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Supporting Autism Spectrum Disorder Students With Their Academic and Social Transition at Community Colleges

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Supporting Autism Spectrum Disorder Students With Their Academic and Social Transition at Community Colleges

Abstract

Students diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder have been entering colleges and universities at an increased rate during the past 20 years. This increase necessitates greater awareness and the development of intentional interventions that support the needs of these students so they are able to make a transition from the K-12 environment to institutions of higher learning. Having a transition plan ahead of enrollment is favorable for these students. Many students with disabilities and their parents feel a college campus does not include the same level of support as provided in high school and they encounter challenges during that critical first-year transition of college, which often results in them dropping out (Ciccantelli, 2011). This study explored the services students with autism spectrum disorder receive at institutions of higher education, from the perspective of the Directors of offices of disability/accessibility. This study also proposes practices that assist these students so they can be successful at the postsecondary level. The findings from the study speak to the role parents, students, and advance preparations play in ensuring a favorable outcome for these students. It also emphasizes the students' own responsibility to self-advocate for services and accommodations needed at the collegiate level.

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By

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of the requirements for the degree
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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my village! To all the people who loved and supported me throughout this journey, thank you is not enough. Praising my GOD, through Him all things are possible. I want to thank all the participants who shared their knowledge and expertise with me. For all that they do to serve a very special population of students, you are all my heroes. To my dissertation committee chair, Dr. Moffett, thank you for the guidance and the still voice in the storm; you are appreciated. To Dr. Stein, my committee member and mentor, words cannot describe how much your guidance and support means to me. I am humbled by your grace and wisdom each and every day. To my friends and family, thank you for understanding when I could not make it to family dinners, birthday parties, girls night out because “I had homework”—you are all simply the best. Maria P, I hope you know how much I love you. I am so very proud of the young woman you are. Team Make It Happen, you are all phenomenal women in many ways. To Maynard, my loving husband, friend, and sounding board. Your support during this process was immeasurable. Thanks for understanding all the dates Mommy had to miss for school and for jumping in whenever and wherever needed. I am blessed to call you mine. Last but certainly not least to my daughters, Olivia and Ashley. You are my only reason for doing this dissertation. My love for you both is more than I can measure. Thank you for loving Mommy through this, although it was not always fun. You both made me tea in the winter, sang to me at night to keep me up, wrote me notes of encouragement, and asked me “Mommy, can you be my doctor after you are done with

school?” That made me laugh and you both make me so proud to be your Mommy!

Ashley, autism spectrum disorder will not stop you from becoming the superstar you are.

I live, dream, and believe because of you.

Biographical Sketch

Tasheka Sutton-Young currently works as the Director for Student Life and Athletics at one of the Community Colleges within the City University of New York (CUNY) system. Mrs. Sutton-Young attended Iona College located in New Rochelle, New York for both her Bachelor and Master degrees in communication obtained in 1999 and 2001. She enrolled in the Ed.D. Program in Executive Leadership at St. John Fisher College in the summer of 2013. Her research focused on Students with autism spectrum disorder and their transition to postsecondary education, specifically community colleges. Dr. Josephine Moffett and Dr. Jerrold Stein supervised her research. She is the mother to two beautiful daughters, one of whom has been diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder, and her passion for this topic comes from working day-to-day with her youngest daughter, which gives her intimate knowledge of this topic. This offers an insider perspective from the lens of a parent on the research. She is an advocate for girls with autism spectrum disorder, and works tirelessly to educate parents on services and support systems available to them.

Abstract

Students diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder have been entering colleges and universities at an increased rate during the past 20 years. This increase necessitates greater awareness and the development of intentional interventions that support the needs of these students so they are able to make a transition from the K-12 environment to institutions of higher learning. Having a transition plan ahead of enrollment is favorable for these students. Many students with disabilities and their parents feel a college campus does not include the same level of support as provided in high school and they encounter challenges during that critical first-year transition of college, which often results in them dropping out (Ciccantelli, 2011). This study explored the services students with autism spectrum disorder receive at institutions of higher education, from the perspective of the Directors of offices of disability/accessibility.

This study also proposes practices that assist these students so they can be successful at the postsecondary level. The findings from the study speak to the role parents, students, and advance preparations play in ensuring a favorable outcome for these students. It also emphasizes the students' own responsibility to self-advocate for services and accommodations needed at the collegiate level.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction

While students with disabilities are being prepared for the academic expectations of college through their Individual Education Programs (IEPs), they are ill prepared for the social and psychological dimensions of their higher education experience (Wehman, 2008). The transition to college is stressful for many students, as Conley (2008) stated: “The likelihood that students will make a successful transition to college is believed to be a function of their readiness, or the degree to which previous educational and personal experience have equipped them for the expectations and demands they will encounter in college” (p. 3). Hadley (2011) pointed out that newly entering students must accustom themselves to the intellectual and social settings of a college environment. Their adjustment to college will require some level of physical and emotional separation from many people and places that were important to them during high school. Students are expected to adjust and accept the expectations of college life and the rules that accompany this experience (Hadley, 2011).

Over the past 20 years, high school students with disabilities have been attending college and universities in large numbers, doubling their participation over two decades (Hadley, 2011). This increase has resulted in young people with disabilities enrolling in more challenging coursework to prepare them for life beyond secondary education. Despite laying the groundwork for the academic transition, students with disabilities face

a series of challenges as they try to plot a course to successful completion of a postsecondary education (Ciccantelli, 2011b).

These adjustments pose a challenge for students with disabilities, who more often than not have a great deal of trouble understanding their disability and how to express their needs. Students may not know how their disability may affect them once they are in college (Hadley, 2011). This is where an Office of Accessibility plays an integral role in the transition process of these students.

According to the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS) (2006), offices of accessibility/disability serve a significant function for the college and the students who require these services. These offices are there to ensure that students have access to all curricular and co-curricular opportunities throughout the institution. The Office of Accessibility must engage in student learning and development that are purposeful and holistic (CAS, 2006). CAS outlines 14 key principles for a disability support services area, emphasizing that the ultimate purpose of this area is “fostering and enhancing student learning, development, and achievement and in general to promote good citizenship (Brown, 2012, p. 71). The Association on Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD) is consistent with the CAS standards and offers professionals an array of services and policy development to support students with disabilities in higher education (Brown, 2012).

These two organizations have created a blueprint for an effective Office of Disability Services. AHEAD has eight standards that are “intended to enhance services provided for college students with disabilities by directing program evaluation and development efforts, improving personal preparation and staff development, and

expanding the vision of disability services at the postsecondary level” (Brown, 2012, p. 70). These organizations advise that there is mounting pressure on offices of disability services because of more students with special needs enrolling in college (Brown, 2012).

Over the past 10 years, institutions of higher education (IHEs) have seen an increase in the number of students that their offices of accessibility support (Ciccantelli, 2011b). This increase may be attributed to a steady rise in autism spectrum disorder (ASD) diagnoses throughout the country. ASD “refers to a group of neurodevelopmental disorders that affect development in the areas of social interaction, communication, and behavior” (Adreon & Durocher, 2007, p. 272). These diagnostic criteria were changed in 2013 when the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5)* (American Psychiatric Association, 2013) published a new definition for ASD. According to the manual, “autism spectrum disorder is defined in terms of two categories: persistent impairment in reciprocal social communication and social interaction plus restricted, repetitive patterns of behavior. Both deficits present from early childhood” (Baker, 2013, p. 1090).

Along with the U.S. Department of Education, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) in 2002 estimated that 1 out of every 150 children in the United States had ASD (VanBergeijk, Klin, & Volkmar, 2008). In 2009, the CDC reported that 1 in 110 children were diagnosed with ASD based on data collected in 2006. Three years later, the report stated that 1 in 88 children were diagnosed from data collected in 2008 (CDC, 2012). The numbers estimated from these reports showed that the prevalence of ASD diagnoses has increased 23% from 2006-2008 and 78% from 2002-2008 (CDC, 2012).

The reality is that a large number of college-bound students are diagnosed with ASD, and IHEs are challenged to meet the needs of these students. On the campus, this charge falls mostly to the offices of accessibility/disability within these institutions. These offices must do outreach and training because it is important for faculty and staff to create an academic and co-curricular support system for these students. Student involvement, social integration, and campus environment can contribute to a successful and satisfactory transition to college for this population (Ciccantelli, 2011a).

Obtaining a postsecondary education offers many benefits to students with ASD, including the option to improve one's ability to earn a greater income and to create and build lifelong networks (Ciccantelli, 2011a; Gretzel & Wehman, 2005). For these reasons, students are seeking entry into these institutions. Many students with disabilities, however, may feel a college campus does not include the same level of support that is provided in high school (Ciccantelli, 2011a). Students with disabilities in college are covered by Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, which states that colleges need to provide reasonable accommodation for students with disabilities (Hadley, 2011), whereas K-12 public schools are mandated by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) to educate and accommodate students with ASD.

Both Section 504 and Title II of the Rehabilitation Act require school systems to provide accommodations and make modifications to address students with disabilities. There is a level of comfort during these years. Parents are seen as advocates and allies to help both their children and the children's teachers (Adreon & Durocher, 2007). During the early years, parents and educational personnel work collaboratively to ensure that students are meeting learning milestones. Using this model allows for structure and

organization, which is of the utmost importance for students with ASD (Ciccantelli, 2011a). The U.S. Department of Education (2014) stated that:

. . . the IEP creates an opportunity for teachers, parents, school administrators, related services personnel, and students (when appropriate) to work together to improve educational results for children with disabilities. The IEP is the cornerstone of a quality education for each child with a disability.

Structure and organization do not extend to IHEs. The transition for many students with ASD from K-12 to college is very difficult. While K-12 schools work with parents and students to help children progress through the academic program, IHEs often provide less structure, less support, and fewer opportunities for parental engagement. Instead, students need to self-disclose their disability and serve as self-advocates (Kelly & Joseph, 2012). The ability to self-advocate is an important transition issue for students with ASD. Leaving the confines of a public school system to now reaching out for accommodations through effective communication is an area of weakness for this student population (Adreon & Durocher, 2007).

Problem Statement

There are differences between mandated services in the K-12 system and reasonable accommodations in higher education. These variances are problematic for students with ASD because one major issue with this population is effective communication. Mandated services in the K-12 system require an IEP as well as parental input. Reasonable accommodations in colleges and universities rely on a student to disclose and advocate for his or her needs. Are IHEs doing enough to ensure these students meet their goals? How are offices of accessibility prepared to handle the influx

of students with ASD coming to IHEs? Are these institutions effectively helping students with ASD transition into their first year of college? How do IHEs ascertain the needs of students who are diagnosed with ASD, and how do student support offices determine if they adequately offer services that address the needs of these students?

Many colleges do not request a student to disclose his or her disability on the admission application; instead, many institutions wait for a student to be admitted to the college before asking about a disability, and many students do not disclose their disability. This process is particularly harmful to students with ASD because they are expected to use communication and interpersonal skills to make successful transitions. These skills are well documented as an area of weakness or limitation in this population of students (Hadley, 2011).

Theoretical Rationale

This study examined how offices of accessibility assist students with ASD transition to the college environment through the lens of a student development/psychosocial theory as well as two microtheories, Schlossberg's transition theory and Sanford's challenge and support theory. The study examined how offices of accessibility and their practitioners facilitate and oversee the process to provide support to these students in their transition from secondary to postsecondary education.

Student development theory. Student development theory looks at the way a student grows, progresses, and increases his or her development capabilities as a direct result of enrolling in an IHE (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010). Student development theory includes three factors: change, growth, and development. Evans et al. suggested that "Student Development is the application of human development concepts

in postsecondary settings so that everyone involved can master increasingly complex developmental tasks, achieve self-direction, and become interdependent” (p. 6). Student development theories can be used to help better understand, support, and serve students.

According to Evans et al. (2010), student development theory should be able to respond to four questions in order to be effective:

1. What interpersonal and intrapersonal changes occur while the student is in college?
2. What factors lead to this development?
3. What aspects of the college environment encourage or retard growth?
4. What developmental outcomes should we strive to achieve in college? (p. 7)

Student development theories can be categorized under three major lenses. The first, the psychosocial theory lens, looks at the interpersonal and identity development of students. The cognitive-structural lens illustrates changes in the way students make decisions. Finally, the student development theory of typology looks at how students view and relate to the world around them (Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito, 1998). Evans et al. (2010) stated that the student development lens helps educators view students in context and gives suggestions for how to provide guidance both in and out of the classroom.

Astin’s involvement theory I-E-O model. Alexandra Astin (1977), author of *Four Critical Years*, addressed the need for students to be involved in their community in order to be successful in college. During a 10-year nationwide longitudinal study of student development that looked at student outcomes and attitudes, Astin developed a model for use by professionals and policymakers to help create programs that support

positive student growth and development. The main notion of Astin's theory was built on three key components: the Individual (I), the Environment (E), and their Outcomes (O). Astin spoke to the change and development that take place in a student as a result of being on a college campus and being engaged. The I emphasizes the Individual and what he or she brings to a campus—unique demographics, backgrounds, and previous experiences. The E speaks to the environment and all the experiences that a student undergoes during his or her college tenure—most importantly, the experiences to which a college or university deliberately and intentionally exposes students. The O is for outcomes, which take into account the “result” or change the individual manifests after being exposed to environmental variables.

Schlossberg's transition theory. Several theories have contributed to the student development framework. This study focused on the transition to college life. Nancy Schlossberg's transition theory tackled and provided insight into elements of transition, looking at the individual, the environment, and the support systems in place during a transition period (Evans et al., 2010). Of the three student development theories, Schlossberg's theory can be viewed through the psychosocial lens. Schlossberg believed there was a need “to develop this framework that would facilitate an understanding of adults in transition and aid them in connecting to the help they needed to cope with the ‘ordinary and extraordinary process of living’” (Evans et al., 2010, p. 213). Drawing from other researchers such as Levison (1978, in Evans et al., 2010) and Neugarten (1979, in Evans et al., 2010), Schlossberg created an integrated theory which expanded the student development framework.

Schlossberg's transition theory, deriving from crisis theory, examined the elements that comprise a transition, including different forms of transition and the process and factors that contribute to a transition. Schlossberg presented the transition process as having a three-part module: approaching change, taking stock, and taking charge (Evans et al., 2010; Schlossberg, 1984). During the taking stock phase, Schlossberg introduced the 4 S's in her view of transition: situation, self, support, and strategies. The 4 S system rests on many assumptions: while no one factor is essential for coping with change, many factors play a role in a person's situation, support, self, and strategies (Chickering & Schlossberg, 1995). Chickering and Schlossberg (1995) pointed out that transition is ever-changing and the resources or deficits a person may have in the 4 S's will change over time. Deficits can turn into resources and resources can turn into deficits during a transition.

When taking stock, the situation aspect evaluates the individual's situation and considers the following factors during transition:

1. *Trigger*, or what brought about this transition;
 2. *Timing*, or whether the transition was viewed as having good or bad timing;
 3. *Control*, or what is in the control of the individual undergoing the transition;
 4. *Role Change*, or whether a role change is happening. Is it a loss or a gain to the individual? and
 5. *Duration*, or is the transition seen as permanent, temporary, or uncertain?
- Previous experience with a similar transition, concurrent stress, and an assessment of who or what is looked upon as accountable for the transition also plays a role. (Evans et al., 2010; Schlossberg, 1984)

The second S in Schlossberg's system, *Self*, looks at the importance of personal and demographic characteristics and how they influence a person's view of life. *Support*, the third S in the model, looks at social support for the person in transition and examines intimate relationships, family, friends, and institutions.

Strategies, the fourth and final S, describes the coping responses one would use during a transition. Schlossberg divided this concept into three categories: those who modify a situation, those who control the problem, and those who aid in managing the stress in the aftermath. During this phase, individuals also use coping modes, which include information seeking, direct action, inhibition of action, and intrapsychic behavior (Chickering & Schlossberg, 1995; Evans et al., 2010).

Evans et al. (2010) explained taking charge by using the terminology of "moving in," "moving through," and "moving out" to explain phases of transition. Working with Goodman (1995), Schlossberg also defined transition as an event or a nonevent that produces change in relationships, roles, habits, and expectations. Transition can include

both positive and negative experiences for an individual during the process. Researchers have used this transition theory to explain “friendsickness,” which is caused by moving away from friends and family during the first-year experience (Crissman Ishler, 2004; Schlossberg, 1984). Others have used the theory to view shifts in student behavior during the transition from senior year in high school to the first year of college (Crissman Ishler, 2004).

Schlossberg presented a framework in which to understand college students and their movement through their transitional phases for the adult learner. The framework is comprehensive and integrative, and draws from other theoretical backgrounds. The theory relies on the individual’s perspective of transition and development. While the theory is widely known and used by student affairs professionals, Evans et al. (2010) emphasized criticisms of Schlossberg’s theory and stated its complexities. Pointing out the lack of formal assessment tools has given researchers reasons to pause when contemplating ways to test the merits of the theory. There is a need to examine the theory through the eyes of a more diverse student population, particularly students with disabilities.

The critical nature of IHE support for students with ASD is enhanced by another common characteristic of this group of students: they often have incredible difficulties with transitions (VanBergeijk et al., 2008). These students need a great deal of time to prepare for any changes. To ensure that this transition takes place successfully, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) also dictated that students in special education must be provided with appropriate transition services with an outcome-based

model (Krell & Perusse, 2012). A college readiness blueprint, including a strong transition plan, is essential to the successful outcome of students in the ASD population.

Sanford's challenge and support theory. Creating a plan for ASD students during their transition from secondary to postsecondary education is significant to their adjustment; providing support during this time is of the utmost importance (Hadley, 2011). One of the first scholars to address the relationship between a college environment and a student's transition to young adulthood was psychologist Nevitt Sanford (Evans et al., 1998). Sanford discussed the process of development in two ways: "(1) Cycles of differentiation and integration and (2) Balancing support and challenge" (Evans et al., 1998, p. 7). Sanford argued that a college environment should be a developmental community where students face both challenges and support. Challenge and support focus on person-environment interaction with three developmental conditions: readiness, challenge, and support.

Sanford stated that the environment plays a pivotal role in a person's ability to be successful. The ultimate outcome is to find the range of optimal dissonance in a person's environment. The environment cannot present too many challenges for an individual; this may lead to regression and allow for less adaptive modes of behavior. If the environment seems too challenging, individuals may want to escape or ignore the situation. On the other hand, if the environment seems less challenging or easy, an individual may feel safe and satisfied with the situation, but does not develop in that atmosphere (Evans et al., 2010). Readiness emphasizes that people cannot demonstrate certain behaviors until they are ready in their own time. This phase can be a result of internal maturation or of environmental conditions (Evans et al., 1998).

Like the E in Astin's model, Sanford's microtheory of challenge and support postulates that the ability to handle challenges is a direct function of how much support is available for an individual. Colleges and universities should make students and parents aware of the support services that are offered to students to help make the transition (Andreon & Durocher, 2007).

Critics have suggested that determining the balance between support and challenge is difficult in any setting; therefore, users of any student development theories need to view each student as an individual, not a subject. Because life is complex, theories do not and cannot explain all behaviors. Practitioners should be mindful that "theory cannot be an accurate description of any specific reality, but only an approximate representation of many" (Evans et al., 1998, p. 29).

The transition from K-12 to an IHE is daunting and overwhelming for all students. That pressure is magnified for an ASD student, for whom communication is a struggle (Ciccantelli, 2011a). The American Institutes for Research (2010) pointed out that the attrition rate of first-year students falls between 30% and 50%, while the U.S. Department of Education (2014) science training indicated that first-year students were twice more likely to drop out of school than their second-year counterparts. Attrition of students with and without disabilities is important to IHEs for many reasons. O'Keefe (2013) indicated that \$6.18 billion in subsidies were paid to colleges and universities to fund students who dropped out at one year. An additional \$2.9 billion in state and federal grants were distributed to students who dropped out in the first year. Students with disabilities are listed as at risk for dropout (Heisserer & Parette, 2002). Therefore, it is of the utmost importance that IHEs do their best to ensure the safety, comfort, and support

for students with disabilities and this must be a priority for college administrators (Andreon & Durocher, 2007).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine, using a qualitative method approach, current accommodations provided to ASD students during their transition year from secondary to postsecondary institutions through offices of accessibility services. The goal of the study was to provide offices of accessibility with an avenue to ensure that this growing population of college students is served appropriately so they are retained and graduate. This includes awareness of reasonable accommodations to students with ASD and ways to improve services to this student population in IHEs.

Research Questions

Four research questions guided this study:

1. What factors contribute to the retention of first-year College students who present with ASD?
2. What services and support systems do students with ASD need to help them with their entry and transition to college?
3. What services and support systems do students with ASD need to help them succeed during their first year in college?
4. What are the best practices that college campuses utilize in order to help ASD students transition to college so they are more likely to succeed and complete?

Statement of Significance

The population of students with ASD seeking postsecondary education is growing. IHEs need to offer them support to help them acclimate and succeed. Current

research promotes the need to integrate students with ASD into the fabric of campus life. Trends suggest that while the student population is increasing, there is limited information on how to support their unique needs (Ciccantelli, 2011b; Hadley, 2011). This study sought the perspectives of staff members from offices of disability support services/accessibility to investigate factors that contribute to successful transition to college for students with ASD.

Definition of Terms

This section addresses many of the terms used in the dissertation. The definitions offer meanings for words or phrases leading to understanding the context in which these terms are used.

ADA: Americans with Disabilities Act—legislation that provides protection for those with a disability and allows them to be educated and employed without discrimination.

ASD: Autism spectrum disorder.

CAS: Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education—this Council offers standards for many areas in higher education and gives benchmarks of best practices of operation for Student Service areas.

CDC: Centers for Disease Control.

DSM-5: *Diagnostics and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (5th version)—serves as the universal authority for psychiatric diagnosis and treatment recommendations. The *DSM* offers classifications for those on the Autism spectrum.

FERPA: Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act—this law protects the privacy of students' education records. These rights transfer to the student once the student reaches 18 or attends school beyond high school.

IDEA: Individuals with Disabilities Education Act—legislation that ensures that students with a disability are provided with a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE).

IEP: Individual Education Program—mandated by IDEA that each student who presents with a disability must have an individualized plan tailored to him or her that defines objectives for that student to reach his or her educational goals.

IHE: Institutions of higher education.

Summary

Colleges and universities are mandated by Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act (Hadley, 2011) to provide equal access to students with disabilities. They commit financial and human resources to support offices of accessibility so that these offices can help students with ASD make a smoother transition to college. However, these offices cannot accomplish this goal alone. They need to invite and engage faculty, other student support services, and student peers to help support their mission (Korbel, Lucia, Wenzel, & Anderson, 2011).

Understanding the phases of transition for students during the first-year experience can be valuable to IHEs regarding retention and student development. Ensuring that students are successful during their transition is a balancing act for both the individual and the institution. Some student populations may need more support than others. Creating a transition plan grounded in theory for students with ASD will give practitioners the ability to understand better the transition that students undergo while

moving into, through, and out of higher education arenas. The campus environment can be more welcoming to students when they feel safe, supported, and encouraged as individuals, and where their disabilities can be seen as part of the diverse fabric of campus life (Hadley, 2011).

Chapter 2 provides a topical review of the literature relevant to the research. Chapter 3 describes the research methodology. Chapter 4 presents the findings of the study, and chapter 5 discusses the interpretation of results described in chapter 4.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

Introduction and Purpose

Over the past 10 years, increased attention has been given to the growing rates of diagnoses of autism. What is autism? How do we treat it? What is the cause? To address these questions, IHEs must understand the spectrum. Adreon and Durocher (2007) defined the spectrum as a continuum of symptoms that can occur in any combination that affects the individual through development in social integration, communication, or behavior. Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) refers to a group of developmental disabilities characterized by impairments in the areas of social interaction and communication, and the presence of stereotyped behaviors that can be restrictive and repetitive (Adreon & Durocher, 2007; CDC, 2012). ASD affects individuals in different ways and varies in a scale of severity.

IHEs face many day-to-day challenges to meet all student needs. This analysis of the literature covers relevant research studies that have examined students with ASD and their transition to college. The present research focused on the services provided by offices of accessibility to students with ASD in IHEs while looking at factors that lead to a successful transition. This study addressed the concern for meeting the needs of students with developmental disabilities transitioning to college.

Topic Analysis

This research was a qualitative study working from a constructivist framework. It involved looking at students with ASD and examining how offices of

accessibility/disability can assist these students as they transition to the college environment. The research was framed by the lens of a student development/psychosocial theory (Schuh, Jones, & Harper, 2010) and looked at Astin's I-E-O model (individual, environment, outcome) as well as two microtheories: Schlossberg's transition theory and Sanford's challenge and support theory.

A historical look at supporting students with special needs. The history of disability support services in higher education has gone through "its adolescence" phase and is now moving into "adulthood," according to Madaus (2011). Over the past 30 years, the field of accessibility has expanded in higher education to become its own area within most Student Affairs divisions. Madaus reported that these offices on a college campus support an estimated 11% of all students in higher education.

In 1864, President Abraham Lincoln signed into law an authorization to establish a college division at the Columbia Institution for the Deaf and Dumb (Madaus, 2011). After this first act to support those with special needs, the federal government at the end of World War I passed the Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1918. That Act led to assistance for a small number of veterans with disabilities (Chatterjee & Mitra, 1998; Madaus, 2011). It was not until 1944 when the Serviceman's Readjustment Act, most commonly known as the GI Bill of Rights, was passed that the government provided \$500 per year to qualified veterans for educational expenses, depending on years of service (Madaus, 2011). After the passing of this bill and the return home of servicemen, veteran enrollment in colleges ballooned to 52% of all college students in 1946. The number of veterans returning to college also increased the number of people attending college with a disability. This created the need for a unit to provide services on campus to

meet the needs of these students, resulting in the creation of many offices for Disability Support Services (DSS) on college campuses (Madaus, 2011).

College DSS programs continued to develop and expand services after both World War II and the Korean War with the return of more veterans and their continued enrollment into colleges. With this growth, colleges and universities created special facilities for the physically handicapped which provided outreach and services to these students. During this period, DSS became a nationwide agenda item (Chatterjee & Mitra, 1998; Madaus, 2011), but until the 1960s, much of the conversation on disability concerned physical disabilities. In 1963, Dr. Samuel Kirk coined the term “learning disabilities,” and by 1968, the U.S. government was using the term as a category of disability for students in the K-12 school system (Madaus, 2011). With this new category, services were developed for students with this diagnosis and the Education of All Handicapped Children Act (EHA) was passed in 1975.

With this new piece of legislation, the government required each child with special needs in the K-12 environment to have an Individualized Education Program (IEP). These plans would help set goals for a student’s development and required periodic assessment (Madaus, 2011). Even with these changes occurring within the K-12 arena, the pathway to postsecondary education was still not a clear one for students with disabilities.

Special education laws. Over the past two decades, the U.S. Department of Education and the U.S. government have put much effort into making postsecondary education accessible for children with disabilities. However, there continues to be a need

for legislation to help students who want to transition from high school to IHEs (Muenke, 2011).

In 1973, Congress passed the Vocational Rehabilitation Act, which stated that any program receiving federal funding could not discriminate against individuals with disabilities (Ciccantelli, 2011b; VanBergeijk et al., 2008). Congress then passed Public Law 94-142 (P.L. 94-142), called the Education of All Handicapped Children Act (EHA), which provided children with a public education (Ciccantelli, 2011b). In 1990, the P.L. 94-142 Act was reauthorized as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) to ensure that children with disabilities received equal access to educational institutions. While the law stressed equal treatment in federally funded programs, IDEA highlighted the fact that “Public schools are required to provide free, appropriate public education (FAPE) from 3 through high school or age 21, whichever comes first” (United States Department of Education, 2014). States must create plans to address the needs of students with disabilities and provide them with a free and appropriate education regardless of the severity of their disability, in order to be in compliance for receiving federal funds (Andreon & Durocher, 2007; Ciccantelli, 2011b).

Along with the reauthorization of EHA, Congress also renamed the Vocational Rehabilitation Act in 1990 to what is now known as the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). IDEA covers a student until he or she receives a high school degree (VanBergeijk et al., 2008), whereas ADA outlines how colleges and universities provide services to students with disabilities. In 2004, IDEA was reauthorized again as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA), and in 2008, ADA

was reauthorized as the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act (ADAAA) (Ciccantelli, 2011b).

Section 504, section E of the Act, speaks directly to postsecondary education and requires both public and private institutions to consider the application of students with disabilities and provide them with reasonable accommodations (Madaus, 2011). Reasonable accommodations are required as long as they are not a financial burden to an institution. These accommodations must be in the form of adjustments, program modifications, and auxiliary aids that allow a student to show his or her ability to be successful (Ciccantelli, 2011a; Madaus, 2011).

Another law that changed the rules of engagement for students attending IHEs was the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), P.L. 93-380. Established in 1974, this federal law protects the privacy of a student's education records from elementary through college institutions that receive funding from the federal government (Ciccantelli, 2011a; Dente & Coles, 2012). These rights are afforded to the parents of the student until he or she, regardless of age, has enrolled in an IHE. When students enroll in college, they must give written permission to release any information about their educational records. This change plays an integral part in the student's experience because parents no longer serve as the primary advocate and voice for the student (Muenke, 2011). After 1990, the number of students presenting with disabilities in IHEs blossomed across the country (Dente & Coles, 2012), which meant an increase in students needing services on campuses.

Autism spectrum disorder. The term *autism* turned 70 years old in 2013, with new diagnostic criteria from the *DSM-5*. In 1943, Dr. Leo Kanner, a child psychiatrist at

Johns Hopkins University, proposed the diagnosis of autism in a paper (Grandin & Panek, 2013). Kanner published his paper called “Autistic Disturbances of Affective Contact” in a journal entitled *Nervous Child*. In this paper, he described 11 children who shared the same set of symptoms, including delayed echolalia, a desire to maintain sameness, and the need for solitude and aloneness. Many of these young people also had exceptional memory skills (Baker, 2013; Grandin & Panek, 2013). Kanner noted as well that the autistic behaviors of the children seemed to be present at an early age (Grandin & Panek, 2013).

The word *autistic* was first used to describe symptoms of schizophrenic patients who rejected reality. Kanner and many other psychoanalysts subscribed to the notion that autism represented an infant’s response to a cold and distant mother (Grandin & Panek, 2013). During the 1950s and 1960s, this belief was accepted as an emotional disturbance in parent-child psychodynamics (Baker, 2013). In 1980, the *DSM-III* listed infantile autism as a category called pervasive developmental disorders (PDD). The five categories are Pervasive Development Disorders-Not Otherwise Specified (PDD-NOS), Rett’s Syndrome, Childhood Disintegrative Disorder (CDD), Asperger Syndrome, and Autistic Disorder (Wehman, 2008).

Infantile autism was distinct from schizophrenia. The main thread of the diagnosis was lack of responsiveness to other people, gross impairments in language and communicative skills, and bizarre responses to various aspects of the environment, all onset before 30 months of age (Baker, 2013; Grandin & Panek, 2013).

In 1987, a revision was made to *DSM-III*, changing it to *DSM-III-R*. In this revision, the name of the diagnosis changed from *infantile autism* to *autistic disorder*,

which required a child to meet 8 out of the 16 criteria divided into three domains of social interaction, communication, and restricted interest of activities (Baker, 2013). *DSM-IV* was published in 1994 and *DSM-IV-TR* in 2002; both further defined the complex criteria of autistic disorder and expanded PDD to five, including Asperger's Disorder (Baker, 2013).

As Kanner was trying to define autism, Dr. Hans Asperger, a pediatrician, was conducting similar research in Austria. Asperger identified a group of children who were not able to form friendships, had one-sided conversations, and lacked empathy. These children would speak for hours on their favorite subjects and were well versed in the topics they spoke of (Grandin & Panek, 2013). Published in German, Asperger's work was not known widely in the United States until the early 1980s when an English doctor, Lorna Wing, changed the term from *Autistic Psychopathy* to *Asperger Syndrome*, due to the negative association with the word *psychopathy* (Ciccantelli, 2011b).

In May of 2013, the criteria for autism changed in the *DSM-5* to the following:

Autism Spectrum Disorder 299.00 (F84.0)

Diagnostic Criteria

Persistent deficits in social communication and social interaction across multiple contexts, as manifested by the following, currently or by history (examples are illustrative, not exhaustive, see text):

1. Deficits in social-emotional reciprocity, ranging, for example, from abnormal social approach and failure of normal back-and-forth conversation; to reduced sharing of interests, emotions, or affect; to failure to initiate or respond to social interactions.

2. Deficits in nonverbal communicative behaviors used for social interaction, ranging, for example, from poorly integrated verbal and nonverbal communication; to abnormalities in eye contact and body language or deficits in understanding and use of gestures; to a total lack of facial expressions and nonverbal communication.
3. Deficits in developing, maintaining, and understanding relationships, ranging, for example, from difficulties adjusting behavior to suit various social contexts; to difficulties in sharing imaginative play or in making friends; to absence of interest in peers (American Psychiatric Association, 2013, p.50).

The *DSM-5* published in 2013 has moved to a more rigorous definition of autism. It has eliminated PDD-NOS, Asperger's disorder, and other subcategories for ASD (Baker, 2013). Taylor and Colvin (2013) described students on the spectrum as being perceived as having "disruptive or culturally deemed inappropriate behaviors, social or communicative limitations, and a limited ability to understand other people" (p. 10). They lack the ability to interpret others' thoughts and feelings. ASD students can also display stereotypical behaviors that are routine or repetitive in nature (Taylor & Colvin, 2013).

Prevalence. Along with the U.S. Department of Education, the CDC estimated that 1 out of every 150 children in the United States had ASD in 2002 (VanBergeijk et al., 2008). In 2009, the CDC reported that 1 in 110 children were diagnosed with ASD, based on data collected in 2006. Three years later, the reports stated 1 in 88 children were diagnosed, from data collected in 2008 (CDC, 2012). The numbers estimated from these reports showed that the prevalence of ASD increased 23% over a two-year period from

2006 to 2008 and 78% from 2002-2008 (CDC, 2012). On March, 27, 2014, the CDC indicated that 1 in 68 children were identified with ASD. “This new estimate is roughly 30% higher than the estimate for 2008 (1 in 88), roughly 60% higher than the estimate for 2006 (1 in 110), and roughly 120% higher than the estimates for 2002 and 2000 (1 in 150)” (CDC, 2014). The CDC also stated that boys were almost five times more likely to be identified with ASD than girls. Numbers indicated that 1 in 42 boys and 1 in 189 girls were identified with ASD.

ASD can also be linked with a comorbid disorder. Nevill and White (2011) stated that it was not unusual for individuals with ASD to have a second disorder which could include mood, anxiety, and psychotic disorders. Some studies have shown as high as 84% of children with autism were also reported to have an anxiety disorder (Ciccantelli, 2011b). While some individuals may have a mood disorder, others may display atypical responses to sensory experiences (e.g., a football game, a large campus fair) (Taylor & Colvin, 2013).

Research has addressed a rise in the diagnosis of autism and autism spectrum disorders. The reasons for the increase are unknown. However, “there is evidence that increased awareness, increased diagnosis, diagnostic substitutions and widening of the definition of the disorder to include individuals with average or above average abilities are most likely driving the increase” (Wehman, 2008, p. 537). The U.S. Department of Education confirmed that the number of young people entering college with ASD is increasing (Wehman, 2008).

In contrast to the rapid increase in the number of individuals diagnosed with this disorder over the past 10 years, our understanding of how to educate children with ASD

has not advanced quickly. There is “relatively little information available about the unique needs of this group” (VanBergeijk et al., 2008, p. 1359). The needs of this group are unlike any other special population on a college campus.

A large number of college-bound students are diagnosed with ASD. offices of accessibility support services are challenged to meet the needs of ASD students while still functioning with the same services and accommodations used for other disabilities. Reports have shown that “the number of student’s ages 3 to 22 identified with autism reported by the federal government has increased from 15,580 in 1992-93 to 97,904 in 2001-02, an increase of 528%” (Safran, 2008, p. 90). Facing this increase, IHEs must address the needs of ASD students transitioning to these institutions.

K-12 and beyond. The board of education in any city must serve and make available supportive services for students with ASD in the K-12 system. By contrast, colleges are required to offer reasonable accommodations to students as long as no undue burden is placed upon the institutions (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). In the college setting, it is incumbent on the student to request accommodations once admitted.

It is the choice of the student and his or her family to transition to an IHE. Because of early intervention in the K-12 system to tackle communication and behavioral concerns, more and more students are academically successful, making it possible for them to attend a university (VanBergeijk et al., 2008). However, at an IHE, the services offered to students with ASD may not look the same as those offered in high school. The IDEA requires the K-12 system to develop an IEP for each student, which requires input from a multidisciplinary team including the student, parent, teacher, and other school officials (Hadley, 2011). By contrast, the college environment for students with

disabilities does not provide the extent of services that a student received in high school (Hadley, 2011). Section 504 of the ADA does not require IHEs to develop an IEP document (ADA, 2009), leaving students to communicate their needs and service requests through self-disclosure. Students with ASD and significant social and language problems may find this difficult to do and thus miss out on opportunities for the support an IHE can offer them.

Getting students from high school where an IEP is “developed with input from multiple stakeholders around the student’s strengths and challenges, to a situation in which they must self-advocate for their needs is challenging” (Higbee, Katz, & Schultz, 2010, p. 10). Self-advocating in college can be a stressful new challenge for students with ASD. Providing support for students at the start of their college experience is important, perhaps even critical in helping them transition. ASD is “a social disability” and failure by universities to provide social supports would substantially impair a student’s ability to be successful (VanBergeijk et al., 2008). The critical nature of IHE support for students with ASD is enhanced by another common characteristic of this group of students: they often have incredible difficulties with transitions (Adreon & Durocher, 2007). These students need much time to prepare for any changes (Dente & Coles, 2012).

Preparing for college. To ensure that the transition to college takes place successfully, the IDEA also requires that students in special education must be provided with appropriate transition services with an outcome-based model (Krell & Perusse, 2012). A college readiness blueprint including a strong transition plan can be essential for a successful outcome with students in the ASD population.

In a study conducted by the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) and the National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC), entitled “Providing College Readiness Counseling for Students with autism spectrum disorders,” the organizations agreed that the “key to successful transition to postsecondary education is early planning” (Krell & Perusse, 2012, p. 33). High school counselors must encourage student input in the transition plan and seek feedback early to ensure the student understands the process. Speaking with high school students and families as early as the sophomore year about transition plans can make a difference during this college readiness process (VanBergeijk et al., 2008).

Dente and Coles (2012) pointed out that when choosing an institution, a student should take his or her time; it is imperative that the decision be made in the best interest of the student and provide a good fit for his or her needs. Many students start at junior colleges with smaller classes and more support to begin their transition into college life. This choice could be problematic for some students because smaller schools “may not be familiar with the unique educational needs of students with ASD. They may approach the student as though he or she has a specific learning disability and provide academically based interventions only” (VanBergeijk et al., 2008, p. 1363).

Transition. Transition to college poses challenges to any student with or without a disability; however, this transition presents many difficulties for students with disabilities, particularly for students with ASD (Taylor & Colvin, 2013). To understand how students with ASD transition to a college environment, one must be aware of the deficits and strengths of ASD students, and how organizational barriers can impede or support their transition to an IHE (Taylor & Colvin, 2013). Over the past 20 years, the

population of students with ASD attending college has grown and continues to do so. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reported that approximately 2 million college students, who make up almost 11% of all students attending an IHE, identified as having a disability (Taylor & Colvin, 2013). Of that population of students, 22% of ASD students reported they were enrolled in four-year institutions (Krell & Perusse, 2013; Taylor & Colvin, 2013). According to the National Council for Disability, from 2003-2009 the number of students with a disability seeking a postsecondary education climbed by 20%. With growing numbers of students enrolling in these institutions, it is unlikely that staffing for offices of accessibility services has increased appropriately (Korbel et al., 2011). Therefore, college readiness and transition planning are essential elements for a student's successful postsecondary outcome (Krell & Perusse, 2012). Conley (2012) defined college readiness as the ability of a student to complete a "wide range of general education course work." With the assumption that each student taking on postsecondary education has certain characteristics necessary to make them successful, these include, but are not limited to, ethical conduct, ownership of one's behavior, initiative, resilience, motivation, and self-regulation skills. Conley's college readiness plan has four key components that he pointed out: "Students are ready to the degree to which they have mastered all four" (p. 2). The four key points are: a) cognitive strategies (a student's ability to problem solve); b) transition knowledge and skills (a student's ability to understand college norms and to self-advocate); c) content knowledge (ways in which a student interacts with content knowledge); and d) learning skills and techniques (a student's ownership of learning).

The empirical research on college readiness and transition for students with ASD is limited. However, some literature has investigated the barriers to transition as well as how students can gain better access to services. VanBergeijk et al. (2008) pointed out that ASD students have extreme difficulties with transition and stressed that without preparation, these students would fare worse than neurotypical students going through the same transition to college. The limited research has pointed to ways to help with transition and offers ideas for best practices for services to these students.

Transition to the college experience involves a great number of changes to routines and patterns for students on the spectrum. Everything from the bus routine to school, course workload, class attendance, and even where to eat in the dining hall (Dente & Coles, 2012) can pose problems. There are also more complex challenges such as difficulty with academic demands, time management, and learning to navigate the social structure of a college campus. VanBergeijk et al. (2008) stated, “One of the most important aspects of the transition to higher education is the fit of the student to the institution” (p. 1363). This is why choosing the right institution for a student on the spectrum is important (Adreon & Durocher, 2007).

Students working with offices of accessibility should draw upon their IEP program from high school, which can serve as guides for services at the college level. Adreon and Durocher (2007) pointed out that students and parents should take into account whether or not a student would like to attend a “vocational, technical school, community college, or 4-year college/ university” (p. 274).

The size of the institution, the student body make-up, distance from a student’s home, and travel accommodations should all be taken into account when applying to an

IHE (Adreon & Durocher, 2007). Some researchers have suggested that students with ASD should start out at community colleges because these colleges offer more individualized attention to students, and often the physical campus is smaller than a four-year school, thus making it easier to navigate (Adreon & Durocher, 2007; VanBergeijk et al., 2008). Larger universities, however, may offer more diversity in the campus climate, which may provide students with a greater opportunity to find people with similar interests. One study pointed out that a transition plan is needed for this population of potential students starting in high school, and indicated the earlier the better (Krell & Perusse, 2012). Krell and Perusse (2012) emphasized that parental input, along with support from guidance counselors and teachers, is needed to make this process worthwhile.

During the K-12 years, parents and educational personnel work together to ensure that students are meeting learning milestones. Using the early intervention model allows for structure. For students with ASD, structure and organization are also of the utmost importance (Ciccantelli, 2011b; Highbee, Katz, & Schultz, 2010). Such structure and organization do not extend to IHEs; for many students with ASD, the transition from K-12 to college is very difficult.

While K-12 schools work with parents and students to help children progress through the academic program, IHEs often provide less structure, less support, and fewer opportunities for parental engagement. Instead, students need to self-disclose their disability and serve as self-advocates (Kelly & Joseph, 2012). Students are expected to contact accessibility offices as well as approach professors to indicate their need for accommodations.

This action moves a student with disabilities from a routine of more passive, dependent behavior to a more responsible role (Adreon & Durocher, 2007; Hadley, 2011). To matriculate and be successful in a collegiate atmosphere, the expectations are for the students to manage college-level rules and increased levels of personal freedoms, while coping with the challenges that come with ASD. Ciccantelli (2011a) suggested that students with ASD must be prepared to “use self-advocacy skills and employ a myriad of learning strategies and coping skills that will allow them to be successful” (p. 59).

This is problematic for students with ASD because one major issue with this population is effective communication. Many colleges do not request a student to disclose his or her disability on the admission application. Rather, they wait for students to be admitted to the college before asking about a disability and many students do not disclose their disability even then (Muenke, 2011). This process is particularly harmful to students with ASD because to make a successful transition, they are expected to use skills that are well documented as weak or limited in that group of students (Kelly & Joseph, 2012). Students with ASD often have difficulty understanding how their disability will affect their college career. They struggle with adapting to new classroom methods, social interactions, new testing conditions, and the need to organize themselves (Hadley, 2011).

Providing reasonable accommodations. According to the CAS, offices of accessibility serve a significant function for the college and the students who require these services. First and foremost, these offices were established to ensure that students have access to all curricular and co-curricular opportunities throughout the institution. offices of accessibility must engage in student learning and development that are purposeful and holistic (CAS, 2006). In an IHE, the services for students with disabilities

are covered by ADA. IHEs are responsible to provide reasonable accommodations to students that will not cause undue financial burden to the organization (Ciccantelli, 2011b; Higbee et al., 2010).

Unlike the prescriptive nature of the K-12 setting, students who present with ASD enter college without an IEP and are covered under accommodations. While these accommodations for students with disabilities vary, some services are standard and mandatory across the country. These services include: extended time on tests, note taking, taking exams in a less distracting area, preferential seating, specialized reading or writing software, and helping students develop study skills, time management, and organizational strategies (Adreon & Durocher, 2007; Ciccantelli, 2012b).

However, despite these mandated accommodations, the research has addressed whether these accommodations are “reasonable” for the population of students with ASD. For example, Adreon and Durocher (2007) argued that more can be done through the Office of Accessibility on college campuses beyond the requirements of ADA on a campus to support the unique needs of these students.

Examples of additional services can include, but are not limited to: early registration, course exemptions or substitutions, permission to be excused from group projects and assignments, providing oral rather than written exams, flexibility in assignment due dates. Offering alternate forms of student orientation that give the student the option to attend online or in person. The campus can seek universal design courses that are all inclusive to students with disabilities at the onset. (p. 276)

In addition, physical adaptations to classrooms can be made, and lecture materials as well as course texts can be adapted. Being challenged as well as receiving the appropriate support and accommodations are both associated with the success and retention of students with disabilities (Adreon & Durocher, 2007; Ciccantelli, 2011a; Hadley, 2011; Taylor & Colvin, 2013).

The Office of Accessibility, while mandated to offer services to students with disabilities, must work with instructors to ensure that students receive the appropriate accommodations so students can learn and demonstrate their mastery of the academic material (Ciccantelli, 2011a). The staff of these offices should also educate incoming students that the accommodations and modifications they were used to in high school will not be the same at universities. Students should be able to understand that faculty members may not be able to offer accommodations that encroach on the fundamental goals of a course. A faculty member could choose to use equally effective strategies or one that he or she feels is less intrusive to the course goals (Ciccantelli, 2011a).

Researchers have observed that most college instructors are aware of the laws for students with disabilities; however, these professors are less informed about special education accommodations than K-12 teachers. K-12 teachers receive more training and coursework on this topic. As a result, college instructors may be less knowledgeable about meeting the educational and social needs of students with disabilities. It is the role of the Office of Accessibility to educate these instructors to ensure they can meet the needs of students with ASD in their courses (Ciccantelli, 2011a; Eckes & Ochoa, 2005).

Student and interpersonal engagement. An important part of college life for students with ASD is the ability to distinguish between what is appropriate and

inappropriate behavior when interacting with peers. Also, positive interactions with professors and seeking them out during office hours can enhance students' intellectual commitments and their involvement in campus life (Dente & Coles, 2012; Hadley, 2011). Taylor and Colvin (2013) noted that student affairs departments should make all materials about student housing, social activities, and other involvement opportunities accessible to students with ASD. They should ensure that all students are aware of student conduct codes and any expectations for the behavior of the student body. Social policies should be written to support students on the spectrum that focus on social integration skills, independent living, and career and jobs skills training (VanBergeijk et al., 2008). These skills will allow students with ASD to be better integrated into the fabric of campus life (Nevill & White, 2011).

Students with ASD are faced with social isolation because of their struggle with forming relationships and thus may be manipulated by others (Adreon & Durocher, 2007). The Association of Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD) (2009) stated that students with disabilities should be encouraged to be fully engaged in campus life. Social integration and involvement must take place for these students to avoid the risk of isolation.

Summary

The literature has indicated that there are key differences in the services students with ASD receive in high school and those given in IHEs. Offices of accessibility on college campuses play an important role in a seamless transition to college for students with disabilities (Muenke, 2011; Neville & White, 2011). For these students to be

successful, they are expected to be prepared to use self-advocacy skills and other coping mechanisms to navigate the academic and social arenas of college (Ciccantelli, 2011a).

Chapter 3: Research Design Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to analyze the services provided to first-year students with ASD that support their transition from secondary to postsecondary education. This research study examined the perspective of practitioners who staff the offices of disability/accessibility support services at five community colleges.

Over the past 20 years, high school students with disabilities have been attending colleges and universities in large numbers, doubling their participation over two decades (Hadley, 2011). This increase has resulted in young people with disabilities enrolling in more challenging coursework to prepare them for life beyond secondary education. Despite laying the groundwork for this academic transition, students with disabilities face a series of challenges as they try to plot a course for successful completion of a postsecondary education (Ciccantelli, 2011b). While students with disabilities are being prepared for the academic expectations of college through their IEPs, they are ill prepared for the social and psychological dimensions of their higher education experience (Wehman, 2008). The ability to succeed for these students must come with significant support. This study is one step towards understanding the types of support that will help students succeed in college.

The following are described in this chapter: research design, description of methodology, population, data collection procedures, and data analysis. The study was

based on a qualitative design using phenomenological analysis. Creswell (2013) defined this approach:

Qualitative research consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. (pp. 43-44)

The research questions guiding this study are:

1. What factors contribute to the retention of first-year college students who present with ASD?
2. What services and support systems do students with ASD need to help them with their entry and transition to college?
3. What services and support systems do students with ASD need to help them succeed during their first year in college?
4. What are the best practices that college campuses utilize in order to help ASD students transition to college so they are more likely to succeed and complete?

Vogt and Johnson (2011) defined phenomenology as follows:

One of the major methods of qualitative research, the phenomenological approach focuses on documenting how subjects experience a particular phenomenon (e.g., the death of a loved one, being a gifted child, or any other “experience” that might be described from the subject’s inner perspective). (p. 289)

This research study collected empirical data by using in-depth phenomenological interviews as its primary data collection method. The secondary method was the focus

group, defined as a group whose opinions on a subject are guided and studied to learn about a topic (Creswell, 2013). Using these qualitative designs, this study sought to understand the lived experiences of those who work with and serve students with ASD on college campuses during their transition year. This study did not seek to meet or interview incoming students; thus, the focus of the study was concentrated on the student support services staff who serves them.

The researcher utilized qualitative inquiry for this study by collecting data from interviews. Creswell (2014) stated that qualitative interviews “involve unstructured and generally open-ended questions that are few in numbers and intended to elicit views and opinions from the participants” (p. 190). Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) described the qualitative research interview as an attempt to understand a subject’s world view from his or her experiences.

The researcher formulated four research questions regarding offices of disability/accessibility support services and the accommodations they offer to first-year students with ASD. Then, the researcher developed an interview protocol for asking and recording interview questions. She interviewed and recorded all answers using a Sony recorder. A transcriber was contracted to transcribe all recorded information and the transcripts were completed within one week of the final interviews.

Positionality

Maxwell (2005) defined positionality as the relationship that exists between the researcher and the participants and described its importance to the research design. This researcher holds an administrative position at one of the seven community colleges within the City University of New York, but not in the disability division. She also has a

daughter with ASD. With these two viewpoints, the researcher can be seen as both an insider when looking at positionality. From the insider positionality as a higher education administrator, the researcher can relate to and develop relationships with disability support staff and garner their trust. The outsider perspective as a parent and a non-disability personnel may have been a disadvantage.

Research Context

The setting for this research focused on the seven community colleges within the 24 campuses of the City University of New York (CUNY), each of which houses an Office of Disability/Accessibility. Conducting this research using community colleges is important; Adreon and Durocher (2007) pointed out that these colleges may be the best fit for transitioning students with ASD. As an administrator in the CUNY system, the present researcher had greater access to the participants.

The City University of New York, founded in 1847 as a free academy, is comprised of 24 campuses. This urban university system is made of up 11 senior colleges, seven community colleges, the Macaulay Honors College, and five graduate and professional schools. The 24 campuses enroll more than 260,000 degree-seeking students and over 240,000 adults in continuing education programs. Student enrollment in the seven community colleges total 97,751 (CUNY Office of Institutional Research, 2014).

Research Participants

This study used a purposeful sample conducted by looking at offices of disability/accessibility at the seven community colleges of the CUNY system located in the five boroughs of New York City. The combined enrollment of the seven participating organizations is more than 97,000 students. The researcher interviewed directors and

managers of disability/ accessibility support services on campuses whose programs have served students with ASD for more five years and have an outlined plan for intervention with these students.

Email messages were sent to the directors or managers of these offices at these institutions requesting their participation in the interview process to be conducted on their campus (see Appendix A). Directors or managers were required to be in their positions for more than four years. An overview of the study accompanied the email to explain its purpose and provide a brief biography of the researcher; required consent forms were also included (see Appendix B). Participants were asked to choose a date and time for the interview from a proposed schedule. This study sought to be population-specific by speaking to personnel working directly with students with ASD and their transition to and retention in postsecondary education. As an administrator at a CUNY community college, the researcher understands that the directors/ managers of offices of disability accessibility are fully aware of the services offered to students with ASD and thus all were candidates for participation.

Instruments Used in Data Collection

The researcher used interviews as a data source to gather information for the research questions in order to understand the experiences of ASD students during the all-important transition year of college. Ciccantelli (2011b) pointed out that Zussman in 2004 noted, “Interviews are one important way to understand people, particularly the meaning they bring to bear on the places where they live and work” (p. 72). The primary instrument for data collection included 21 interview questions designed by the researcher (see Appendix C).

To test the 21 semi-structured interview question instrument for reliability and validity so that the respondents would understand the questions and respond in a suitable way to garner the required data, the researcher gathered a team of experts who were acquainted with the needs of this student population and the research needed to support them. The team consisted of a nationally known author and educator with over 20 years of experience working on the topic of ASD students and their transitions; a director of disability support services with over 25 years of experience at both the secondary and postsecondary levels, working for students with silent disabilities; a project director working with ASD students within a major university setting for over 30 years; and a program developer who creates programs for students with special needs within higher education, with 20 years of service for students with special needs.

The researcher sent correspondence to all directors/managers of offices of disability/accessibility support services, inviting them to take part in the interview process. The interviews, which were conducted over a three-month period from February to April 2015, were all recorded using a Sony recorder purchased by the researcher. Four interviews took place on the individual community college campuses, allowing for a more familiar environment for the directors. One interview, however, was conducted on the phone at the request of the participant because of the spring break schedule of the campus. The researcher personally conducted all interviews. A transcriber was contracted to create transcripts of each interview. All identifiable markers of the participants were removed.

Procedures for Data Collection and Analysis

Open-ended semi-structured questions were asked of five directors/managers of offices of disability/accessibility support services. The researcher coded the data to look for themes and categories using the QSR NVivo 10 software system. This system helped the researcher identify and evaluate relationships and trends throughout the data. Thus, the data informed the researcher about whether disability service professionals believe that students with ASD are being retained during their transition year with the current mandated accommodations. All data collected were kept in a locked safe and electronic documents were stored under a password-protected computer at the researcher's home. The researcher and the hired transcriber were the only personnel to view the data.

The researcher examined and coded the interview transcripts in order to evaluate the data in an effort to answer the four research questions. Bloomberg and Volpe (2012) explained how a phenomenological researcher interprets data:

The researcher reflects on essential themes that constitute the nature of this lived experience. The researcher then writes a description of the phenomenon, maintaining a strong relationship to the topic of inquiry. Phenomenology is not only a description, however; it is also an interpretive process in which the researcher interprets the meaning of the lived experience. (pp. 32-33)

Understanding this description dictated that semi-structured interviews were chosen to be used to collect the lived experiences of the directors/managers of the offices of disability/ accessibility support services. Once the data were collected and transcribed, the researcher began the three phases of coding to draw themes from the participants' responses. Creswell (2013) addressed these three steps: first, the researcher reviews and

highlights “significant statements” such as quotes, statements that give understanding to the lived experience of the participants, and combines them into themes. Next, the researcher develops a textural description of the themes and statements to describe how the participants experienced the phenomena. In combination with the textural, the researcher also creates a structural description to look at the context of the experience. The present researcher followed these three steps and uploaded all transcripts to the NVivo software, creating parent nodes and child nodes which made it convenient to auto-code and view prevalent themes. Finally, the researcher composed an overall description that outlined the “essence” of the common experience that would lead to a better understanding of the phenomena.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

While students attend colleges and universities across the country for many reasons, Bean and Hossler (1990) explained that retaining students is a combination of many factors, which include but are not limited to the students' social and academic background. In addition, the out-of-class experience provided for students plays a part in retaining them while also contributing to their social development (Ciccantelli, 2011b). The purpose of this study was to look at students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and their transition to community colleges, seeking the best ways to support them through the all-important first year. This study aimed to provide a structure to help community college administration, faculty, and staff streamline the transition process for students with ASD from secondary to postsecondary education. The researcher focused on the works of Sanford's challenge and support theory, Schlossberg's transition theory, and Astin's involvement theory (I-E-O model) to create a primary theoretical framework.

This chapter provides results from five semi-structured interviews with directors or managers of disability support services within the seven community colleges of The City University of New York (CUNY). This method of collecting data offered a look into the participants' expertise, thoughts, and lived experiences on the topic of study (Creswell, 2013). The chapter also provides answers to the four research questions that guided the study, and introduces the four high-level themes that surfaced from the in-depth data analysis. The analysis of the data section is arranged to focus on the four

research questions. The four high-level themes are presented along with all subcategories that were generated by using the NVivo QSR 10 software to code the data. The chapter concludes with a summary of the results.

Research Questions

The research questions guiding this study were:

1. What factors contribute to the retention of first-year college students who present with ASD?
2. What services and support systems do students with ASD need to help them with their entry and transition to college?
3. What services and support systems do students with ASD need to help them succeed during their first year in college?
4. What are the best practices that college campuses utilize in order to help ASD students transition to college so they are more likely to succeed and complete?

Data Analysis and Findings

Five semi-structured interviews took place from February to April 2015, with a convenient sample size made up of directors/managers of disability/accessibility support services at five community colleges. The sixth and seventh institutions were eliminated from the process because the sixth director felt there would not be a contribution to the body of knowledge given the very small population of ASD students on campus. The seventh institution was not included as the director was a member of the panel of experts who reviewed the researcher's instrument (see Appendix C). To eliminate any bias, this director was not asked to participate.

Each interview was conducted by the researcher in person or on the telephone. Zussman (2004) explained that “interviews are one important way to understand people, particularly the meanings they bring to bear on the places where they live and work” (p. 359). The researcher conducted four face-to face interviews on each director’s campus. One interview was conducted on the phone at the request of the director because spring break prevented availability to participate on campus. Sturges and Hanrahan (2004) favored this method of interviewing when a participant is reluctant to meet face to face. At the beginning of each interview, all participants signed a consent form as approved by the institutional review boards at both St. John Fisher and CUNY. The participants were presented with questions from the researcher’s 21-question instrument, which allowed them to answer freely.

All participants were located within the five boroughs of New York City. Each interviewee held the title of Director of Manager and together, all five have over 60 years of combined experience working with students with disability. In an effort to protect the identity of all the participants, each member was assigned a pseudonym which identified them only as Participant 1 through 5. Their descriptions, minus any identifying details, are listed below.

1. Participant 1 (P1) is a manager with over 20 years of experience working with students on the spectrum both in secondary and postsecondary education.
2. Participant 2 (P2) is a director with 15 years of service working in academic support services within student affairs, with over 10 years working specifically with students with disability.

3. Participant 3 (P3) is a manager with 18 years in higher education in academic support areas and over 8 years supporting students with disability.
4. Participant 4 (P4) is a director who has worked at the current institution for over 12 years, but did not want to disclose years of experience working with disability support services.
5. Participant 5 (P5) is a director with over 25 years of experience working with tutoring, advising, and disability support services.

After the conclusion of the interviews, the researcher submitted the recordings to a third-party transcriber who transcribed them within a week. The researcher read and reread the transcripts, and also transcribed her field notes for review. The recordings were reviewed while reading the transcripts to ensure they were correct as well as to listen for any fluctuations in tone of voice affect on the recordings. The researcher highlighted the transcripts as she read them to take notes throughout each document. She entered notes in the margins as well as the header and footer of each page while she analyzed the data.

Ryan and Bernard (2003) stated that:

...analysis of texts begins with proofreading the material and simply underlining key phrases “because they make some as yet inchoate sense.” For those who tape their interviews, the process of identifying themes probably begins with the act of transcribing the tapes. (p. 88)

The researcher summarized each interview and the field notes as well as noted all initial impression of the conversations with the participants. Each interview was summarized individually to capture the crucial maxims and thoughts of each participants. Emphasizing significant points made from the researcher’s initial reactions, as Saldana

(2013) pointed out, is important to the open-coding process. The same process was done for all field notes, as the researcher sought to connect the participants' ideas and thoughts. She also searched for meaningful segments of the data to assign codes.

The researcher conducted an inductive approach, permitting themes to arise from the data Johnson and Christensen (2008) pointed out that "Inductive codes are codes that are developed by the researcher by directly examining the data" (p. 4). Saldana (2009) defined a code in qualitative work as "most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence capturing, and/or evocative attribute" (p. 3).

The purpose of the data collection, then, was to recognize high-level and subthemes from the participants about their lived experiences as directors/managers of disability/accessibility support services on the phenomenon of students with ASD and their transition to community college. The researcher reviewed the data keeping the four research questions in mind as a guide. Descriptive codes formed major topics from the data; the researcher used the qualitative data software, QSR NVivo 10, after the initial coding progress to help produce a catalog that allowed for further analysis. Spickard Prettyman (2008, as cited in Ciccantelli, 2011b) emphasized the role of analysis: "Data analysis is the search for patterns, identification of themes, discovery of relationships, and development of explanations and is a means of processing qualitative data so that what has been learned can be communicated to others" (p. 1).

After the initial coding process, second-cycle coding took place, during which the researcher continued to explore the data to compare and contrast the emerging themes. Four emergent themes surfaced, which allowed for another round of coding. During this

cycle of coding, all of the interview transcripts were uploaded along with the four themes into the QSR NVivo system as parent nodes (high-level themes); over 12 child nodes (subthemes) were created between the four parent nodes. The researcher ran the auto-code system to support the themes that were evident during the first two coding cycles.

The four high-level themes continued to emerge, showing that 95% of the data collected supported the four themes: a) preparation for transition, b) parental engagement at the postsecondary level, c) emotional difficulties of the students, and d) students' ability to be successful both academically and socially. The researcher was confident that the data reached saturation through this process. Saturation is described by Gall, Gall, and Borg (2003) as "When no new data are emerging relevant to an established coding category, no additional categories appear to be necessary to account for the phenomena of interest, and the relationships among categories appear to be well-established" (p. 456).

The high-level themes that contribute to the transition of students with ASD to postsecondary education are illustrated in Figure 4.1.

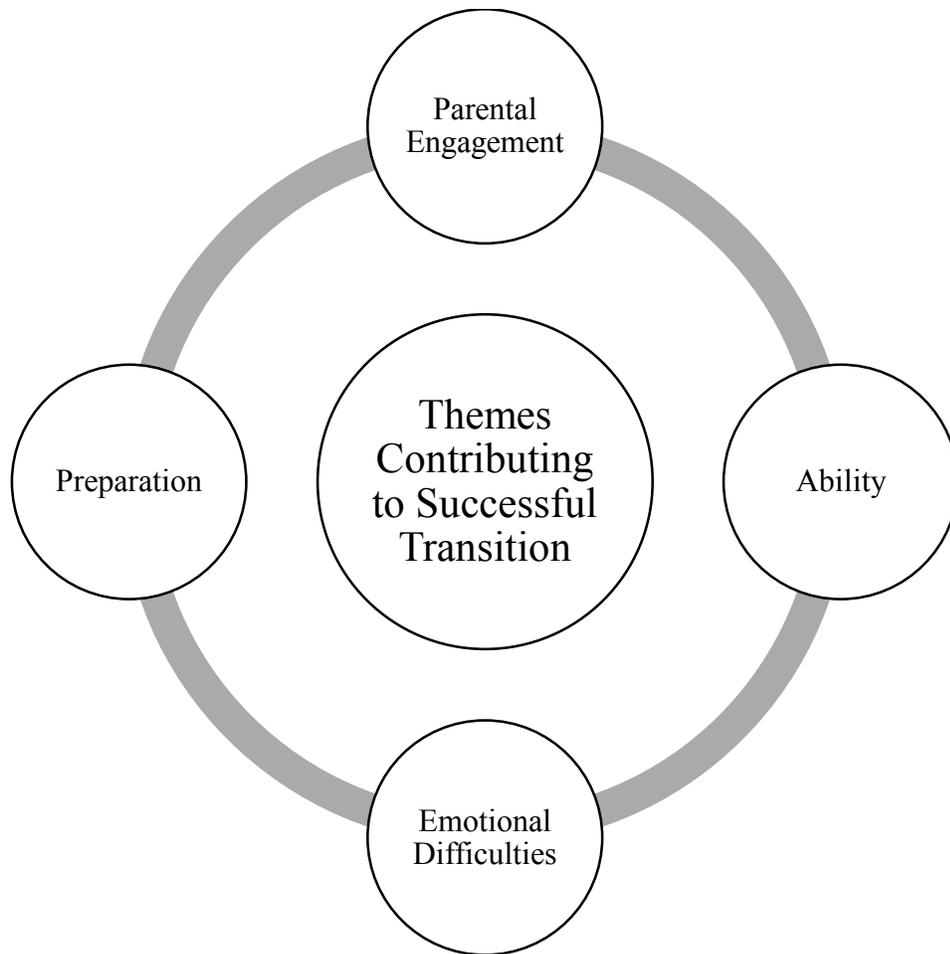


Figure 4.1. High-level themes of successful transition.

Table 4.1 gives a brief overview of the four high-level themes and subthemes. This is followed by a discussion of the four themes and supporting data from each participant to substantiate the findings.

Table 4.1

Themes and Subthemes Emerging From the Data

Themes	Subthemes
Parental Engagement	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Overprotective parents/parental barriers 2. Allies 3. Service learning for parents 4. Weaning parents 5. Support system at home
Preparation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Lack of student awareness 2. Lack of student involvement in transition planning 3. Reasonable accommodations 4. Misperceptions of services in College 5. Collaboration between high school and colleges
Ability	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Advocate 2. Compatibility to college 3. Student expectations 4. Student responsibility 5. Awareness
Emotional Intelligence	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Balance 2. Social isolation 3. Limitations 4. Guilt 5. Motivation

Table 4.2 illustrates the number of times participants referenced one of the high-level themes.

Table 4.2

Number of Times Participants Referenced the High-level Themes

Themes	Number of Times Referenced
Parental Engagement	95
Preparation	155
Ability	85
Emotional Intelligence	75

Summary of Results

The data uncovered four major themes that stemmed from an initial coding cycle of 89 codes, and from these four themes emerged 20 subthemes. The findings of this research are represented according to these four major themes and describe how they relate to the theoretical frameworks of Astin’s I-E-O model, Sanford’s support and challenge theory, and Schlossberg’s transition theory, earlier discussed in Chapter 2.

Astin spoke to how a person develops during his or her tenure at a college; he stated that what the *I*—individual—brings to the table is important to that person’s retention and success. In addition, Schlossberg denoted that the *self* plays an integral role in one’s ability to “move in-move through-and move out of a transition.” The present results indicated that the preparation of the student (the individual) is the key to an effective transition. The participants focused on the need to start the students early. Four out of five participants suggested that a transition plan be created during the IEP meeting with the student present during the first year of high school. The plan must include the student’s voice indicating what his or her future goals may be. Timely communication to students and parents about expectations in college is also necessary. Moreover, high

school counselors should help create an environment for students that allows them to start the process of self-advocating. As the third component of the theoretical framework, Sanford proposed that the support a student receives within an educational environment is crucial during transition. The data of the present supported this assertion.

Preparation: Answers research questions 1 and 2. While all participants concurred that preparation is key for students, the views of both Participants 3 and 5 evidenced the need for preparation to take place. The following quotation from Participant 3 illustrates this point:

I think the earlier the better. I think that for most things that people do, they are more reactive than proactive. My experience, as students are transitioning into college, this should start in elementary school really. However, definitely before the student leaves the high school. There should be some kind of transitional, counseling from the transitional counselor at the high school to a representative of the disability office at the campus, where there's definitely communication, letting them know exactly what the student is going to need to be able to transition. (P3)

Participant 5 supported that idea that the earlier the students are told about their transition plan, the better off they will be. The process must focus on students becoming more independent and aware of their own needs, and weaning a student and parent off the IEP planning format is critical to this process.

I think preparation for that should start as soon as they start high school, to start thinking about college, and to start that transition process from being totally sheltered and cared for and everything, towards a situation where they might be

totally independent and have very limited contact with other people in terms of service providers, in terms of paraprofessional support. None of those services really exist in higher education, so as a formal way in higher education, so therefore, the earlier they try to wean them away from all of that, the better. Not only students with ASD but also just about every other student, especially students with learning disabilities and so forth, emotionally disturbed. All the students go through the same thing. It's like a shock from the parents, when they get to reach college, when "I thought they were going to get all of that," and then they don't get any of that, and then it kind of really is a major letdown, emotionally for the parents and also for the kids who thought that, "Well, now it's on my own, I'm on my own. I don't know how to handle it," because they never could—they were never prepared." (P5)

It is not only important for students to be involved in the planning process of their transition, but they also need to understand that their preparation must include the knowledge that mastering the academic rigor of a college campus is completely based on their contributions and ability to handle and produce the work required. Within the planning, counselors should look not only at the academic side and prepare students way before time, but also getting them involved in student life. A viable transition plan should include workshops that cover: a) reasonable accommodations in college and the difference between those services and the IEP process; b) self-advocacy training for students on how they can approach and speak to faculty about their needs; c) time management skills and how to read an outline or a syllabus; d) encouragement of students to partake in co-curricular activities group or club involvement at the high school level;

and e) parental support of a transition plan, which is significant to the implementation and follow-through of the plan.

Parental engagement: Answers research questions 1 and 3. Parents are the advocates for their child while they are at the K-12 level; however, once a student enrolls in an institution of higher education, he or she becomes a self-advocate and the parents play a more minor role. The data indicated that this current arrangement may not work in favor of the students. All five participants explained that parents could become a barrier for students because they continue to need to protect their child during this transition time, and so bar students from being more vocal about their own needs. Parents along with administrators have usually been the ones outlining the students' path for 18-21 years, thus making it difficult for parents to willingly relinquish the role of advocate upon their child's entry to college.

The data suggested that practitioners believed IHEs should harness that engagement from parents in order to help students to transition well. For example, holding open houses for both students and parents stands out as a mandatory event that should take place; during these sessions, prospective students can tour the campus to see classrooms, social areas, offices of accessibility, and other significant spaces. Parents would be able to ask all questions and have one-on-one counseling from an academic advisor about what works best for the student—with the student present at the session. They can also meet with the DSS staff to review any paperwork that may be needed for enrollment beyond the application. A workshop on accommodations in college is necessary at this time as well, allowing for open communication with both parents and students. A personal counselor should also speak to the parents about the support the

student has at home and can receive on campus. As Sanford suggested, the support students receive is pivotal to a successful outcome.

The data also addressed parental engagement as the missing piece of the puzzle for these students, as a quote from Participant 2 illustrates:

We need to train the parents to cut, what I said is “cut the cord,” okay? Once they begin to learn and they are adjusted to college, let them know that there is a real world and they are going to function and to do things “normally.” But the parents, they do a lot of hand holding, which I don’t think is good. Let the students develop themselves. Learn like any other student, carry themselves, socialize with other students. And they will grow with that, right? (P2)

Parents also must understand the legal obligations a college has to the students’ rights. Acknowledging the difference upfront can garner support as well as partnership from parents—a point underscored by Participant 3:

A successful case would be that parent that is able to sit in the passenger seat; I do not want them out of the car. I want them to sit in the passenger seat. I want them to support their child. I want them to take an active role. There’s nothing wrong with them knowing what is due on any given week. There’s nothing wrong with them saying, “Hey, do you have your pencils? Do you have your pens? Do you have your books? Hey, I didn’t see you doing homework yesterday.” There’s nothing wrong with that. They need the structure to be able to help. A successful transition is when that parent is able to realize that their child is able to do it, and in the beginning, there’s going to be some bumps and there’s going to be some scrapes. What I need from you is to keep supporting your child at home. (P3)

Participant 5 summed up how important it is for parents to be in this entire process. Bringing them in the fold, without jeopardizing the student's privacy, is always key to a college campus.

I think the parents have a very critical role when it comes to the transition of students, because they are the first ones who know their kid more than anybody else, number one. They know their breaking point. It works both ways because, because they know their breaking point, because they are parents, every sign of distress, they'll be the first ones to say, "Hey, hey, quit, stop, stop," whereas they don't realize that in college they're going to be stretched. So the parents could be a guide up to a certain extent, we need to encourage conversations with parents.

(P5)

Another high-level theme was emotional difficulties. Students with ASD have demonstrated that they are able to perform at or above the level of their peers academically. These students can contribute to the knowledge base of the classroom. However, their ability to understand and maneuver relationships throughout the campus poses another concern. These students are often isolated from group activities and may shy away from others, based on their maturity level and experiences with being bullied by others. Many students with ASD have a dual disorder that may contribute to their lack of emotional growth, which is needed to be successful. These disorders include, but are not limited to, anxiety, depression, and ADHD, all of which lead to additional limitations for these students. They may feel guilty over not fulfilling their parents' expectations, thus leading to self-loathing and insecurities about their ability to make it through college.

The data spoke to this concern, indicating that during the transition phase, open communication to students and parents about additional services on campus (e.g., personal counseling, tutoring, and academic support services) beyond the mandated accommodations is available.

Emotional difficulties: Answering research questions 2 and 3. Students could have any number of concerns about attending college. Participant 2 suggested that “most of the students do have the IQ, to complete the college courses, except that there is the diagnosis of autism, they act differently. They act sometimes they act like children. Sometimes they feel uneasy by the environment.” However, Participant 5 saw that these students tend to be hard on themselves because they feel they need to be perfect to make their family proud or happy. This kind of pressure, whether actual or perceived, can be detrimental to a student.

I’ve been seeing a lot of guilt in the students because the parents give them a high expectation and they’re going to be doing this and that, and then all of a sudden they cannot, and so they feel guilty, they feel bad, and they’re really mortifying themselves over the idea that they cannot do certain things as their parents thought they would be able to do. Because college work is college work. The hand holding that they had, you know, it is special. There are some students who obviously are high achievers, but there are some that are not. Those that are not, they tend to feel, I feel bad for them because they tend to feel guilty to the point where they are crying over the fact that “I’m dumb, I’m stupid, and I don’t even know why I’m here.” (P5)

Students need to understand the changes that are occurring around them in order to cultivate new mechanisms for coping in the college environment both in and out of the classroom, as Participant 3 alluded to:

They are trained; they are very good with taking down notes and going down their outline structure. They have built those coping mechanisms, the skills. The difficulty comes within the transitions where those skills may no longer work in higher education. (P3)

Astin's *I*, Schlossberg's *self*, and Sanford's *person* all emphasize the need for students to take stock and evaluate their state of being during a transition. The data strongly supported that in order for students to transition smoothly both academically and socially, they need to possess the ability to do so. This population is prone to bullying from their peers and may be labeled "problem students" by faculty who lack awareness of their disability. Therefore, it is imperative that these students understand their needs and have the ability to be resilient during this process. It is the role of the campus community to give the students all the resources they need to express and manifest their ability to be successful.

Ability: Answers research questions 1 and 4. Ability suggests not only can students enroll in an institution of higher education, but more so can they function both academically and socially at the same level as their peers. Participant 1 addressed this point:

When you see a student coming in with a notebook and a pen, you know he or she is ready and taking themselves seriously and is taking their education very seriously. In order to succeed, time management, organization, study skills, these

are the things that you need. In addition, if you need help, come, come to my office. Let me show you what, what color-coding your syllabus looks like. Let me show you how this will look like in terms of your science class, in terms of your English class. (P1)

In an effort to support students and nourish their innate abilities, the research highlighted that students need to:

consider colleges that do give support. Remember, under law we are only going to give you what reasonable accommodations, which are very limited. Right now, it so happens that we have the project reach that is being sponsored by CUNY that provides that extra support at four different CUNY colleges. (P2)

Project Reach is a grant-funded program at four of the seven community colleges to help support students with ASD with their transition, academic, and social needs. Four of the five participants championed this program as a best practice for going beyond reasonable accommodations; the fifth member could not comment since the program was not available on that campus.

Managing expectations and responsibility on the part of the student is an important element of the ability to be successful. A certain level of understanding needs to take place during the transition year, and students must make their expectations known and realistic to ensure they can meet them. Even more critical for these students is the fact that they are responsible for their education and the faculty expects them to take that responsibility and produce quality work like everyone else, as Participant 5 commented:

They need to know first that, as obvious with college, it's a college, it's hard work. It's not going to be as easy because it's a community college, like Hunter or

Harvard or whatever other college. It's going to be college first, and then community next. And so you're going to have the support that you need, you're going to have people there that care for you. However, you are going to have to be disciplined to do the work by yourself. And I think that's the number one thing that students with ASD need to know, that they will have people that will care for them and that they're not going to be alone in that experience, because they tend to believe that community college is a lesser or inferior education, that it's a trial. Maybe if that works, maybe I can go to a real college. They need to know that this is college, period. (P5)

During the intake process for the first meeting with the student and the Office of Accessibility, a discussion of ability needs to take place—namely, the ability to focus and be disciplined, to see through the frustration of learning a new system and adjusting to a new environment. Schlossberg coined this as the moving-through stage of a transition. Part of having this knowledge is the ability to know how to use it. Participant 4 asserted that “understanding the responsibilities, understanding the differences in the transition, and understanding how to advocate and attempt to advocate for yourself is one of the most important things a student with ASD should know.”

Summary of Results With Research Questions

Research Question 1: What factors contribute to the retention of first-year college students who present with ASD? The data showed that students are more likely to be retained during their first year if they are included in the transition process from the onset. The more students are engaged in their plans, the more they will connect to the campus and feel supported by the staff. Several factors contribute to a successful

transition, including parental involvement, clear communication to the student of his or her responsibilities, and each student's realistic self-expectations.

Research Question 2: What services and support systems do students with ASD need to help them with their entry and transition to college? An analysis of the data revealed that in order for students with ASD to transition smoothly into college, a great deal of preparation needs to occur. The earlier this preparation starts, the better off the student will be. Having a transition plan at the start of high school is ideal. Working with parents to include the students in IEP meetings about the students' college goals is key as well. Moreover, educating students about the difference between high school and college and how they must self-disclose their disability in college to receive the help and support they need is of the utmost importance for these students. The creation of summer bridge programs designed to help students with ASD transition and learning skills (e.g., time management, reading a syllabus, or advocating for one's needs to a faculty or staff member) is also necessary. The data spoke to the unique role that a welcoming environment plays in a successful transition.

Research Question 3: What services and support systems do students with ASD need to help them succeed during their first year in college? A review of the data suggested that the most important service these students require from an institution of higher education is educating the staff and faculty on what ASD is. Awareness on the part of the faculty comes to the forefront, given that students sometimes feel marginalized in a class or are labeled as troubled and sent to the behavioral intervention team (BIT) without any understanding of their needs. A strong need for collaboration between the college campus, high school counselors, and parents emerges as a system that requires

streamlining. The role of orientation for these students and their families supports their need to feel connected. The data also spoke to the gap between parental involvement and the need to find a way to include parents in important conversations during the transition year.

Research Question 4: What are the best practices that college campuses utilize in order to help ASD students transition to college so they are more likely to succeed and complete? The data indicated that a unique program has been created for the colleges that helps support these students; however, each individual campus has its own campus-specific programs that are tailor-made for their students. The central programs are more social to ensure that students have the social capital they need to engage in meaningful relationships both inside and outside the classroom. To this end, safe spaces need to be created for these students that give them an outlet to express themselves. Campus awareness can ensure that faculty understands what is expected of them in doing their best to accommodate a student's needs. Orientation to the campus is also one key area addressed, and would include giving students and parents the opportunity to ask questions, tour the campus, and meet staff and faculty. Such activities would allow for an open dialogue and make the students feel supported.

Other elements that emerged from the findings included the need for faculty training and involvement with the orientation process. This would entail encouraging faculty interest groups that focus on students with disability and establish a classroom environment that supports these students. There is a critical need for greater collaboration between feeder high schools and higher education institutions to create summer bridge programs geared towards transition, thereby giving students an increased chance to be

retained during the first semester and move forward. One final emergent was the need to improve the out-of-class experience for these students. In short, students need to feel they belong and are not marginalized; if they do, they may not seek help when they need it most and will feel unconnected to the campus community. Including these students' needs in all facilities and programing will allow for their inclusion in the campus community and reinforce their sense of belonging.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Introduction

This qualitative study looked at students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and their transition from secondary to postsecondary education, particularly the transition to community college. The research, framed by the lens of a student development/psychosocial theory (Schuh et al., 2010), looked at Astin's I-E-O model (individual, environment, and outcome) as well as two micro theories: Schlossberg's transition theory and Sanford's challenge and support theory. This study is intended to contribute to the knowledge base of information that supports students with ASD during transition. In addition, it has provided a framework, which administration, faculty, staff, parents, and students can utilize to build a transition plan.

Essential information for this study was collected by conducting in-depth interviews with five directors/managers of offices of disability/accessibility support services working for one of the seven community colleges within The City University of New York (CUNY) system. The study examined what students need to make a smooth transition, both academically and socially, during the all-critical freshman year. Transition to college is one of the most significant points in a young adult's life; however, for students with ASD, "such a transition is complicated by the very nature of their disorder, a disorder whose hallmark is one of social, behavioral, and communication deficits" (Ciccantelli, 2011b, pp. 156-157). With the rise of children being diagnosed

with ASD, there is also a rapid increase of these students enrolling in college, both four-year and two-year institutions.

Given the urgency for IHEs to understand this trend, it is of the utmost importance that they recognize the key factors contributing to a successful transition for these students. While research has shown a steady growth of students with disabilities attending college over the past 20 years, data are limited that connects with and reports on students with ASD and their experiences at IHEs (Ciccantelli, 2011b; Hadley, 2011). The research has been particularly minimal in looking at how these students transition, from the perspectives of the practitioners who support them through their work in offices of disability/accessibility.

To answer the four research questions framing this study, the researcher used a qualitative interview design. She gathered a small sample with predetermined criteria to participate in the research. Interviews were conducted over a three-month span and data were analyzed and coded using the QSR NVivo 10 software system to extract themes. Suggestions for a successful transition plan were pulled from the data.

Meeting the needs of this student population leads to creating a more inclusive campus community—an environment that, according to Boyer (1990), can be an open, just, and celebrative community in which all members matter, good business sense is strengthened, and retention is supported. In short, a student who feels supported and engaged on campus tends to be retained. This chapter presents the findings detailing how community colleges can go beyond reasonable accommodations to meet the needs of this unique population. Implications of these findings and the limitations to the study are discussed, along with recommendations for further studies.

Implications of Findings

This study provided crucial information for the successful transition of students with ASD to community college from the perspectives of practitioners in offices of accessibility/ disability support services. Research has indicated that the number of students with disabilities is increasing college enrollment; however, there remains a gap in how IHEs understand the distinct needs of this population. Ciccantelli (2011b) pointed to the research, confirming, “if the transition to college is negotiated successfully, the likelihood of student persistence is significantly increased” (p. 172). Because the leadership of the disability offices works so closely with these students, these leaders’ experiences with the transition process and how it affects development and retention among students with ASD provided a unique awareness. The important elements of the study suggested a number of implications for students, parents, faculty, and administrators.

The findings revealed how vital it is for students with ASD to be prepared for college. The need for early preparation was evident throughout the study. Experts suggested advance training for the transition to start as early as elementary school. It is recommended that parents and K-12 staff work hand in hand to ensure that students are included in conversations about their future. Speaking to students about their needs and communicating the changes that may take place during the transition can lessen the level of anxiety students may feel when the actual transition takes place. This study suggested that students are more successful when they are prepared for what is ahead of them.

It is also important that students understand their disability and be able to articulate their needs while understanding the expectations of a college campus and the

responsibilities they have as students. Because students need to be informed, it is essential that all stakeholders play a key role to ensure that no one veers off-track. Communicating the differences between the IEP process and reasonable accommodations to both parents and students from the transition counselor is a vital piece of transition planning.

During their years in the K-12 system, students are monitored closely through their IEPs, which is a plan that keeps them in a routine and structured school life. This plan may include an aide to guide them throughout the day, speech therapy, occupational therapy, and social group work. However, these programs do not continue with the students into college nor do their IEPs. Thus, it is up to students to self-disclose their disability to the offices of disability/accessibility services. This change can be challenging for students who have never had to do this before. It is therefore important that students and parents be educated in advance about structural and programmatic changes that will take place in college.

Awareness on campus with a focus on faculty development also plays an integral role. Faculty should be able to understand the needs of the students who identify themselves to a faculty member. Learning classroom management techniques for this student population would decrease the number of students with ASD who are sent to the conduct office and labeled as problematic. Proper preparation is a holistic approach to supporting students on all levels. Offices of disability/accessibility services collaborating with the office of academic affairs to program during new faculty orientations will help to disseminate information about accommodations and ways to handle behavioral concerns

in the class. Educating faculty on how to address concerns in a manner that respects both the student and the academic process is essential to student success.

Additionally, the findings implied the need to include parents in the transition planning. With FERPA, it is difficult to communicate to parents that they are not included in conversations with their child unless he or she consents for the institution to include the parents. The data indicated that the increased gap in communication between parents and institutions from high school to higher education is more harmful than helpful to this unique population. For most of their lives, students have been used to their parents advocating for them; however, that is not the case on a college campus. The study found that parental involvement does play a significant role in the lives of their children, whether by encouraging, supporting, or simply empathizing with the issues they face in college (Ciccantelli, 2011b; Getzel & Thomas, 2008). Offering a parental welcoming event before the student attends would serve to educate the parents as well. Weaning the parents away from college while also encouraging them to support their child from home can give students a sense of independence and regard the campus staff as an ally.

Building parental engagement also includes helping the student understand why his or her parents can no longer be as involved as before. Any student's capacity to grasp the curriculum and maneuver the social life of college is imperative for his or her completion. The study found that addressing students' ability in summer bridge programs that involved workshops on time management, note taking, essay writing, and so on help fulfill what these students need. Engaging in the out-of-class experience also speaks to the students' ability to handle the rigor of campus life. Ciccantelli (2011) explained that it is important for this student population to have social involvement and social networks

because they create important buffers against certain emotional and mental health concerns, such as stress, loneliness, anxiety, and “friend-sickness.” One implication of the study is that students who create a strong social network need to be aware of their own disability. They should understand their areas of strengths and weaknesses, which will in turn encourage their ability to advocate for themselves.

Lastly, the study found that the emotional difficulties ASD students experience contribute to their understanding and management of behavior and classroom expectations. The maturity level of these students becomes a concern when dealing with their social skills. It is imperative that these students anticipate how the innumerable experiences they will encounter can affect their transition and retention. This research confirmed that the comorbid disorders of these students may contribute to their feelings of marginalization and feed into their limitations. Hosting group rap sessions and bringing counseling services and outside agencies to campus to help with mental health concerns that are prevalent in this population are vital tools from which these students can benefit. It is evident that the students are capable of understanding their academic responsibilities. Bringing their parents on board with training that offers coping mechanisms for dealing with stress, isolation, and fear of the unknown is part of the foundational work that will prepare students and give them the latitude they need to handle whatever they may encounter.

Limitations

The insider/outsider positionality of researcher. The researcher suspected that her insider/outsider positionality may have played a role in the respondents’ response time as well as their willingness to participate. As an administrator in the CUNY system

who does not work in the area of disability/accessibility services, participants were less enthusiastic to share their views of the research topic because they felt the researcher did not share their lived experiences. In an effort to be transparent, the researcher discussed her personal experience with ASD and assured the participants that her experience, while not as a practitioner, was one of an ally and supporter.

Participants. Having five participants made it difficult to obtain generalizable results, but in a qualitative study it is possible to have a small sample size. Four of the five participants were forthcoming with information and produced rich data for the research. Participant 4 proved to be challenging and thus data from this participant was minimal compared to the other four. The refusal of the sixth candidate to contribute to the study on the basis of the low number of enrolled students was a concern because the study had to do with director's or manager's lived experiences with students who may want to enroll in the institution. Offering a written request from the researcher and a member of the Council for Disability Services did not seem to persuade other members to participate. The fact that the researcher could not interview her own campus director was an unexpected limitation.

Lack of triangulation of the data. In order to allow for triangulation, the researcher could have assembled the directors/managers for a focus group to collect further data. However, to maintain the participants' anonymity in accordance with IRB approval, a focus group could not take place. The researcher felt that the interviews allowed the participants to have open and authentic dialogue about the topic. This permitted for complete and truthful responses that contributed valuable information to the

work on students with ASD. However, the group meeting would have allowed for triangulation and made the results more generalizable.

Recommendations

The study investigated the transition of students with ASD to community college through the lived experiences of those who work with them in the student service offices of disability/ accessibility. It examined what helps this student population to transition successfully to postsecondary education. Future research could include speaking to ASD students themselves to compare those who make the transition and persist with those who do not. A study including the voices of the students themselves would address the gap in existing research that does not speak to their experiences as college students and would provide important voices to the body of research.

Recommendations for research on parents with students with ASD. This study identified that parental engagement is extremely important for students to be successful in their transition to college. During the K-12 years, parents tend to be involved every step of the way. It is understood that the success of the student and his or her ability to attend college has much to do with parental/guardian involvement. It would be beneficial to understand how important the role of an engaged parent is to a student's successful enrollment in college. Parents are seen many times as barriers to the process; however, looking at them as partners or collaborators in order to meet the unique needs of these students may open the door to a new partnership. Research that captures the parents' journey during this process would be beneficial to learning how to communicate with parents as they too are undergoing a time of role change during their child's transition to postsecondary education.

Additionally, it would be advantageous to understand how the parents' new role of supporter and not lead advocate affects the parent-child (student) relationship at home. Having this insight can contribute to finding better ways to serve this population of students that go beyond reasonable accommodations.

Recommendation for research on ASD students and their involvement in campus life. It is important to see how students with ASD navigate the social life of a campus and engage their peers in club activities. An examination of the data from the participants in this study indicated a great interest in the social integration of these students. The participants acknowledged that looking at their ability to navigate the politics of social relationships is a deficit in this population. It would be fascinating to see what these students need in the co-curricular arena, and how these needs could be supported in order to meet them. Future research could look into the complexity of social engagement and what factors prohibit the students from engaging on campus. Looking at male versus female students with ASD and their level of involvement in co-curricular activities on campus could be another venue to explore. As part of the out-of-class experience, what role does athletics play in the lives of students with ASD who may be team members (either competitive or recreational teams) and does their involvement in organized sports contribute to their retention and academic success?

Recommendations for research on faculty and staff awareness of the needs of students with disability. This study interviewed the staff of the disability/accessibility offices. These individuals work with ASD students and other students with silent and visible disorders. It would be beneficial to conduct further research of faculty to review their perceptions or misperceptions of students with ASD, whether they understand what

reasonable accommodations mean, and if they go beyond what is required. More studies are needed to include a broader range of faculty across disciplines to speak to their best practices regarding classroom management for these students and how they produce creative curriculum to engage these students that go beyond chalk-and-talk. Conducting a study looking at the faculty's willingness to volunteer time to participate in a social mentorship program for ASD students that goes beyond reasonable accommodations could also be beneficial. Having them participate in a program of mentoring students with ASD during their tenure at the college and measuring their level of engagement during this process could enlighten practitioners on new ways to bridge the gap between students and faculty.

Conclusion

Analysis and data collection from directors and managers of disability/accessibility services supported four emerging themes suggesting that students with ASD would navigate a more successful transition plan if it encompassed the following ideas: student preparation, parental engagement, student ability, and understanding of students' emotional difficulties. The results indicated that preparation for these students plays an integral role in their success. The need for a plan that includes parents, students, and counselors from early onset is ideal for this population. It is necessary to encourage dialogue with all the stakeholders, seeking direction from students and parents about their intention to enroll in college or not. The answer to this question can start all students on a path of development and enlightenment for a successful college career. Advanced preparation and fostering students' ability to become

more independent during this process will allow them to assume more responsibilities as college students.

Conley (2008, in Ciccantelli, 2011b) wrote about preparation and what would make these students successful during the transition phase:

The likelihood that students will make a successful transition to the college is believed to be a function of their readiness, or the degree to which previous educational and personal experience have equipped them for the expectations and demands they will encounter in college. (p. 2)

The need for this population to be ready for this journey points to Astin's theory on how important the role of the individual (I) is to a campus, and what is brought to the environment (E) makes an impact on the outcome (O), which for these students is their ability to be retained and ultimately graduate with their degrees.

The findings in this study demonstrated that all participants expressed the importance of parental engagement for the students who need to maneuver through their transition to postsecondary education. The practitioners felt it was necessary to keep boundaries with parents while allowing students to become more independent; however, they emphasized that if parents receive critical information, they can then support their students from home and essentially empower them. Having parent advocates is most helpful for both students and campus staff. Parents as well as students need to understand the legal transfer of rights upon enrolling in an IHE and how that impacts the communication structure both parties are used to. Explaining these changes to parents in the presence of their child is beneficial, ensuring that the rules of engagement are laid out from the beginning (Conley, 2008). Understanding this shift of authority will take time

for both parents and students to grasp, but ongoing education is needed for everyone to be on board.

Parent and student understanding of the transition is highlighted in Schlossberg's transition theory and the 4 S's (self, situation, support, and strategies). These 4 S's are critical for parental engagement: the *strategy* is how from the home *situation*, a parent can *support* the student *self* through his or her transition plan. All of these components working in harmony are the essence of transition theory.

Additionally, the results of this study revealed that the student's ability to function on a college campus contributed greatly to their retention. Research has shown that while these students can understand the academic curriculum at a college campus (Ciccantelli, 2011b; Eckes & Ochoa, 2005; Wehman, 2008), their ability to handle both social and academic demands simultaneously is an area of weakness these students need to work on during transition planning. Can they adjust to large amounts of homework, class note taking, study groups, group work, presentations, and different semester/trimester schedules? Another point could be their ability to register for classes and participating in campus clubs or organizations. The findings showed that the students' ability to handle all that college has to offer is an important step in their attainment of a degree.

Furthermore, the research study pointed out that students' emotional difficulties add to their ability to function and process the responsibility and expectations of a transition plan. Palmer (2006) observed that for these students to succeed in college, they must find new coping mechanisms to deal with the plethora of information coming to them at once. Most students with ASD have a comorbid disorder that can contribute to

their level of difficulty during this process. This is where a complete and effective preparation plan will come to bear.

Understanding the needs of these students is the only way IHEs can support them through this rite of passage. It is this researcher's hope that students can start at the community college level and move toward four-year institutions. Ultimately, the environment and culture of a campus will determine the level of support a student feels. Building an inclusive campus that embraces the challenges of this population, while supporting them through their transition. Is the mark of an institution that understands its students and brings Sanford's support and challenge theory to life. As this population increases, and as their demands and challenges increase alongside them, future forecasting by the leaders of IHEs will ensure preparation for adequate accommodations that will cater to the number of students with ASD who may attend college over the next decade.

These students are attending college in greater numbers than before, in part because of the laws and policies that the local and federal governments have put in place. This year, 2015, is the 25th anniversary of one of these laws, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), signed into law on July 26, 1990 by President George W. Bush. This law enabled all Americans with a disability to be free from discrimination both in employment and in education. Section 504 is dedicated to reasonable accommodations requiring colleges and universities to offer equal access for students with disabilities.

With the ADA, the path was paved for these students to attend college. The ability to be successful hinges on many things; however, ultimately, success is a shared responsibility. The study found that in the preparation process, it is up to each student to

understand his or her disability in order to gain greater awareness of needs and self-advocate more effectively. The gold standard of all these efforts should be students and parents working in the spirit of shared responsibility with the staff at both secondary and postsecondary institutions while preparing for college, maintaining open communication once students arrive, and offering support systems and services while they are enrolled. Navigating this journey alone would not be a recommendation this researcher would assert. Tremendous support is needed from both home and campus to ensure a positive outcome for this student population—an outcome, which the practitioners in this study confirmed was both necessary and achievable.

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Appendix A

Sample Introduction Letter to Potential Participants

Dear Director of Disability Support Services:

My name is Tasheka Sutton-Young. I am the Director of Student Life and Athletics at Kingsborough Community College and a doctoral candidate in the Ed.D. in Executive Leadership Program in the Ralph C. Wilson Jr. School of Education at St. John Fisher College. My dissertation Chair is Dr. Josephine Moffett.

My dissertation research explores students with autism spectrum disorder and their transition to postsecondary education into community college, and best practices that practitioners use to address the needs of this population.

In light of your expertise in the area of students with disabilities, I am seeking your participation in a study. If you choose to participate, you will be asked to sign an Informed Consent document. Your involvement in the study will entail a one-on-one interview that will take an estimated time of one and a half hours to complete. Your one-on-one interview will take place at a time and location of your choosing. A one-time focus group meeting will also be conducted at a central location.

Your participation in this study will be kept confidential. I am the only person who will collect and maintain all information about the research participants. Participation is voluntary; you can choose to end your participation at any time. The CUNY IRB and St. John Fisher College IRB have approved the study.

If you have questions about the study and or your participation, I can be reached at [REDACTED] or by phone at [REDACTED].

Thank you for your time and attention, and for your interest in partaking in this valuable research. I look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,

Tasheka Sutton-Young

Appendix B

THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

Student Affairs

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

Title of Research Study: Supporting Students with ASD with their Academic and Social Transition at Community Colleges.

Principal Investigator: [REDACTED]

Introduction:

You are being asked to participate in a research study. This study is being conducted under the direction of Tasheka Sutton-Young, doctoral candidate at St. John Fisher College, in the Ralph C. Wilson Jr. School of Education, and the Director of Student Life and Athletics at Kingsborough Community College. You are being asked to participate in your role as the Director of Disability/Accessibility support services on a CUNY community college campus.

Purpose:

The purpose of this research study is to understand experience and the need of Students with autism spectrum disorder and their first year transition to post-secondary education in community colleges. This investigation seeks to determine what best practices help facilitate a successful transition to post-secondary institutions. This study looks to discover how administrators in the support services office can address the needs of these students, when it pertains to transition and attrition. The results of the study could help to discover best practices for community colleges to better serve ASD students during their transition year. An audio recording of your interview will be collected, so the information can be analyzed.

Procedures:

If you volunteer to participate in this research study, we will ask you to do the following: Sit down for a one and half hour interview preferable on your campus during normal business hours, or in another private room on the campus of the investigator. The interview will be guided, open-ended conversations. During the interview, you will be asked to describe what process and student with ASD may need to go through while transitioning to post-secondary education. What role if any can the college administrators play in meeting the needs of these students? Each interview will be recorded by the investigator using an IPAD recorder.

Time Commitment:

Your participation in this research study should last a total of one and a half hour.

Potential Risks or Discomforts:

You may feel uncomfortable answering some of the interview questions, considered a minimal risk factor. You may choose to skip a question, and move on to the next question. You can refuse to answer any question you choose and remain in the study.

Potential Benefits:

There are no direct benefits. Nevertheless, your participation in the study could help disability/accessibility offices better service student s with ASD and their transition to institution of higher education.

Alternatives to Participation:

There are no alternatives to participating.

Costs

There is no cost to you.

Payment for Participation:

You will not receive any payment for participating in this research study.

Research Related Injury

N/A

Confidentiality:

We will make our best efforts to maintain confidentiality of any information that is collected during this research study, and that can identify you. We will disclose this information only with your permission or as required by law.

We will protect your confidentiality by coding with a pseudonym. All documents will be kept separately form the personal information collected on the consent form, Only the investigator will be able to link research materials to specific participants. All recordings and transcript materials will be kept on a locked and password protected computer, only accessible by the investigator, and will not include any personal identifying information. All documents will be destroyed in March 2017.

The research team, authorized CUNY staff, the research sponsor and government agencies that oversee this type of research may have access to research data and records in order to monitor the research. Research records provided to authorized, non-CUNY individuals will not contain identifiable information about you. Publications and/or presentations that result from this study will not identify you by name.

Participants' Rights:

- Your participation in this research study is entirely voluntary. If you decide not to participate, there will be no penalty to you, and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.
- You can decide to withdraw your consent and stop participating in the research at any time, without any penalty.

Questions, Comments or Concerns:

If you have any questions, comments or concerns about the research, you can talk to the following researcher: Tasheka Sutton-Young, Director of Student Life and Athletics. I can be reached at [REDACTED] or at [REDACTED].

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, or you have comments or concerns that you would like to discuss with someone other than the researcher, please call the CUNY Research Compliance Administrator at [REDACTED]. Alternately, you can write to:

CUNY Office of the Vice Chancellor for Research
 Attn: Research Compliance Administrator
 [REDACTED]

Signature of Participant:

If you agree to participate in this research study, please sign and date below. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

 Printed Name of Participant

 Signature of Participant

 Date

Signature of Individual Obtaining Consent

 Printed Name of Individual Obtaining Consent

 Signature of Individual Obtaining Consent

 Date

Appendix C

St. John Fisher College

Ed.D. Program in Executive Leadership

Interview Questions

		Research Question	Astin's Model I-E-O
1.	When should preparation begin for young people with ASD who plan to transition to college?	A	I
2.	a) When do students with ASD and parents need to be made aware of the differences between high school and college? b) How should ASD students and parents be informed about the difference between high school and college?	B	I
3.	Do high school seniors with ASD have an understanding of accommodations, and how to get them when they get to college?	C	I
4.	a) Do you feel entering freshmen with ASD know how to advocate for themselves? b) How can self-advocacy skills be improved/taught? c) When should it be taught?	C	I
5.	Are ASD students coming from high schools well prepared for a successful transition to college?	A	I
6.	What are some critical issues students with ASD need to consider when applying for admission into a community college?	A	I
7.	What are some challenges that prohibit retention with first year students with ASD?	B	I
8.	As a Director, do you ask the following questions to freshmen entering college and if not should they be asked? To what degree is the student 'self-determined,' that is able to make personal decisions and accept responsibility for those decisions? What is the student's vision of their future? What skills and abilities does the student currently possess that would match his/her vision for him/herself? What skills and abilities will this student need to		I

	learn between now and graduation that will assist him/her in achieving his/her vision?		
9.	Can you walk me through a “typical first/initial intake appointment for students with ASD?	C	E
10	What role if any does an orientation program for students with disability play in a successful transition?	A	E
11.	Tell me some best practices that support a successful transition to postsecondary education?	D	E
12.	Tell me about a parent transition experience that was not as successful.	A	E
13.	What role if any can parents play in supporting the transition process?	A	E
14.	What referrals, resources, and agencies will increase the likelihood of a smooth transition into postsecondary education?	C D	E
15.	Can offering additional support services beyond accommodations to ASD students in a community college setting be helpful for retention?	B C D	E
16.	How many professional staff members work in your area, and is there a dedicated member for transition work?	A D	E
17.	a) How many years of experience do you have in Disability Services? b) What type of experience do you have with students on the spectrum?	D	E
18.	Has the number of students entering with ASD increased, decreased, or stayed the same in the past few years?	A C	E
19.	If resources were not a concern, what interventions would you suggest to help students with ASD make successful transition to college?		E
20.	How do you define a successful transition from secondary to postsecondary institutions?	A	O
21.	Tell me about a successful parent transition process. How did it work?	A	O