

Introduction
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Leadership within the nation's business and education communities has long pointed to the need for highly educated, skilled workers as the nation seeks to succeed in the increasingly competitive global economy. Postsecondary education has been described as, "America's traditional gateway to the professions, more challenging jobs, and higher wages" (U.S. Department of Education Strategic Plan, 1998-2002). Yet, persons with disabilities have often experienced limited access to and success in postsecondary education programs, resulting in poor employment outcomes.

Unfortunately, insufficient information has existed regarding the availability and use of educational supports and how such supports might affect the successful access and performance of persons with disabilities within postsecondary educational and subsequent employment environments. The Center on Disability Studies, University of Hawaii, in collaboration with the Institute on Community Integration, University of Minnesota, Institute on Community Inclusion, Children's Hospital/University of Massachusetts/Boston, Rehabilitation Research & Training Center at Virginia Commonwealth University, and the American Association on Higher Education & Disabilities (AHEAD), have responded to this critical area of need over the past five years with the conduct of a Rehabilitation Research & Training Center (RRTC) focused upon **educational supports that increase access and improve outcomes for persons with disabilities in postsecondary education programs.**

The focus of the RRTC has been on the following goals: (1) Examine and evaluate the current status of educational supports, including (a) individual academic accommodations, (b) adaptive equipment, (c) case management and coordination, (d) advocacy, and (e) personal counseling and career advising; (2) Identify effective support practices and models of delivery that contribute to successful access, performance, and retention/completion of postsecondary programs; (3) Identify specific barriers to the provision of disability-related services, including policy and funding requirements; (4) Assess effectiveness of promising educational practices and disability-related services that are important to career mobility and success in the workplace; (5) Test the effectiveness of specific models of delivery that are believed to increase the accessibility of educational supports and innovative technologies; (6) Identify the types of educational and transitional assistance that postsecondary programs provide to improve educational and subsequent labor market success; (7) Provide training, technical assistance, and information to educational support personnel, public and private rehabilitation personnel, career placement specialists, and students with disabilities based on the findings and implications of the proposed research program, and (8) Implement a consumer-driven empowerment evaluation plan.

The RRTC research program was based on an inclusive conceptual framework and the use of both quantitative and qualitative research designs. In addition to

conducting national surveys, participatory action research teams conducted field studies within diverse postsecondary educational settings inclusive of all disability types and levels, representative of urban, rural, and suburban sites, and varied across ethnic and racial populations. Further, the RRTC used an innovative and integrated training, technical assistance, and dissemination model to ensure the application and sustainability of research-proven policy and practice.

This forum of papers was developed and peer reviewed for the *Review of Disability Studies (RDS)* and presents a range of findings from studies conducted through the RRTC. These include findings concerning postsecondary support provision in the areas of assistive technology, use of natural institutional and family/community supports, and the preparation of faculty to be universally prepared to support all students with diverse learning and behavior needs. Several papers focus on those support variables that make a contribution to improved performance and academic success within a postsecondary setting. These papers provide an in-depth view of the struggles and successes of persons with disabilities within postsecondary education settings. Other papers focus on the value and role of advocacy and self-determination skills for persons with disabilities in postsecondary education and employment settings.

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