses. The inclusion of students and recognizing their needs and abilities create a safe environment and a sense of security for students who might not find it elsewhere and therefore feel better about requesting support services (Graham-Smith & Lafayette, 2004). Students who don't feel comfortable or accepted on a campus might not access support services and therefore have a smaller window of opportunity to succeed, especially in a large school setting.

Research has indicated that there is a positive correlation between disability-specific accommodations and student postsecondary education success and satisfaction. However, there are also many barriers and deficits in accessing those supports. The most frequent barrier that students experience is related to how students think faculty would perceive them if they revealed that they needed an accommodation (Hong, 2015). Students found that after revealing that they had a disability they were treated differently than a "normal student" (Hong, 2015). Even students who had received accommodations in the past felt skeptical about having new instructors every semester and therefore were hesitant to ask for accommodations (Hong, 2015). Students with learning disabilities in particular found it difficult to transition from a high school setting to a college setting, where accommodations are offered on an individual basis (Hadley,

2007). Higher education settings are required to provide reasonable accommodations to qualified students; however, it is the student's responsibility to progress in the classroom. Students who feel like their disability leads to a disadvantage or who feel as though they stand out in a classroom will struggle more than the average student population.

This research is important to social work because throughout their work social workers will encounter people with disabilities, including those that may be students transitioning to college. Social workers can encourage and assist those with disabilities who are transitioning to college in ways that other professionals cannot such as offering understanding and empathy. According to the NASW Code of Ethics, "social workers pursue social change, particularly with and on behalf of vulnerable and oppressed individuals and groups of people" (2008). Social work strives to achieve social justice, which in turn impacts students with disabilities in a postsecondary setting as they can be considered oppressed individuals and groups due to the nature of their experiences in postsecondary education. Social justice dictates that students with disabilities get their needs met in a timely and fair way without having to keep advocating for themselves over and over again.

This research aims to examine the accessibility factors related to accommodations and also barriers to educational success for students with disabilities in postsecondary settings. The research question that this systematic review will be addressing is what are the best practices in engaging students with disabilities in a postsecondary setting. By conducting a systematic review there will be better understanding of this population and their needs, which will enable more students with disabilities to find success and belonging within college settings. The barriers that this population faces include not knowing how to access services, or there being a lack of services, or accessing services that are not appropriate or suited for their needs. However, the

successful utilization of disability accommodations includes supports for this population that offer adequate and effective services to students with disabilities. Thus enabling them both to succeed academically and to obtain an educational experience that prepares them for future success. This systematic review will assist social workers and school counselors with better engaging students with disabilities and assisting them with accessing services. Advancing the research will allow new policies and methods to assist students with disabilities and faculty to find success where it might otherwise be impossible.

Literature Review

Types of Disabilities

Different disabilities can have different influences on young people and their experience preparing for and attending college. Disabilities were categorized by type in a study by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) that included difficulty hearing, seeing, or speaking, mobility or orthopedic impairment, traumatic brain injuries, learning disabilities, ADD or ADHD, autism spectrum disorders, cognitive or intellectual disabilities, health impairments or conditions, and mental illness or psychiatric and psychological conditions (NCES, 2011). In one study it was found that students with varied types of disabilities ranging from learning disabilities and dyslexia to ADHD and physical disabilities did not show a significant difference in average usefulness of accommodations (Abreu, Hillier, Frye, & Goldstein, 2016). The study recruited students by submitting a survey to 525 students or 3.3 percent of the student body that were registered with the student disability office (Abreu et al., 2016). Approximately 21 percent of the 525 students responded to the questionnaire, which consisted of 28 items (Abreu et al., 2016). The findings of this study indicated that the most useful accommodations were extended time on tests, reduced distraction environment for test taking, and permission to tape lectures

(Abreu et al., 2016). Furthermore, students identified the ways in which disability services was helpful with their academic career including sorting out accommodations for the semester, academic support, and social and emotional support (Abreu et al., 2016). This study is important because it shows not only that different types of disabilities exist in a postsecondary setting, but also that there are different needs for accommodations.

There is some discrepancy between students with “visible” disabilities and those with “invisible” disabilities, where students with physical impairments versus students with cognitive or psychological impairments may be assessed differently. It is noted that students with physical or visible disabilities receive more concern than those with invisible disabilities, regardless of actual need and students with invisible disabilities may be underserved (Cole & Cain, 1996). It is occasionally the case that “sometimes faculty may feel burdened by the responsibility to accommodate students with disabilities” (Cole & Cain, 1996, p. 343). So whether or not the student has a visible or invisible disability, there can be strain on the faculty with their attempts to accommodate. The research says that “they should realize, however, that responsibility for solutions is shared; they should seek active involvement from the student and should urge and assist the student to engage a college or university specialist in the planning process” (Cole & Cain, 1996, p. 343). For students with disabilities, obtaining accommodations can be difficult and uncomfortable, however, it is up to the faculty, students, and campus resources such as student disability offices to work together to maintain and be open to opportunities to succeed for all students.

The literature goes on to say that students with disabilities need to act with self-determination, where the transition to college “presents an immediate need to make decisions regarding their disability-related needs” (Newman & Madaus, 2015). Particularly among

students with psychiatric disabilities, seeking out accommodations can be a difficult task due to stigma and feelings of discrimination (Newman & Madaus, 2015). This study takes data from the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2), which was funded by the U.S. Department of Education in 2000 beginning with an initial sample of 11,000 students (Newman & Madaus, 2015). The NLTS2 identified students with disabilities in high school and followed them through high school to college so the data represents the complete population of postsecondary students with disabilities (Newman & Madaus, 2015). Findings from this study indicate that students with learning disabilities comprised 70 percent of the entire population of students with disabilities across three types of postsecondary schools including 2-year and 4-year colleges (Newman & Madaus, 2015). Students with ADHD and ADD on top of their primary disability made up approximately 10 percent of those that received accommodations (Newman & Madaus, 2015). The types of disabilities represented across different types of colleges and universities mean that student disability services must accommodate for those students; however, the student also plays a key role in requesting those services, which can be difficult.

Disability Law

According to the Office for Civil Rights (OCR) in the U.S. Department for Education, the OCR enforces Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, which prohibit discrimination on the basis of disability (2011). The law goes on to say that responsibilities as a postsecondary student compared to a high school student are different, where the OCR encourages postsecondary students to know the responsibilities under Section 504 and Title II (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). The laws for those individuals with disabilities are set in place to advocate and support; however, it is often a challenge when a student transitions from high school to college.

In postsecondary education settings, you are not required to inform the school that you have a disability, however, in order to receive academic accommodations you are required to identify as having a disability, which can be difficult (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). The laws that are set in place to assist students with disabilities are not always clear. For example, a student may not know that they need to provide proof of their disability in order to receive accommodations and this may seem invasive or make them feel vulnerable. However, schools are allowed to set reasonable standards for documentation and some require more than others (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). Students may not know of the laws that are there to advocate and protect them from discrimination and other barriers to success. It is important that schools make it clear that they are there to help and assist where it is appropriate.

Accommodations and Supports

Accommodations must be accessible and usable to students with disabilities. For example, test administration is a major concern for accommodation. According to Cole and Cain (1996) there is an infinite variety of testing alternatives and accommodations including braille translations, large print texts, wheelchair access and adjustable table heights, rest breaks, and additional time. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2007) reasonable accommodations are modifications or adjustments to the tasks, environment or to the way things are usually done that enable individuals with disabilities to have an equal opportunity to participate in an academic program or job.

Students report their experiences and interactions with disability support services in college settings. Some students visited the support services office to seek out assistance with time management and organization or to get advice from staff, however, most visited to establish accommodations (Abreu et al., 2016). While support services offices differ depending on the

campus and its culture, many offer a broad range of services including supports to enhance executive functioning skills, intervening and communicating with professors, academic-related advice, referrals, support groups, and a general base of knowledge for many issues related to campus life (Abreu et al., 2016). Students in this study reported visiting the disability support services office an average of 4.7 times per semester which shows that services are not being utilized to their full capacity (Abreu et al., 2016), which is supported by Hong (2015) who found that students avoided visiting the office to get away from being labeled a disabled student.

It was found that students who participated in high school transition planning activities were related to a higher receipt of accommodations and other disability-specific services in postsecondary school (Newman & Madaus, 2015). This was especially true with students at 2-year schools where high schools focused particularly on the transition planning process, which related to higher receipt of accommodations (Newman & Madaus, 2015). It is important to consider that students who receive accommodations at a postsecondary level often have to advocate for themselves and reach out to their school's support network, which can in turn impact whether or not they receive appropriate and adequate accommodations. This relates back to the social justice piece, where students with disabilities should be advocated for on a micro, mezzo, and macro level in order to help them adjust to and be successful in a postsecondary setting.

Barriers to Success

Individuals with disabilities encounter a host of individual and systemic barriers when considering enrollment in postsecondary or higher education. Students might not have enough information about the programs or services that a school offers when they register as well as a lack of awareness about career or technical training programs (Lindstrom, Downey-McCarthy,

Kerewsky, & Flannery, 2009). This study surveyed students at four different community colleges using an in-depth, semi structured interview where 99 students participated (Lindstrom et al., 2009). The study found that barriers included a lack of information about the variety of programs and services available to them on campus (Lindstrom et al., 2009). Students with disabilities also showed a lack of confidence in their skills and abilities and also had trouble completing the initial process of enrolling including filling out financial aid packets and initial placement tests (Lindstrom et al., 2009, p. 7). Students are shown to be more successful when specific accommodations are available in the classroom setting where flexibility and adaptation of curriculum foster an increased engagement and result in more meaningful learning opportunities (Lindstrom et al., 2009). But that is not always the case and students with disabilities often experience discouragement and may lack self-confidence when encountering college settings or processes such as admissions and enrollment (Lindstrom et al., 2009). These barriers often snowball, turning fears and insecurities into more anxiety about a student's likelihood to succeed and adapt to the college environment.

Students who participate in transition planning activities in high school have higher rates of self-disclosure earlier in their college careers, which in turn led to more accommodations (Newman & Madaus, 2015). Barriers to receiving accommodations in the postsecondary setting include not receiving high school transition planning services, where 64 percent of students with disabilities received transition planning and therefore received better services (Newman & Madaus, 2015).

This research is important to consider because not all students with disabilities get their needs met in a postsecondary setting. They either don't get set up with adequate or appropriate accommodations or don't receive accommodations at all due to fear of discrimination, or simply

not knowing how to access services. Transition planning in high school seems to lead to a better outcome in postsecondary education; possibly because students are familiar with the services they need or require in order to be successful learners.

Successful Programs

The literature shows that a successful program for postsecondary education includes students who have shown self-determination (Anctil, Ishikawa, & Scott, 2008). That same study introduces the idea that persistence enhances competence, where “negative experiences were instrumental in their ability to eventually succeed” (Anctil, Ishikawa, & Scott, 2008, p. 168). Persistence can take many forms and “without the ability to persist through failure and obtain the necessary accommodations to succeed, the participants would not have found the sense of competence needed to make career decisions” (Anctil, Ishikawa, & Scott, 2008, p. 169). Programs that have higher rates of success and support among students with disabilities will be able to alleviate the stress and uncertainty that comes with disclosing a disability, whether that be “visible” or “invisible”, and will be inclusive overall.

Summary

Overall, students with disabilities in a postsecondary education setting must overcome barriers in order to succeed and feel at ease with their academics. They encounter faculty who feel as though they are a burden when they request accommodations and laws and rights that they must be aware of. There are some successes moving forward in postsecondary settings where more schools are utilizing student disability services and making the accommodations more accessible. However, it is still fairly difficult for a student to feel comfortable requesting those accommodations or knowing what accommodations they might need.

Conceptual Framework

Ecological Systems Theory

The ecological theory incorporates ideas from biology, sociology, psychology, social psychology, geography, and other disciplines (Forte, 2007). The ecological perspective helps social workers see the difference between the nature and consequences of humans between their physical and social environments (Forte, 2007). For this research question the ecological model was selected because it covers a broader scope of practice relating to disability accommodations on the *micro*, *mezzo*, and *macro* level. There are four layers to the ecological system; for example, a child's family, siblings and home environment define the *microsystem*, the neighborhood they live in and school they attend define the *mesosystem*, and the fire department, welfare system, and police make up the *exosystemic* layer, where the *macrosystem* incorporates national government ideologies and social policies (Cross, 2017). "The *exosystem* is the collection of those systems that do not involve the developing person as an active participant but that nevertheless influence what occurs in the immediate setting" (Forte, 2007, pp. 136-137). This theory provided framework for my research through the connections of the population of students with disabilities and their environment, which is the educational system.

"The *mesosystem* is a system of relationships between two or more immediate settings" (Forte, 2007, p. 136). Within the context of postsecondary education, the relationships between students with disabilities and their classroom environment and school experience as a whole defines the *mesosystem* within these parameters. The *exosystem* in this case could include accommodations that schools offer that might influence a student's progress. Finally, the *macrosystem* refers to the level of ideology and policy at the larger setting, which could include school systems and their interrelated settings (Forte, 2007). For example, the laws surrounding

persons with disabilities need to be adequate and clear in order for those students with disabilities to receive proper accommodations that they know they can utilize. On a macro level, policy is important in order to assist not only the students, but the colleges and universities also.

All of these systems are interlinked and can be applied to the research question of how does the utilization of disability accommodations in postsecondary education impact academic achievement and educational experiences. The experiences of students with disabilities can be applied across these four levels that Forte describes as the ecosystems serving many social workers as a paradigm, an overarching system of beliefs about the nature of reality and about the helping work suited to this reality (2007). This framework will be used to help organize information that is chosen from the articles in this systematic review.

Methods

Research Design

The research design for this study was a systematic review. A systematic review aims to make sense of large bodies of information by mapping out areas of uncertainty and identifying areas where little research has been conducted (Petticrew & Roberts, 2006). There is a need to understand how the utilization of disability accommodations in postsecondary education impacts academic success and experience. The research that exists is fragmented and sometimes out of date, which is why a systematic review would be a strong choice for this research question.

Search Strategy

The following databases were searched including: Social Work Abstracts, SocINDEX, PsycINFO, ERIC (Educational Resource Information Center), and Scopus. The following terms were used as search terminology: “disability accommodations”, “postsecondary education”,

“academic success”, and “academic experience”. Different uses of the keyword disability were used including “disability”, and “disabled”.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Studies that met the inclusion criteria for this systematic review were studies published in English with full text available online and that were published during or after the year 2000.

Articles that were included were also peer-reviewed. Both qualitative and quantitative studies were included, as well as prior literature reviews, however, dissertations, books or book chapters, and editorials will be excluded. These materials were excluded due to the necessity of peer-reviewed studies that are current and include a large enough sample size to be relevant.

More specific criteria for this systematic review required that articles focus directly on disability accommodations in postsecondary or higher education. Studies that focused on high school accommodations were excluded with the exception of articles dealing with high school transitions to college and their impact on postsecondary success in students with disabilities. The scope of the term “disability” was broad and encompassed multiple different disabilities definitions including learning disabilities, physical disabilities, mental health and psychiatric disabilities, attention deficit disorder, and other disabilities.

Sensitivity and Specificity

Sensitivity is described as the “proportion of all studies that were retrieved by the search, sometimes called recall” (Petticrew & Roberts, 2006, p. 83). Specificity is defined as the “proportion of studies, that were retrieved that were relevant, sometimes called precision” (Petticrew & Roberts, 2006, p. 83). High sensitivity is important to a well done systematic review and searches often trend towards lower specificity in pursuit of high sensitivity (Petticrew and Roberts, 2006, pp. 83-84). The results of the search with sensitivity and specificity can be

found in Table 1 below. This researcher used the keywords “disability accommodations” for this search.

Table 1.
Sensitivity Review

Database	Sensitivity
PsychINFO	769
Social Work Abstracts	19
SocINDEX	476
ERIC	1,916
TOTALS	3,180

For the specificity search this researcher conducted a specificity review using the terms “disability accommodations” AND “postsecondary education” AND “college”.

Table 2.
Specificity Review

Database	Specificity
PsychINFO	44
Social Work Abstracts	0
SocINDEX	11
ERIC	287
Totals	342

The results of the specificity review yielded a far fewer articles. The next step was to use the inclusion and exclusion criteria to go through articles to see if they would be included. The data abstraction grid in Appendix A was used to find relevant information within the articles that were included.

Data Abstraction Grid

The key factors for choosing what to include and exclude on the data abstraction grid (Appendix A) include what this research aimed to address. The types of disabilities addressed and whether or not the article was disability specific was included in order to discern what the study was looking at as well as including invisible or visible disabilities. Accommodations including the individual (micro), classroom (mezzo), and the institutional (macro) were included in order to obtain information related to best practices with accommodations using the ecological framework. The same can be applied to barriers to success. Impact on students (both positive and negative) was also included in the data abstraction grid in order to find what the program or accommodations impact was on student needs and outcomes. Outcomes and successes was included in order to summarize what the best practices had to offer and to include what may need to be done differently. Finally, ethical concerns and marketing and funding were included to address any areas of concern with making services available to all students and if there was any funding or marketing efforts included in the study.

Findings

The goal of this systematic review was to determine best practices for students with disabilities in postsecondary education. The 12 articles that met the inclusion criteria were examined in terms of specific accommodations in the micro, mezzo, and macro levels, barriers and stigma that students with disabilities face, positive and negative impact on students, and successful practices. Both qualitative and quantitative articles were included in the final review. Common themes throughout the process included the need for and utilization of self-advocacy strategies, and the creation of a positive relationship with faculty and staff.

Attitudes Towards Accommodations

Of the articles reviewed, a little over half of them (7) discussed attitudes towards accommodations. The general themes were that some professors weren't familiar with accommodations and therefore didn't know how to implement them. Professors were in favor of workshops or trainings that would familiarize them with how to implement and utilize accommodations to help their students. Students are also hesitant to disclose for fear of stigma from either professors or students. On a micro level, these findings are similar to other studies consulted for this systematic review in that students are hesitant to disclose disabilities in order to obtain accommodations out of fear of stigma or the risk of not being independent. Where on a mezzo level in the classroom, students want to succeed and interact with their professors, just as any student without a disability would want. On a macro level, it was found that professors want to engage in learning about disability accommodations and how they can assist students with disabilities.

The varied use of accommodations by postsecondary students with disabilities was overall shown to be influential to academic success. Though some students indicated that they had negative experiences when they requested accommodations, either from disability services or even from professors. A study by Sniatecki, Perry, and Snell (2015) focused on faculty attitudes towards accommodations found that some faculty hold negative attitudes towards the provision of accommodations where 4.9% (n = 6) agreed or strongly agreed with the ideas that providing accommodations compromises academic integrity and gives an unfair advantage over other students. Sniatecki, Perry, and Snell (2015) also found that students with physical disabilities were looked on more favorably than those with learning disabilities, and moreover those with mental health disabilities were looked on least favorably. The results suggest that at

least a small proportion of faculty continue to demonstrate some negative attitudes towards students with disabilities and the provision of accommodations.

Dong, and Lucas (2016) found that students were hesitant to disclose their disability or receive accommodations because they had difficulties adjusting to the identity of being a student with a disability. Students with psychiatric disabilities also face challenges in accessing accommodations. A study by Kupferman and Schultz (2015) focused on students with psychiatric disabilities and identified five factors that could address the needs of this population. These included ethical and legal considerations, accommodations and supports, disability aspects, community resources, and campus considerations. Of these five factors students perceived the ability of disability service providers to assist them in developing natural supports as being particularly important ($M = 4.00$, $SD = 0.75$). These supports would likely assist students with psychiatric disabilities in becoming more comfortable with requesting accommodations. Kupferman and Schultz (2015) suggested adopting an “aggressive outreach” where disability service providers would use this program to target current and prospective students ensuring students are aware of their right to services.

Another study that focused on psychiatric disabilities by Stein (2014) indicated that a significant amount of participants reported being hesitant to ask for accommodations when they felt they would not get a positive response from their instructor. In this study, caring in the classroom was viewed as a pertinent issue with a positive impact on a student’s experience. Caring was operationalized with behaviors such as providing encouraging statements, responding to emails and requests for assistance in a timely manner, availability during office hours, and providing accommodations with or without reminders (Stein, 2014). Graham-Smith and Lafayette (2004) also noted the need for caring, where of the 71 responses to the qualitative

study, 23 responded that caring people were important to them as well as having a place of refuge where caring people are always available to listen and understand. Students also indicated that a negative impact on achievement was the result of not receiving accommodations even when professors were presented with official documentation, professors lacking knowledge related to disability support services, lack of communication, and negative interactions with professors (Stein, 2014). Finally, the study by Stein (2014) showed that a professor not providing appropriate accommodations even when students provided proper documentation was the most frequently encountered challenge. Stein (2014) determined that testing accommodations and obtaining adequate notes were two major concerns of students with psychiatric disabilities in this study.

Kranke et al. (2013) found that students, particularly those with psychiatric disabilities had a fear that professors would perceive them as incompetent to complete tasks if they requested accommodations. Kranke et al. (2013) indicated that students reported that supportive professors who were empathetic towards their needs led them to be less fearful to accessing accommodations. This study, which focused on 17 students with self-reported diagnoses including mood disorders (82%), ADHD (12%), and PTSD (6%), found that another factor that influenced whether or not students would request accommodations was a sense of autonomy and the need to be independent (Kranke et al., 2013). The respondents indicated that they did not want their disability to detract from their academic performance, however, they would inform their professors about their need for accommodations before their functional limitations could potentially disrupt their ability to perform tasks (Kranke et al., 2013).

Attitudes towards students acquiring accommodations in a postsecondary setting are not always positive even when a student is working closely with a disability service office or similar.

In a study by Cawthon and Cole (2010) reported that of the 110 students surveyed, about a fifth reported difficulty obtaining accommodations related to their learning disability with specific challenges relating to faculty members who were unwilling to accommodate.

Barriers and Stigma

Nearly all articles (10) addressed barriers and stigmas that students with disabilities face in postsecondary education. Common themes on a micro level included that students wanted to be independent and not disclose their disability to professors and other students. Some themes surrounding barriers on a mezzo and macro level indicated that professors didn't know how to properly implement disability accommodations and therefore didn't use them correctly.

Students with disabilities often experience discrimination in postsecondary education when it comes to utilizing accommodations or even just existing amongst other students without disabilities. Some students choose to push through without accommodations in order to maintain autonomy. However, some students choose to utilize accommodations and risk the chance of being stigmatized or facing barriers. Lyman et al. (2016) identified six main themes related to barriers that students with disabilities face in accessing and utilizing accommodations. Four of the more complex barriers include a desire for self-sufficiency, desire to avoid negative social reactions, insufficient knowledge, and quality and usefulness of disabled student services and accommodations. The final two themes were negative experiences with faculty and fear of future ramifications (Lyman et al., 2016). This study also found a strong need for students to feel independent and only use accommodations as a "back-up", as well as not wanting to be a burden to others because of their accommodations and also expressed a fear of not being "disabled enough" (Lyman et al., 2016).

Graham-Smith and Lafayette (2004) noted that it is important for students with disabilities to develop a thorough understanding of the difficulties they will face in college and to be prepared to promote their own individual growth. This is where the disability services office should step in to be a support and to challenge those stigmas and biases. In order to address some issues that students with disabilities face, some students expressed a need for disability support offices to place a high priority on facilitating self-advocacy skills (Graham-Smith & Lafayette, 2004). Finally, as noted previously, this study found that care overcomes a sense of isolation and separateness that students with disabilities face and gives them permission to belong and succeed in a difficult and overwhelming college environment (Graham-Smith & Lafayette, 2004).

Students with disabilities often carry some level of self-stigma in terms of their perceived attitude towards their capabilities. Kranke et al. (2013) highlights the needs for self-stigma to be addressed so that they feel more comfortable with disclosure and respond in a positive fashion to the intrinsic stressors created by disability-related barriers.

In their study, Yssel, Park and Beilke (2016) found that their respondents expressed a need to be like everyone else (i.e. non-disabled college students). Their participants didn't want extra attention drawn to them or their disability, and did not want to be "babied" (Yssel, Park, & Beilke, 2016). This study found that one factor related to a lack of self-determination skills is school (K-12) preparation, where in one case a very negative school experience fuelled a desire to be independent in college (Yssel, Park, & Beilke, 2016). Students who were prepared in school to be independent and advocate for themselves often negotiated the college environment and experience with more ease than others. The need for self-advocacy skills to combat stigma, barriers, and fear is not an uncommon idea.

Fleming et al. (2017) used a sample of 325 students receiving disability services from one of three large public universities. They found that there is a need for colleges and universities to become aware of and carefully consider the impact of faculty and peer interactions with students who have disabilities and in particular those who are requesting accommodations (Fleming et al., 2017). They indicated that a sense of belonging is related to satisfaction among the sample of students with disabilities and for those who experience bias that is disability-related could utilize social interventions as a buffer against adversity (Fleming et al., 2017). These results would suggest that a positive relationship with a student with disabilities and their professor would promote better satisfaction and self-advocacy.

Best Practices and Outcomes

Throughout the studies that were reviewed, a major theme was that best practices included participation and understanding from both students and professors. A caring environment was also cited as important in a majority of the articles that were included on a mezzo and macro level. On the micro level, students wanted to be independent and interact with both professors and the disability services office in order to succeed.

Although there are some practices that are not favorable for students with disabilities in a postsecondary setting, some schools and studies indicated practices that do work and show promising results. Dong and Lucas (2016) found a positive correlation between students who are registered and integrated into the university environment through registering with disability support services perform better. Other positive outcomes stem from the disability services providers and disability services offices themselves. Though in-service training is not shown to be a “quick fix”, but rather one of many on-going professional development steps that disability

service providers can take toward developing and improving the services they provide (Kupferman & Schultz, 2015).

Participants in the study by Stein (2014) expressed frustration regarding the lack of knowledge of faculty regarding accommodations. There is a need for faculty education and increased knowledge around students with disabilities, particularly those with “invisible disabilities” such as psychiatric issues or learning disabilities (Stein, 2014). Students indicated that they felt more academically successful in courses where professors not only utilized effective teaching methods, but also interacted with students in a positive and caring manner (Stein, 2014). The theme of caring and positive attitudes towards students with disabilities remains one of the most important priorities for best practices. In order to achieve this, there needs to be a relationship between faculty and students with disabilities including the support offices.

The inclusion of students with disabilities remains at the forefront of disability support offices. Cawthon and Cole (2010) found that students who interacted with the disability service office and initiated contact were more likely to report higher satisfaction with the overall services they received. Results show that the student population might not have used the university resources to the extent that they were available, pointing towards a greater need of awareness of campus resources (Cawthon & Cole, 2010). They also found that students who were familiar with the accommodations they received in high school were more familiar in utilizing the same accommodations in college (Cawthon & Cole, 2010).

Weis, Dean, and Osborne (2016) provide a reminder that clinicians that interact with students with disabilities and recommend accommodations should be mindful of both the student’s limitations and the academic context.

The importance of staff education and inclusion will make a difference in terms of students with disabilities satisfaction and overall experience. Kranke et al. (2013) shows the importance of educating students on the benefits of seeking support through the disability services office and having knowledge about this process in order to bolster their confidence and overall feelings of success. Students coming into college with fears or self-stigmas can have those feelings alleviated by normalizing the use of disability support services and reducing the judgments around doing so (Kranke et al., 2013). Another best practice that Kranke et al. (2013) highlighted was referring students to other pathways or organization on campus, such as groups like Active Minds, which is an organization that aims to reduce mental health stigma in the college environment.

Discussion

The purpose of this systematic review was to determine best practices for engaging students with disabilities in postsecondary education. Twelve articles were reviewed for this study of the literature. They included both quantitative and qualitative studies. Best practices for enabling students with disabilities to succeed ranged from students self-advocating, to having in-service trainings for faculty and staff to address stigma related to disabilities.

Stigma and Barriers

A large portion of the barriers that students with disabilities face revolves around stigma. On a micro level, students in the classroom might face stigma from their peers who don't exhibit disabilities that require accommodations. The findings suggest that in order to combat this, faculty should be involved in the process. This includes both professors and disability support

service staff. On a mezzo level, faculty providing accommodations at a classroom level may be unsure how to implement them or make sure they are carried out appropriately. Faculty expressed interest in opportunities for growth and learning, however, without administrative support, getting faculty to participate could be challenging. On a macro level, institutions should implement actions that will best serve students with disabilities, and make sure that their needs are met in a postsecondary setting. Some of these actions they can take have been mentioned, however, it is important to consider the relationship between the students and professor and other environmental considerations. On all three levels, there are ways to implement changes that can assist students with disabilities to succeed. There needs to be cooperation between all that are involved, from the students themselves to the colleges they are enrolled in.

Recommendations for Best Practice

These feelings and fears that students with disabilities experience might suggest overt and covert use of stigmas and barriers they must overcome to be a part of the postsecondary environment. Trying to combat some of that stigma that faculty and staff hold towards students with disabilities can be daunting. Instead of seeing the person as disabled, faculty and staff should work uniquely with each situation that needs to be accommodated (Graham-Smith & Lafayette, 2004). Dong and Lucas (2016) suggest that students must learn to advocate for themselves, and that some subgroups of students with psychological and cognitive disabilities may need training in self-determination and self-advocacy. Kupferman and Schultz (2015) suggest that disability service providers participate in professional development opportunities to fuel their knowledge, skills, and attitudes towards students with disabilities.

Another implication for best practice is a greater awareness of the services provided on any campus. High school transition programs are often useful for students who received

accommodations at the secondary school level, as they are more familiar with utilization and practice. The more that high schools interact with their students with disabilities and provide services such as meetings with both students and their parents, it seems that the outcome is better when those students go on to a college setting.

It is also necessary to make sure students are receiving the right accommodations. This is important to consider so that students end up with the appropriate and the most helpful accommodations. Weis, Dean, and Osborne (2016) suggest that providing accommodations to students who don't need them, or for coursework for which students do not show impairment, has the potential to erode academic standards. This is important to keep in mind so that students with disabilities are getting all they can in terms of services, but also being mindful of their strengths and competencies as well.

The promotion of self-advocacy and self-determination is a primary consideration when working with students with disabilities at a postsecondary level. It is imperative to consider the needs of the students and their accommodations when working with this population. Making sure that their needs are met and that they feel inclusive and safe in the college environment should be a priority. Students with disabilities whether they are visible or invisible, face challenges and adversity at the postsecondary level. This stigma and subsequent barriers can be addressed with the help of faculty and staff in a disability support services setting, as well as with the help of professors and students who self-advocate.

Researcher Inspiration and Bias

Inspiration for this research topic stemmed from this writer's own experiences as a student with a disability. The decision to use this topic for this magnitude of a project was an easy one, as this writer knows how imperative it is to support and encourage students with

disabilities who often face struggles beyond the classroom. The struggles that students with disabilities face is a long list and follows a complicated path that sometimes does not end with a degree or initials after their name. There are colleges and campuses that are making strides to alleviate the tension that students with disabilities hold, but there is nothing that can take away the identity that comes along with the labels of both being a person with a disability and also a college student. This writer has faced discrimination as a student with a disability who is seeking a graduate degree, as well as many supportive faces who have encouraged and reassured during troubling times. This experience guided how the framework for this paper came together, in that the articles that were selected and reviewed were looked at through the lens of someone who could understand and relate to the experiences of the students who struggled. There will be those times when a student with a disability will think they won't be able to make it or succeed, and there will be times where that student doesn't succeed. But there will also be successes and moments to look back on and be proud. This writer is proud of the work that went into this research paper and is proud of the opportunities and education that have been bestowed upon her. But with success there is failure, and there have been many mistakes made along the way. Just as there are mistakes made by institutions and faculty and staff. But the reminder that this writer wants the audience to hear is that there is hope for students with disabilities in higher education. If ever someone is looking for an example of what that looks like, then they may look upon this writer, and for every time she heard from someone that she couldn't or wouldn't succeed, she persisted.

Limitations

This systematic review was able to address issues related to the utilization of disability accommodations in postsecondary education, as well as best practices for engaging students.

However, there were limitations to the study. One of the main limitations was the number of databases used to find articles. Only a few databases were able to produce adequate articles that fit the themes of this systematic review. Another limitation was that there were not many articles that examined a broader range of disabilities, instead focusing on one or two specific disabilities. This made an impact on the number of outcomes of the research, for example mostly learning disabilities, psychiatric disabilities, and some physical disabilities were focused on. However, more could have been done to include other categories of disabilities, for example, more focus on mobility, deaf and blind, and other physical conditions which was outside the scope of this review.

Implications for Social Work

This research is important for social workers and other helping professionals ranging from primary and secondary school to postsecondary and higher education. The findings are important to consider when working with students with disabilities and helping them to self-advocate. Social workers can learn how to better assist students and even faculty and staff when working with disabilities and accommodations. Some of the findings are especially important for social workers that find themselves in disability service offices where they can be inclusive and advocate for their students on a college campus. For example, advocating for students' rights when their professors are unfamiliar with accommodations or how the process works is something that a social worker could be a bridge between the student and professor.

The research shows that students are hesitant to reach out for accommodations or are unsure how to best utilize them. This can negatively impact their college experience in a large way where they may not feel included or appreciated. This is where social workers on campus

can come into play and be proactive in addressing issues surrounding disability accommodations and disability rights including the barriers and stigma the school environment presents.

Gaps in the Literature

This study also found that hardly any research has been conducted around ethical concerns and marketing or funding in terms of disability accommodations. This is not only an implication for future research, but for social work as well. Ethics is especially important when considering working with students with disabilities because so many students are not receiving proper accommodations or assistance. On a micro level, students experience discomfort and other challenges that dissuade them from seeking accommodations. On a mezzo level, the classroom environment is not always capable of addressing students' needs and there is often stigma. This could turn into an ethical concern. It is also important to know on a macro level where funding is coming from and how marketing is used on a campus so that the most can be made of disability support services and more students can be reached out to.

Conclusion

This systematic review aimed to address how best practices are impacting students with disabilities and how those who aren't receiving proper support can have access to it. As demonstrated in this review, best practices and considerations for students with disabilities in postsecondary education are important to helping those students succeed and thrive. Some considerations included self-advocacy and working alongside disability support offices and professors. A caring environment was also addressed as being important to students with disabilities. There were some barriers to accessing accommodations such as self-stigma and discrimination. Implications for future research included addressing ethical concerns and

marketing and funding of disability support services. Overall, implementing best practices for students with disabilities in a postsecondary setting is no easy task, however, having an understanding attitude and hopeful outlook will address the needs of students with disabilities. Perhaps it won't eradicate the problems and stigmas they face, but it can help them advocate for themselves and become more confident that they can succeed in a postsecondary setting. It is imperative to be hopeful when working with students with disabilities because their success often depends on their environment and attitudes they are confronted with in a postsecondary environment. As stated in their study Sniatecki, Perry and Snell say, "With a broader and deeper understanding of faculty attitudes and knowledge regarding students with disabilities (SWD), disability staff can better address gaps in knowledge and/or problematic attitudes that faculty hold... With sufficient knowledge, informed efforts to implement appropriate accommodations and remove barriers to success. Students with disabilities deserve no less" (2015, p. 267).

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**Appendix A
Data Abstraction Grid**

Citation:

Types of Disabilities Addressed:	Disability Specific? Invisible or Visible?
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Accommodations:		
Individual (Micro):	Classroom (Mezzo):	Institutional (Macro):

Barriers or Stigmas:		
Individual (Micro):	Classroom (Mezzo):	Institutional (Macro):

Impact on Student (Positive or Negative):
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Outcomes/Successes:

Ethical Concerns?	Marketing or Funding?
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