

# All Black Swans?

*Showcasing three U.S. postsecondary institution's disability support services for students with learning disabilities*

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Comparative and International Education

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"Education is the currency  
of the Information Age, no longer  
just a pathway to opportunity  
and success but a prerequisite."

~ *Barack Obama, 2008* ~

**(Ostergren, 2009: 14)**

## Abstract

The main purpose of this study was to investigate the disability support service (DSS) office designs at three varying U.S. postsecondary institutions and their relationship to the experiences of students with a learning disability. The three postsecondary institutions represent a community college, a medium sized university and a large research university all-residing in a single bellwether state. Selection of the cases and postsecondary institutions was carefully done in order to investigate a diverse range of institutional environments potentially influencing the design of their disability services.

Conducted at three U.S. postsecondary institutions, participants in this study included federal/state officials, disability support service coordinators, faculty members and students with a learning disability. All participation was conducted via online utilizing Skype and an online questionnaire service (Freeonlinesurveys.com). Using DSS coordinators, faculty members and students as primary sources, a triangulation of responses and experiences contributed to the multi-perspective depiction of the three DSS designs. Adopting a multi-frame theoretical framework on organizations, Bolman and Deal's four-frame model provided the analytical tool from which the three DSS cases were viewed and their actions supported.

The data shows little difference between the three DSS designs at the three postsecondary institutions; instead sharing many similarities between the experiences of DSS coordinators, faculty members and students with a learning disability. Established and culturally accepted on postsecondary campuses over the years as a resource for those seeking information and support for learning disability issues, all three DSS offices have created a similar niche at their respectful institutions. Unanimously regarded as a necessity by postsecondary institutions, coordinators, faculty members and students, the DSS offices are an essential factor in the continuous commitment to provide equal opportunity for students with a learning disability.

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## Abbreviations

ADA -	Americans with Disabilities Act
DSS -	Disability Support Services
FAPE -	Free Appropriate Public Education
HR -	Human Resource
ICF -	International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health
IEP -	Individualized Education Plan
IDEA -	Individuals with Disabilities Education Act
LD -	learning disability
NCLB -	No Child Left Behind
OCR -	Office for Civil Rights



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Travis Rice

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## Chapter 1: Frame of the Study

*“Let the shameful wall of exclusion finally come tumbling down.”  
~ George H.W. Bush, at the signing of the ADA in 1990 ~*

### 1.1 Choice of Topic

In choosing a topic for which to conduct research, I looked back to my past and what I have grown-up seeing, hearing and doing throughout my education and young-adult life. My mother, an educator for those with learning disabilities as well as a current educator for those with intellectual disabilities, had me involved in her classrooms ever since I can remember. Throughout my high school and university years I volunteered in my mother’s classrooms and found myself further involved helping persons with special needs through events such as the Special Olympics. Working with individuals with learning disabilities or other mental/physical disabilities was a very rewarding, but also a very harrowing experience. Rewarding in that I was helping the disadvantaged, but harrowing in learning that many do not continue on with education after high school. Their talent and their capabilities were there, but the support and guidance were not. The term ‘equity’ regarding any social or public institution, such as education, is usually in reference to minority groups defined by race, gender, and the poor, rarely in reference to those with a disability. Disability is the ‘forgotten’ minority. Knowing and preaching education’s necessity; my interest in discovering what limitations and obstacles limit students with disabilities in pursuing postsecondary education thus came about.

### 1.2 Learning Disability Defined

Before continuing it should be noted, that this study focuses on students with a learning disability, a specific category of disability, in the U.S. Within U.S. federal policies, the general term disability is used to encompass all forms of disability be them physical, more severe mental and/or learning. Throughout this study the term learning disability (LD) is used in reference to the description below.

A learning disability in the U.S. is defined and categorized differently than the same term used in other countries. As cultural and historical differences in postsecondary education

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vary greatly between nations, in addition to the terms defining a learning disability, it became to large an endeavor for this study to compare internationally. Therefore, this study focuses on postsecondary institutions and their disability services within the U.S. The National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities (NJCLD) (1997) defines a learning disability as:

*“Learning disabilities is a general term that refers to a heterogeneous group of disorders manifested by significant difficulties in the acquisition and use of listening, speaking, reading, writing, reasoning, or mathematical skills. These disorders are intrinsic to the individual, presumed to be due to central nervous system dysfunction, and may occur across the life span...”*  
*(<http://www.ldonline.org/ldbasics>, p. 1)*

A LD is not the same as an inability to learn (Wolanin & Steele, 2004); academic problems do not constitute a learning disability. As a learning disability, it is most often *invisible*, intrinsic in its affects on the individual and their abilities.

There are many different learning disabilities with Wolanin and Steele (2004) reporting dyslexia as the most common. Students with a learning disability represented 40 percent of the enrolled freshman with disabilities, in 2000. Meaning, one in 25 students or statistically, one student in every class has an LD (Wolanin & Steele, 2004). The need for an improved understanding in the realities of students with a learning disability in postsecondary education is essential and urgent.

### 1.3 Rationale

The United States’ educational system has historically been highly decentralized down to the local district level. Most recently with the signing of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) in 2001 along with the previously established Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), educational documentation of students, especially students with a learning disability and students with special needs, increased as district officials as well as state and federal education departments require increased accountability from teachers and schools. This increase in documentation governs and provides K-12 students, ages 5-18, with a learning disability specialized and unique accommodations to their education. NCLB and IDEA’s premise, “provide the appropriate curriculum, environment, and contingencies, [so that] each child will thrive” (Hale, Naglieri, Kaufman, & Kavale, 2004: 7), captures the intense focus on intervention and constant support for students with a learning disability students have

throughout compulsory school. However, NCLB and IDEA only extend to the 12<sup>th</sup> grade. There exists little legislation as encompassing as NCLB and IDEA aiding students with a learning disability after high school.

In effect from the increased individualized education students receive to aid them in grades K-12; students with disabilities are the fastest growing group of enrolling college students in the U.S. (Wehman & Yasuda, 2005). The latest statistical data presents between 9 and 11 percent of college students report having a disability, 41 percent of which are learning disabilities (Scott & McGuire, 2005; Hock, 2005; & NCES, 2004). As far as postsecondary institutions attended, 60 percent of students with disabilities enroll in community colleges or degree programs that are less than two years (Getzel, 2005), while of the few who seek postsecondary education at a 4-year institution, only 28 percent will receive diplomas compared with 54 percent of their peers without disclosed disabilities (Duffy & Gugerty, 2005).

Globally, disability has become a recent topic for the United Nations and the World Health Organization. The United Nations realizes students with disabilities are under represented in postsecondary education, even within the OECD countries (United Nations, 2008). In 2006, with the latest International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the United Nations essentially declared disability an issue of needed focus and attention for all world nations. Though not a signatory of the declaration, discovering the reasons why students with a learning disability struggle in postsecondary education is pertinent to both the U.S. and its postsecondary institutions; important not only as the U.S. competes on the world stage, but also because the U.S. design of postsecondary education is replicated and duplicated internationally. Ensuring quality and equality for all students is a necessary global responsibility.

The World Health Organization, in early 2001 approved the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) altering the way disability is to be viewed and addressed. Under the new classification, the issue of disability is separated into its affects on body functions and on body structures as well as the influence environmental factors can have on a particular disability. This new classification highlights the importance of the dimensions between the disability and the contextual setting in which the person with the disability is located (i.e. nation, socio-economic status, age, family support, etc.). The

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classification treats and views these dimensions as interactive and dynamic rather than static (<http://www.who.int/classifications/icf/en/>).

For this study, DSS is used as a general term referring to the various structural forms, policies and practices specifically geared and/or created to serve students with disabilities within postsecondary institutions. With over 4,000 postsecondary institutions in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009), all varying in size, curriculum, policies, organizational structures and practices, the rationale in showcasing three DSS cases is not to provide statistically representative data, but to explore the diversity or similarity of disability support services at varying postsecondary institutions.

The case study approach was specifically sought as the best fit to address this study's objectives. As researchers proclaim, more research is needed into the various models of disability service delivery, as the increased enrollment of students with a learning disability requires more varied and specialized services from DSS offices (Getzel, McManns & Briel, 2004). Thus, an in-depth look and projection of three DSS offices contributes and furthers the insight into a little known establishment. Using the terminology "black swan" in this study's title takes the pre-assumption that most DSS designs are unique to their institutions, as postsecondary institutions themselves are quite unique in size, faculty members, funds and a multitude of other variables, all shaping the campus environment.

## 1.4 Disability Policy Overview

To begin to understand the present, the past must be made sense of for it establishes the existence of reasoning in an organization, influencing an organization's objectives and the means by which it pursues those objectives. Obtaining a solid foundation on the issue also provided this study with its initial purpose and the assumptions guiding the research.

Throughout this study, the government level is always regarded as an indirect-participant, for it can be argued that the government has several claims on an organization (Jones, 2007) and therefore requires consideration for its roles and potential in creating change, especially at postsecondary institutions. According to Jones (2007) the government's hand can control the market, monitoring for fair and free competition, act as a police force, making sure organizations abide by agreed upon rules and laws and act as a buffer, between businesses

and the public. For these reasons, the government's hand in disability support services is an essential side of the story and therefore provided due attention.

Initially, students with disabilities were excluded and/or separated and marginalized in ways seen as unacceptable for other groups (Christensen & Rizvi, 1996). Not even until the early twentieth century did special education become an established field in most Western nations. Only within the past 40 years has disability become a concern in the political arena, with the creation of two important pieces of legislation, The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act 2000 (ADA). Understanding over the past few decades of intellectual/physical and learning disabilities has grown through theoretical insights into ethics and educational practices, evoking a gradual evolution within human institutions and their acceptance and treatment of persons with disabilities.

Individualized support mandated by policy, such as IDEA, requiring compulsory schools to provide a free appropriate public education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment through the establishment of Individualized Education Plans (IEP) and/or other accommodations have led to an influx of students with a disability pursuing postsecondary education. Though the coverage of IDEA does not carry itself to students in postsecondary education, it is the cradle most students with a learning disability are acquainted with as they enroll and continue forth with their education.

As then Senator Barack Obama stated in his speech titled: *What's Possible for Our Children?*, education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is a prerequisite, a requirement to be able to establish a worthy future. According to the Alliance for Excellent Education, roughly 90 percent of the fastest-growing and highest-paying jobs demand at least some postsecondary education ([http://www.all4ed.org/files/Louisiana\\_wc.pdf](http://www.all4ed.org/files/Louisiana_wc.pdf), 2009). Students with disabilities realize the necessity of a college degree citing the same reasons as the general public: to obtain further education or training, to learn a particular skill, to go because everyone else goes, to earn a degree, and/or to become employed (Stage & Milne, 1996). Such a reality is encouraging considering even some postsecondary education, from vocational training to as little as a single semester at a postsecondary institution, greatly increases a person with a disability's chance of obtaining meaningful employment (Gilson, 1996).

Below, The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the ADA, the two most important and relevant federal policies regarding students with disabilities/learning disabilities pursuing

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postsecondary education are further presented. It is because of these two pieces of legislation that disability services were established across U.S. university and college campuses.

### **1.4.1 The Rehabilitation Act of 1973**

Important to note when dealing with policy is the timing and feasibility in which the policies were made (Howell & Brown, 1983), for often times the setting sheds just as much light as the actual policies themselves. Helping those with disabilities has always been connected with a moral obligation out of charity and pity. However federally, the assistance of those with disabilities began with aiding veterans who had acquired disabilities, both physical and mental, through service (Reilly & Davis, 2005). With timing being important in terms of policy making, the 50's, 60's, and 70's in the United States is key to the eventual creation of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. The heat of the Civil Rights movement, much key legislation was created on the rights for equal access regardless of race, gender, and/or ability in all public and private sectors. The Rehabilitation Act of 1973, was the first of such legislation geared specifically towards those with disabilities, prohibiting discrimination in 'public' places, which later came to be defined as institutions receiving federal funds.

Section 504 of the act is the only relevant section to this study, addressing the extension of civil rights to persons with disabilities in such areas as higher education. Section 504 (PL 93-112) states:

*(a) No otherwise qualified individual with a disability in the United States, as defined in section 7(20), shall, solely by reason of her or his disability, be excluded from the participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance or under any program or activity conducted by any Executive agency or by the United States Postal Service. The head of each such agency shall promulgate such regulations as may be necessary to carry out the amendments to this section made by the Rehabilitation, Comprehensive Services, and Developmental Disabilities Act of 1978...*

“Program or activity” includes:

*(2)(A) a college, university, or other postsecondary institution, or a public system of higher education; or...*

Section 504 is what prompted the creation of disability support services (DSS) in postsecondary institutions. Although Section 504 does not require the creation of special education programming, it does require that institutions are able to make appropriate accommodations and adjustments to allow for full participation of students with disabilities.

### **1.4.2 Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)**

Students with disabilities have been attending postsecondary institutions since before the 90's and the signing of ADA, but many of the legislation's goals before ADA focused on transitioning those with disabilities to the workforce. However, during the late 80's and 90's, with 54 million Americans with disabilities (Reilly & Davis, 2005), it became essential for greater access to postsecondary education. In 1990, and later amended in 2008, the ADA was signed into existence extending non-discrimination based on disability into all public entities.

The ADA can be regarded as an extension of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973; however, the ADA does contain various additives broadening the civil rights jurisdiction. It grants protection against discrimination to persons with disabilities in similar ways as the Civil Rights Act of 1964 did with race, religion, sex, and national origin in the U.S.

Under ADA, disability is defined as:

*Section 12103 of the ADA:*

(1) *Disability*

*The term "disability" means, with respect to an individual*

*(A) a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more life activities of such individual;*

*(B) a record of such an impairment; or*

*(C) being regarded as having such an impairment*

(2) *Major Life Activities*

*(A) In general*

*For purposes of paragraph (1), major life activities include, but are not limited to, caring for oneself, performing manual tasks, seeing, hearing, eating, sleeping, walking, standing, lifting, bending, speaking, breathing, learning, reading, concentration, thinking, communicating, and working.*

The ADA consists of five titles with Title II addressing education:

*§ 35.130 General prohibitions against discrimination:*

*(7) A public entity shall not impose or apply eligibility criteria that screen out or tend to screen out an individual with a disability...from fully and equally enjoying any service, program, or activity, unless such criteria can be shown to be necessary for the provision of the service, program, or activity being offered.*

*(8) A public entity shall not impose or apply eligibility criteria that screen out...individuals with disabilities...unless such criteria can be shown to be necessary for the provision of the service, program, or activity being offered.*



- (d) *A public entity shall administer services, programs, and activities in the most integrated setting appropriate to the needs of qualified individuals with disabilities.*
- (e)(1) *Nothing in this part shall be construed to require an individual with a disability to accept an accommodation, aid, service, opportunity, or benefit provided under ADA...*

Title II prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability by all public entities at the local and state levels. Public entities are those receiving federal funds or grants, which includes universities and colleges. Therefore, under Title II, postsecondary institutions are prohibited from denying access to students with a disability, adequate accommodations. Common accommodations include auxiliary aids, note-takers, interpreters and readers.

*“Most lasting peaceful change is brought about incrementally. Where the vehicle of change is legislation...we build on precedents, correcting the most critical imperfections...Occasionally we experience a quantum leap...In the case of the [ADA] very significant advances have been made in several dimensions” (Boggs, 1993: 2).*

Before IDEA, ADA, and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, U.S. schools only educated one in five children with a disability (U.S. Office of Special Education Programs). Today, every child with a disability in the U.S is guaranteed a free (compulsory) public education in the least restrictive environment. Even within postsecondary education, leaps have been made in enrollment and obtainment of college degrees since the establishment of these federal policies. However, the number of students with a learning disability enrolling in 4-year institutions and the number obtaining degrees is still a far cry from that of peers who have no disabilities. Though a quantum leap has been made, there still must exist critical imperfections prohibiting and hindering students with a learning disability.

## 1.5 Problem Statement

The assumptions of this study may be translated into a single problem statement:

**What are the various designs of disability support services and their relationship to the experiences of students with learning disabilities at postsecondary institutions?**

Three main questions can be drawn from the problem statement:

1. What are the possible design options in creating disability support services at postsecondary institutions?
2. What theoretical perspectives can best shed light on the relationship between DSS designs and the experiences of students with a learning disability?
3. How do DSS coordinators, faculty members and students in practice perceive the disability support services intended to enhance opportunities for students with learning disabilities?

Within the U.S., education is regarded as a state's right, and therefore postsecondary education is governed by each individual state's own legislature. Even further, within each state, postsecondary institutions have traditionally been autonomous from state control and directed by their own individual curators and board of regents. Though it is unknown for this thesis the various policies different states have for postsecondary education and even for students with disabilities pursuing postsecondary education, it is an intent to showcase the top to bottom organizational thread from peak to practice using one state as a focus. Due to confidentiality requests by participating institutions the states name will not be given, as doing such leads to a breach of anonymity. The selected state is located within the Midwest and termed a bellwether state, for its political views and economic tastes are comfortably representative of the U.S. as a whole. All three institutions exemplified as cases in this study are postsecondary institutions residing in and at the mercy of legislation of this state, but just-as-well, are influential actors in both the federal and state-level political arenas.

Although postsecondary institutions may reside in the same state, it is not assumed that they are for this reason organizationally similar, justly termed "black swans". Yet, as all postsecondary institutions reside within the U.S., they are subjected to the wording in both The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the ADA. Showcasing three postsecondary institutions and their DSS designs will allow for a look at similarities and differences between organizations defined into being by the same two federal policies and how each postsecondary institution's DSS office has been designed around such policies.

## Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

*“The world simply can’t be made sense of, facts can’t be organized, unless you have a mental model to begin with. That theory does not have to be the right one, because you can alter it along the way as information comes in. But you can’t begin to learn without some concept that gives you expectations or hypotheses”*  
~ (Goran Carstedt, as cited in Bolman & Deal, 2008, p. 13) ~

This study adopts a four-frame organizational theory created by Lee Bolman and Terrence Deal (2008) for its versatility as an analytical tool for organizations. Bolman and Deal’s framework metaphorically views organizations as factories, families, jungles, and temples. The four-frame model’s intentions are not to offer solutions but rather to inspire powerful and provocative ways of thinking about opportunities and pitfalls (Bolman & Deal, 2008). In essence, Bolman and Deal’s (2008) four-frame model is to encourage a reframing of thought, to think about things in more than one-way and to put even the most basic things into question.

### 2.1 Theoretical Design

In adopting a multi-perspective framework, drawing and utilizing various disciplines, and incorporating both positivistic and interpretivist epistemologies, this study hopes to minimize the limitations and increase the creativity in presenting and viewing three DSS cases and their organizational structures, policies and practices.

Bolman and Deal (2008) refer to their frames, Structural, Human Resource, Political, and Symbolic, as windows and tools for navigation, making it easier to know what one is up against and what one can do about it. “When we don’t know what to do, we do more of what we know” (Bolman & Deal, 2008: p.8). Reframing is to aid in breaking away from what is known and what is always done to push the limits in how organizations are viewed and defined. Organizations are complex, but the increase in the amount of organizations has made almost all aspects of life collective pursuits, as is the case with disability support services.

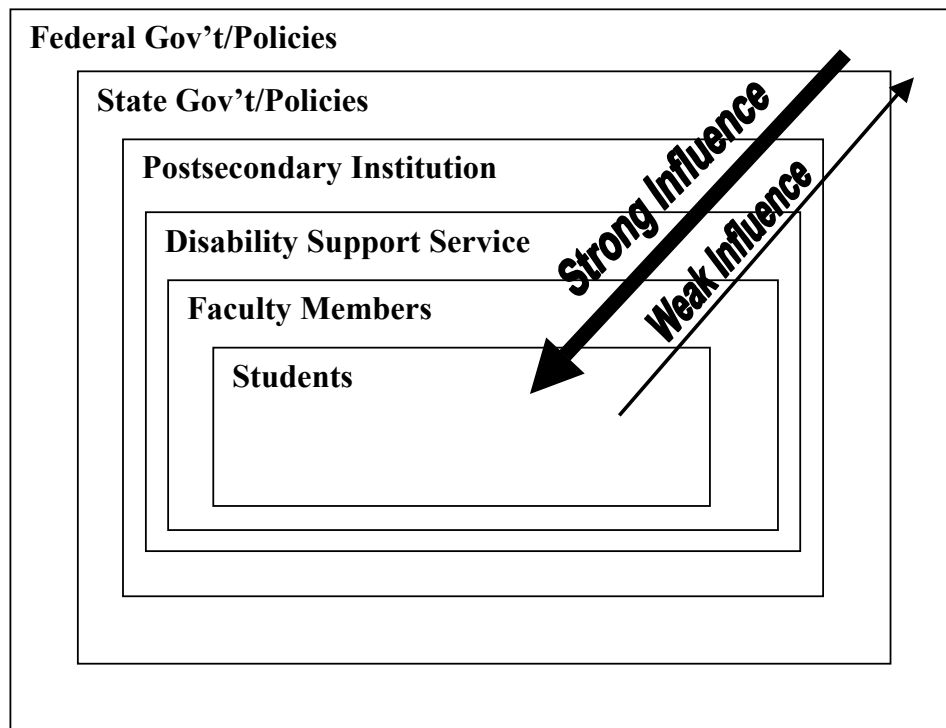
Organizationally, disability support services are located within a wider institutional setting. It is with the utilization of the four-frame model that three organizational DSS cases are illustrated through an open systems approach, insisting on the importance of the wider postsecondary context or environment as it constrains, shapes, penetrates, and renews the organization of disability support services (Katz & Kahn, 1966; Scott, 1998). Broken into five foci (Structures, Communication, Resources, Advocacy and Determination), design aspects of disability support services lead the assumptions guiding this study, with Bolman and Deal's four-frames providing multiple perspectives from which to view and analyze the five foci and their contextual idiosyncrasies on the three institutional campuses.

## 2.2 DSS Design Assumptions

The following DSS design assumptions developed from an in-depth literature review were created as the focal points for data collection and investigation for this study.

### *Structural Assumptions*

This study initially views the organizational structure and policies of all disability support services as depicted in Figure 1 below. Focusing on structural factors, these assumptions regard the influence and the power between the various actors concerned with disability support services at postsecondary institutions. The smaller the box, the more subordinate the role. The two arrows signify the direction and intensity of direct-control and influence between the various actors, assuming a stronger top-down approach to management, with only meager influence in- reverse. All actors in Figure 1 above are viewed as active members within each of the three DSS organizational cases presented in this study, possessing specific roles and responsibilities established through policy and/or management.



*Figure 1: DSS Organizational Structural/Policy Power Perspective*

Leading structural assumptions are one, that the organization of the disability support services are inadequately structured to meet the needs of students with a learning disability, with this being the case even more so at larger postsecondary institutions. Secondly, the policies themselves are too rigid, out-dated and/or insufficient in providing adequate needs to students, as with The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the ADA created decades ago, when ‘normality’ (insuring access to normal life activities) equated equality, are not adequately keeping up with contemporary disability research and practices.

### ***Communication Assumptions***

Students with a learning disability are members, as well as, customers of the postsecondary institutions they attend, and thus should have their needs met by the postsecondary institution and its designated offices. Needs range from academic needs, to needs of belongingness, esteem, and self-actualization (Bolman & Deal, 2008), and come in the form of support through accommodations. All of these needs are important for success in postsecondary education. For students with a learning disability, postsecondary education can be a nightmare, “for they are not only beginning an unexplored and unfamiliar way of life but embarking on a journey that threatens their established motivational drive, need for order, compensatory skills, and social relationships” (Heiman & Precel, 2003: 249).

Though the most successful students with a learning disability have learned to cope with their disability (Stage & Milne, 1996; Heiman & Precel, 2003), postsecondary education possesses new difficulties that students with a learning disability either do not have the means or the know-how to overcome. Many students with a learning disability report having difficulties with academia, such as time management and a tremendous workload (Stage & Milne, 1996), with little ability to communicate their exact needs to faculty members. Yet, a clear lack of communication is more commonly associated with faculty members, as many faculty members are simply unaware and/or not fulfilling of their responsibilities, “We have to deal with professors, but they don’t deal with us” (Lehman, Davies & Laurin, 2000: 61). The lack of communication through support, training and/or understanding must lie within the services of the DSS office, resulting in neither faculty members nor students receiving the training and support they need to succeed.

### ***Resource Assumptions***

Howell and Brown (1983) view postsecondary institutions as parapolitical systems; a system which is both part of the political arena and also a political arena within itself. In essence, postsecondary institutions are influenced by external forces (i.e. federal/state policies, constituents, current fads, technological innovations, availability of resources), but are mutually capable of influencing those same forces. Resources are an important factor in the quality and quantity of services DSS offices and the institutions from which they are a part provide. Funds, in terms of dollars, is arguably the most important resource; as more money allows for the existence of more staff positions, training programs and new technological innovations aiding in accommodating students with a learning disability. Where certain organizations play to the motto, ‘more money then sense’, institutions of postsecondary education often are quite tight with budgets and conservative in spending. Additionally, many large institutions are often centered on research, with more money being sanctioned in that direction with less sectioned off for other programs, such as disability services. This is contrary to small institutions and community colleges, where the absence of a research dominance allows for the promotion of other departments and programs. This assumption is reflected and supported by the data reporting higher enrollment and tales of success from students with a disability in community colleges compared with their peers in 4-year institutions.

### ***Advocacy Assumptions***

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Internally, postsecondary institutions consist of various members (administrators, deans, faculty members, students, alumni), referred to here as stakeholders, vying to make their voices heard and needs met. As stakeholders in their own education, many students with a learning disability already feel stigmatized when enrolling in postsecondary education and therefore are apprehensive in reporting their disability to the DSS office. Though desperately needed, some students never step foot in their disability support services office. Even for those students who do report their disability, they find it difficult and scary to speak with professors to alter courses or provide accommodations (Stage & Milne, 1996), as some professors ‘shrug off’ the requests made by students from a lack of acceptance (Lehmann, Davies & Laurin, 2000). Yet, “more than any other campus entity, faculty members...influence the academic success of students with a disability” (Wilson, Getzel, & Brown, 2000: 199), requiring a means of understanding between faculty members and students.

The culture of academia in postsecondary education from the curriculum to daily shifts in routine are often difficult to alter and difficult for students with a disability to become accustomed to, forcing many students to develop their own coping strategies independently of disability support services (Heiman & Precel, 2003). However, as organizational environments often change, it creates a problematic and inconsistent scenario for students with learning disabilities. Students with a learning disability require help, fellow advocates on campus to aid them with everything from transitioning to continued guidance and support. Becoming self-advocates is essential in taking control of their own situation and their own disability. Yet, this alone does not equate change, for students often do not possess the means to persuade an entire institution’s way of order.

Stakeholders of an organization with similar goals must come together in groups and align themselves with other groups in coalitions in order to obtain a voice. Groups and their coalitions are the pawns in the institution’s political arena, as groups negotiate and bargain for power and influence. The disability support office’s keen location within postsecondary institutions puts it at an ideal place to advocate for students with disabilities to institutional leaders, faculty members and policymakers. It is then assumed that little advocacy for students and from students exists on university/college campuses.

### ***Determination Assumptions***

“Organizations are filled with people who have their own interpretations of what is and should be happening, each with a glimmer of truth, but also with the prejudices and blind spots of its maker” (Bolman & Deal, 2008: 19). Educating students with a disability is something about which all educators have an opinion, and leaves few neutral (Cohen, 2006). A repeating theme amongst literature is the need for students to be self-determined and self-advocates (Stage & Milne, 1996; Lehman et al., 2000; Thoma & Wehmeyer, 2005).

Students with a learning disability in postsecondary education with such skills are able to seek out proper help, as they know their rights and their own abilities. This is reported as being a major deterrent in the success of students with a learning disability, as a lack in understanding their own disability hinders the ability to seek aid and use it appropriately.

Still today, there exists a cultural sympathy for those living with disabilities, and charity is most often regarded as a response to aid those with disabilities. In postsecondary institutions, charity is neither acceptable nor beneficial; unacceptable in that the accommodations students with a disability receive cannot jeopardize the academic standards of a program and not beneficial in that charity stifles the development of self-sufficiency for those students living with a learning disability. In terms of culture, meaning is more important than what actually happens, putting more emphasis on perception than actuality. How a learning disability is perceived, especially within the context of a postsecondary institution, among its members and by those with the disability, becomes an important factor in the actions others take to provide disability support services.

Unknown, the types and level of assessment services institutions and DSS offices have in place are assumed to be minimal, as institutions appear adamant with their services and stubborn to change. Policies are in place to aid students with a disability, but the institutional beliefs held by university/college staff, faculty members and students are influenced by a well-established institutional culture blurring the actual intentions of such policies.

Figure 2 below, organizes the above five design foci and their relevant assumptions guiding both this study’s theoretical and methodological approaches.



<b>DSS DESIGN FOCI</b>	<b>ASSUMPTIONS</b>
<i><b>STRUCTURAL</b></i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>SMALLER POSTSECONDARY INSTITUTIONS ARE MORE CAPABLE OF ACCOMMODATING STUDENTS WITH A LEARNING DISABILITY</b></li> <li>- <b>MANAGEMENT OF DSS HINDERS THE ‘QUALITY’ OF SERVICES</b></li> <li>- <b>OUTDATED AND/OR VAGUE POLICIES ARE NOT ENCOMPASSING ENOUGH</b></li> </ul>
<i><b>COMMUNICATION</b></i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>LACK OF OPEN COMMUNICATION BETWEEN DSS OFFICES, FACULTY MEMBERS AND STUDENTS</b></li> <li>- <b>INSUFFICIENT STAFF, FACULTY MEMBERS AND STUDENT TRAINING AND/OR SUPPORT REGARDING RULES AND RESPONSIBILITIES</b></li> </ul>
<i><b>RESOURCES</b></i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>DSS ARE DELEGATED OR POSSESS LIMITED RESOURCES THAT NEGATIVELY AFFECT THE QUALITY AND QUANTITY OF THEIR SERVICES</b></li> </ul>
<i><b>ADVOCACY</b></i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>STUDENTS WITH A LD LACK A VOICE ON POSTSECONDARY CAMPUSES</b></li> <li>- <b>POSTSECONDARY INSTITUTIONAL CULTURE IS TRADITIONALLY NOT ACCOMMODATING TO STUDENTS WITH A LD</b></li> </ul>
<i><b>DETERMINATION</b></i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>STUDENTS WITH A LD LACK THE SELF-DETERMINATION AND SKILLS NECESSARY TO SUCCEED</b></li> <li>- <b>EVALUATION SYSTEMS ARE INEFFICIENT IN PRODUCING NECESSARY CHANGES TO DISABILITY SUPPORT SERVICES</b></li> </ul>

*Figure 2: DSS design foci and their relevant assumptions overview*

## 2.3 Bolman and Deal's Four-Frame Model

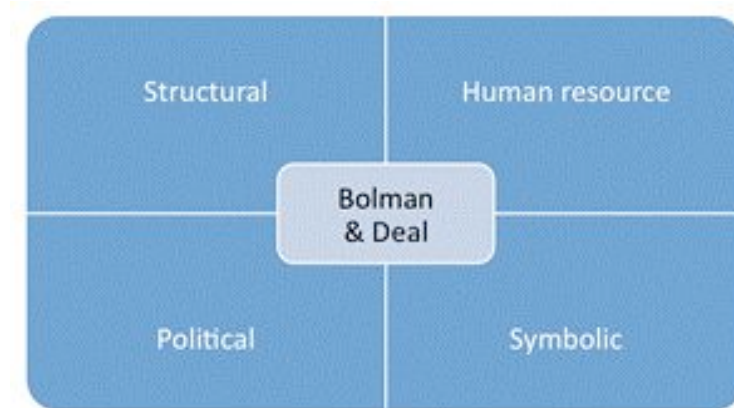


Figure 3: Bolman & Deal's Four-Frame Model (2008)

Where theories are to shield from confusion and uncertainty, preconceived theories determine the images seen and the actions taken. Using the four-frames as conceptual ideas from which to view the five relevant design foci promotes creativity and artistry in the analysis and development of discussion. Where one frame, theory, or tool has its limitations, multiple frames, theories, or tools add versatility. This is important because DSS concerns structures, behaviors, relationships, environments, and cultures. These can exist in varying forms and it must be possible to view them varyingly as well.

The four-frames are presented below in connection with the five DSS foci. Like the five foci, the four-frames were established as fluid ideas, ways of thinking about the social reality of disability support services. A commonality between the two is their fluidity; boundaries between the frames and likewise between the foci are fuzzy. Metaphorically, each frame can be likened to a tree. Though the various theories within each frame may twist and turn branching off in different directions, they are all connected and hold fast to the same roots. Each frame alone is not intended to portray the only solution or the only perspective, but instead portrays a possible reality relevant for addressing this study's intended aims.

*Chapter 5: Discussion* and *Chapter 6: Conclusion and Recommendations* breakdown the four-frame walls, bringing them together with the foci in an exposition of all the theoretical ideas, providing a critical perspective to the analysis and discussion of the three case studies' findings.

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## 2.4 Structural Frame

Bolman and Deal metaphorically liken the structural frame to a factory. Initiating images of assembly lines, conveyor belts and managerial hierarchies, the idea of a factory conjures up thoughts of efficiency, distinctively assigned tasks established in robotic like organizations governed by pre-established rules and policies. Assumptions within this frame concern themselves with the achievement of goals through efficiency and the clear coordination and control of efforts. Deriving many of its foundational beliefs from economics and the natural sciences, the perspectives from this frame have influenced many early organizational theories and practices.

Further relating the structural frame to Burrell and Morgan's (1979) functionalist paradigm, a structural perspective on organizational structures, policies, and practices takes an objectivist stance, with a very rational, pragmatic approach for addressing organizational faults. In keeping with rationality, the structural frame sees the challenge for solving organizational faults in the attunement of organizational structures to the environment and the task(s) at hand.

### 2.4.1 Structural Perspectives

Disability support services are organizational entities that were created into existence after the establishment of the federal policies, The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the ADA. The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the ADA do not mandate the creation of a DSS office nor provide clear prescriptions for conduct; but U.S. postsecondary institutions naturally created such offices to address and uphold the requirements set forth in these acts. Legislation in the case of disability support services is the underlying structural blueprint governing all DSS offices.

*“Because ultimately a third party must always involve the state as a source of coercion, a theory of institutions also inevitably involves an analysis of the political structure of a society and the degree to which that political structure provides a framework of effective enforcement” (North, 1990: 64).*

However, as DSS offices are also contained within institutional settings, there exists the possibility for various policy nuances in addition to the federal policies.

Institutions and organizations are built on regulative aspects, which constrain and regularize behavior (Scott, 2001). Regulation breeds consistency and is beneficial to students with

disabilities, especially as they enter new environments. In addition, evident in the regulatory application process postsecondary institutions require of students in order to receive disability services, as well as, typical accommodations prescribed, disability support services initiates conformity. Conformity to certain DSS practices is backed by federal policy, as intimidation of the law can be used to manipulate and/or encourage faculty members, staff and students to oblige.

An important aspect of rules and regulations is how they are communicated and enforced throughout the institution and various organizational levels. In a more classical view, organizations are directed through vertical coordination with a top-down approach, higher levels control and direct the work of subordinates. Vertical coordination provides organizations with rigid, pre-defined purposes through authoritative rules and policies. Organizational charts provide the most appropriate image when talking about an organization's line of communication as they usually depict an organization's power structure. At the top of the power structure is management. Management holds the power, whether it is headquartered in an individual, an office and/or within policies.

Taylor (1947), an early organizational theorist, developed his idea of 'scientific management' from a natural sciences' perspective. Being practical in his approach Taylor viewed the success of an organization through a structural lens. He viewed management and leadership as the controls behind the successful functioning and coordination of the various organizational parts contributing to the achievement of an organization's goals. As Bolman and Deal (2008) see it, structure (i.e. rules, policies and standards) set forth by managers, limits individual discretion and helps to ensure that behavior is predictable and consistent by reducing the influence of personal whims and political pressures.

Reflected in Taylor's three objectives: efficiency, predictability, and control, management is the key to structural and organizational stability (Huczynski & Buchanan, 2001). It is the responsibility of the manager to keep actions aligned with an organization's initial goals and objectives. Managers are seen as problem solvers, evaluators of performance and experts in their fields. Like scientific subjects, organizational parts can be isolated and analyzed individually to determine any alterations needed to increase productivity. In getting the structure correctly attuned, human behavior and organizational performance will follow. Under Taylor and other classical organizational theorists, disability support services orbits

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around the DSS coordinators as experts. They decide the distribution of resources, the lifeline for disability services, to qualified students.

Fayol (1916) and additionally Drucker (1988) also two classical management theorists, coincide with Taylor in that they emphasize a managerial role as the single most pertinent in an organization. Planning, organizing, coordinating, controlling, measuring, and developing people (Law & Glover, 2000) are the functional task headings Fayol and Drucker assign to managers. Taylor, Fayol and Drucker prescribe management as the link between an organization's objectives and reaching those objectives. "Any personal objectives are necessarily collateral [organizational] objectives" (Davis, 1951: 39), conditioning the creation of organizational values. Softly defined, the classical view of an organization is "basically any group of individuals who are cooperating to a common end under the guidance of leadership" (Davis, 1951: 39).

Disability support services, within the traditional structural frame, lack individualized support for faculty members and students, as there exists none outside of the written rules and regulations of federal and institutional policies. Advocacy and determination take a strict, surveillance like perspective. Determination becomes limited to the level at which individuals, students and faculty members, are able to meet the DSS's performance requirements (Tosi, 2009), all be it on their own, measured by an institutionalized evaluation. The purpose of such an evaluation would be to increase the efficiency of organizational practices, by using results to locate target areas. Tosi (2009) states the difficulty meeting performance requirements can become as organizations grow, as more people equate more problems. Often times to address such issues, various departments or positions within departments are established, creating a bureaucratic organizational web.

Max Weber's principles of bureaucracy depict each member/department of an organization as having a single purpose, for which they can be held accountable and by which they are required to act in accordance (Jones, 2007). The establishment of roles and responsibilities comes both from managers, superiors in the organization, and the policies that govern the organization's actions. Though a bureaucracy can take various forms, the "primary advantage of a bureaucracy is that it lays out the ground rules for designing an organizational hierarchy that efficiently controls interactions between organizational levels" (Jones, 2007: 134).

Possessing all that is structural and functional, a bureaucracy is founded on the ideals of objectivism. A bureaucracy separates the position from the person, stressing equity and fairness. Members are assigned roles based on their competence, and grow to specialize under the standard rules and procedures assigned to such a role. The operation of most organizations is at their hearts, dependent on their bureaucratic setup. As Weber intended, “bureaucracy [is] the most efficient form of social organization...because it [is] so coldly logical and [does] not allow...feelings to get in the way of achieving goals” (Huczynski & Buchanan, 2001: 491).

### **2.4.2 Structural Short-Comings**

“Structures in a sense are broader and more subtle than the rigidity, bureaucracy, and red tape” (Bolman & Deal, 2008: 68). Structure is an organizational necessity, yet the varieties of organizational structures are as diverse as the purposes they were created to fulfill. Organizations and their structures brought into being by policies have dates, reflective of the time and setting under which they were created. Time and setting are extremely influential characters as times become outdated and settings evolve. DSS structures and the policies that govern them are further linked and intertwined with the structures and policies of their postsecondary institutions.

The contingency theory is a structural view of organizations but represents quite an alternative. As contingency theorists view it, for an organization to change and survive in its environment, all aspects of the organization must be willing to change (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). Context is central to the contingency theory, as it views all variables affecting an organization as pertinent considerations in contemplating its structure. However, contingency theory fits well under the structural frame as contingency theorists, “focus upon the organization as a unit in its own right, distinguished from [the] wider environment by a notional boundary” (Burrell & Morgan, 1979: 168), consisting of interdependent subsystems, each of which having their own function.

Primarily depending on a structural perspective of disability support services salutes objectivism, ignoring individuals and focuses solely on the services as a unit, never isolating the concerns of staff, faculty members and students. The structural frame is often criticized for its simplistic view of organizations, overlooking the human aspect individuals bring to the larger society. If institutions work to promote stability...how does change occur? If

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institutions control and constitute individuals, how can individuals hope to alter the systems in which they are embedded? (Scott, 2001).

Man is seen as merely an observer, the prelude of society where his/her actions can be explained only within the wider social context. However, this collides with the individualized affects a disability has on students and their education. Rather than a mutual relationship between students, faculty members and the DSS, students and faculty members can only alter their actions in response to the DSS's actions. Reflected in the conceited evaluative purposes within the structural frame, improvements arise only when beneficial to the organization. Completely degrading the power of self-determination and advocacy, crucial elements for the success of students with a disability, classical structural and functionalist perspectives are thus labeled as such, classical.

## 2.5 Human Resource Frame

The human resource frame believes organizations exist to serve human needs, rather than the converse view held by the structural frame. Where the structural frame placed management and its ability to control subordinates as central to achieving organizational objectives, the human resource frame considers understanding and empowerment as alternatives to guide an organization and its members. In understanding the members' of an organizations needs, the organization can better be aligned to fit them, as neither an organization nor its members can succeed without the other.

### 2.5.1 Human Resource Perspectives

“It is assumed that organizational creativity, flexibility and prosperity flow naturally from employee growth and development” (Shafritz, Ott & Jang, 2005: 145). However, member growth and development within an organization do not occur naturally. Within the human resource frame, organizations must invest in their members through resources, training and professional development. The DSS coordinators/offices hold the responsibility as leaders and experts on disabilities at postsecondary institutions. Leadership, as opposed to the structural frame's management stronghold, better fits the institutional environment of U.S. postsecondary institutions where there exists a traditional hands-off approach in interfering with professors and their teachings. A leadership approach is suited for disability support services at postsecondary institutions where power is shared and so many people are near

equals (Belbin, 1993). The traditional autonomous atmosphere for faculty members at U.S. postsecondary institutions limits the control, outside of policy, that DSS offices have. Therefore, DSS requests are mere guides to follow and not scripture enforced upon the campus.

Investing in members of an organization requires an increase in support, but also an increase in the level of authority and responsibility of organizational leaders. Jones (2007) states that studies equate more authority and responsibility for managers and/or members to an increase in motivation to perform organizational roles. In essence, members of an organization need motives to drive them. Certain motives are innate (i.e. curiosity, competence, self-understanding), while other motives must be acquired through training, rewards, punishments or more direct control methods. Yet, any form of development is positive, as under-trained members of an organization can inflict more damage than good (Cascio & Boudreau, 2008).

Maslow, known for his hierarchy of needs theory, argues that for humans to achieve their full potential there are certain basic needs that must be satisfied in a sequential order. His hierarchy begins with the basic biological needs, food, water, rest, etc., and is peaked with the obtainment of self-actualization. Important needs of an individual to reach self-actualization are self-respect, recognition, attention and the feeling of worth from others. Research pinpoints many of the biggest deterrents preventing students with a learning disability from succeeding in postsecondary education as lying in the higher levels of Maslow's pyramid.

Through providing information, guidance, autonomy and participation, the human resource approach to management highlights the need for empowerment of students and faculty members, rather than power over them to initiate organizational creativity eventually leading to student success (Huczynski & Buchanan, 2001). As the HR department for disability services on postsecondary campuses, DSS offices are the main source for information on disabilities and the greatest advocates for disability issues. The name itself, human resource, implies the importance humans are as resources to an organization. As important and necessary participants, students, staff and faculty members of an institution add to the constant evolution of their institutional environment(s).



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Regarded as personal management, organizational policies and procedures are implemented in a manner that contributes to both the well being of organizational members and to the overall organizational effectiveness. Less as a Big Brother and more as a Big Mother, a human resource approach does not degrade the importance of the organizational responsibilities of its members, but does highlight the importance of member contribution and participation in the organization and decision process. A personal management approach enables students, staff and faculty members to maintain a close-knit relationship through the consideration of their well being and allotment to make maximum potential contribution(s) to the effective working of disability support services (Huczynski & Buchanan, 2001). Allowing for student, staff and faculty members impute, creates a learning organizational atmosphere, where all members' contributions leads to improvements within the DSS design.

### **2.5.2 Human Resource Short-Comings**

“No organization can rely on genius: the supply is always scarce and unreliable” (Drucker, 1988: 17). Critics of the human resource perspective find the approach too costly and time consuming. Where time equates money, addressing the needs of members in an organization through continuous training and support takes away resources, energy and time from the organization's actual objectives. This is quite important when addressing postsecondary education; institutions are most often under tight budgets and abstain from frugal spending. Further, this becomes understandable when you consider that member interests and organizational needs are fundamentally irreconcilable, and trying to then align members with the organization is futile (Huczynski & Buchanan, 2001).

Where organizations need to plan ahead to stay relevant and anticipate possible problems, the human resource approach is more reactive, only addressing issues after they are established as a problem. HR focused DSS leadership/management is less concerned with shaping and developing its organizational strategy, and more concerned with addressing the desires of its faculty members, staff and students; treating the symptoms, but not the cause.

Under personal management, though more member focused than that of the structural frame through its learning organizational approach, members are often regarded as manipulated by management rather than led under a shared sense of purpose, as reverting to a structural approach is naturally easier, less risky and cheaper. Critics simply believe the term learning

organization is a guise for self-development encouraged by managerial directives (Huczynski & Buchanan, 2001). Personal management “is certainly insolvent, unable to honor with ready [results] of performance the promises of managing workers and work it so liberally makes” (Crichton, 1968: 38). In essence, critics believe a human resource approach lays within fantasy, where members are always happy, the organization and its members co-exist in peace and only loose leadership is necessary to guide members and the organization into the right direction. The next frame accepts that disagreement is inevitable, and believes change can only come about through conflict.

## 2.6 Political Frame

Bolman and Deal (2008) characterize the political frame as a jungle, where power, conflict and competition create the natural pecking order for organizational politics. According to the political frame, accomplishments come through advocacy and political savvy, as obtaining a power base is the only means by which to develop one’s own agenda. As in the jungle, a limited amount of resources forces stakeholders of an organization to clash, most often in the form of peaceful bargaining. Stakeholders vie for their interests and objectives in the “realistic process of making decisions and allocating resources in a context of scarcity and divergent interests” (Bolman & Deal, 2008: 190). Faculty members, students with a disability and the DSS office are important stakeholders in the disability services. Their interactions and level of influence are remarkable tools for prompting organizational change.

### 2.6.1 Political Perspectives

Politics are an unavoidable evil. The constant existence of limited resources and varying wants and needs pushes stakeholders to continually seek recognition for legitimacy of their position. Through the existence of an unequal power base, groups vie for power while subordinate stakeholders continue to deny their agendas in support of their own agendas (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). For some organizations, like postsecondary institutions, power is loose. Universities and colleges always have chancellors, deans and boards of regents whose decision(s) and power are governed more by established policies and structures than constant bargaining and influence. Yet, “organizational theorists from the politics and power school argue that organizational goals are only rarely established by people in positions of formal authority” (Shafritz et al., 2005: 283), as is the case with postsecondary institutions, where

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faculty members and academic departments are given free rein to teach as they deem fit, free from strict control.

Shafritz et al. (2005) define power as the ability to get things done the way one wants them done; it is the latent ability to influence people. Authority is perhaps the most commonly regarded source of power, but as stated, formal authority rarely has the greatest influence and more often becomes the target of influence (Bolman & Deal, 2008). Middle managers, members of an organization who are both responsible for supporting the development of others as well as having role-specific responsibilities, can hold a greater source of power than formal authority. Middle managers are those with the information and know-how to solve problems. Being in the possession of information is valuable to any stakeholder, as information is the token for negotiating, influencing and rewarding others. "Information can be a very important and scarce organizational resource. Access to strategic information and the control of the information flow to, from, and between [stakeholders] are sources of considerable power in the ...change process" (Jones, 2007: 406). As information is a resource, it is obviously treated as one, and stakeholders only divulge when needed or when strategically applicable. The withholding of valuable information is a tactic central to the political frame underlining the self-interest perspective stakeholders embody. Specialized roles are most often times the headquarters of such weighty information as they control the knowledge that has the power to change, positively or negatively, an organization and the objective(s) at-hand.

A stakeholder's structural locale within an organization can presume their actions, as behavior is neither random nor accidental (Pfeffer, 1981 as cited in Shafritz et al., 2005). In combining Pfeffer's view with Bolman and Deal's sources of power indicates that members or stakeholders structurally located in the middle are quite influential from a political perspective. DSS coordinators as middle managers play double roles, as their know-how and structural 'closeness' to higher ranking and subordinate stakeholders, provides them with a greater edge in pushing their own agenda at the top or tweaking the agenda as it makes its way down the structural hierarchy to the bottom. Metaphorically, this can be described as 'having a seat at both tables', meaning DSS coordinators are seen as valuable contributors at both the formal institutional level and in more subordinate circles, academic departments. In certain respects a DSS coordinator's role reflects a human resource perspective, as it involves passing information up and down the hierarchy, dealing with

internal disturbances to smooth running and manage relationships between both faculty members-students, faculty members-university and student-university, inside and outside of the DSS office (Huczynski & Buchanan, 2001). Yet, it is not the tasks the DSS coordinator performs, but the reasons why and how that makes them important political organizational stakeholders for disability services.

Postsecondary institutions consist of various organizational departments, specializing in everything from academic fields to student affairs; DSS is only one department influencing the greater campus environment. Reflected in the assumptions that organizational goals are not always made by a single apex, but rather multiple stakeholders who through reputation and alliances obtain power and influence, makes the act of communicating and networking between other departments crucial. Adopting social capital theory, stakeholders balance the need for gains and social networking within the organization. Law and Glover (2000) stress the importance of restructuring organizations into alliances, especially postsecondary education, a profession that relies too heavily on individual abilities to generate success. Alliances between the DSS office and other departments would establish a basis, a platform in which objectives are built and referenced, the establishment of a voice. Alliances turn an individual member's whisper into a shout, while also fulfilling an individual's need for affiliation, allowing for students and faculty members to feel that their voices are heard.

Related to Maslow, groups provide members help and support through coordinating the activities of individuals, providing learning opportunities and enhancing communication (Law & Glover, 2000). Therefore, a group's existence is pertinent on its ability to influence its own agenda, consisting of its members' interests, in-order to keep its members. Nobody wants to be on a sinking ship and any group that becomes ill-fated in accomplishing its members' expectations, eventually dies out as members seek sanctuary elsewhere. "Having a basis for power is not enough. The individual [group] must act in order to become an influencer" (Mintzberg, 1983 as cited in Shafritz et al., 2005: 334). Reputation and personal power are important sources for a group to have in order to push their own agenda, yet they are also important sources from which a group or an individual can obtain support for their agenda. The obtainment of self-advocacy, fighting for one's own cause, is crucial in the political arena to become a player. As stakeholders compete in the sake of their own interests, certain organizational issues and problems become overlooked or perhaps even completely disregarded. Self-advocated individuals bring issues to light as active members

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in the decision making process regarding their own supports (Abery & Stancliffe, 1996 as cited in Getzel & Wehman, 2005). Resorting to human nature's basic survival instinct, fight or flight, to thrive in the political jungle individuals and groups must take responsibility to act.

### **2.6.2 Political Short-Comings**

A postsecondary institution consists of a web of crosscutting conflicts between individual stakeholders and groups that give it life (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). The same conflicts however, can interfere with the postsecondary institution, departments, the students, faculty members and its foundational objectives. Political pressures are not always those of the common good and can overshadow or completely disregard issues resulting in negative affects on other organizational members. Placing the obtainment of power at the top of the political frame's to-do list completely narrows the scope of members' goals within an organization. Feelings of self-interests and self-righteousness infect those in power as they push their own agenda. A lack of trust then emerges between members of an organization as no one finds support for another's cause. Members can even go as far as to undermine those in power, who likewise, alter and refrain from dispersing information that could be vital to all members. Even in a more formally centralized power structure, "managers often fail to get things done because they rely too much on reason and too little on relationships" (Bolman & Deal, 2008: 218). Relying on relationships in the political frame is tricky and can lead an individual to lose control and sight of their own original pursuits. Groups, meant to enhance an individual's cause become reflective ties to each member, regardless of if they agree or not. Their simple affiliation with the group encompasses them as an individual, sacrificing their own goals for that of the entire groups. For others who seek power through self-advocacy, the political arena can be too large and demanding.

DSS coordinators have a key role as middle managers for disability services, lying structurally between institutional administration and faculty members and students. Being a middle manager however, does not come without its downfalls. The role is time consuming and with the busyness many "do not have the time to undertake reflective thinking and planning" (Earley & Fletcher-Campbell, 1989 as cited in Gunter, 2001: 108), negatively affecting the quality of information and services provided. It then becomes necessary, as the

next frame addresses, for members and groups of an organization to be held accountable and responsive to the perceptions and thoughts of others.

## 2.7 Symbolic Frame

“Organizational processes come in a variety of cultural forms, including routines, rituals, dramas, and games. Some are tightly scripted, rather predictable, and governed by well-established social rules and cognitive schemas. Some are not” (van Maanen, 1998: 60). The symbolic frame focuses on how members of an organization interpret and make-sense of the world around them, with its central concern on meaning, not action. (Bolman & Deal, 2008). The concepts addressed within the symbolic perspective articulate the view of the members directly involved, focusing in on spirit and idea rather than data and sense perceptions. A symbolic perspective of organizations finds importance in what is expressed, with expression even taking precedence over what is actually produced; reflected in evaluations. Their purpose legitimizes an organization’s activities, even though their procedures may not serve any immediate purpose (van Maanen, 1998: 61-62). For the symbolic frame, organizations are likened to theaters as their processes (i.e. meetings, planning, evaluations etc...) come to reflect necessary cultural ceremonies like acts in a drama. Within postsecondary institutions culture(s) can thrive, “as professors are bound less by structural constraints, than by rituals of teaching, values of scholarship and the myths and mystique [of postsecondary institutions]” (Bolman & Deal, 2008: 254). Culture, values and beliefs further underlie the affects and effects terms such as *disability* and *learning disability* possess on students, faculty members and the entire disability support services.

### 2.7.1 Symbolic Perspectives

The symbolic frame recognizes the significant effects associated with the wider social and cultural forces of the environment on an institution (Scott, 2001). As such, postsecondary institutions from Ivy League schools to community colleges conjure up not only images, but cultural and value laden beliefs that become further established as they are passed from person to person, generation after generation.

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“Re-creating and re-living what is alien and past shows clearly how understanding rests on special, personal inspirations...which develops with the development of historical consciousness” (Dilthey, 1976: 228). The perceptions that guide the practice of educating students with a learning disability incorporate explicit assumptions about disability and education in postsecondary settings (Isaacs, 1996). Gathering the accounts and investigating the nature of students’, faculty member’s and DSS coordinators’ thoughts on disability support services allows for the penetration into the cultural-makeup of postsecondary institutions.

Institutional theorists define institutions as social structures, which over time have attained a high degree of resilience increasing their ability to grow and survive in competitive environments (Scott, 2001; & Jones 2007). The resilience attained by institutions and individual organizations provides stability, legitimacy, reliability and accountability to members of an organization, as it satisfies their needs (Jones, 2007). However, this resilience is bred out of the institutional environment, the culture, which regulates the norms and values of daily procedures and practices. The continued existence of DSS offices relies on their ability to satisfy the needs and wants of both institution and members, rooting themselves within the various cultures.

“Culture is to the organization what personality is to the individual – a hidden, yet unifying theme that provides meaning, direction and mobilization” (Kilmann, 1985 as cited in Shafritz et al., 2005: 352). Culture is what can distinguish organizations within a single institutional setting apart; as for example with postsecondary institutions, which can vary even between campuses residing in the same city or state. Organizational cultural differences can be traced to a variety of factors: leadership, organizational knowledge, learning, and versatility. Cultural beliefs are reflected in the level of support and services institutions and members within are willing to provide to those with a disability. Such services affect curriculum, accommodations and extra student supports such as tutoring and peer groups.

The scope of culture, consisting of observed behavior regularities, group norms, habits, shared meanings and formed philosophies, exists at the level of the organization and not at the level of the individual (Schein, 1993). Organizational structures at most postsecondary institutions tend to challenge Schein’s statement, as many departments down to individual professors are given autonomy, free from strict control or surveillance. Organizations and

members have both a body and a mind (Isaacs, 1996), but which is stronger? What individual members say and what they do can contradict with the greater institutional culture, especially in dealing with disability, a topic difficult to explore, as members' true values are disguised by culturally anticipated answers.

“If we understand the dynamics of culture we will be less likely to be puzzled, initiated and anxious when we encounter the unfamiliar and seemingly irrational behavior of people within organizations” (Schein, 1993: 360). Evaluations, assessments and audits are utilized to inspect an organization's accounts and services, bringing reason to the unfamiliar. However, meaning from evaluations is not given, it must be created (Bolman & Deal, 2008). Whether evaluations are administered by the postsecondary institution on its DSS office or organized by the DSS office itself, the results can potentially alter, as interpretations depend on who, what, when, where, why and how of the evaluations. Subjectivity is omnipresent within evaluations and their interpretations. DSS coordinators, faculty members and students view disability services from varying points of view, and their unique experiences are naturally reflected in their perceptions.

The level of determination for organization and members obtained from evaluative methods depends again on the purpose and meaning of the evaluation(s), but additionally on who and what is the target of the evaluation. Outcomes of assessment are not guaranteed and two similar organizations do not always do the same things. Students with a learning disability and faculty members within the postsecondary institutional setting are quite independent in both traditional and cultural senses. Postsecondary education is a traditional start to adulthood for many U.S. students, as independence and self-discipline become increasingly important factors to their success. The larger social context exceeds students, faculty members and the DSS office. Evaluative fixes cannot always solve long-term issues or alter an institution's way of thinking. Overcoming struggles in postsecondary education for students with a learning disability is perhaps a solution better found in the students themselves, as one's own vision is seen as vital in contemporary organizations (Bolman & Deal, 2008).



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### 2.7.2 Symbolic Short-Comings

Central to the symbolic frame and relatable to the structural frame, cultural concepts focus around a point of regulation, where culture, values and beliefs come about from the status quo, in-which members of an organization are participants (Burrell & Morgan, 1979).

In the theatrical theme of the symbolic frame, heroes and heroines are the self-determined characters of a play, seemingly creating their own destiny. Yet, scripts bind the actors of a play much the same way members of an organization are bound by culture. DSS offices, faculty members and students with a learning disability are constrained by established institutional cultures. So influential are these cultures controlling behaviors and values with the strength to limit individual members' determination and block institutional changes, that breaking away would take a hero/heroine.

“Institutions are multifaceted, durable social structures, made up of symbolic elements, social activities, and material resources. Institutions exhibit distinctive properties: They are relatively resistant to change” (Jepperson, 1991 as cited in Scott, 2001: 49). Evaluations and assessments are purported to incline improvement and change, yet they simply are a guise assuring ‘spectators’ that an organization is responsible, serious and well managed; “the plan constitutes a ‘dramaturgical’ to actual change. They persist because they project vital messages that members both in- and outside of the institution/organization want to hear” (Bolman & Deal, 2008: 249-296). The plans become the ends in themselves. The symbolic frame becomes nothing more than informal structures, unwritten laws governing the value structures of faculty members, students and disability services.

## 2.8 Four-Frame Perspective on Five DSS Design Foci

The four-frames present four distinct perspectives into the organizational design of disability support services. Though presented as four varying realities, the frames are not fragmented, but pluralistic. Every institution and organization consists of characteristics from each frame. However, the strength and size of the frames differ between organizations. For example, the organization of a prison consists of a large structural frame and a much smaller human resource frame, whereas a religious organization consists of a larger symbolic frame and a much smaller political frame. Discovering the four-frames and their perspective over the five design foci is key to illustrating the reality of disability services at three

postsecondary institutions in the U.S. Gaining insight into the diverse affects various DSS designs have on students with a learning disability is made possible by the adoption of the four-frame model. The broad, yet highly defined boundaries of the four-frames present a scope of possibilities able to prescribe DSS conditions. Table 1 below relays a general reality of each DSS foci viewed within each of Bolman and Deal's four-frames:

Table 1: Summary, four-frame perspectives on the five DSS design foci

	STRUCTURAL	HUMAN RESOURCE	POLITICAL	SYMBOLIC
STRUCTURE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- CLASSICAL VIEW; ORGANIZATION IS STRICTLY MANAGED BY POLICY AND REGULATIONS</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURES ARE MUTUALLY ALIGNED WITH MEMBERS THROUGH LEADERSHIP</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURES ARE STABLE OR SHIFT AS POWER SHIFTS BETWEEN STAKEHOLDERS</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- ORGANIZATION IS STRUCTURED ACCORDING TO TRADITIONAL, CULTURAL, NORMS AND VALUES</li> </ul>
COMMUNICATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- HIGHLY BUREAUCRATIC, HIERARCHICAL, TOP-DOWN APPROACH</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- TOP-DOWN APPROACH, WITH OPEN-COMMUNICATION FOR MEMBER PARTICIPATION AND CONTRIBUTION</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- STAKEHOLDERS USE COMMUNICATION METHODS TO INFLUENCE, PERSUADE AND/OR MANIPULATE OTHERS FOR THEIR CAUSE(S)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- MEMBERS COMMUNICATE THROUGH SYMBOLIC CULTURAL MEANS (I.E. EVALUATIONS, MEETINGS)</li> </ul>
RESOURCES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- ALLOCATED BY MANAGER(S) ACCORDING TO REGULATIONS AND FOR INCREASED PRODUCTIVITY</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- MEMBERS REGARDED AS PRIMARY RESOURCE; VITAL TO ORGANIZATIONAL SUCCESS</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- LIMITED RESOURCES DRIVE STAKEHOLDERS TO VIE FOR THEIR CONTROL</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- RESOURCES OR LACK OF, REPRESENT THE ORGANIZATION, ITS MISSION AND ITS ACHIEVEMENTS</li> </ul>
ADVOCACY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- ONLY AS IT COINCIDES WITH THE LARGER ORGANIZATIONAL MISSION</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- THE ORGANIZATION IS THE MAIN SUPPORTER OF MEMBERS' NEEDS AND WANTS</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- ALLIANCES COOPERATE, PUSHING MEMBER'S CAUSE WHILE ENHANCING THEIR SOCIAL CAPITAL</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- ORGANIZATIONS AND MEMBERS RALLY BEHIND VALUES, TRADITIONS AND ETHICS</li> </ul>
DETERMINATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- EVALUATION(S) UTILIZED ONLY TO INCREASE EFFICIENCY WITHIN THE ORGANIZATION</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- EMPOWERMENT AND MEMBER DEVELOPMENT IS KEY TO ALIGNING MEMBERS WITH ORGANIZATIONAL PURPOSE(S)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- RELATIVE TO THE WANTS, NEEDS AND MISSION OF THE STAKEHOLDERS IN POWER</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- PERSONAL INSPIRATIONS PROVIDE MEMBERS PURPOSE WITHIN AN ORGANIZATION AND ITS CULTURE</li> </ul>

## Chapter 3: Methodology

*“...for I am convinced that one form of research should inform the other.”*  
~ (van Maanen, 1998: xiv) ~

An interdisciplinary, versatile and multi-frame theoretical view on organizations needs to be reflected and matched by multi-dimensional methods in research. Employing a qualitative approach, this study supports Bent Flyvbjerg’s (2006) article in support of case-study research. Like multiple languages telling the same story, each case strengthens and increases the scope and capability to view and analyze disability support services. To address the aims of this study and “...to cultivate the most useful of all human capacities, the capacity to learn” (Patton, 2002: 1) about DSS structures, policies and practices the following design and methods were employed:

### 3.1 Study Design

“Sometimes we simply have to keep our eyes open and look carefully at individual cases – not in the hope of proving anything, but rather in the hope of learning something” (Flyvbjerg, 2006: 224). Flyvbjerg’s statement expresses this study’s purpose and subsequent aims, molding this study along with the situational circumstances under which the research took place. All methods chosen for this study were selected for their ability to be dispersed and conducted electronically and anonymously. Though the research topic and institutional cases are situated in the United States, all research was conducted from Europe. Residing overseas made it important to utilize data collection instruments that allowed for the obtainment of exceptional and in-depth information, while still practical enough to have conducted abroad.

### 3.2 Methods

Influenced by the purpose, theory, accessibility and protection of anonymity to participants and institutions, the following methods were utilized in a strategic order:

### ***Policy Analyses***

“Knowledge of what problem to solve requires information about a problem’s antecedent conditions, as well as information about values” (Dunn, 2004: 4). Document and policy analyses based on the literature review provide this study with a foundation on the policy goals and basic intents for disability support services federally and institutionally, while also providing topics of discussion. Postsecondary institutions are traditionally decentralized, so investigating the government’s claim through existing policies and their extensiveness in supporting disability support services both at the federal/state and institutional levels was a necessary pre-component to analyze and build the three cases. Perhaps there is an unrealized opportunity for improvement in policy objectives and the observation of policy outcomes and performances (Dunn, 2004) in regards to federal/state and institutional policies.

### ***DSS Coordinator Semi-structured Interviews***

Semi-structured interviews with DSS coordinators and state officials working in government agencies concerned with disability rights and services were conducted simultaneously along with the policy analyses. Interviews were conducted both over the phone and through email to provide a more detailed understanding of the structures, policies, and practices unique to each case. In answering the title’s question, it was necessary to obtain information from the experts by a means that allowed for further probing and/or questioning if necessary, while still practical to the situational reality under which the research was conducted. As organizational structures, policies, and practices can vary from postsecondary institution to postsecondary institution, it was necessary to utilize the strength of interviews for clarity in understanding and depicting each institutional DSS case accurately.

### ***Faculty Member and Student Questionnaires***

In surveying faculty members and students with learning disabilities, an online questionnaire was administered ([www.freeonlinesurveys.com](http://www.freeonlinesurveys.com)) asking a majority of closed-ended questions dually addressed in both questionnaires. Questions were carefully scripted to address the five foci of the study with a majority asked in the form of a rating scale (i.e. *Strongly Agree* to *Strongly Disagree*) to increase the levels of validity and reliability in analyzing the data. The theme behind the creation of the two questionnaires was, ‘Listen, listen, listen and then

ask strategic questions.’ The original layout of the two questionnaires changed numerous times as both the policy analysis and literature review provided information helping to direct the questions in becoming more suitable for collecting the desired data. In essence, the policy analyses and literature review were methods in themselves to design the faculty members and student questionnaires. Similar to the interviews, the questionnaires provided information about participants’ internal beliefs and ways of thinking, yet this study also utilized them for their usefulness in exploring and confirming existing research findings. The two questionnaires, one established for faculty members and the other for students with a learning disability are also naturally reflective of the interviews with state officials and the DSS coordinators.

The design and methods used for this study are depicted below in Figure 4. As organizations are complex and consists of not only groups, but also individuals, and as policies are interpreted by the values and ethics of organizations and the individuals within, this study on disability support services did require a look into the cultures, settings, and environments in which the three cases exist. In utilizing the case study method, it was necessary to pay constant heed to the distance from the object of study (disability support services), as “great distance...and lack of feedback easily lead to...blind alleys” (Flyvbjerg, 2006: 223).

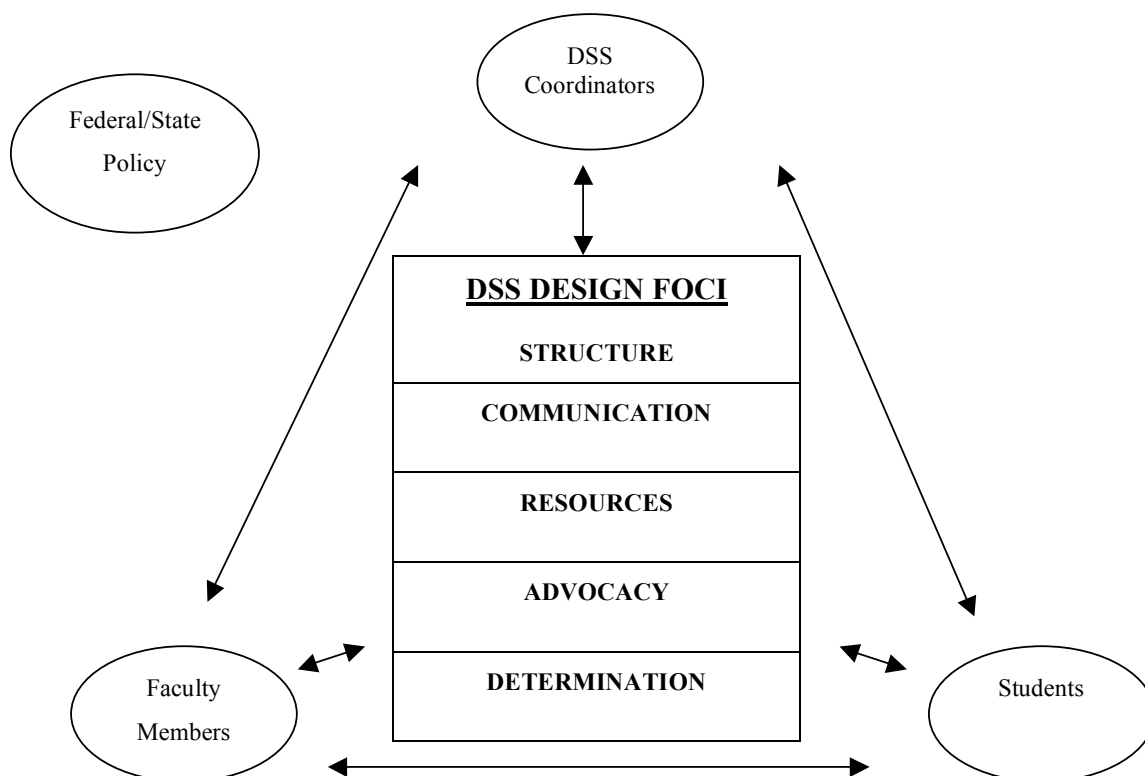


Figure 4: Illustration of methodological design

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To prevent blind alleys, “mutual knowledge, shared by observer and participants whose actions constitutes and reconstitutes the social world” (Giddens, 1982: 15), of disability support services were obtained. Participants included DSS coordinators, faculty members and students with a learning disability, and were purposefully selected not only for the collection of group specific data, but also in verification or falsification of the other two groups data. Inspired by and resembling the U.S. federal government’s establishment of a checks and balances, the methodology depicted above, was created in the same fashion and for the same purpose, as contradictions depict flaws and perhaps gaps in the organizational practices of the disability support service cases. Federal/state policies are depicted as separate from the triangulation of participants, as they are utilized less for verification and shaping of the three cases and more for points of discussion; more of an outsider’s perspective. Thus, the questioning of state officials concerned with disability can be pictured as sprinkles on a cake providing dash, rather than an essential or vital ingredient in building the three DSS case studies.

### 3.3 Participants & Sampling

The postsecondary institutions in this study were selected to represent different exemplars of postsecondary institutions commonly found in the U.S. Initially, 10 postsecondary institutions were contacted and invited to participate, of the 10, three postsecondary institutions accepted the invitation. Selection of the original 10 and subsequent 3 cases was governed by the intentions of “maximizing the utility of information from small samples and single cases [and obtaining] information about the significance of various circumstances for outcomes (e.g. size, form of organization, budget)” (Flyvbjerg, 2006: 230). As stated earlier, the state of focus was selected in order to present the entire policy to practice reality of disability support services starting with federal policies at the top and down to students with learning disabilities at the bottom. Though the cases are not to be ranked or graded, selecting only institutions within one state narrows the focus and contextual views necessary in analyzing the data.

In order to keep complete anonymity upon the requests from the participating institutions, only a description of the institutions shall be provided, whereas they are identified simply as Institutions A, B and C. The brief descriptions below provide a quick synopsis of the three participating institutions, allowing for various readers, postsecondary staff, faculty members

and students to identify themselves and their institution with one of the three cases. “Even single-case studies are multiple in most research efforts because ideas and evidence may be linked in many different ways” (Ragin, 1992: 225).

**Institution A** - represents a single two-year accredited member campus (i.e. community/junior college) of a greater community college satellite system totaling in all, four-campuses. Institution A is located within a major urban environment; the campus enrolls over 6,000 students, with an enrollment of around 26,000 students system-wide. Each of the four-campuses has an independently established DSS office, directed and run by their own individual coordinators and staff.

**Institution B** – represents a four-year state institution enrolling around 20,000 students. Institution B often appears in listings regarding postsecondary institutions that ‘go a step further’ and provide more comprehensive disability support services ‘above and beyond’ other comparably sized institutions.

**Institution C** – represents the largest of the three postsecondary institutions, with an enrollment of over 30,000 students. Establishing itself as a research university, Institution C consists of 20 academic colleges. Institution C is part of a greater university system similar to that of Institution A, but greater in scale and spread throughout the state. Also in similar fashion as Institution A, each university within the system has an established DSS office independent of the other campuses, run by its own coordinator and staff.<sup>1</sup>

### 3.3.1 Participants

The participants within the postsecondary institutions of this study (A, B and C) are broken into four categories: DSS coordinators, faculty members and students with learning disabilities, along with an additional category for federal/state officials. Each category was selected to represent and provide feedback on each of the five DSS design foci bringing their own unique experiences, expertise, insights, and value to the cases.

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<sup>1</sup> It should be noted, that the initial design of the study included a private postsecondary institution with a student enrollment between that of Institution A and B, enrolling around 12,000 students. However, due to uncontrollable circumstances, participation was withdrawn.



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***Participant Overview:***

*3 Federal/State Officials*

*3 DSS Coordinators*

<i>95 Faculty Members:</i> Institution A (n=29)	<i>74 Students:</i> Institution A (n=10 <sup>2</sup> )
Institution B (n=23)	Institution B (n=24)
Institution C (n=43)	Institution C (n=40)

**Federal/State Officials**

Participants in this category were hand-selected for their position and affiliation in a state department or agency concerned with federal and state disability policies and practices. Their unique outside perspectives provide flair to the discussion and recommendations sections. Participating officials were initially contacted via email correspondence to inquire if they or their office possess information relevant to this study. Three officials representing three state departments/agencies concerned with persons with disabilities were then asked to participate through a series of semi-structured questionnaires conducted by email. Any and all follow-up questions or clarifications to the questionnaires were additionally sent via email.

**DSS Coordinators**

As this study's assumption regarding DSS designs at postsecondary institutions as black swans, DSS coordinators' participation was essential in establishing a clear understanding of each postsecondary institution's disability support services for verification or falsification of this assumption. Naturally, selective sampling based on title and position was used in choosing participants for this category. Each postsecondary institution has either an office or a chairperson responsible for overseeing disability services at their respected institution. The

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<sup>2</sup> Students at Institution A were invited multiple times to participate in the survey. A gift-card incentive was offered to prompt additional responses. As students could not be contacted directly, all options were exhausted. The smaller sample size affects the strength of the ability of the analysis to diagnosis significant differences or trends between Institution A and other institutions.

three DSS coordinators from Institutions A, B and C were selected for their oversight and expertise on their institution's disability programs. For this reason, much of the DSS interview scripts took a structural focus (e.g. amount of staff, office organization, roles/titles). Coordinators participation included a one-hour online semi-structured interview, and subsequent correspondence through email if in need of answers to follow-up questions and/or clarifications.

### **Faculty Members**

Data collected in 2003-04 by the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES, 2004) reports students with disabilities enroll in the same study programs as their non-disabled peers, with Business, Health, and Humanities programs enrolling the most students. When applicable, faculty members within Business, Health, and Humanities departments were contacted to participate in the online questionnaire. Sixty randomly selected faculty members from each postsecondary institution were randomly selected by choosing sporadically from university/college list serves and invited via email to participate in the online questionnaire with a minimum of twenty faculty members responses from each institution set as the target. Faculty members were invited a second time two weeks after the original invite via email. Faculty members from Institution B were sent the questionnaire via word format and asked to attach the completed survey in a return email, as Institution B's IT policy denies any outside researcher from sending mass linked emails to its faculty members. To sustain anonymity with the faculty members from Institution B, all data from the received completed questionnaires were entered and subsequently deleted along with the participant's email. The final response rate for total faculty members is 53% (95 respondents out of 180 invited faculty members). The average age range of the faculty members is between 40-50 years old with a majority having taught at their respective university/college between 0-10 years. More female faculty members participated in the questionnaire 66%, than males 34%, though no connection between gender and responses is assumed in this study.

### **Students with a Learning Disability**

Participants in this category met two criteria: one, they were students with a learning disability and two; they were registered as having such a disability through their respective institution's DSS office. Due to confidentiality laws and the rights of students, the initial

sample size for this category is an approximate obtained from the DSS coordinators. The target was twenty student responses from each institution. Questionnaires for students with a learning disability were distributed online through the DSS coordinator at each postsecondary institution, where they were invited to participate with an introduction to the research and its purpose. To encourage the utmost responses, the DSS coordinator was asked to resend an invitation to participants in the study by completing a questionnaire two weeks after the original invitation along with an added incentive of a \$20 valued gift-card to a random participant at each institution. The final response rate for total students with a learning disability is 23% (74 respondents out of 320 approx. registered students with a learning disability). Student respondents are generally in their twenties, with a 69% female and 31% male response.

Timing of the distribution of the questionnaires to faculty members and students was highly considered and only decided on after consulting with the three DSS coordinators. It was decided to send out the invitations to participants three weeks after the beginning of the spring term as students and faculty members had become settled into their classes and had yet to prepare for mid-term examinations. Beyond the invitations and the single re-invites to both faculty members and students, the final participant totals from the institutions were merely luck. Institution C, being the largest of the three did provide the most responses for both faculty members and students, but only for the student sample population can this be justifiable, for the same number of faculty members were invited as with both Institutions A and B. Additionally, the method of distributing the questionnaires to faculty members at Institution B could be affiliated with the cause for it having the lowest of the three institution's responses. Beyond these two explanations, there are no further methodological implications that would explain the differences in the participant variations between institutions.

### 3.4 Ethical Issues

The term learning disability carries with it a stigma for both those with and those without such a disability. In questioning and writing about students with learning disabilities it has been pertinent that this study is constantly aware of the sensitivity such a label brings, and that it made certain all participants were aware of the freedom and anonymity in which they were expressing their thoughts and experiences. All participants, participating institutions

and state departments/agencies were insured confidentiality and anonymity throughout the entire research process with all research methods carried out under informed consent. In analyzing and publishing the data, it was necessary to portray the gathered findings as best and as accurately as possible, eliminating and/or limiting all pre-existing biases.

It is essential that the story, in all its diversity “unfolds from the many-sided, complex, and [perhaps] conflicting stories that the actors in the case have told...thus the goal is to allow the cases to be different things to different people” (Flyvbjerg, 2006: 238). Establishing clear results and presenting them through justified theoretical grounds, with the support of empirical data provides a reliable picture into the reality currently facing learning-disabled students pursuing postsecondary education. Creating a resource for students with learning disabilities and universities/colleges is an important mission behind this study, as their participation was vital to the success of the research and will thus be shared as a resource with all participants and institutions involved in the research process.

### 3.5 Designing of Interview Scripts and Questionnaires

All the details within the design of this study are connected and reflected throughout the entire thesis, from the methods to the applied four-frame theory (SEE Table 1 on p. 43). Every chapter, page and paragraph serves a purpose, for they are not only necessary to fully understand the three organizational cases, but to approach the organizations with an objective mind. A grand hurdle consuming much of the formulating behind this thesis, regarded the ability to portray cases as exemplars and/or paradigmatic cases of their respective type and size of institution. However, Flyvbjerg’s (2006) arguments in favor of case studies and Patton’s (2002) manual for how to construct case studies enlightened the new direction of the cases’ construction, having “readers...discover their own path and truth inside the cases” (Flyvbjerg, 2006: 238) contrary to the initial labeling of the cases as exemplars and/or paradigmatic cases.

The same reasoning behind the design of the thesis is the same reasoning behind the designs of this study’s interview scripts and questionnaires. Postsecondary institutions are complex; they contain various actors at varying levels, who all bring their own values and beliefs, while acting in accordance with policies, procedures, and organizational cultures. This study can be likened to a court case. In trying to build strong multiple cases, while consecutively

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establishing possible reasons why students with learning disabilities are failing in postsecondary education, one needed to hear and gain insight from every perspective, a sort of ‘triangulation’ of experiences/witnesses; only then could analyzing the collected data from each perspective and putting them together rightfully point out possible faults within the five established foci.

Establishing the best possible means for empirical data collection required a re-designing of the faculty members and student questionnaires inspired by Biemer and Lyberg’s (2003) book on survey quality. Whereby both the initial questionnaires were originally designed with open-ended questions inspired by Getzel’s and McManus’s (2005) article *Expanding Support Services on Campus*, the re-designed questionnaires substituted open-ended questions for close-ended scaled questions (i.e. Strongly Agree <--> Strongly Disagree). This change also decreased the amount of time it took to fill-out the questionnaires encouraging more responses.

Each scaled question also includes the options *neutral* or *other*, providing participants the full range to answer as they feel, the questions were purposefully worded as claims encouraging a more desired response of either *agree* or *disagree*; as such an answer provides more of an idea behind the participants thoughts and experiences. An example of this re-wording with question 5 in the *Student Questionnaire* where the original question read as:

Original:

I find that faculty members and staff at this university/college are knowledgeable and capable of dealing with my learning disability.

To the re-designed question:

Present:

I find that **a majority of** faculty members and staff at this university/college are knowledgeable and capable of dealing with my learning disability.

Where the original question invited more of a *neutral* response, “some faculty members are and some are not”, the present question with the addition for a more specific claim, invited more of a direct answer. Though neutral responses are valid and embody participants true ideas, it is difficult to interpret their meaning without the addition of comments or the participants reasoning, which is not part of the questionnaire, as doing such lengthens the

time it takes to complete the questionnaires; and consequently shortens the response rate. With the methodological intentions of collecting strong empirical data, focused on the five foci, on three DSS cases with a high response rate the following questions were posed (SEE Appendices starting on page 104):

### ***Structure***

To obtain detailed insight into the structural particularities (i.e. organizational structures, institutional policies, number of registered students, structural changes, etc...) at each institution, the DSS coordinator semi-structured interviews were created to be flexible, so that specifics unique to each DSS design could be investigated further. The interviews were designed to allow for coordinators to share their own perspectives and ideas, using open-ended questions; so that coordinators' own voices and veteran experiences could be illustrated within the three case narratives. As experts and leaders/managers in their respective positions, their personal insight was indispensable.

Structural concerns pertinent to faculty members and students, unlike the DSS coordinators, are concerned less with the actual DSS organizational structures and more with their reaction to the existing structures. Questions regarding size, procedures for reporting a disability and basic structural questions for faculty members regarding years of employment and title reflect the concerns addressed in the literature review and provide information pertinent to understanding the possible effects of each DSS cases' organizational structure on faculty members and students' experiences.

### ***Communication***

The basic overarching question behind the focus on communication, 'do the three participant categories openly communicate between each other?' was central in the brainstorming and initial designing of the 'triangulation' methodology model illustrated by *Figure 5*.

Communication encompasses the transmission of information, of needs, of concerns and responsibilities through various training, supports and other communication outlets such as informational emails and pamphlets. In its most elementary meaning, communication focuses on any form of interaction between the three participant groups of focus in this study.

Many of the questions asked of the participants usually fell into more than one of the five focus categories, as is evident with communication having such a broad meaning. However, the focus questions on communication centered on responsibilities, and the level of which participants understood their responsibilities and rights. The assumption being, a lack of clear and constant communication results in a decrease in the quality of services given to students and in the application of those services by students.

### ***Resources***

Every organization and those within requires certain resources to do a specific task. With disability support services as an established necessity at postsecondary institutions in the U.S. due to federal policies: The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the ADA, there are specific resource necessities, but are they sufficient? In order to comply to the requirements established in the federal disability policies and to further accommodate to the institutional environment in which the DSS office is located, the questions regarding resources are to discover the amount, kinds and sufficiency of the resources not only given to DSS offices, but then dispersed to the faculty members and students. Questions regarding new forms of accommodations, access to funds, dispersal of services, frequency of resources in terms of technological innovations, and availability of staff were established to further the understanding of what kinds of services are provided and the distance these services go to aid DSS offices, faculty members and students.

### ***Advocacy***

Advocacy for students with a learning disability is an important variable of positive experiences by students with a learning disability; not only advocating by faculty members and/or DSS staff, but also self-advocating by the students themselves, as many students are often not active in the decision-making process regarding their own disability (Wehman & Yasuda, 2005). Advocacy and determination are very similar, with the main difference being advocacy dwells more on the DSS offices' and the faculty members' support for and backing of providing services to students with a learning disability, and determination is focused more on the students' own willpower.

Vogel, Leyser, Wyland and Brulle (1999) disclosed two important factors behind students with a learning disability successfully obtaining a degree, 1) faculty members have a positive outlook, and 2) faculty members are willing to provide accommodations. To obtain data

form the three cases regarding advocacy, questions were posed to faculty members regarding their willingness to provide accommodations, as well as to students, if they felt faculty members are accommodating to their needs. In general, questions regarding campus culture, in terms of acceptance not only felt by students with a disability, but also the general perception of disability acceptance by faculty members and DSS staff, provided important feedback for the discussion of advocacy and the strength of its presence and consequent affect(s) on the experiences of students with a learning disability.

### ***Determination***

Though determination primarily focuses on the students and their capability in taking ownership over their own responsibilities and their disability, it also focused on the DSS offices and their level of determination to change and evolve in response to faculty members and student evaluations/feedback. Questions posed to students, regarded their involvement on campus and with the DSS office, assuming the year they reported their disability and the number of times they are in contact as important correlations to a high level of self-determination.

Faculty members and DSS coordinators were also questioned regarding their level of interaction between each other and with students, to further the perspective over students' actions beyond the accommodations provided them by the DSS office. Data to these inquiries was gathered by posing whether most students are clear in communicating their needs and accommodations in a timely and professional manner, again with the pre-assumption that more self-determined students are better at informing their professors and DSS staff of their needs.

Additions to the questionnaires, outside of the five foci, include an additional field allowing for open-ended responses at the end of both faculty members and student questionnaires and four questions regarding reactions to discrimination developed by Ali, Strydom, Hassiotis, Williams & King (2008) in the student questionnaire. The open-ended question was added to allow for comments and/or reactions to the topic in general, allowing participants the freedom any additional information or comments. The four questions over stigmatism from a disability were primarily attached to the questionnaire as a pilot study for future use of the authors' scale, but equally provided data in support of existing discussions.



Semi-structured interviews were also used with federal/state officials. However, in questioning them the focus was less on the repetition of themes and more on the breadth of insight they could provide regarding disability and the current attention this topic is getting in both the federal and state legislatures. As policy trends reflect the societal fads of the present and recent past, the government's perspective contributes to understanding. Knowing very little beforehand and unable to access such information through secondary means influenced the design of a more conversational interview script with the federal/state officials. As their expertise lay outside the institutional realm, the questions probed to them took a different take on disability support services, with advocacy stitched as the main theme.

### 3.6 Validity

This study is more exploratory than explanatory. It is not intended to find causal relationships between the five foci and the low matriculation rate of students with a learning disability through case study depictions, but merely to highlight trends and/or gather information to further the understanding and point out possible inefficiencies of disability support services at U.S. postsecondary institutions. Thus, external validity rather than internal validity, dealing more with the casual relationship of variables, is more of a concern in this study. External validity is concerned with the level at which a study's findings can be replicated and/or generalized. This study and its depiction of three DSS institutional cases are not to be generalized of all U.S. postsecondary institution's disability support services. The term 'cases' is used to imply uniqueness and particularities; however, this does not decrease the validity of this study. Peattie (2001) believes the very value of the case study, the contextual and interpenetrating nature of forces, is lost when one tries to sum up in large and mutually exclusive concepts...as the dense case study is more useful to social theorists than the high-level generalizations of theory. Even though the initial sample size of 10 participating institutions was greatly reduced to three, this merely allowed for more time and investigation into the three postsecondary institutions, as the creation of 10 case-studies would consume time and a lot of pages. Though generalizations cannot be made for U.S. disability support service designs from this study's three cases, relevant concepts, trends and themes applicable to all disability support services are addressed.

To address the concern of replication, especially with aspects of the study using random-sampling, the parameters in which this study has been designed and the methods employed have been clearly outlined and defined. Yet as Shadish (1995) illustrates, it is not the methods that make this study's claims valid, but the principles used in making such claims. It is the experiences, views and voices of the participants that are presented in this study, not those of the researcher. By controlling personal biases, little interference occurs in the objective analysis of the participant's responses.

### 3.7 Reliability

Reliability concerns itself with the extent to which a study would yield the same results however and whenever it is carried out (Kirk & Miller, 1986). With that said, reliability has an expiration date; data becomes outdated, policies change, organizations and those within them rearrange and along with theories and frameworks they evolve. Establishing reliability in this study has been accomplished through the meticulous descriptions of current structures, policies and practices presently affecting students with learning disabilities pursuing postsecondary education. Change is inevitable, but establishing a clear context in which this study takes place establishes reliability and trust that the three cases presented are realistic and representative of their present situations.

### 3.8 Methods of Analyses

Purpose guides analysis (Patton, 2002). To address the purpose of this study the method of analysis is through the construction of three case studies, before doing a cross-setting pattern analysis. Each disability support service case is described in a holistic and context specific way presented thematically headed by the five foci. The case studies are both the method of analysis and the product of analysis. Cases are layered, as participants represent both their particular roles and the greater disability support service design. Trends between participant categories and across cases are analyzed and add to the strength of the claims addressing the aims of this study. The complexity of the cases reflects the complexity of organizations, where the quality of the analysis is measured by the clarity and portrayal of the cases.

Self-analysis was primarily utilized in analyzing the data as this study only dealt with small sample populations from each of the three participating institutions. SPSS was employed for

its ability to organize the data and to run simple significance tests. T-tests allowed for the analysis of faculty members with student perspectives within institutions and one-way ANOVA was utilized to compare responses across institutions A, B and C. However, as the focus was on the cases and participant voices, the analysis was centered less on comparing variables and more on simply conveying them. Thus, this research and its findings developed into the traditional narrative case study, exploring and projecting the reality of disability services at three postsecondary institutions.

## Chapter 4: Results and Analysis

*“In every field there is a need for writing where the main objective is to extend the reader’s field of acquaintance with the complex cases of the real world.”*

*~(Boulding, 1958: p. 5) ~*

This chapter is divided into two parts. Organized around the five DSS design foci, part one portrays the three cases independently. Part two provides a comparative analysis of the three cases’ empirical data starting on p. 75. Limiting the repetition in presenting the data, part one depicts selected data highlighting themes from each individual DSS case. Complete student and faculty member data reports are provided in-conjunction with the questionnaires in the Appendices providing an overall view of their responses. Part two’s comparative analysis brings the cases together, presenting relevant findings in accordance with the DSS design foci.

### 4.1 Part I: Postsecondary Institutional Cases

The portrayal of the three disability support services comes after months of communication, inquiry, questioning and investigation into three very unknown, yet familiar institutions. Unknown, for absolutely little regarding disability services, their policies, practices and the like were known before this thesis endeavor took way. However, the postsecondary institutions themselves provide a familiar backdrop in which to probe and spotlight disability support services and the effects of such services as perceived by the DSS staff, faculty members and students with a learning disability. Following are the three DSS realities presented using the voices and perspectives of the coordinators, faculty members and students.

#### 4.1.1 Institution A – Community College

A depiction of the disability support services requires a simultaneous portrayal of the postsecondary institutions from which they are a part, as their mutual and dependent relationship are an organizational reality that cannot be ignored. Institution A is a community college; a postsecondary option usually noted for its affordability, short track associate degree options or as a stepping-stone to a four-year college or university. The uniqueness of a community college is a vital point of interest in highlighting disability

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support services and the contradiction or similarity that exists between it and larger postsecondary institutions, especially as the current economic status of the U.S. and many Americans makes community college the more attractive postsecondary option.

#### *4.1.1.1 Co-Dependent Member*

Working with around 80 students a year, the DSS office at Institution A views itself as only a member of the greater disability support service design. It is the college's legal responsibility, not just the DSS offices', to provide access to all programs for all qualified students. Though the college views the DSS office as necessary, the entire campus is seen as crucial in delivering accommodations, protecting the privacy of students and preventing discrimination against students with a learning disability.

As a satellite member of a greater 4-campus community college system, Institution A along with the other three campuses possess great independence in designing and running their own disability support services. However, because students are able, and often do, jump from campus to campus, the DSS coordinators meet on a monthly basis. According to the DSS coordinator at Institution A, "these meetings are to get policies and procedures in-line with each other, making them pretty much the same; but staffing differences cause slight alterations".

Originally, the DSS office was not even its own department, but has since become a college funded stand-alone department. Answering directly to the Vice-President of Student Affairs the DSS coordinator at Institution A oversees 4 full-time staff with additional part-time advisors and 'as-needed' support persons. Overhauling policies are established institution wide, but the four coordinators decide the 'nitty-gritty', as they are deemed better fitted to make such decisions. The "college understands their responsibility: if [the DSS office] runs-out of funds and there is a need, [the college] always finds a way, though it might tax the college in other ways".

Neither federal nor institutional policies have changed much over the past 34 years since Institution A's DSS coordinator has taken the role. However, the office and services themselves have "evolved much over the years, especially the DSS process for applying and receiving services". Developed after years of problems (i.e. students in the past taking advantage of the system), current procedures were initiated to prevent abuse by students. Though trouble haunted the application process for seeking disability services in the past, at

the present, a majority of students find the application process to receive disability services adequate and easy to provide. The structural procedures established overtime do not deter students from seeking services.

#### **4.1.1.2 Size Doesn't Matter**

Research links the smaller size of a community college to the enrollment of a higher percentage of students with a learning disability. "The bigger it is, the harder it becomes; smaller classes at a community college are a positive thing," believes the DSS coordinator at Institution A, who believes a smaller institution is better fit for students with a learning disability. Faculty members at postsecondary institutions are trying to meet the needs of a diverse community of learners, some of which have a learning disability.

*"At community colleges, faculty members are there to teach, not to publish, not to do research. Their profession is teaching. Because they are trying to teach to all learning styles, using all modalities, students with learning disabilities benefit. The goal is student success" (DSS coordinator – Institution A, 2009).*

Interestingly, when posed the same question, whether a smaller institution is better fit for students with a learning disability, neither a large amount of faculty members nor students from Institution A strongly agreed. A number of students and faculty members were quite hesitant in making a claim in either direction, as they are "only acquainted with a community college." Of those that answered, a majority, 63% of students were in-between agree and disagree with 20% disagreeing altogether. More faculty members from the community college were willing to agree with the statement, 29%, than students, but still a majority, 36%, of faculty members were between agree and disagree. If the size of the institution is not a factor, then "I think a lot has to do with the staff" states Institution A's DSS coordinator shifting the focus to the interaction between the DSS office, faculty members and students.

#### **4.1.1.3 Communication, Communication, Communication**

The DSS office at Institution A takes full advantage of its initial contact with both faculty members and students. Qualified students with a learning disability are introduced to the campus, along with the rules and regulations of disability support services' policies and procedures during an in-take appointment. Attended by every student with a learning

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disability, the in-take appointment allows the DSS office to discuss with the student(s) their disability, their accommodations, their needs and any other topics for which students seek advice. Referring to the students who are in constant and open communication with the DSS office as 'high touch students', the DSS office encourages more engagement between itself and the students that they serve. Hearing from the students themselves about their disability, how it affects them and what needs they feel are necessary, is the first step in a continuous line of support and guidance throughout their time at Institution A.

Faculty members are also as equally encouraged and invited to engage with the DSS office as students. All new full-time faculty members have been required for years to attend college training sessions, which include a two and a half hour session on ADA and their responsibilities. Adjunct faculty members may also attend an orientation, however it is not mandatory. Additionally, only 5-10 minutes of the adjunct orientation is designated for addressing disability services. To try to counteract the less than meager time with incoming adjunct faculty members, the DSS office tries to make it aware of their online DSS handbook. Institution A's and its sister campuses' have created and made available an extensive and easy to navigate online handbook as an information source for faculty members, students, prospective students and even parents, explaining both the federal and institutional DSS design, policies and services.

The DSS coordinator at Institution A states that they are in contact with faculty members on a daily basis. This is dually reflected, with 72% of faculty members stating they are aware and often in contact with the DSS office. Yet, only 25% of faculty members admitted to contacting the DSS office more than 6 times within an academic year and a majority, 68%, replied in the range of 0-5 times within an academic year. To reach as many faculty members as possible and continually support both faculty members and staff, workshops and 'brown bag' luncheons are held throughout the year. Attendance at these events ranges from 30-40 people, with college deans and presidents present, to just a few attendees. Depicted in Table 2 below, on average, faculty members at Institution A feel they are knowledgeable enough and aware of how to teach students with an LD. However, faculty members responses on whether they receive enough professional development from the DSS office, in the form of workshops, significantly differs from their responses to their ability to teach such students  $t(28)=5.45, p<.001$ . The mean score indicates that many faculty members are unsure as to the level of LD specific and/or worthwhile training they have received or need

to receive, “I really cannot say. I don’t know what my needs are because I don’t know what the students’ needs are” (Faculty member – Institution A, 2009). Yet, more faculty members than not are assured that their level of knowledge and ability are sufficient enough to address the needs of students with a learning disability.

*Table 2: Selected means of faculty members’ responses from Institution A*  
**Faculty Members – Institution A**

		<i>Knowledgeable about LDs and how to teach students with one</i>	<i>Aware of rights and responsibilities</i>	<i>Aware and in contact with DSS office</i>	<i>Receive enough support from DSS office</i>	<i>Attend valuable prof. dev.</i>
N	Valid	29	29	28	24	26
	Missing	0	0	1	5	3
Mean		4.0345	3.8621	3.8214	4.1250	3.4615
Std. Deviation		.56586	.74278	.86297	.85019	1.02882

\*Scores assigned to the response categories to the student and faculty member questionnaires were: 5=Strongly Agree, 4=Agree, 3=Neutral, 2=Disagree & 1= Strongly Disagree. Thus, a mean of 3.8 is in-between the range of Neutral and Agree, leaning more towards Agree.

The DSS office conversely disagrees with faculty members’ assurance of their knowledge and ability to adequately accommodate students with a LD stating, “some are and some aren’t...with even a minority [of unsure faculty members] being too many.” Thus, the DSS office believes making the ADA/Disability orientation mandatory to all faculty members and staff members is an important step to improve their services.

#### **4.1.1.4 Determination Factors**

Students are the sole proprietors of their accommodations; they must “LET PEOPLE KNOW!” (DSS coordinator – Institution A, 2009). Notifying instructors of their needs and proscribed accommodations is an essential step the DSS office sites as a large barrier against student progression. In an urban community, a number of the students attending Institution A come from lower to middle class backgrounds. The students’ lives, especially with the added struggles of having a disability, are a common barrier obviously contributing to their experiences as students.



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*“Students come from behind the 8 ball. Things are just handed to them. They don’t understand their disability or anything regarding accommodations; as they never have had to seek out anything on their own. When students come to us, they are not aware of their disability, there needs or how to use the accommodations we give them...all has been handed to them. However, when they leave...I agree that in general, students have become aware of their rights and responsibilities” (DSS coordinator – Institution A, 2009).*

The DSS coordinator feels there is a lack of academic preparedness, lack of advocacy, lack of self-determination by the students. Faculty members echo the feelings of the DSS coordinator. Data from Institution A indicates that most faculty members disagree that students are responsible and clear in communicating their needs.

*“I wouldn't say "the majority" - many students contact the [DSS] office and establish permitted accommodations, but at least half of my students do not self-identify at the beginning of the semester. They may identify later, when they actually want to invoke an accommodation, but many try to "get by" without self-identifying immediately” (Faculty member – Institution A, 2010).*

Faculty members and the DSS coordinator may feel students with a learning disability lack certain skills necessary to succeed at a postsecondary institution, but this does not stop them from providing support to students. Nearly three-quarters of all students in the questionnaire believe that a majority of faculty members and staff are sensitive regarding their learning disability, making adequate class and/or testing accommodations. In general, both faculty members and students agree that the general campus environment at Institution A is understanding, sensitive and accepting of students with a learning disability with little difference in their responses.

Targeting students early on, the DSS office’s approach to aid students with a learning disability has recently begun to focus on early intervention as the best means of improving their student’s college experiences. Aiding students with their transition to postsecondary education, Institution A has recently begun to offer two courses for high school students with a learning disability. Fifteen high school seniors are bussed four days a week to the campus, where they receive orientation classes twice a week taught by a college professor and the other two days by the DSS coordinator. This new program is to get the seniors’ feet wet as they begin their transition from high school to higher education. Viewed as college prep, this program is geared towards getting students with a learning disability the head start needed to put them on an equal playing field with peers who have no disabilities. As the program just began, no data or feedback has yet been obtained.

## **4.1.2 Institution B – A Unique Program**

A relatively average sized 4-year university, Institution B is labeled as going a step-further in servicing students with a learning disability. In today's world any postsecondary education provides students with better career opportunities, but a degree from a 4-year institution is essential to contend for the more competitive positions. The unique service programs universities offer to students, especially students at greater risks of struggling with the transitioning process into university, provides a glimpse into the design options postsecondary institutions are investing.

### ***4.1.2.1 A Different Location***

Institution B's organizational structure of their disability support services is split into two different offices: Disability Services, concerned with students with physical disabilities and the Learning Clinic, concerned with students having cognitive and/or psychological disabilities, "basically anything to do with the brain" (DSS director – Institution B, 2010). The Disability Services office is organizationally located under the direction of the Office for Student Affairs, the same office directing university programs such as Student Housing, Greek Life and Dining Services. Historically based, the Learning Clinic is located under the Department of Psychology, which "is very weird in regards to organizational placement". Overall, beyond the physical separation on the campus between the two offices it works well, "the Director of Disability Services is an expert in her area and I in mine" (DSS director – Institution B, 2010).

Assisting the university with ADA accommodations in regards to cognitive issues/disabilities is the overarching role of the Learning Clinic. The office itself is headed by a director and aided by an assistant director. The roles of the director are to: receive documentation regarding students' application for services and based on documentation prescribe accommodations. "As a licensed psychologist, having this role...which is rare...it is my ethical and legal obligation to provide adequate accommodations to legitimate students with a learning disability. I will and have denied individuals diagnosed by others" (DSS director – Institution B, 2010). Determining inappropriately diagnosed applicants is just as important as providing adequate accommodations to properly diagnosed applicants, but often goes overlooked, as many coordinators are not licensed psychologist and are not able to make such distinctions.

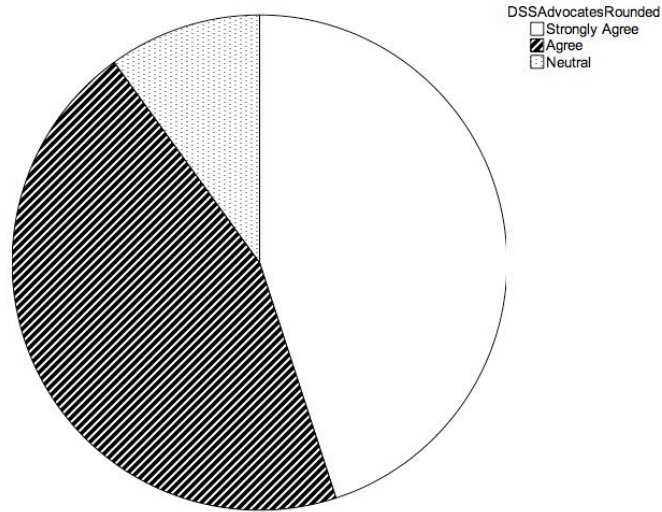
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Making himself an advocate for students with a learning disability, the Director of the Learning Clinic has an initial meeting with every student to counsel them over their accommodations and the responsibilities in using such accommodations appropriately. Currently, the clinic oversees around 200 students, with approximately 120 of the 200 students registered as having a learning disability as their primary disability. At Institution B, the director of the clinic is the only staff member dealing with ADA issues; other staff members are increasingly involved with proctoring and scheduling exams. “We proctor around 1,300 exams a semester...thus, we see students all the time” (DSS director – Institution B, 2010). On average, students responses show they are in contact with the Learning Clinic between 11-15 times each semester, beyond that, students’ interactions with the clinic vary from case-to-case.

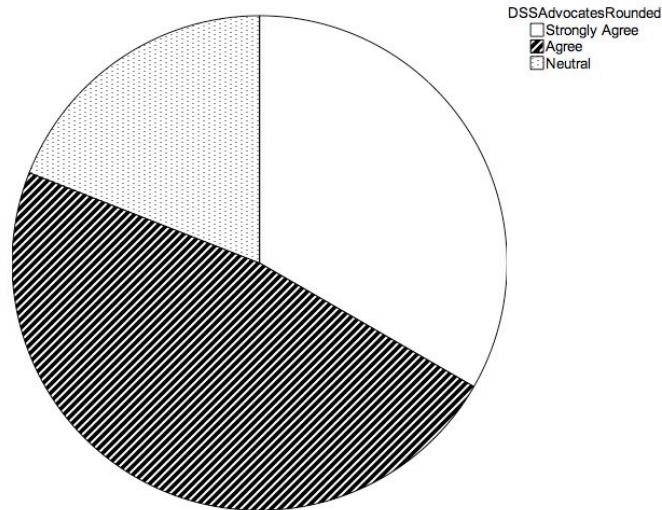
#### ***4.1.2.2 Advocating What’s Right***

Pushing awareness of disability rights and responsibilities on a university campus is equally as important as advocating for what is right for students with a learning disability. Figures 5 and 6 illustrate the level to which students and faculty members at Institution B feel satisfied with the level of support they receive from the Learning Clinic. The charts were calculated by computing the mean scores of four variables posed to both faculty members and students. All four variables measured levels of advocacy and communication between faculty members and the DSS office and students and the DSS office. As the figures illustrate, both students and faculty members are overwhelmingly satisfied with the Learning Clinic. Students (76%) and faculty members (74%) are satisfied with the level of support they receive on campus, with the response rate from the Learning Clinic, the general level of acceptance on the campus for students with a learning disability and their feelings of awareness over their rights and responsibilities; leaving a small percentage neutral and not a single student or faculty member in disagreement.

Over the thirteen years that Institution B’s director has held the title, little has changed organizationally with the disability services, however the “culture has definitely changed” (DSS director – Institution B, 2010). “For the first 8 years I went to 90% of department meetings and spoke directly to faculty members. Though mostly invited, sometimes it was out of hostility.”



*Figure 5: Students at Institution B's level of agreement to having a favorable satisfaction towards the Learning Clinic*



*Figure 6: Faculty members at Institution B's level of agreement to having a favorable satisfaction towards the Learning Clinic.*

A shift in accommodating over the past few years has gone from faculty members refusing to accommodate to faculty members now over-accommodating. Educating faculty members over the past 8 years on learning disabilities, Institution B's DSS director presses the fact that someone with a learning disability has at least an average IQ, "[faculty members] must by federal law provide accommodations to qualified students...[but] also must NOT make accommodations that 'fundamentally alter the nature of the course'. We don't want students coddled!" Recently, the director has not attended any department meetings though he presents to all new full-time faculty members at orientation and is additionally in constant

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communication with faculty members during the year. Main concerns and questions posed to the office today from faculty members are concerned with their want to do more for the students in their classes with learning disabilities. Over-accommodating being a reason, the director feels a majority of faculty members are not knowledgeable enough regarding learning disabilities, which interestingly contradicts the majority of the students' beliefs, that faculty members are aware and knowledgeable regarding learning disabilities.

Approximately 65% of faculty members frequently make accommodations/modifications for students with a learning disability, with an additional 22% stating they provide them when applicable, "it depends on whether or not I know if [a] student has a disability" (Faculty member – Institution B, 2010). Accommodating too much is just as detrimental if not more so, than not accommodating at all. The director makes it clear to faculty members and students what their rights are but also what is right in terms of the purpose and nature of a university education.

#### ***4.1.2.3 Outside ADA***

All qualified students with a learning disability receive 'for sure' two things: one, extended time on exams, and two, they are allowed to take their exams in a distraction-reduced environment, with all further accommodations based off the director's diagnosis. "The worst classes students can have are lecture classes," as the exams are the sole determinants of their grade. These classes are usually all in their first two years of university. With the change in class structure and further strains in transitioning to university life, the director sees the great barriers for students with a learning disability as planning and organization skills, time management and study skills.

*"Yes, other students have these issues, but students with a LD walk-in the door with significant deficiencies in these areas. Parents and teachers prior to postsecondary education have always done the work for them (i.e. Individualized Education Plans, (IEP)), where other peers had to figure out and organize on their own...thus having already developed these skills."*  
(DSS director – Institution B, 2010)

It is a double-edged sword; students need support, but not too much. The director tries to address these issues in the initial meeting with students as a forewarning for what to expect, but many students still continue to struggle. Addressing organizational skills, time

management and study skills along with further academic and emotional support, Institution B established an academic support program for students with a learning disability or other diagnosis who desire “more comprehensive services” than those guaranteed under ADA.

The goal of the program is to ‘impart professional and academic skills which will enable the student to function independently’. The Learning Clinic currently has no quantitative data system for tracking their students’ graduation rates or the success of their academic program, but the responses from parents and students along with the overhaul of applicants indicates it has positive affect(s). Unfortunately the downside, the program can only admit a certain number of students and does come with a high fee. Though, “I would love to offer [the program] for free,” the money is just not available.

Even with the existence of an academic support program, approximately half of the students are either not in the program or any organizations sensitive to students with a learning disability. This is further confirmed by approximately half of the students agreeing to not having attended any valuable courses and/or tutoring offered by the DSS. Yet, this would appear to not affect their view of the disability services they receive, as again the overwhelming majority of students are satisfied with the Learning Clinic (Figure 5, p. 68).

### **4.1.3 Institution C – A Large University**

Being the largest university in the state equates having both the largest student population as well as the largest student population of students with learning disabilities. Institution C’s DSS office has 576 registered students, with 132 reporting a learning disability as their primary disability. An additional 214 of the 576 list Attention Deficit (AD) as their primary, with acquired learning disabilities as a consequence. As a university, there are certain admittance requirements applicants must possess in order to be accepted by the school (e.g. certain GPA, ACT/SAT scores, etc.), which unlike Institution A and other community colleges are in existence to filter prospective students by means of their achievements. These requirements are justified by the workload and rigors a large and renowned state university typically requires and expects from its students.

#### ***4.1.3.1 Always Room for More***

Driven by ADA and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Institution C is required to provide disability services with the DSS office at Institution C being charged with the

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task. Institution C does have some institution specific policies as well, that dictate the design and practices of the DSS office, but they always point back to ADA and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Situated within the Department of Student Affairs, along with Student Life, Residential Life and Dining Services, for 4.5 years, the DSS coordinator feels, that “we are where we should be.” Being organizationally together, allows the DSS office to cooperate, communicate and coordinate with the practices and routines of the other offices regularly; keeping the information flow constant. Additionally, the DSS coordinator works closely with the campuses ADA officer. “We work well together, communicate regularly about issues on campus. We do recognize the distinctions between our jobs and also where they overlap...but we work to try and have a uniform voice on campus” (DSS coordinator – Institution C, 2010).

Six full-time members currently staff the DSS office itself, with additional ‘as needed’ support from tutors, ASL translators, work-study students and others. Overseeing the entire office, the DSS coordinator along with two assistant coordinators, who have been given senior status within the office, handle all in-take processes, advocate for students and provide education/intervention. All three top coordinators possess higher education degrees stressing the importance of knowledge and expertise. Other staff members, like the special needs advisors, are assigned with making exam accommodations and material accommodations (e.g. books to brail, audio books, etc.). “We can do our jobs with the staff we have, but we could do more...that is where the rubber hits the road in acquiring more tasks.”

Students and faculty members do not feel the crunch caused by the limited number of staff in the DSS office. Having no large difference in their responses, both students and faculty members agree that the DSS office provides enough support to aid faculty members in teaching students with learning disabilities and to aid students in pursuing university. Students’ mean score ( $x=4.5$ ) is slightly higher than the faculty members’ ( $x=3.6$ ) as more students believe the DSS office responds to inquires or concerns in respectable time, whereas faculty members tend to be more unsure of the level to which the DSS office responds to their questions and feedback, though they lean more towards satisfactory. “They like what we do and are fine with the services they get”, as there are no trends in the DSS office’s yearly student or faculty member evaluations, no complaints or suggestions for improvements, “only small things like, we don’t like this form.” The focus for the structural

design now in the office is concerned with re-assigning roles, making each member of the staff more of a ‘jack of all trades’. In this way, the workload could become more evenly divided, providing more time for meeting with individual students.

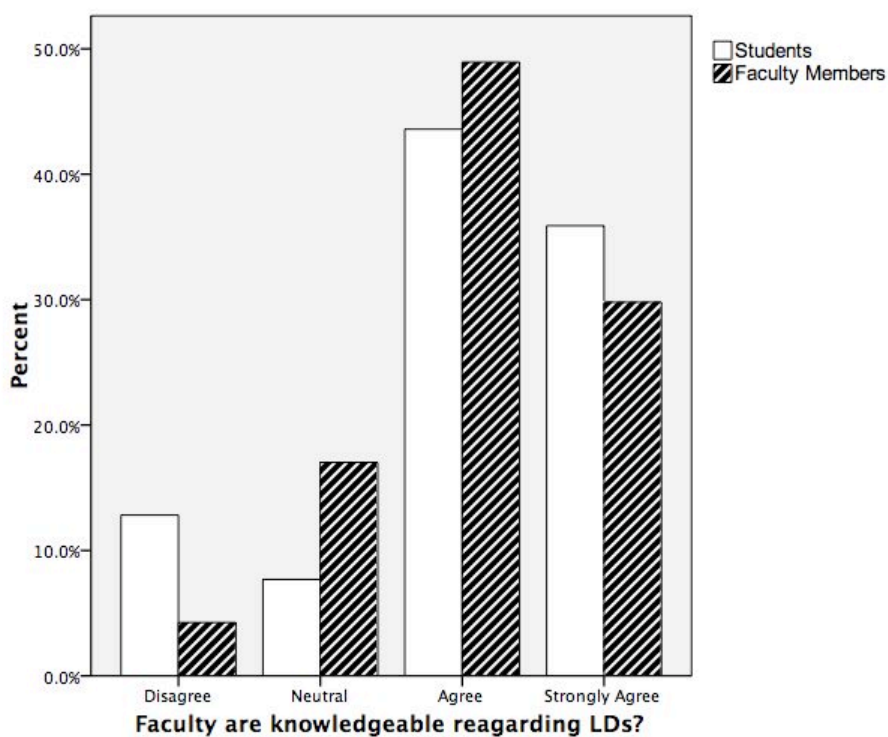
#### **4.1.3.2 Experts**

The support and guidance that the DSS office at Institution C provides is driven more by individual needs, “more organic”, through establishing one-on-one assistance with both faculty members and students. “We have pretty regular contact with faculty members and students. Email gives us a chance to open communication with students and especially faculty members...if we send...hope is they won’t hesitate to email back.” All qualified students are given an in-take appointment where issues regarding their disability, needs and accommodations are discussed; additional points of discussion range from emotional issues (though then advised to see counseling services) to academic issues. Similarly, the DSS office addresses all new faculty members during their new faculty orientation. “We are given a fair amount of time relative to the entire orientation, [of course it is] never enough, but to ask for more is impractical” (DSS coordinator – Institution C, 2010).

Though given time, “too many faculty members and staff still have a misunderstanding” of what a learning disability is and how to accommodate students with one. There is simply “not enough education, especially with the amount of faculty members and staff at this institution.” Therefore, the DSS office believes “every interaction is a teach-able moment, especially at an institution of this size.” The DSS coordinator believes faculty members could improve with more education, but they don’t think they need it. “When faculty members were asked in [previous] surveys if they wanted professional development, courses, etc., they replied...NO!”

Faculty members’ confidence in their knowledge and ability to teach students with a learning disability is supported in the data. Figure 7 below displays both student beliefs regarding faculty members’ knowledge of learning disabilities and sensitivity to their disability, as well as, faculty members’ beliefs regarding their own knowledge and sensitivity to students with learning disabilities.





*Figure 7: Students' and faculty members' beliefs on faculty members understanding of a learning disability.*

A strong majority of Institution B's faculty members and students are in agreement, that faculty members are sufficiently informed about learning disabilities and sensitive to student needs. However, there are a percentage of students who disagree. Students provide experiences of where "professors know what to do, but often they do [nothing]", or suggest "more sensitivity training to professors and students". For those in disagreement, access to more educational opportunities is their proposed solution.

#### ***4.1.3.3 Determined to Be Better***

Determination is an important attribute behind the experiences of students, but is also important for the continuous development of the DSS office and their services. The DSS sends out student surveys every year during the spring semester using a survey program adopted a few years back. The versatility and user friendliness of the program allows the office to send out 'quick and dirty surveys' throughout the year. For example, "we asked students how [they] want communication from us...Facebook, email, etc.". The student response rate is usually between 35-40%, "better than we thought they would be" states the DSS coordinator. The faculty members' response rate is considerably lower, around 15%, "at the most".

The evaluation of the DSS's services ends with their self-distributed surveys. There are no external evaluations conducted on the office, though the DSS coordinator wishes there were, "we are responsible for policing ourselves." There also does not exist a tracking method to measure whether or not their services have any real positive affects on their students, though a plan to start collecting retention rates is presently underway. Change often comes about slowly, but 2.5 years ago when the current coordinator of the DSS office at Institution C assumed the role, she made it her purpose to bring the DSS office out of isolation. The move under the Student Affairs Department 2.5 years earlier "aided in developing alliances," but more cooperation was still needed campus-wide. "[We] are really lucky on this campus," believes the DSS coordinator in connection with their close ties to other campus offices, "our key is fitting [ourselves] into existing structures".

Given the budget and support needed by the university, close ties to other offices, such as the Adaptive Computing Technology Center (ACT) further provides the DSS office with better services and resources. For example, working closely with ACT has allowed the DSS office to utilize their funds in testing cutting-edge technological devices like Pulse Pen, a smart pen, that could easily be adapted for students requiring note takers. As note takers are the third most common accommodation received by students with a learning disability, such resources are the key for future development into disability services. For the resources and services of the DSS office to work and work well, students must be aware of and responsible in their use. Not using accommodations correctly is cited as one of the major barriers by the DSS office for students. Lack of preparedness for the rigors of higher education, though difficult for all students, is more a "double whammy for students with a learning disability", in addition to the traditional one-size fits all teaching style at universities.

In making modifications/accommodations, faculty members at Institution C are divided on the frequency of modifications/accommodations they make for students. About half of faculty members strongly agree or agree that they frequently make accommodations with the other half neutral or disagreeing, stating "I don't have many students with a learning disability in my classes" (Faculty member – Institution C, 2010). Students, 29%, feel the majority of professors are insensitive towards their disability, presenting incidents of faculty members being uncooperative in accommodating to their needs. However, the general majority of students agree that faculty members are willing to accommodate to their needs.

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Students seeking extra resources outside of their provided accommodations can find them on campus. “Students...benefit more with study skills and time management classes...more focus on individual needs”, though not offered by the DSS office study skills courses are available on campus. A high percentage of students polled, 80%, believe the university courses are valuable, along with the tutoring opportunities provided to aid them. Yet, many students are stressed and still struggle with the intense workload, “sometimes the course load is too much to handle and during those times I just do my best” or “the course load is very tough for me...I push myself to get through each day. The reward is good grades.” (Students – Institution C, 2010). Like the students quoted, “services are driven by students’ responsibility to keep [the DSS office] informed”. A certain level of responsibility lies with the students and it takes self-determined and self-advocating students to be mature in their communication and understanding of their disability, as mandated services can only go so far.

## 4.2 Part II: Comparative Analysis

Comparing the three DSS cases according to the five DSS design foci merely highlights the similarities and differences between them. By no means are one case’s practices graded by another’s, as comparing across campuses is a little apples n’ oranges. The institutional environment each DSS case is situated within heavily influences the culture in-which students, staff and faculty members play a natural part. The disability support services are established offices set into existence by federal law, and the interpretation of what is required and what is needed by each postsecondary institution over the years has created a DSS design fit to each university/college. Collected information from state governmental sources along with the three DSS cases’ data presents an all-around comparison of disability support services at three U.S. postsecondary institutions.

### 4.2.1 Structures

“More alike than different...all internally structured differently, but other than that, the same” (DSS coordinator – Institution C, 2010). The old mantra, “It’s not what’s on the outside, but what’s on the inside...” sums up what the investigation into these three DSS cases has uncovered. Of course historical differences, such as Institution B’s rare split of

their disability services into physical disabilities and cognitive disabilities, with the later being housed within the Department of Psychology, is a unique design, “though not intentional, only historical” (DSS director – Institution B, 2010). Further, traditional cultures of the type and kind of postsecondary institution, a community college versus a larger 4-year university, can influence the structural design of the DSS office. However, from the outside, all three DSS cases in this study are structurally similar, an independent/stand-alone department with a centralized DSS office, run by a single coordinator and further supported by assistant coordinator(s) and additional staff.

“We all do pretty much the same things based on federal legislation, nothing radically different” (DSS coordinator – Institution C, 2010). Qualitative differences arise, i.e. how the office and its staff prioritize or their customer service, between DSS offices across postsecondary institutions, but this is merely a consequence of the staff and the office coordinators, not a result of policy or design. In fact, beyond ADA and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, there exist no further state policies or current legislation regarding students with any disability pursuing postsecondary education. No formal structures exist connecting disability concerned state agencies to the postsecondary institutions, though their role “to provide leadership to improve the lives of [citizens of the state] with disabilities” (State official, 2009) and their affects are not exactly known by this study.

With similar external appearances, internal differences lie in the assigned roles and tasks of the DSS office coordinators and staff based on their qualifications and level of experience. The three DSS coordinators of this study have very similar job descriptions, with all three taking the primary role of contact person and advocate for students with disabilities on their respective campuses. All three are responsible for the in-take process where needs are addressed and accommodations provided. Processes to receive accommodations are strictly enforced and standard across the institutions. Though the application process to receive disability services is meticulous and in-depth, 86% of all students questioned across the three campuses agree that the process is adequate and all are requirements are easy-to-provide.

In questioning faculty members about whether they feel the DSS design and its established policies and practices are sufficient enough for students with a learning disability, no differences arise between institutions. Both of the larger institutions have a greater number of faculty members neutral compared to the community college, but a lack of significance implies that regardless of small or large postsecondary institutions, professors feel students

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are given adequate treatment by the law,  $F(2, 86)=0.95, ns$ . In general, neither faculty members nor students feel there is a difference between a smaller university/college and a large university/college in terms of their ability to adequately accommodate students with a learning disability. Faculty members and students from Institution A, the smallest institution of the three cases, are more willing to answer neutral, but still a majority from Institution A do not feel that a smaller institution provides more notable services for students with a learning disability than a larger institution.

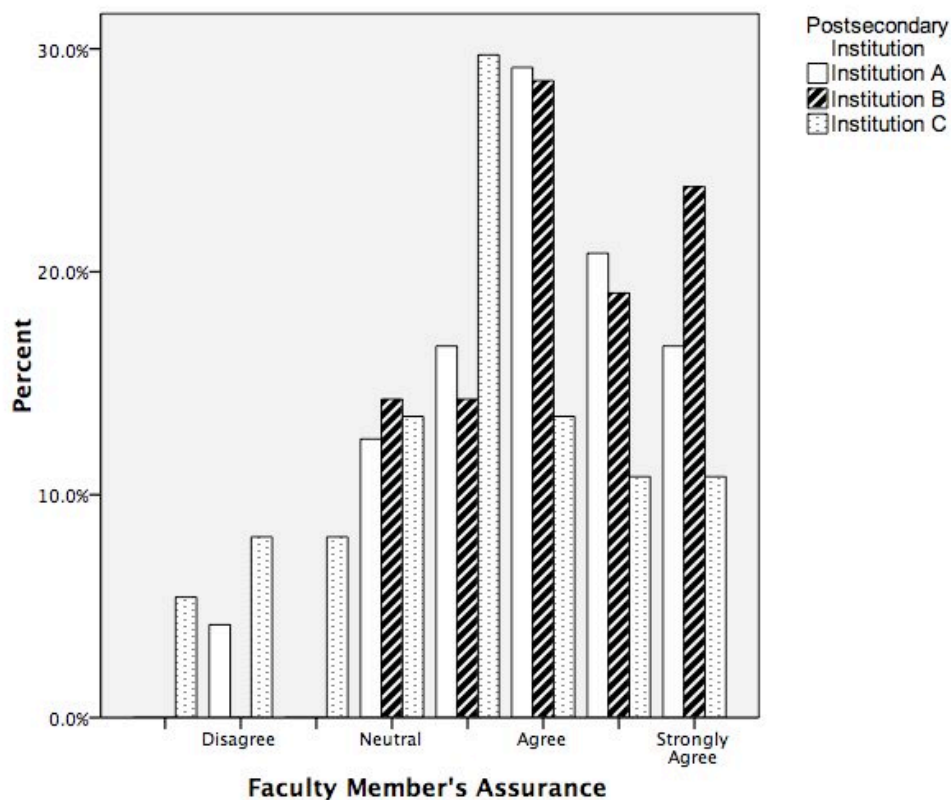
#### **4.2.2 Communication**

Making initial contact with faculty members at orientations and students during their initial in-take sessions are common practices all three institutions utilize to their fullest, in hopes that reaching out to them solicits responses in times of need for support or information. All three DSS coordinators utilize email as the main tool for communicating on a regular basis with professors and students. Websites, online resources, informational pamphlets and electronic informational email blasts are some of the many ways technology is utilized to keep communication up-to-date and constant, to address issues faced by both faculty members and students.

However, two DSS coordinators, from the Institution C, the largest, and Institution A, the smallest, of the three institutions, were quick to pinpoint the dark side of new innovative technologies, such as web based classroom programs WEB-CT and Blackboard, presently popular as communication and resource tools between professors and students. One DSS coordinator labels the program Blackboard as ‘a monster’, “all colleges are struggling. Only one office and faculty members post stuff daily.” Suggesting more e-learning training to faculty members in how to accommodate for students with disabilities on-line, especially as more and more focus and class requirements are connected to these programs.

Awareness, by educating faculty members is an issue of significance between institutions. Institution A and B’s faculty members are significantly more likely to be aware of their DSS office and how to utilize their services compared to Institution C’s faculty members,  $F(2, 79)=5.066, p<0.001$ . For Institution A this matches its faculty member’s assurance of the sufficient amount of support they receive from their DSS office. This all means, that the faculty members at the two smaller institutions feel more support and are thus more aware of disability services than faculty members at the largest of the three institutions.

In combining two variables used to measure the level and intensity of communication between faculty members and the DSS office, Figure 8 below illustrates the level faculty members at the three institutional cases agree to their assurance in possessing adequate information and education on educating students with learning disabilities. Figure 8 clearly depicts the gap between the percentage of Institution C's and Institutions A and B's faculty member's agreement to being adequately informed. Institution A's high rating by their faculty members is further supported by the amount of times an academic year their faculty members are in contact with the DSS office. On average, a faculty member from Institution A is in contact up to five more additional times than their faculty peers at Institution C.



*Figure 8: Variable combination illustrating faculty member's agreement to engaging in adequate communication between themselves and their DSS office*

In regards to the same variables and questions posed to students of the three institutions neither significances nor trends arise. Students from all three postsecondary institutions are positive of their awareness and of their professors' awareness, with all averages implying students feel their respective DSS offices succeed in creating awareness and support on campus.

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### 4.2.3 Resources

“I think a lot has to do with staff. If you are understaffed, one person serving 500 students versus 5 staff with the same, your services will be very different...and I am talking about services not mandated accommodations” (DSS coordinator – Institution A, 2009). Although staffing concerns are a common issue for organizations and postsecondary institutions, all three DSS coordinators feel properly staffed, “though cannot say that at other campuses, including our sister campuses for example” (DSS coordinator – Institution A, 2009). More staff allows for the luxury of having time to work more with students where those with less staff do not; which the DSS coordinator at Institution B confirms, does negatively affect students.

Categorized as resources for this study’s purpose, are the services and not ‘mandated accommodations’ referenced by Institution A’s DSS coordinator. Services include workshops for faculty members and students, tutoring opportunities, technological resources and naturally the funds to provide such services. Presently, all three campuses understand their responsibility to their disability offices with none having any issues of insufficient funds. However, forecasts for the coming years include cuts due to financial binds; the exact cuts and probably effects from them are unsure.

Although all three DSS coordinators feel they possess adequate staff, funds and access to resources, content is still not a word that can be used. Though they are adequate, “the more the merrier,” states the DSS coordinator from Institution C. All three coordinators feel their services, in terms of providing professional development for faculty members and students, are a little lackluster. Yet, this is also linked back to the gap in communication, as faculty members and students do not feel they require more education over disabilities. The DSS coordinator at Institution B is the only coordinator who agrees to providing valuable workshops, but only to faculty members.

Faculty members and students between institutions are more divided than their DSS coordinators regarding the availability of resources. A significantly greater amount of faculty members at Institution A, compared with Institution C, agree that they have attended valuable workshops or courses regarding disabilities, with ‘valuable’ being the key,  $F(2, 81)=10.82, p<.05$ . Compared with faculty members at Institution B, Institution C’s faculty members disagree more to attending any form of valuable workshops compared with faculty

members from Institution B who are evenly split. The trend with these three cases renders the smaller the institution the more likely the faculty members are to feel they are provided with and have attended valuable professional development opportunities.

Interestingly, students at the three institutions don't provide the same trend. In fact, students at Institution C overwhelmingly agree that their DSS office and/or school offer valuable courses/tutoring opportunities, significantly differently from Institution B's student responses. Larger institutions do have more resources and access to even more, such as learning centers or tutors, according to the DSS coordinator at Institution C. Yet, Institution B is the university with the unique program specifically established to aid students with disabilities in transitioning to and completing university. However, the program is not free and can only admit a certain number of students. Therefore bound by funds and staff, its services are not accessible to all students who could benefit from them, though the DSS coordinator at Institution B finds this reality unsettling.

The postsecondary institutions do their best to provide the DSS offices with their needs, but often times, the federal policies "say we are to do this, i.e. provide interpreters, but no money comes with it, as [financial] consequences of policies go unforeseen" (DSS coordinator – Institution A, 2009). Interpreters are not a necessity for students with learning disabilities, but as funds are shifted to provide such resources mandated by policies for other students, then less is dealt to their needs. The lack of federal policy benefiting those with cognitive disabilities is severely lacking feels Institution B's DSS coordinator, "learning disabilities simply do not get funding or grants," in comparison to physical disabilities.

#### **4.2.4 Advocacy & Determination**

Advocacy and determination are two separate foci, but highly intertwined. At the federal and state levels disability is advocated for by legislation, "providing a good framework for the civil rights of people with disabilities...though education of the law needs to continue" believes one state official; holding "consumers with disabilities, parents and educators" responsible for educating legislators and others. At the institutional level, all three DSS coordinators feel it is a shared responsibility between the office, faculty members and students to advocate for those students with disabilities. Although shared, a more heavy reliance on students self-advocating is drawn from the interviews with both DSS coordinators and state officials.



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*“First, the students need to acknowledge their strengths/abilities to strategize how their needs will be met in a postsecondary setting. The big difference in a postsecondary setting is that they are eligibility standards and not an entitlement standard (as in the high school setting). Many youth with disabilities do not have high self-esteem and education is one way to learn that an individual of value and the need to advocate for yourself is necessary once you are in a postsecondary setting” (State official, 2009).*

The traditional concept of postsecondary education requires independence from students, independence in creating and maintaining their own pursuits. Self-advocacy and self-determination are two-traits essential in establishing independence. All three DSS coordinators feel a lack of the two-traits creates one of the greatest barriers to student progression at postsecondary institutions.

Determination equates taking responsibility for oneself. Collecting the year in which students first reported their disability in addition to the amount of times they are in contact with their DSS office, ideas about the students' levels of independence becomes visible. Over half, 55%, of all the students in this study reported their disability their freshman year, with 15% their sophomore year, showing that nearly three-quarters of students reported their disability within their first two years of postsecondary education. Students at all three institutions continually stay in contact with their DSS offices on an average of 0-10 times an academic year.

In keeping faculty members informed of their needs and accommodations, faculty members at Institution C disagree that students are responsible and clear in communicating their needs, different and significantly so from Institution A's faculty members,  $F(2, 84)=5.06$ ,  $p<.01$ . Institution A's faculty members agree that a majority of their students are responsible and clear in coming forth with their needs. Moreover, a trend in the data indicates that the level of stigmatization of students with a learning disability positively correlates to the institution's size; meaning, students are more likely to feel a greater level of stigmatization due to their disability at a larger institution, possibly connecting to their willingness to inform their professors,  $F(2, 67)=2.262$ ,  $p=.112$ , *ns*.

Another strong difference in the data depicting a correlation to the size of the institution is how faculty members view their DSS office's response quality to questions, evaluations and feedback. The smaller the institution the more faculty members tend to agree that their DSS office replies to- and changes according to feedback. Supported by the trend coming out of the data showing a significant difference between Institution A and C, with a trend emerging

between Institution B and C,  $F(2, 86)=6.76$ ,  $p<.01$ . Again, this data correlates back with the findings in regards to communication, indicating the greater the size of the institution the less faculty members are to feel aware and supported by their DSS office.

## Chapter 5: Discussion

*“Civilization is the process in which one gradually increases the number of people included in the terms "we or "us" and at the same time decreases the labels "you" or "them" until that category has no one left in it.”*  
~ (Howard Winters, as cited in Cantwell, 1994) ~

Led by the DSS-design assumptions of this study, the discussions that follow are supported by the findings and theoretical framework utilized for this study. Using current literature focusing both on organizations and postsecondary education, supplemental ideas and perspectives are added creating more depth and multi-dimensional angles to view and address the experiences facing students with a learning disability pursuing postsecondary education.

Used as the analytical tool for the three DSS cases, Bolman and Deal’s four-frame model provides interesting perspectives in discussing the realities of disability support services. Taking a large human resource role, the DSS offices are governed little by formal structures and more by current issues faced by their campuses’ faculty members and students. Shaped by the symbolic culture in-place at the three institutions, services are given on an ‘as-needed where-needed’ basis, governed less by structural policies and practices. The loose coupling between the DSS offices, faculty members and students at postsecondary institutions greatly reduces the influence political whims or strict power management have over the distribution and design of each DSS offices’ services. However, political action is an important tool accessed by the DSS coordinators in influencing and networking across institutional departments to build and sustain cooperative relationships. Furthermore, a lack of strict centralized control at either the federal/state level or institutional levels highly de-formalizes a majority of the actions DSS offices take in serving the needs of those seeking services. Services are more individualized, highly dependent on resources and staff competence as well as the needs of those seeking services. Primarily utilizing the human resource frame as a lens, the DSS office’s role at all three institutions is viewed as such, a resource, accessed by those who are able to access its services when deemed necessary.

These analytical perspectives observed through Bolman and Deal’s four-frames initiate the discussions below addressing and headed by the assumptions from Figure 2 on p. 25.

## 5.1 Structures: The Building Blocks

Structural assumptions regarded disability support services and their dependency on the size of the postsecondary institution, on the quality of management from the DSS office and on the established policies meant to support and provide equal opportunity for students with a learning disability.

### **5.1.1 Are smaller postsecondary institutions more capable of accommodating students with a learning disability?**

“Those familiar with large college campuses would not be surprised to hear them described as cold and isolating” (Stage & Milne, 1996: 441). Statements such as the one prior along with the National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities’ statement (1999) regarding the wide variance in postsecondary institutions and the consequent lack of consistency in the way that institutions provide services to students with learning disabilities, were the guiding lights in making the assumption that smaller institutions are better suited for students with a learning disability.

Data indicates that the larger the institution the more stigmatized students with a disability are apt to feel on campus, but little else from the data supports this trend. Being a research institution like Institution C, skeptics envision professors’ foci as away from teaching and more on research and publishing (Bok 1994; Cole 1994). Though the reality is that research and publishing are an important aspect for faculty members at larger institutions, this study could say that only in certain aspects in providing disability services does the issue of size affect services, with a majority of the differences arising from the perspectives of faculty members themselves, and not from the DSS office or students.

Communication, the amount of times in contact with the DSS office, and the provision of support through workshops, etc...provide the two biggest differences in response rates in coordination with the sizes of the institutions. Under Bolman and Deal’s structural frame it can be argued that the management of disability services is a greater link to student success than the size of the institution. Again referencing organizational theorists Taylor, Fayol and Drucker, it is the management that links organizational objectives and reaching those objectives. The priorities and customer service mentality of the DSS coordinators, identified

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as the main differential factors between DSS offices across campuses, compared with structural differences becomes the driving force for the design of the disability services.

Yet, size does influence services. Understandably so, with the same number of staff in Institution C's DSS office compared with that of the other two smaller institutions, and serving a student and faculty population much greater than Institution A's and greater still from Institution B's, less time is naturally spent with all faculty members and students, especially on an individual basis. In a structural sense, the DSS office at Institution C manages a greater population with a limited number of staff, allocating less time, or 'touch' as coined by one DSS coordinator, to individual members within the university. More people equate more problems, and providing individualized services to a greater population increases the need, but limits the choice of prioritization. Structural precedence then takes place, with mandated accommodations taking priority over additional services. However, such a case is potential at any postsecondary institution with a shortage of DSS staff able to manage their services. Thus...

*Small, medium and large postsecondary institutions seem more similar than different in accommodating students with a learning disability.*

### **5.1.2 Does the management of DSS hinder the 'quality' of its services?**

R. C. Davis (1951) provides creative planning as the solution to management issues regarding what should be done, how and where it should be done, who should do it, and what resources are necessary. Creative is interpreted and adopted as a synonym for quality, as the term is usually attached to a unique, but successful alternative to the norm. Although there lacks a centralized organizational setup for how a DSS office should provide services, there does exist an obvious level of correspondence across postsecondary institutions made evident by the three DSS offices in this study, perhaps limiting the creative aspect.

Within the postsecondary educational setting it is extremely difficult to control teaching and learning, even if learning disabilities have been socially accepted (March & Olsen, 1976). In a strict structural sense, members have specific roles for which they are held accountable. Such clear-cut roles lack on postsecondary institutions. Faculty members are to teach within their respective fields, students are to learn and DSS offices are to provide disability

services, but the how and when are undefined. For this reason, disability services at all three institutions go essentially unmonitored, making it difficult to rate the quality of the management of the DSS offices to their services. This loose link between the DSS and the faculty members and students at the three institutions is archetypical amongst educational organizations, especially postsecondary institutions. As DSS coordinators are not direct managers of faculty or students it is quite difficult to establish services outside of legislatively mandated ones that all members must abide by. Thus, contrary to Figure 1 on page 21 and the depiction of a top-down managerial model of disability support services, the interaction between the three groups is more horizontal, limiting the control the DSS office has over faculty members and students and relying more on the relationships established between them. However, as the data illustrates, the closer organizational proximity between the DSS coordinator at Institution A compared with that of Institution C to faculty members and students can affect the quality of certain services, but the management of the DSS office ultimately is the decider in the quality of the services administered to the postsecondary institutional members. Thus...

*The management of DSS has the potential to hinder the 'quality' of services.*

### **5.1.3 Are outdated and/or vague policies not encompassing enough?**

ADA and The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 are the two policies at the heart of the establishment of all DSS offices. Having good intentions, policies regarding serving students with a learning disability in postsecondary education fall short in providing the necessary support to carry out their mandates.

A foreseen policy gap between the services mandated at the compulsory educational level, IDEA and NCLB, and those mandated at the postsecondary educational level, in addition to a lack of follow-up at the federal/state level pinpoints areas where policies are not encompassing enough to ensure students with a learning disability are succeeding in pursuing postsecondary education. At the center of the human resource frame is the belief that organizations exist to serve human needs, ADA and The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 exemplify this mantra, mandating the provision of accommodations to essentially equalize the opportunity for persons with disabilities. The issue does not arise from the wording of the policies, but in the symbolic cultures that the federal disability acts are interpreted.

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For students with a learning disability, the disability policies governing their services from Kindergarten to the 12<sup>th</sup> grade “coddle them,” according to one DSS coordinator. Students with a disability in K-12 are tested and given an IEP, based on parent and/or teacher recommendations. Teachers then become legally bound to these established accommodations, which must be re-evaluated and updated. The federal government and state’s role in compulsory education holds schools and educators accountable, usually through various forms of assessment. These established policies in K-12 education, in addition to tighter federal and state supervision take a 180-degree flip when the students enter postsecondary education. Changes that arise: services are no longer recommended, the student must seek them out independently, professors are only legally bound to the proscribed accommodations established by the DSS office and services become extremely less individualized compared to what many students with a learning disability are used to receiving. As a professor and parent of a learning-disabled student describes it, “the change [in policy] between high school and college is like learning to ride a bike without ever getting the chance to use training wheels.” Her concern reflects that of others, in regards to the lack of transitioning aid from K-12 to postsecondary education, because of the highly detailed policy support at the K-12 level “students come to us not knowing their disability, its affects on them or their needs” (DSS coordinator – Institution A, 2009).

Understandably, the traditional autonomous self-governance allotted to postsecondary institutions in the U.S., plus the high level of diversity between university and college campuses, plus the individualized effects a learning disability has on a student inherently limit the amount of details policies, such as ADA and The Rehabilitation Act of 1973, can establish. Institutions are aware of the mandated obligations, but in addition, “many institutions feel they have a moral obligation to provide further services” (Stage & Milne, 1996: 426), assigning DSS offices with the task. Established to fulfill a structural need in addressing policy mandates, DSS offices more importantly fill a human resource need in providing additional services outside of policy mandates. Thus...

*Policies are not outdated or vague, but lack transition from the K-12 educational setting to the postsecondary educational setting.*

## 5.2 Communication: Keeping it Open

A lack of open-communication between DSS offices, faculty members and students results in an insufficient understanding of members' rights and responsibilities was the primary communication assumption.

### **5.2.1 Is there a lack of open communication between DSS offices, faculty members and students?**

Communication is utilized to not only inform members, but to keep all members of an organization aligned with the organization's goals. Not a single institution's data indicates a strong lack of communication between the three groups, especially with the existence of modern technologies, such as email and social networking sites like Facebook. However, an open line of communication between the DSS office, faculty members and students does not come from thin air, it must be established, a grassroots effort. All three DSS coordinators recount attending department meetings with department heads, deans and faculty members in attendance during the start of their role as coordinators, building relationships, networks and alliances. These meetings satisfied multiple purposes, spanning all four-frames.

Structurally, the coordinators were able to link themselves up with existing programs sometimes allotting them resources in the forms of technologies or funds. Politically, the DSS office became represented on all relevant campus committees, enabling them to disseminate information and receive feedback from faculty members and students (AHEAD, 2009).

Wright and O'Neil (1994) conclude that the most effective factor in improving teaching is the leadership of deans and department heads, making their participation essential in the collaboration processes for improving disability services. The organizational placement within the administrative structure for Institution's A and C DSS office, under the Office for Student Affairs "promotes a strong academic focus and shared faculty responsibility for providing accommodations" (NJCLD, 1999). From the initial orientations for faculty and students, the DSS office is provided with the opportunity to make contact and establish themselves as a legitimate office and necessary campus resource. For disability issues and concerns, the DSS offices act as human resource departments, making sure needs are met and concerns resolved. Faculty members and students in this study across all three institutions find no issues in contacting their DSS office. Though the study finds the larger



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the institution the less contact faculty members have with their DSS office and students, this same trend is not reflected in the student responses. Perhaps this is explained by the “university’s large class sizes...which interfere with relationships between faculty and students”, allowing for tutors or DSS office staff to fill the important personal role in the students’ academic lives (Stage & Milne, 1996: 434-35). Thus...

*There is an established line of open communication between DSS offices, faculty, and students.*

### **5.2.2 Is there insufficient staff, faculty member and student training and/or support regarding rules and responsibilities?**

“The nature and funding of educational organizations means that staff are the key institutional investment. This means that effective staff planning and development are essential prerequisites for achieving and maximizing organizational goals” (Law & Glover, 2000: 189). Law and Glover (2000) cite skills, knowledge and attitudes as important elements in developing members to fit the organizational goals. However, with the horizontal management base between the DSS office, faculty members and students there lacks an authoritative pressure by the DSS office to define what ‘sufficient’ understanding of disability services are and then hold faculty members and students accountable to obtain them.

Overall, DSS coordinators feel that while students throughout their years in postsecondary education learn more and become more responsible, faculty members are not adequately informed and knowledgeable about learning disabilities and their rights and responsibilities, though in fact, faculty members at all three institutions feel as if they are knowledgeable. “Perhaps perceived as deprofessionalising their identity as an academic...” (Gunter, 2001: 140), faculty members do not see a need or want for training from the DSS office. Instead, their use of the DSS office’s services is more a peer relationship than a bureaucratic one, meaning the DSS office’s role and influence is based on being a representative for each institution’s disability services, accessible when necessary rather than ordered and forced upon them. In addition, some faculty members do not even see DSS office’s services as part of their role, “I’m not a special education teacher...” or like this faculty member’s response to what additional resources are necessary, “support staff who are trained in working with these populations; as I am NOT!”

Though the majority of faculty members, as seen by students in this study, are knowledgeable, and “try to help in any way they can”, issues of faculty misunderstandings are still frequent in the students’ comments. In a university or college setting, a single class holds great importance for the continuation of students in their degree process. Struggling with even a single class or faculty member can greatly tarnish a student with a learning disability’s self-esteem and motivation. In addition, a lack of faculty knowledge can easily perpetuate itself; especially as more and more classroom requirements are accessed through online services like Blackboard and WebCT. Online communication between faculty members and students happens daily, making it impossible for the DSS office to monitor all postings. Under-trained faculty members in this situation severely hinder the experiences and success of students, continuing practically unmonitored. Thus...

*There is insufficient **faculty** training and/or support regarding rules and regulations.*

## 5.3 Resources: The Lifeline

In the distribution and allocation of resources it is assumed that the DSSs are not provided with the appropriate amount of resources, limiting the amount of resources they can provide to faculty members and students.

### **5.3.1 Are DSS offices delegated and/or possessing limited resources that negatively affect the quality and quantity of their services?**

The three DSS cases in this study have it all. “We are lucky,” believes the DSS coordinator from Institution C, in describing the amount of resources (i.e. funds, staff and technologies) provided to the DSS office, “yet this is not the case at all campuses.” Closely linked to Bolman and Deal’s human resource frame, the postsecondary institutions regard their members, and more importantly their students, as vital to their success. An ever-increasing amount of enrolling students with disabilities requires an increasing amount of resources, which the three postsecondary institutions have left to the discretion of the DSS coordinators. Entrusted with providing sufficient and quality services, the postsecondary institutions delegate all responsibility in-terms of providing and requesting resources to the DSS coordinators.

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Probing for perhaps a lack of resources in the form of workshops offered for faculty or tutoring opportunities for students, brings attention to an unexpected discovery. The reason that the three DSS coordinators do not provide workshops for faculty or students is not based on financial limitations, but because neither faculty nor students attend the meetings, “wasting [the DSS office’s] time that could be spent more valuably” (DSS coordinator – Institution B, 2010). Thus...

*The three DSS offices are delegated and possess a sufficient amount of resources.*

## 5.4 Advocacy: Battle Cry

In taking a negative stance it was assumed that students with a disability lack a voice on their campuses, further muted by a traditional institutional culture unaccommodating to the needs of students with a learning disability.

### **5.4.1 Do students with a learning disability lack a voice on postsecondary campuses?**

Again, the DSS offices take on a human resource role in fully supporting students with a learning disability at their respective institutions. Acting as advisors, resources and points of referral, the DSS offices at all three campuses make it aware that they are there for the students when and if needed. From the first initial in-take until they graduate, the DSS offices are the students’ greatest advocates. “I know and have personally met with everyone of our students,” says the DSS coordinator at Institution B. As for faculty support, though students at all three institutions tend to agree that faculty members are accepting and accommodating to their needs, faculty members feel that “students need more regular contact with an advocate” hinting outside of the classroom and not from faculty members.

In general, postsecondary campuses are quite open to student input, as student success is the selling point for many institutions. The DSS office acts as the main hub for the voices of students with a learning disability, who then take it upon themselves to take action based on the feedback from the students. Inquiring at the federal/state level, little to no important issues have been raised or brought to their attention in recent years. All students who feel they are discriminated against can contact their university or college’s Office of Civil Rights, but according to the DSS coordinators this option is rarely sought. Overall, students’ voices

across the institutions show that they feel their general campus's environment is accepting of them and their needs. Thus...

*Students have a voice on postsecondary campuses.*

### **5.4.2 Is postsecondary institutional culture traditionally not accommodating to students with a learning disability?**

The 180-degree change in disability policy indicates a 180-degree change in cultural beliefs about the role of postsecondary education and the role of the student. A lack of continuation in the support suggests the idea for students to grow and mature, independently of external aids. Large class sizes, intense workloads, heavy reading, high-stakes exams and lecture style instruction are all typical characteristics of large postsecondary institutions. In addition, most college courses rely heavily on verbal skills (i.e. understanding lectures, reading textbooks, writing papers and making oral presentations). Unfortunately, professors are often unable and sometimes unwilling to recognize students with learning problems (Stage & Manning, 1992).

For the institutions, this issue requires a re-thinking and consideration of the balance between members' needs and formal roles (Bolman & Deal, 2008). Professors' comments indicate that beyond the accommodations students provide them from the DSS office, many do little more. In asking faculty members to describe their roles and responsibilities, almost all stated verbatim "I am required to accommodate students who register with the Office of Disabilities in a manner consistent with their recommendations...with the right to maintain the integrity and standards of the course." Taking into consideration what much research states, it is not surprising that more students, though not the majority, from the two larger institutions reported issues of struggling with workloads or dealing with unaccommodating professors.

Though unaccommodating faculty members is still a concern, a majority of the literature used in this study focusing on the topic of students with a learning disability in postsecondary education is dated 5-10 years ago, as "data comes in 4-5 year cycles...following and tracking the students" (DSS coordinator- Institution C, 2010). Perhaps then, this study's findings pinpoint the current 'cultural trend' in accommodating students with a learning disability, over-accommodating. Over-accommodating, contrary to

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unaccommodating, has become the biggest issue threatening the success of students with a learning disability according to all three DSS coordinators. “I find myself playing the ogre”, states the DSS coordinator at Institution A, “...like, don’t give a good grade just because they came.” The DSS coordinator at Institution B stresses the fact that, “students with a learning disability have at least an average IQ”, in an effort to prove to faculty members that they do not need to water-down their courses. The answer then lies somewhere in the balance of accommodating and over-accommodating. The opinion of this study is summed up by one faculty member’s response,

*“I think you need to look at what expectations this gives students when they graduate. Do they assume workplaces are going to give them 2x the amount of time to do their jobs? This is unrealistic and will keep them from being hired...I am concerned we are setting them up for failure by giving them too much assistance and then in the real world, the rug is pulled out from under them.”*

Key the human resource frame is the idea of empowerment, guiding students in the right direction. Merely assisting, especially through over-accommodating, never gives students the chance to act independently and grow. Thus...

*Postsecondary institutions’ cultural trend is over-accommodating students with a learning disability.*

## 5.5 Determination: Self-Help

Assumptions that guided an investigation into determination focused primarily on the students and on the DSS offices. Two difference assumptions were established, one, that students with a learning disability lack the self-determination and skills necessary to succeed in postsecondary education, and two, that DSS evaluation systems are inefficient in producing necessary changes in disability support services.

### **5.5.1 Do students with a learning disability lack the self-determination and skills necessary to succeed?**

The definition of self-determination depicts a student who is goal-oriented, able to make consistent choices and decisions -and is self-aware of their knowledge and capabilities. As the DSS coordinators state, a lack of self-determination is a common issue among many incoming university/college students. For students with a learning disability, this issue comes in tow along with their disability, making it difficult for students with a learning

disability to transition to postsecondary education as quickly as their peers who are not disabled.

Students in this study, along with faculty members, naturally report issues of struggling with intense workloads, having difficulty following lectures and keeping up with reading assignments. However, this is not in the majority and those with such issues present ways they have learned to cope. Yorke (2005) who contrives-up the issue of formative assessment, a self-reflective process often lacking in postsecondary institutions, believes it is lacking, especially in the first two-years where it is most vital.

Yorke's conclusion that the ability to self-reflect, essential for self-determination, is not innate and must be taught highlights the importance and need for transition policies. External factors as much as internal factors play into the development of a student with a learning disability's level of self-determination. Students with a learning disability who come from almost thirteen years of being coddled by IEPs and disability services at the K-12 level; come to university or college without any transitioning services and are expected to know how to integrate into -and fit-in on their own. Fit-in to an educational setting far different from the small classes, individualized attention and standardized curriculums they are used to from high school. Take also into consideration the recent trend by faculty members to over-accommodate students, again haltering their growth to become independent, self-determined students. Of course faculty members have and will continue to come into contact with unprepared and academically immature students, but a majority of students in this study do not heavily support the current literature, as they have learned to cope and evolve into the postsecondary setting. Thus...

*Students with a learning disability do possess the self-determination and skills necessary to succeed, although such skills should be taught to aid students.*

### **5.5.2 Are evaluation systems inefficient in producing necessary changes to disability support services?**

In order for evaluation systems to be inefficient there would first have to be evaluation systems in-place. At the federal/state level, there are no evaluative standards or assessment services committed on the DSS offices, though one DSS coordinator wishes there were, "the only time our services would be evaluated is if there happened to be an OCR complaint"

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(DSS coordinator – Institution C, 2010). Not even at the institutional level are the DSS office’s services evaluated; all three DSS cases are left to police themselves.

Currently even within the DSS offices, none of the three have a means to track their students, though two are beginning the process. With no data or means of tracking students, their offices are not able to calculate graduation rates or the affects their services have on the success of the students they serve. The distribution of surveys, often each term for students and yearly for faculty, provide the only source of evaluative feedback. Unfortunately, low response rates and uninformative responses provide little detailed feedback, “they say that they our satisfied with our services...absolutely no recommendations for changes.”

All three DSS coordinators are passionate about their roles, “Love our profession! Never perfect, but always full of challenges”, however, within the institutional setting, it can be difficult to carry that passion over to others, which is seen most clearly with the larger institutions. Without clear data presenting trends or issues arising from disability services, little more than a minority of students and faculty members are heard, providing little indication of what is most needed. Thus...

*Evaluation systems are inefficient in producing necessary changes to disability support services.*

## 5.6 Summary

Collecting information from only three out of the 4,000 postsecondary institutions in the U.S. does not provide a panoramic view of disability support services at postsecondary institutions. Instead, it begins to open-up the issue and provides a glimpse into what can be expected by students with a learning disability pursuing a postsecondary option at one of the three case models; a community college, an average sized university, and a large research university.

Summary of key findings from this study:

- *The DSS organizational design and services are not related to the type or size of institution, but to the history, resources available and HR management of the DSS office.*

- *Beyond ADA and The Rehabilitation Act of 1973, disability policies at the institutional level are not highly formalized, made at the discretion of the DSS coordinators*
- *The use of modern forms of communication, such as email and Facebook, make information more accessible and communication more frequent, but naturally larger institutions struggle more with reaching all faculty members and students than smaller institutions.*
- *The DSS office's staff members are the most valuable resources for providing quality services.*
- *Recent years have resulted in a reverse trend from unaccommodating students with a learning disability to over-accommodating students with a learning disability.*
- *Students with a learning disability are self-determined, but lack additional external supports to aid them.*
- *Evaluation systems of disability support services do not exist at present, providing DSS offices with student and faculty surveys as the only means of obtaining feedback.*



## Chapter 6: Conclusion and Recommendations

*“A system of education...has in it some of the secret workings of national life. It reflects, while it seeks to remedy, the failings of the national character. By instinct, it often lays special emphasis on those parts of training which the national character particularly needs.”*

*~ (Sadler, as cited in Holmarsdottir, 2008) ~*

Chapter 6 concludes with three parts. Part one answers the original problem statement guiding this study and its three subsequent aims. Part two presents three possible actions that can be taken to aid disability support services and students with a learning disability pursuing postsecondary education. Part three concludes the study with suggestions for further research topics into disability support services.

### 6.1 Part I: The Findings

Obtaining the participation of three postsecondary institutions, A, B and C, each various in size and purpose, the intent was to investigate various DSS designs and their relationship to the experiences of students with a learning disability. Interviewing federal/state officials and DSS coordinators as well as questioning faculty members became essential, as their natural role in providing services at postsecondary institutions is key to understanding the experiences of the students.

It can be concluded from this study that the design of an institution’s disability support services has the potential to positively or negatively affect the experiences of students with a learning disability pursuing postsecondary education, and that these services are not dependent on the type of postsecondary institution in which they are a part. The services provided for students with a learning disability have a wide range of effects and the experiences had from these services are as diverse as the DSS coordinators who coordinate them, faculty members who accommodate to them and students who utilize them. With similar DSS designs, further investigation into the relationships between specific services and the experiences of students is necessary to make any solid conclusions.

### **6.1.1 DSS Design Options**

Investigation into the three DSS cases presents less diversity between DSS designs across postsecondary institutions than originally assumed. Rather than black swans, the three DSS designs are more alike than different. Minor service differences exist, like Institution B's unique split between physical and cognitive disabilities. There are some structural differences, but these do not appear to radically alter the experiences of the students.

Unanimously created to sustain the mandates required in both The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and ADA, the DSS offices and their services at Institutions A, B and C are rooted in these policies. Additional disability service options outside of mandates rely on an array of factors, the management of the DSS office, availability of resources, number of staff and level of cooperation between the DSS office, faculty members and students. Perhaps it is the high level of dialogue between DSS offices, such as the three in this study that keeps services somewhat standardized, preaching and initiating best practices while halting those that are less successful. Maybe there exists an unwritten policy within disability services reflected in postsecondary institution's and member's beliefs and assumptions. Whatever the reason, the three DSS cases in this study designed similarly, presenting no drastic differences in their services or methods of providing such services to students and faculty members.

### **6.1.2 Theoretical Perspectives**

Bolman and Deal's four-frames were adopted for the leading assumption that DSS designs were black swans; with a multitude of DSS design possibilities, it was necessary to have a means to adequately illustrate one DSS office for what it is rather than how it compares to another DSS office at another institution. On the contrary, the versatility of the four-frames allots them their value in this study, as their use highlighted the lack of an adequate deference in DSS design between the three DSS cases.

*“One objective should remain clear: It is the role of disability services personnel to seek, nurture, and preserve institutional commitment and support for ensuring that students with disabilities have equal access to educational opportunities available to all other students” (Duffy & Gugerty, 2005: 89-90).*

Duffy and Gugerty's strong human resource belief in the purpose of disability services is the central motto and purpose of all three DSS cases at Institution's A, B and C. The three DSS offices and coordinators pinpoint their role as advisors, advocates and as a resource for students and faculty members as their most important roles. Acting first as a resource, providing for the needs of students with a learning disability and other disabilities, this lens helps to justify all other actions taken by the three coordinators: politically, networking with deans, department heads and other departments to gain influence and obtain resources, and structurally, as with Institutions A and C, the DSS offices use their location within the Student Affairs Department to advocate for students and their needs.

Strong symbolic cultures on postsecondary campuses, along with strong symbolic beliefs over learning disabilities heavily influence the intensity, method and kind of services the DSS offices provide. Institutions A, B and C all understand the need and importance of their DSS offices and this is reflected in each of the three DSS cases' strong presence on their campuses. Given sufficient resources and attention, the three DSS coordinators note the changed perceptions towards disability support services that has undergone over the past twenty years. Yesterday's student with a learning disability is today's average student, thanks to the nurturing and cultural urgency of disability services. As a resource, all three DSS offices have established themselves as a necessity to the success and positive experiences of students with a learning disability.

### **6.1.3 Perceptions**

The human resource frame provides the best insight into how faculty members and students perceive the DSS office and its services. There are mandated responsibilities, such as faculty members legally bound in providing accommodations to qualified students and students required to provide up to date documents to qualify for disability services, which are laid out by federal/state and institutional policies; but these are merely formal procedures. Students and faculty members see disability services the same way the DSS offices see themselves, as a resource. Students use the DSS office to obtain the skills necessary to pursue postsecondary education, but are not forced to utilize the provided services. Faculty members access the services and resources available to them by their DSS offices when necessary, acknowledging the DSS offices wealth of knowledge in the area of disabilities. Viewing disability services through the human resource frame provides reason behind this

study's findings and allows for proper action to be taken in addressing present or future disability service issues.

## 6.2 Part II: DSS Recommendations

“The purpose of schools are to enable the workforce to be appropriately skilled to operate in the current and developing economy” (Gunter, 2001: 18). This being the goal of education, postsecondary institutions have a responsibility to their students, all students, to provide them the means to become ‘appropriately skilled’. Below, three recommendations based on the results of this study are given concentrating efforts of improvement at the institutional level, federal/state level and at the individual level.

### 6.2.1 DSS Assessment Installment

For students with a learning disability, the DSS office is given the task to ensure students with a learning disability are provided with the tools necessary to equal the playing field with peers who have no disability. However, this must be a shared responsibility between staff, faculty members and students, as the jurisdiction of the DSS office ends with ADA and The Rehabilitation Act Of 1973's mandated accommodations (Collie & Taylor, 2004). Additional services are merely suggestions that faculty members and students must be willing and able to accept.

Educational and disability policy in the compulsory years hold teachers and schools accountable to standards and students' achievement. “During the last decade, conversations about accountability in higher education have resonated across political, economic, legislative, and educational boundaries” (Anderson, 2004: 17). As schools have stakeholders who invest their resources into learning outcomes, accountability through measurement enables judgments to be made about the value for money, an important issue as many postsecondary institutions are making tremendous budget cuts because of the current economic times (Gunter, 2001). The roles DSS offices play in a campus setting are vital, but the affect they have is not measurable without a method of assessing their services.

All organizations and individuals need to change and grow in order to adapt to current conditions, but an assessment of student and faculty member learning cannot happen, without clear indications of problem areas (Anderson, 2004). Therefore, a recommendation

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for a DSS office initiated assessment of their own services, provides DSS offices with solid empirical data, diverse in its potential uses.

### **6.2.2 Transition Policy**

The policies in line to establish disability services for students from K-12 take a drastic leap at the postsecondary level. From coddling to cutting the umbilical cord, there are no established steps to aid students in moving from the high school environment to the unfamiliar campuses of universities and colleges. Recommended that the policy changes take place at the federal/state level, are in consideration to one, that the current policy gap exists between to federal policies; two, leaving the governance of transitioning to individual schools creates a plethora of possible issues (i.e. lack of consistency between schools and postsecondary institutions); and three, gross amounts of funding would be necessary to initiate program implementations of this size.

“Unity of actions depends on unity of thought” (Davis, 1951: 40). Davis (1951) references the importance the participation of stakeholders of a policy have on its eventual success. Plus, it just makes sense; including the aid of students with a learning disability, faculty members and DSS staff in transitioning services policy ensures that those the policy are meant to aid, voice their needs. Staff, faculty members and student input in combination with the recommendation for DSS assessment and/or evaluation data, are the perfect beginning to initiating transitioning services to students with a learning disability at the postsecondary institutional level.

### **6.2.3 Education, Education, Education**

Over-accommodating, under accommodating, abusing accommodations and unsure how to accommodate are hot themes in the literature and echoed in the findings of this study. These issues indicate a lack of proper training and education in rights and responsibilities in providing and utilizing disability services. Educating faculty members and students in best practices (i.e. universal curriculum design, online training, etc.) through a multitude of communication outlets, keeps faculty members and students updated, in whichever means they find most fitting. Creating the opportunity to access information however, does not mean that faculty members and students take advantage of its benefits. Ensuring faculty members attend DSS training in their initial faculty orientation does not certify them as

experts, and no systems are in-place to mandate further training. Students participate in a similar process, with an initial in-take appointment. Beyond the appointment, communication relies solely on the student's self-determination to seek out further aid.

University policy should encourage the development of collaborative relationships among academic department and the DSS office to adequately serve students. "Each entity has common goals for students with disabilities, and sharing knowledge and expertise can be mutually beneficial" (Briel & Getzel, 2005: 282). Educating faculty members and students requires time and money. An investment of such valuable resources should come with a guarantee, that people would attend. Today, training sessions do not have to take place in a classroom with all simultaneously in attendance. Technologies allow videos, conferences and more to be viewed from offices and rooms at times determined by the participants. Mandating, or highly recommending, faculty members and students watch a short video and take a small quiz afterwards, are sure fire ways to ensure information is not only accessed, but also understood.

### 6.3 Part II: Further Investigation

Answers merely breed more questions, and this investigation into disability support services at postsecondary institutions has opened Pandora's box. Continuation of the research this study started is necessary to gain further insight into the similarity or possible diversity of disability support services that exist at U.S. university/college campuses. Discovering and illustrating DSS designs is essential in finding best practices, for future development in this area. This study concludes with suggestions for future research into the topic of students with a learning disability in postsecondary education.

Selected suggestions for further research:

- Further investigation into the positive and negative affects of using online based educational tools and resources for students with a learning disability. *How are such resources utilized? What are the potential of these resources for students with a learning disability? What are the negative aspects these resources have on students' success, and how can their potential be maximized?*
- Conduct longitudinal research following students with a learning disability throughout their university/college career. *What are trends in the growth and*

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*maturation of students with a learning disability? Does the intensity of the services they require and/or use change? Are students' opportunities enhanced by the accommodations they receive?*

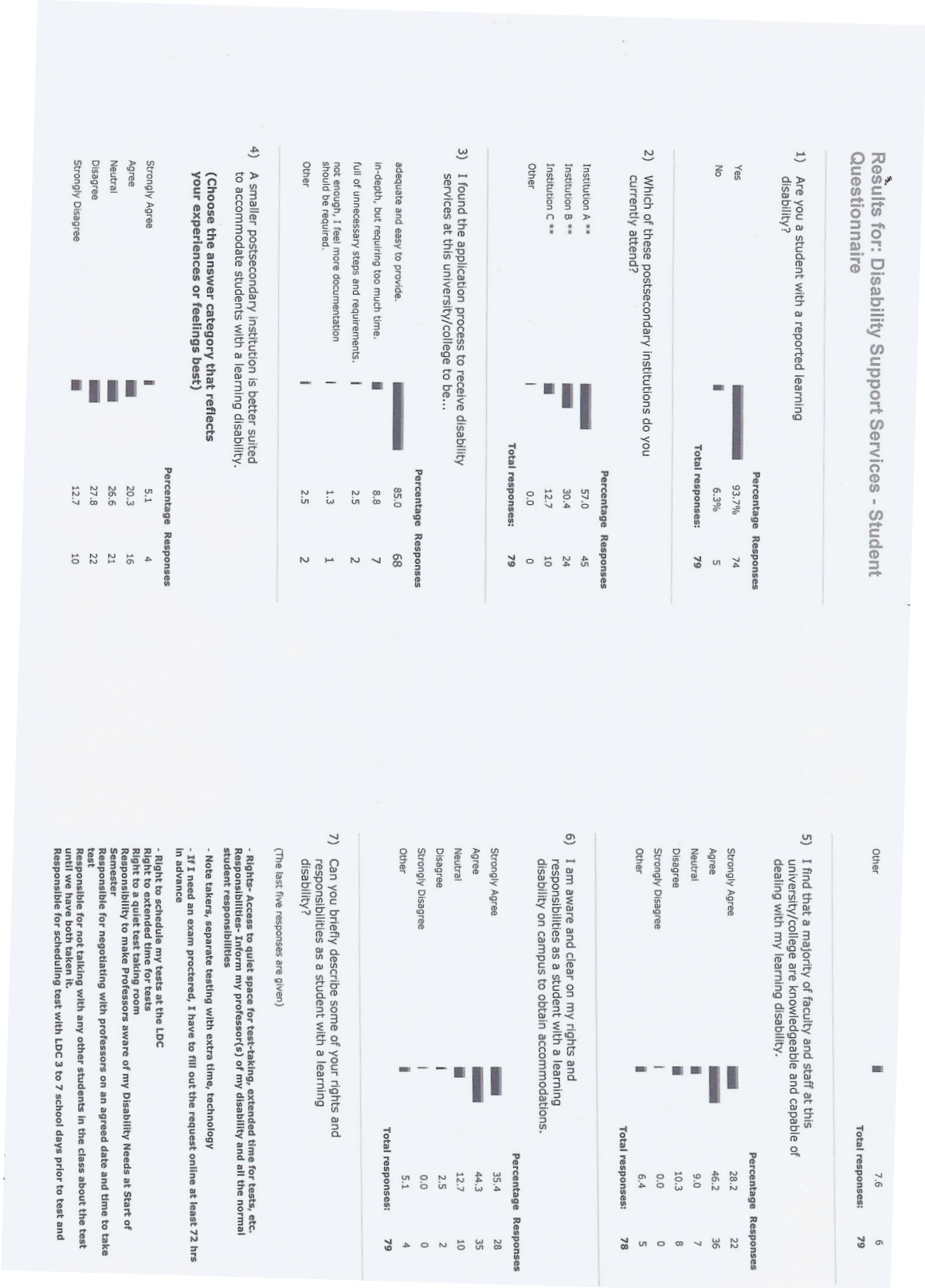
- An in-depth look at students' means of transitioning from high school to university/college, a comparison between students with a learning disability and peers who have no disability. *Have any preparations been taken? Where do they encounter their greatest struggles? Where do they turn for emotional and academic support?*
- Observe the installation of assessment services into the disability support services on a single or multiple campuses. *What assessment services, if any, were already in existence? What and/or who is being assessed? Who's responsible for administering the services and who is responsible for analyzing and 'publishing' the data? Are any forms of accountability tied into the assessment's results?*
- Investigate disability support services at institutions across state lines. *What policies are in place? Do policies differ from state to state? Do services differ from state to state?*
- Taken to a global arena, investigate how other countries service students with a learning disability pursuing postsecondary education. *What policies are in place? Is there a continuation of policy from the compulsory years to the postsecondary education level? What are the organizational designs of their disability support services?*

Final words:

*"In a perfect, universally designed world, perhaps there would be no need for a specialized program facilitating support services that provide equal access to university programs for students with disabilities. However, until that day arrives, all U.S. colleges need to take affirmative steps to ensure that students with disabilities have access to their educational programs and services on an equal basis with other students" (Duffy & Gugerty, 2005: 89).*

# Appendices

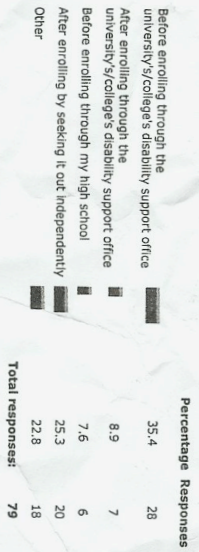
## Appendix 1 – Student Questionnaire and Data



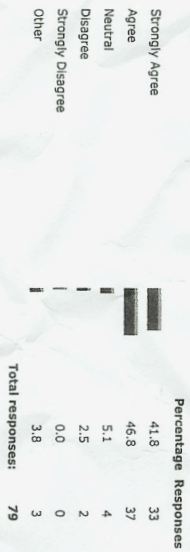


during hours they are open  
 - To have my learning disability and information be kept confidential. To receive the necessary accommodations.

8) When and how did you become aware of disability support services at your school?



9) The Disability Support Services office at my school provides enough support for students with a learning disability to succeed.

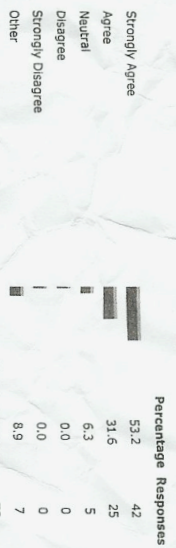


10) My university/college and the disability support services office offer valuable courses and/or tutoring opportunities to aid me in school.

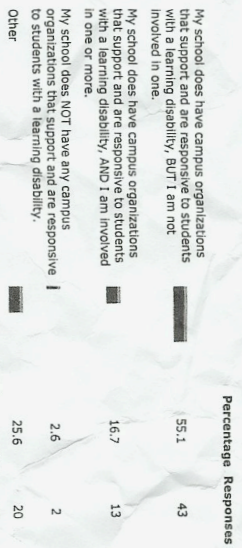


11) I have been given appropriate accommodations since reporting my learning disability. (i.e.,

extended testing times, provided note-takers, etc.)



12) Please select one of the following in regards to campus organizations...

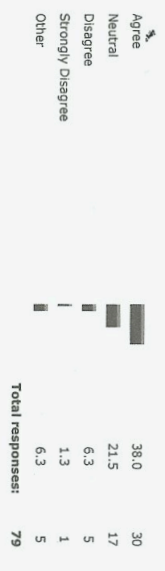


13) The majority of faculty and staff on this campus are sensitive regarding learning disability-related issues.

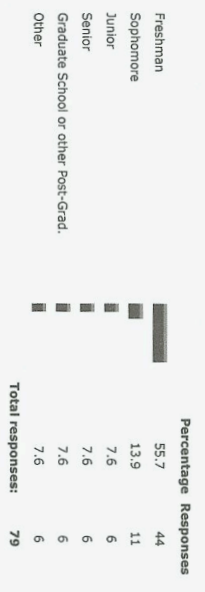


14) The general campus climate - with respect to understanding, sensitivity, and acceptance of students with disabilities - has positively affected my success as a student with a learning disability.

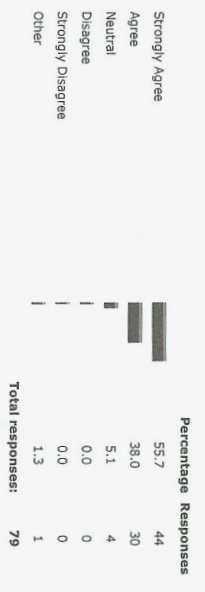




15) In what year did you first report your learning disability to your university/college?



16) How many times a year would you say you are in contact with your disability support services office or coordinator?



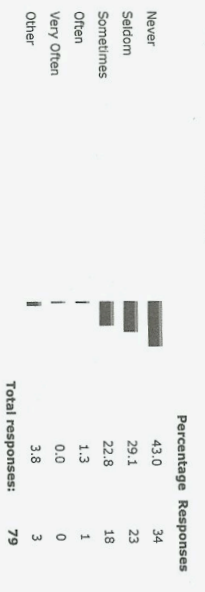
17) The disability support services office/coordinator listen and respond to student questions, evaluations and feedback in a respectable time and manner.

18) Could you describe the actions, if any, you have taken as an individual (outside of the support you receive from the DSS office) to limit the affects your learning disability has or has had on your education in college?  
(The last five responses are given)

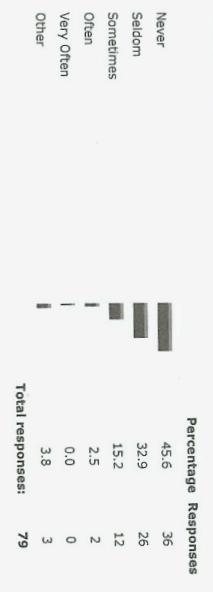
- Counseling, discussing possible negative affects of my disability with professors at beginning of each term (not just turning in my disability form to them)
- Change in study habits and amount of time spent studying, buying different books and materials than I would have before so I will be able to learn more easily
- Extra time studying and utilizing external books and support materials for various learning styles (audio, visual, etc.)
- I purchased a lightscribe pen that records audio and video of whats written on special paper
- get organized and spend the time necessary studying. I try to be proactive and show some motivation towards trying to be successful. most instructors are willing to help someone that is trying. I think this appoche has helped the most.

19) The next four questions (19-22) reflect your experiences at this institution as a student with a learning disability.

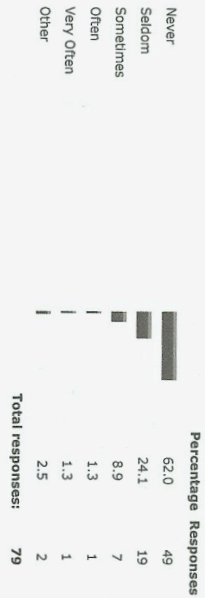
The way people talk to me makes me angry.  
(Choose the answer category that reflects your experiences or feelings best)



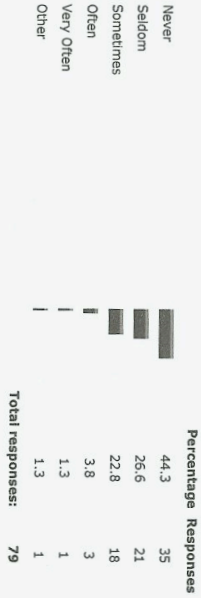
20) People make me feel embarrassed.



21) I keep away from other people because they are not nice to me.



22) I worry about the way people act towards me.



23) Can you describe, if any, major barriers during your time at your current university/college as a result of having a learning disability? (i.e. with professors, course loads)

(The last five responses are given)

- My biggest problem is that the semester scheduling isn't very conducive to my learning style. I do MUCH better in shorter summer classes, I think because I only have one or two subjects at a time to worry about.
- The volume of material to learn
- I've been told, "oh well, that won't affect you" and since my disability accommodation relates to absences, I have had Professors say things like: "Well, if you had been here you wouldn't be counted! Ask another student, I won't waste my class time dealing with you." The questions were about an assignment and it was horrible experience. I just quit asking any questions in that course. She said things like that so many times, and I was rarely out, even though I was quite ill much of that semester.
- I get overloaded with information and forget what I just learned
- One professor did not want me to audio tape her lectures and it was an accommodation that I had. I asked to disability office and they corresponded by e-mail with the professor to further explain the purpose of taping. After that the professor had me sign a form that I would only use them for personal use. She was afraid that she would get out on the internet, like on t-tube or something. We came to respect each other all is well.

24) What would you change, if anything, or add to your school's services to students with a disability to better support students with a learning disability?

(The last five responses are given)

- I attended NU for years before I even knew that my disability qualified me for disability services. I wish I would've been aware of that much sooner- I think I could have graduated by now if I'd known about the services available to me.
- None
- Have the LDC give the professors the letters instead of the students because it makes you stand out from day one. It sets you apart and allows for conversation about the letter when other students are present, which is inappropriate.
- make sure there is someone to take notes

Programs to help remediate the learning disabilities. Like Project Success at University of Wisconsin Oshkosh. I know that it is expensive but so is not being able to read and write

25) Gender:



26) Age:

(The last five responses are given)

- 24
- 24
- 26
- 24
- 28

27) Please provide your reported learning disability/disabilities:

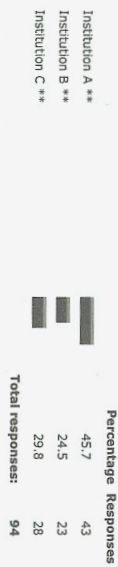
(The last five responses are given)

- Dyslexia
- Anxiety disorder, depression
- Visual Learning Disability
- Neurological
- Traumatic Brain Injury, Cognitive Thinking Disorder, Chronic Headache Disease.

## Appendix 2 – Faculty Member Questionnaire and Data

### Results for: Disability Support Services - Faculty Questionnaire

1) At what university/college are you currently employed?

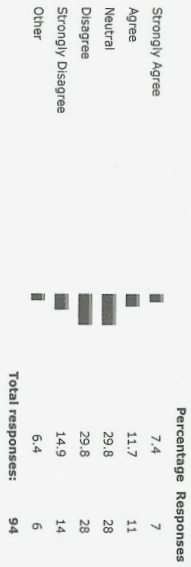


2) Are you considered an adjunct or full-time faculty member?



3) A smaller postsecondary institution is better suited to accommodate students with a learning disability.

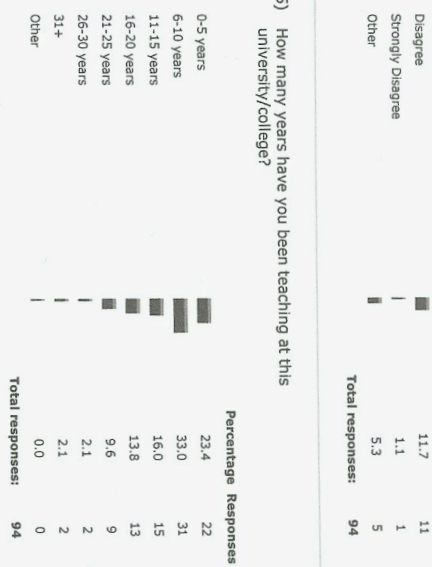
(Choose the answer category that reflects your experiences or feelings best)



4) The established institutional policies and practices at this school are sufficient enough for students with a learning disability to succeed.



5) How many years have you been teaching at this university/college?



6) I am knowledgeable about 'learning disabilities' and the different accommodations needed between them and physical disabilities.



7) I am aware and clear on my rights and responsibilities in teaching students with a learning disability on this campus.



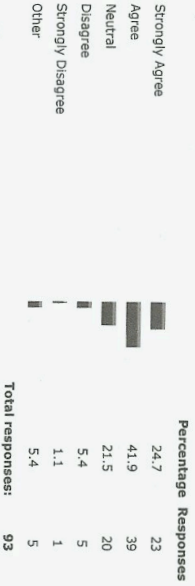
8) Can you briefly describe some of your rights and responsibilities in teaching students with a learning disability?  
(The last five responses are given)

- Accommodate for different learning methods, especially in testing situations (e.g. more time allowed, different location, different method of delivery, such as orally)
- If I receive from our DSS Office a letter indicating that a particular student should receive certain accommodations, I then am responsible for providing these if appropriate for my class. I have a right to refuse an accommodation request directly from a student without such a letter.
- To provide all students with the resources needed to learn and to treat all students the same.
- My understanding is that for students w/ a learning disability...we just try to "level" the playing field for them. The learning disability should not be a barrier to their capacity to learn.
- Responsibilities: Teaching methods must be designed for and respond to students with diverse abilities and learning styles.
- Rights: Students who need an accommodation must register with MSU's disability services and notify me.

9) I am aware of and often in contact with the office(s) at my university/college that I can contact to obtain information and guidance in teaching students with a learning disability.



10) The Disability Support Services office at this school provides enough support to faculty members to adequately teach students with a learning disability.



11) How many times a year are you in contact with your institution's Disability Support Services office or coordinator?



12) I have attended valuable professional development training and/or classes regarding teaching students with a learning disability.



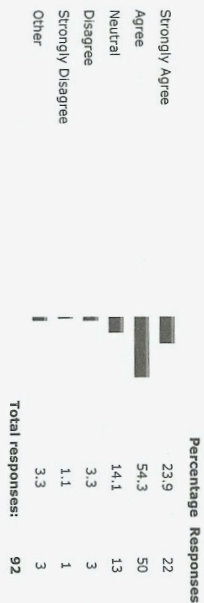
13) What forms of support or resources do you feel are further necessary to adequately provide you with the skills needed to teach students with a learning disability?

- (The last five responses are given)
- The on-line training that we require for all employees is good, but we c some kind of periodic training that is a refresher/update required for lon employees.
- Discuss different teaching techniques.
- none that I know of.
- Probably something related to the psychological aspect of working w/ w/ a particular type of disability. Sometimes, it's hard to know if the stu "genuine" in their disability versus using the disability to manipulate the circumstances! I know we are not allowed to know exactly what the disa but when you have a student taking tests in class w/ the other students wonder if they wouldn't be better off to take it at the testing center, for where they might be more successful. If you knew the student had a pe Problem...as an instructor, maybe you could reach out to that student on information in a different manner.
- For students with disabilities related to reading and writing, I would li specialized tutoring. Right now, these students are given "more time" t exams (proctored by Disabilities Services) or provided audio tapes for t this doesn't really seem to address larger learning issues.

14) I frequently make modifications and/or accommodations for students with a learning disability.



15) The general campus environment is accommodating and accepting to students with a learning disability.



16) The majority of students with a learning disability are responsible and clear in communicating their needs.



17) The Disability Support Services office/coordinator listens to and responds to faculty questions, evaluations and/or feedback in a responsible and adequate manner.

Percentage Responses



18) Questions 18 and 19 are general background questions for presenting the data.



19) Age:



20) Are there any additional comments and/or information you would like to add in response to any of the above questions or to the topic of students with a learning disability pursuing postsecondary education?

(The last five responses are given)

- I do not teach many students anymore, but even when I did, the disabilities and accommodations I dealt with were never extreme.
- The only problems I am aware of happen when students try to claim LDs AFTER the fact. I sit on a committee that hears appeals from students regarding requirements for LD for math, let's say, during their final semester of study they call in even visited the Center for LDS, simply because they have failed without taking several times. I don't know if this is a misunderstanding on the part of students or an attempt to get around the rules (or some of both, in a large group of students). And I don't know how to solve it, since we don't hear from these students until they claim they are "desperate" to graduate and "must" have a math waiver (or whatever). We usually tell them they must visit the LDS division, seek testing, and go from there, but of course that requires that they remain in the university beyond their proposed graduation date, and they are not happy, but so it goes. In the cases of students who work through the LDS division,

## Appendix 3 – DSS Coordinator Semi-Structured Interview Script

### Introduction:

- Provide background and purpose of my research
- Establish an understanding with the interviewee of their role in the research
- Present to the interviewee that he/she will obtain complete anonymity

1. Do you understand the purpose of my research and that by answering my questions you are giving oral consent to the information you provide?
2. Do you understand that you are able to pass on any questions, and can back-out of the interview at anytime?
3. Are you clear about how to contact both I and/or the University of Oslo regarding questions/concerns about your participation in my research?

### Semi-Structured Survey Questions:

4. What are your legal responsibilities as the \_\_\_\_\_ at \_\_\_\_\_ university/college? What are the legal responsibilities of your office at \_\_\_\_\_ university/college?
5. How are the disability services organized at \_\_\_\_\_ university/college? Can you provide an illustration of the organizational structure(s) between your office and the university/college (administration, departments, faculty, and students)?
6. Who is responsible and for what at each level of the DSS ‘hierarchy’ (from university/college level down to the individual student)?
7. How closely do you work with either the ADA official and/or ADA office at your university/college?
8. What kind of support and guidance does your office provide most commonly to faculty? most commonly to students? Do you feel the support/guidance is effective and sufficient?  
*(Professional development programs....how many faculty are usually in attendance?)*
9. What is the frequency and intensity of services and supports to faculty? to students?
10. Can you identify some barriers to student retention and success?
11. What are the components of the services you offer that contribute most to academic success and student satisfaction?
12. Are the faculty, administration and students equipped with the necessary knowledge, information, and resources to adequately provide support services to students with disabilities? How is this information generally distributed?
13. Are faculty and student’s voices often heard? If so, what forms of evaluation exist and which are most utilized for the services offered to faculty and to students?  
*(Are any student surveys and/or responses available for I to look at?)*
14. Do you feel your office(s) lacks any resources necessary to provide adequate or improved services to faculty and students? If so, what resources are lacking?
15. Do you feel there exists an established cooperative environment between the DSS office(s) and the faculty/students at your institution? How does communication most commonly take place?
16. Does your office/institution provide courses for students or even specifically for students with a learning disability to aid in the transitioning to university/college? If so, what are some of the main lessons taught in these courses (i.e. what are the key issues addressed?) Does your institution have campus organizations for learning disabled students?
17. How many students with a learning disability are currently registered through your office at \_\_\_\_\_?
18. What is the graduation rate for students with a learning disability at \_\_\_\_\_?
19. Is there any, and if so how, follow-up with the accommodations requested and the satisfaction with the accommodations received and/or the implementation by faculty to students?
20. Have there been any big changes in policy/practice w/n the past 5-10 years at your school?
21. Are your services ever evaluated? How often and by whom?
22. Do you often administer evaluations to obtain students’ responses and/or faculty responses?
23. What do you feel might hinder student success, structures, policies and/or the practice?
24. What do students with a learning disability have the most problems w/?  
*(i.e. course loads, independence...?)*
25. Is your office able to implement policies/practices independently of university/college approval?
26. Do you feel federal/state policies go far enough in providing ‘equity’ to students with disabilities?
27. Faculty and staff are knowledgeable about learning disabilities and the differences between them and other disabilities?

**Structured Questions:**

28. A majority of faculty and staff at this university/college are knowledgeable regarding learning disabilities.  
Strongly Agree – Agree – Neutral – Disagree – Strongly Disagree
29. The size in terms of the number of students enrolled, of this university/college plays a positive role in the success of students with a learning disability.  
Strongly Agree – Agree – Neutral – Disagree – Strongly Disagree
30. The majority of students are aware of their rights and responsibilities.  
Strongly Agree – Agree – Neutral – Disagree – Strongly Disagree
31. We offer valuable professional development training and/or classes for (1) faculty (2) students  
(1) Strongly Agree – Agree – Neutral – Disagree – Strongly Disagree  
(2) Strongly Agree – Agree – Neutral – Disagree – Strongly Disagree
32. The DSS office listens and responds to students/faculty questions and feedback in respectable time.  
Strongly Agree – Agree – Neutral – Disagree – Strongly Disagree
33. The general campus climate – with respect to understanding, sensitivity, and acceptance of students with disabilities – is positive.  
Strongly Agree – Agree – Neutral – Disagree – Strongly Disagree

**Conclusion:**

Do you have any further questions and/or comments to add?

Thank you for your time! I shall keep you updated on the progress of my research and shall be in touch if further information is needed. A final thesis shall be submitted to you and your office as gratitude for your aid and participation.

*NB! If further questioning is needed for either clarification or for the further gathering of information, I shall inform the IRB of any and all additions.*

**Source:**

Wilson, K.E., Kregel, J.J., & Getzel, E.E. (1999). *VCU External review final report: Services for students with disabilities*. Richmond: Virginia Commonwealth University, Rehabilitation, Research, and Training Center and School of Education.



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