

Sophie Huntley

Dr. Brent Wolfe

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## **Post-Secondary Education: How Can we Best Support Students with Disabilities?**

### **Introduction**

Living away from home can be difficult for anyone, especially if this is their first time doing so. There is a multitude of challenges that can influence any student's college experience including navigating relationships, academic performance, and extracurricular opportunities (Clark, 2005). Because of this, students transitioning to university life often struggle socially or academically. It also requires them to figure a lot of things out on their own, because college is a place where people live independently. This aspect of independence applies as students facilitate their own relationships, find opportunities within campus life. Navigating this challenging period of adjustment can be made harder if the individual has a disability. The Americans with Disabilities Act (1990) states that disability is "a physical or mental impairment that the substantially limits one or more life activity". The limitation that a disability can pose onto an individual has the potential to create difficulty for them when succeeding in the community and classroom.

The presence of a disability often amplifies the difficulty of social and academic situations, independent living, and the experience of accessibility across campus. This creates a unique set of challenges that hinder the enjoyability of the college experience. Examples of such issues include but are not limited to: difficulty socializing with their peers due to lack of accessible opportunities, issues with general campus accessibility, having issues in the classroom their peers do not typically face, and accessibility within independent living. Due to this, it has

been found in research that many people who have disabilities and caretakers are hesitant to have young adults go to college because of the demands and obstacles they may face in independent living (Blasey et al., 2023). But it is not impossible for them to do so because of accommodative services in the university space

In order to provide an equitable experience for those who have disabilities in the college setting, universities are required by legislation to provide accommodations. Accommodations are defined as services provided to reduce obstacles that are present in one's social and academic life while attending college (Blasey et al., 2023). In order to receive any type of accommodation services, students must go through a process to determine what support they need. These services are provided to students who register their disability with their school's office of accessibility resources. (Smith et al., 2021). Each person who utilizes accommodations requires a unique plan for their success, which applies to their specific needs in the classroom and/or in their living situation (Deckoff-Jones and Duell, 2018). Some of these plans help students live on and navigate the campus independently, have access to social opportunities, and be successful in the classroom. Not everyone is keen on having a plan though, because certain college students are less likely to seek out accommodation. Worrying about the stigma surrounding feeling different from peers because of their use of accommodation services is a common challenge, reducing some student's likelihood to request services (Blasey et al., 2023).

Accommodation is mandated by law to provide college students with equitable education, housing, and access to resources on their college campus. Laws that enforce these mandates include The Americans with Disabilities Act (passed in 1990), Americans with Disabilities act amendment (passed in 2008), and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act (passed in 1973) (O'shea et al., 2023) These laws are huge milestones because historically people were made to feel unwelcome in university spaces and were not provided with access to disability resources that

would help them be successful when living independently or learning in the classroom. Understanding legislation, how it came into play, and what it stands for is immensely important to understanding why students have accommodations and what qualifies something as accommodation.

Back before legislation was introduced, many people who have disabilities were discriminated against greatly and lacked many opportunities. They were not allowed to set foot in university spaces, had segregated classrooms or no education all together, and people could deny them access to housing based on their disability status. A cornerstone law enforced to combat discrimination for those who have disabilities is Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. Tom Smith found that Section 504 was created in order to prevent discrimination in places that are federally funded and expand on services offered to those who have disabilities so that they are able to see the same success as their peers who do not have disabilities (2001). Since schools, including colleges, receive federal funding, this was a landmark in educational equality for people who have disabilities. However, Bianca Chamusca found in her law research that Section 504 had a lot of pushbacks in its early stages and that it did not cover certain aspects of education and did not prohibit rejection from housing based on disability status (2017). Because of this lack of regulations, the American government still had a long way to go.

After a continuing battle for equal rights and resources, the American Government passed the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990. Reinarts and Melo say that it is a law to prohibit discrimination and provide accommodations in the college setting, under any level of experience including admissions and participating in college activities. In turn, this law made it easier for people with disabilities to participate in and attain post-secondary education (2023). However, it also added a new layer to accessibility that Section 504 did not. It added a section for housing accommodations and regulations. Ashworth and Kleiner say that it is covered under Section V.,

which is the Fair Housing Act. This act “prohibits housing discrimination on the basis of disability and covers private housing, housing that receives Federal assistance, and local and state housing” (2000). This means that people who have disabilities cannot be denied housing and are required to have accessible living spaces suited to their need. Since universities fall under this provision, they are required by law to provide accommodation and housing to people who have disabilities without pushbacks.

Eighteen years later in the year 2008, The Americans with Disabilities Act Amendment was signed into play. This amendment was signed by President Bush, which gave a more specific definition of disability, making it anything that inhibits one or more major life activity. Major life activities were defined as any basic human function. ADA was also created to enforce the laws against discrimination on a higher level. (Rozalski et. al, 2010). Instatement of these amendments provided huge progress for individuals seeking higher education, as it made the process of receiving accommodations more person-centered than proof based.

While in the past the focus of providing documentation to a university was to provide proof of disability exclusively to prove you were eligible for services, universities were now using it to specify what students needed so they can provide the necessary accommodations (Keenan et., al 2019) Accommodations under ADA made the process center more on making a plan to help students to succeed than if they needed the services in the first place. It took Americans who have disabilities and wanted to seek post-secondary education years to make this progress so that they could be provided with the necessary tools and supports to be successful in a college setting.

Understanding the legislative history of accommodations shows us not only the injustice and inequality people with disabilities faced to get to this point but also shows us why there is a need for these services as well. Legislation, as it is defined, is supposed to be used as a tool to

prevent discrimination and promote inclusion in both private and public spaces, including universities. Because of the development of ADA in 2008, universities are now legally obligated to provide their students with accommodations that are adapted specifically to their needs. With that said, legislation should be utilized to hold universities and government officials accountable so that they are supporting their students and following the law. On top of that, those in power should continue to listen to the voices of individuals who have disabilities regarding their opinions on the quality of services they are receiving under legislation. If that is not being done, that is more reason to reevaluate and adjust what is provided so it is up to an equitable standard.

Sometimes, students have issues within their academic careers that accommodation services cannot help. While they are helpful in many areas, there are some daily activities in which these services do not account for the fact that students must learn on their own, including self-advocacy, navigating their interpersonal relationships, and independent tasks such as self-care and cleaning. A Certified Therapeutic Recreational Specialist (or CTRS) works with individuals who have disabilities to develop necessary skills so that they are able to live independently within their community. According to Porter and colleagues the job of a CTRS is to work with a wide variety of individuals to follow the APIED process (assessment, planning, implementation, evaluation and documentation). They work with clients to assess their needs, plan an intervention made to meet said need with the client's leisure preferences and strengths in mind, implement the intervention, evaluate their progress and document throughout the process. All progress made through utilizing interventions go towards meeting the overarching goal (2020). In recent years, institutions have been employing them on their post-secondary education staff to ensure that students are learning skills necessary to thrive when they are living independently. There are many ways a CTRS can utilize their skills in a higher education setting

to address areas of need and assist in aspects of education that students cannot get help with in the classroom environment.

This analysis of literature aims to provide a deeper understanding of accommodations and what is being offered to students participating in higher education. There will be emphasis on two aspects of accommodation services: how they serve students who have disabilities, and how well they provide these services, all within the scope of research, additional literature, and most importantly, the perspectives of individuals utilizing these services. However, there are certain areas these services will be unable to address, which is where a CTRS could come in and teach these individuals necessary skills for advocacy or independence to improve the quality of their college experience.

### **Accommodations: Who Are They Designed To Serve and Why Do They Exist?**

Accommodations are tools in a college setting used to make the experience of someone who has a disability of any kind much easier. They are utilized both in the classroom and out in the community to address student needs. It has been proven in a study that the earlier students register for disability services, the higher their outcomes and performance rates will be throughout their college career (Blasey et al., 2023). For the purpose of this review, accommodations will be broken down into three categories, based on when and where they are utilized: social (for living out in the community and navigating campus), housing (for living spaces) and academic (in the classroom). Researching literature in a categorical manner makes it easier to find sources and studies on college students, based on the specific accommodations they are receiving. Some students receive extended time on testing, which helps them in the classroom environment, but has no bearing on their social life. By doing so, it will also be easier to organize critical information, so that strengths and weaknesses of each can be identified.

So, who do these accommodations provide for? According to research done by Dong and Lucas, it has been found that there is such a wide range of disabilities, that there is a need to condense it into three categories: psychological, intellectual/developmental, and physical (2016). Some of the articles that were found were more specific to disabilities such as autism and acquired brain injuries, while some looked at the populations from a broader perspective. Researchers would sometimes find an area where a group of individuals would have their own unique diagnosis that fits under the scope of intellectual/developmental disabilities, but they would research the issue as if it were pertained to them collectively. While research for people who have psychiatric disabilities is valuable, this literature review will aim to look at the articles pertaining to people who have intellectual/developmental and physical disabilities specifically because of their participation in college programs discussed later.

Revisiting the definition of disability under the ADA (1990), it is again defined as “a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more life activities.” Physical disabilities fit under that definition as limiting the individual in any physical capacity. For research purposes, physical disabilities will also include any aspect of disability that impacts mobility or sensory (as they pertain to external sensations such as sight and hearing). Some of w these disabilities include but are not limited to conditions such as neuromuscular disease/impairments, spinal cord injuries, cerebral palsy, muscular skeletal disorder, and hearing/visual impairments (Schreuer and Sachs, 2014).

A disability that was not mentioned on this list, but had a very noticeable presence in literature on academic accommodations was aa traumatic/acquired brain injury. According to Gilmore and colleagues, T/ABI occurs when the individual is impacted by trauma after they are born. It impacts on a person’s physical functioning including motor skills and spatial awareness.

Though it also has a cognitive effect as it impairs attention and memory as well (2021). This disability had some interesting literature because it had both physical and cognitive implications that had a pretty significant effect on academic needs and achievement. But, because trauma can be onset at any time, it does not classify as an intellectual disability unless a child acquires a T/ABI.

So, what classifies someone as having an intellectual/developmental disability? Tassé and colleagues describe these conditions as follows. An intellectual disability occurs when the individual has lower cognitive ability than what is expected for their age before the age of 18. A developmental disability is a disability that hinders an aspect of an individual's development and will continue to do so and more often than not, they struggle to do tasks that directly correlate with independent living. An intellectual disability is a type of developmental disability, but a developmental disability is a broad category that refers to many areas of development (2024). Basically, intellectual/developmental disabilities is an umbrella term that covers a wide variety of diagnosis. These diagnoses include but are not limited to down-syndrome, autism, cerebral palsy and ADHD. Cerebral palsy, while being a physical disability, is simultaneously a developmental disability as well (Tasseé et al., 2024). Many people with these diagnoses go on to attend a post-secondary education program after high school.

In more recent years, there has been a significant increase in individuals who have intellectual developmental disabilities attending universities. As of 2021, “6000 students with ID (intellectual disabilities) are enrolled in 310 universities (Grigal et. al, 2021). Though, there was a surprising lack of literature surrounding the number of people who have physical disabilities that attend college. However, in 2015 it was noted that students who have physical disabilities only make up less than 10% of college students who have disabilities (Gelbar et al., 2015). It was not recorded in any recent literature if that has changed or remained stagnant.

In more recent years, the need for accommodations in the United States has been rising, meaning there is a much higher need for services. The most current study found on the subject was done by Weis and Bittner. They found that the overall eligibility for accommodation qualifications has gone up from 2.8% to 5.2% over a twelve-year period as of 2021, but access was much more disproportionate to the level of need (2021). With the rising rates of disability and eligibility, support in institutions is more important than ever. Lack of improvement could lead to major accessibility issues, which can in turn break legislation.

Having accessibility services available is incredibly important and while they open up new opportunities for students in post-secondary education, there are still flaws with access to these opportunities. Many students have expressed having issues with getting support from their university for a variety of reasons. Barbara Hong found in a study she did that the students she interviewed felt intimidated to get assessed for disability services due to the connotations receiving those services had. They also felt intimidated by negative interactions they had with staff performing their assessments to determine their needs and eligibility, and on top of that they did not know how to advocate for their needed services (Hong, 2015). This causes major accessibility issues and reduces the quality of support students feel they are receiving while attending college.

While some struggle with accessing services in the first place, others struggle with the accommodations they are already receiving. Abreu and colleagues (2016) found that 63% of the students in their study found need for improvement in their disability services. They stated that these include “delivery of services, improved communication between student faculty and disability services, expanding locations/hours/availability of office staff, and increased awareness of available services.” Quality of services, interpersonal relationships of students to faculty members of the university, and levels of education all impact students’ feelings on whether or not

they are getting the support they need. It has been found that the attitudes of faculty influence the likelihood of a student speaking to their office of accessibility and advocating for their services. (Smith et al., 2021). With that said, this is why it is important to use a critical eye when assessing programs in higher education, as the services themselves are not the only aspect of the process.

Accommodations themselves are sustainable tools in higher education. They serve a wide variety of populations and help people with many things, such as living independently or succeeding in the classroom. In order to utilize them effectively, students and faculty need to work together to find where the student is struggling, so they can create a plan to combat their challenges. However, it is also dependent on the quality of the services and how they are delivered. So, this review seeks to ask in the next section, what are some examples of effective accommodations? What has been ineffective? If that can be pinpointed, suggestions could be made to make improvements on services or a CTRS can find ways to provide students with support they feel they are lacking from their university by working with them to create goals for their success. That way, universities can look at their own programs and determine if they need to make changes, adjustments, or keep an already thriving program-

### **Academic Accommodations**

Before beginning the review on accommodations, it should be noted that there was limited information on literature for those who have physical disabilities. Much of the literature surround this topic had to do with students who have intellectual/developmental disabilities, as there were many resources pertaining to Autism and accessibility. But there was little to no research on classroom accessibility concerning those who have conditions such as cerebral palsy, hearing or visual impairments. This was the case for literature pertaining to academic accommodation, but let it be noted that thorough research was done surrounding the challenges

and issues many students in the community face, not just those who have intellectual or developmental disabilities.

As explained earlier, this literature review will be breaking accommodations down into three categories with the first one being academic accommodations. Academic accommodations are utilized in the classroom to help students who need additional assistance succeed on tests, with note taking, and other academic skills (Kurth and Mellard, 2006). They are put in place for a student so that they are able to have the same levels of academic success as their peers who do not have disabilities. For example, if a student has a learning disability and needs to spend more time on their tests than their peers, then the school's accessibility office will grant them extended testing time. This would be fair and reasonable accommodation as stated earlier when talking about legislation.

Fair and reasonable academic accommodations covers a wide range of offerings provided by post-secondary institutions. Smith and colleagues did a study of accommodation materials utilized by one hundred and fifty-five students at two West Coast schools. In this study, they found some of the resources utilized were materials such as: alternate texts and materials, assistive technology for visual/auditory impairments, brail equipment, extended time on testing, interpreters, note takers/scribes, and other adaptive equipment, made to meet accessibility needs (2021). These are some ways that universities can make physical adaptations in the classroom to make the experience more successful. However, this is only a small portion of the accommodations that schools can offer in their classrooms. This was just the area of focus that this particular study decided to examine.

There are other additional measures found in another study done by Weis and colleagues, they found that their colleges had the same types of accommodations for the most part, but there were other tools students could have such as grading modifications, tutoring, and permission to

record lectures with the teacher's knowledge (2016). Both studies had a wide range of accommodations and recommendations and showed that colleges offer a wide range of services. Some being physical, such as the auditory and brail accommodations and others for non-physical needs such as extended time on testing and the ability to record lectures. The literature had a general consensus on what the most recommended and used accommodations were for learning difficulties.

It has been a common consensus between studies and statistics in the past that extended time on testing is the most utilized service in university spaces. In the study previously mentioned by Smith and colleagues found that one-hundred and nine out of the one-hundred and fifty-five students surveyed used extended time on testing and that it was on a large number of student's classroom success plans (2021). It was also largely during the 2008-2009 academic year when additional time on testing had the largest percentage of utilization. They found that around 93% of universities that had students who have disabilities enrolled in their programs used extended time on testing (Raue and Lewis, 2011). But there is not much recent data from current surveys to uphold that claim.

Nevertheless, the process of receiving academic accommodations is not randomized, as mentioned when discussing the logistics of legislation. Academic accommodations are often based on student needs determined by their diagnosis. Weiss and colleagues found that accommodation was often based on what the student's current diagnosis is and what they struggle with in the classroom setting (Weiss and colleagues, 2016). For example, if someone had issues with motor control, they would get an accommodation that would help them with note taking, while their peers who struggle in other areas may use different interventions. The process of receiving services caters to specific student need, making it individualized.

Academic accommodations provide use for those who need them, but it is important to remember that they have strengths and weaknesses, it is ultimately important how they impact those who use them. That truly determines if the accommodation is sufficient at what it does. If a certain academic accommodation is designed to aid with reading, but fails to help a number of students, then it may be time for the faculty to take a look at it and make adjustments. With this information, schools can figure out how to best support their students learning. The three I was able to find the most literature on and the focus of the critiques will be extended time on testing/test adaptations, adaptive equipment in the classroom, and one on one tutoring. These resources are used by a wide range of students as seen in the following sections.

### **Housing and Social/Housing Accommodations**

Social and housing accommodations are typically provided through the school as a means to support students in living on their own and facilitating relationships between students and their peers. Social support mainly serves young adults who have intellectual disabilities, but most of the literature points toward individuals on the Autism spectrum. Literature on housing accommodations was somewhat harder to find, but it mostly centered around physical accessibility and providing support for those who have intellectual disabilities. This way, they are able to live in an environment that is both comfortable and accessible to their needs.

For individuals with intellectual/developmental disabilities, the idea is that they will be able to grow in independence and confidence the more they use their services. Social accommodations can include registering with a post-secondary education program, just like UNCG's own ICS (integrative community studies), where students can have a community of support staff that help them transition to adulthood through individualized support in both the classroom and the college community (Oakes et al., 2018). These programs mostly serve those

who have intellectual developmental disabilities, but often these students can have co-morbid conditions that can sometimes have physical impacts.

In more recent years, post-secondary education programs have been creating opportunities for social support, inclusion and integration. In 2017, ThinkCollege listed over 264 post-secondary programs created to help college students who have intellectual disabilities lead independent lives (Prohn et al., 2018). The aim of these programs are to teach individuals skills that will help them live on their own and promote independence in the long run. These programs are typically designed to help individuals with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), down syndrome, and other disabilities to thrive throughout their college career. Many of the supports provided encourage students to learn how to advocate for themselves, cook, and use public transportation which are essential functions to living on their own after college.

Housing accommodation often includes modified spaces to meet the needs of people who have physical disabilities such as a larger living space and a single room for more mobility. For those who have intellectual/developmental disabilities, it could be something like ESAs or a room that meets their sensory or emotional needs (quieter spaces, single rooms, and rooms with emotional support animals) (Wilke et. al., 2019). These are spaces that are readily available on campuses for students to choose, but they need to get them through special request and go through the same process as one would for getting academic accommodations by visiting the school's office of accessibility resources. Literature on this topic particularly addresses student attitudes towards the process of receiving housing support and their satisfaction in doing so. Housing support makes living on your own slightly easier, but social support really solidifies that transition into the college environment.

Unlike social or academic accommodations, there were no studies that showed the “most preferred” or “highest used” accommodations in the community/housing settings for people who

have physical disabilities. The majority of their literature centered around the usefulness or attitudes towards the effectiveness of space. Effectiveness is the most important information anyhow, so it did not impact the quality of understanding strengths and deficiencies.

As for students with developmental disabilities, Accardo and colleagues found that 43% of the 23 Autistic individuals interviewed use housing accommodations to some capacity (2019). Autism was the only diagnosis with data found when researching a specific population, as the rest of the use/satisfactions of the general population of students with disabilities in their communities. This poses an issue as there are many more intellectual and developmental disabilities that need just as much research so they can make changes.

Another piece of information that was interesting was that a housing and social supports were often put together in literature. Wilke and colleagues said that housing accommodation matters because support can facilitate smooth integration into the social community (2019) and Minotti and colleagues made a similar claim, saying that housing is a vessel for social inclusion that could ultimately influence student mental health (2021). It is not a far off claim to say that these two depend on each other, as college is both a living and social community.

### **Critical Analysis of Academic Accommodation**

When searching for resources on this topic, there was one common problem. That problem being that much of the literature found on this subject and on the information on accommodation in academic spaces was from the years 2005-2022. There was not much new or updated information found within the past three years which posed an issue and showed gaps in current research. Regardless, there was still some research on this topic, it still poses the issue that there is nothing current enough to make proper evaluations on accommodations in more recent years. The literature found will focus more on what historically has been done at that point with the overall analysis and solutions being based on it. Additionally, there is not much

literature out there on accommodations for people who have physical disabilities shown in a positive light, but there was some as you will soon see.

Starting the analysis off on a positive note, it was found many times in literature that accommodation services ultimately benefited people who have disabilities in the long run. For example, it was found in a study by Kim and Lee those accommodations, such as test modifications have positive outcomes that boost the student's GPA the more that they use that resource (2016). This outcome came from the habitual use of this particular accommodation, meaning that the use did not just take the test with modifications once, but multiple times over their college career to get this outcome. It was also found in the same study that accommodations are most effective when they are used together (ex: using testing accommodations and modifications on assignments) (Kima and Lee, 2016). It can be determined that if students make a plan for their academic success and continually follow it, they can see long-term benefits towards their academic accommodations and their GPA.

Extended time on testing seems to be popular among students who's disabilities tend to interfere with their learning. One of the groups it was found to help the most was individuals on the autism spectrum. It was found in a two-year study done by Accardo and colleagues that 83% of the students who have autism that they surveyed enjoyed using extended time on testing. They felt it helped them comprehend the material better and understand what was being asked of them on the test (2019). It is not only for students with autism because it has been found to be a popular testing strategy among other college students who have disabilities as well. Slaughter and colleagues found that the college students they were interviewing who had a variety of disabilities liked extended time on testing because they reduced their anxiety, allowed them to demonstrate their full academic abilities, and improved their grades (2022). Adaptations to

testing seem to popular in literature, as many users are satisfied with their outcomes and it allows them to better understand and concentrate on exams.

Literature surrounding physical accommodations was scarce and far between unless you would like to learn more about the physical accessibility of college buildings. However, opinions on accessibility in campus spaces has been inconsistent and differs quite a bit. Edwards and colleagues heard little to no complaints when interviewing college students about the accessibility of their classroom spaces. They felt they were designed just fine to fit their mobility (2022). In comparison, some students were not so happy about the accessibility they were provided with. Some felt that the spaces were not user friendly. Simonson and colleagues found that their students with physical disabilities were unhappy with the physical spaces in comparison to their peers who had intellectual/developmental disabilities. They felt a lot of the public, non-living spaces they were using on campus were not user friendly (2013). There is a noticeable nine-year difference between these studies, so spaces may have improved over time, however it would take more than one study to come to that determination and there is a scarcity of literature in that department.

Students with acquired/traumatic brain injuries reported experiencing multiple challenges during their schooling. Their issues with services were not so much with their delivery, but how their condition affected their performance and the implementation of services. Davies and colleagues found that while the students they surveyed still used accommodations and had no issues with their services, they often felt like they did not have ample time to recover some of their skills they had before being injured before going back to school, posing issues with implementation (2019). Additionally, interviews done by Edwards and Parks revealed that their students still struggled with underlying issues associated with their condition as well but regularly used accommodations. Despite this, one interviewee voiced his distaste for some

accommodations thinking they were not sufficient or well thought out compared to other services he received at the same institution (2015). Underlying issues conditions can pose could further problems with full success in the educational environment and this is prevalent throughout literature. A CTRS could potentially help with these issues, as working with one could help reduce issues with the use of accommodations.

Much of the literature pointed towards issues that the deaf community had when receiving accommodations for communication. They often had problems with the quality of the interpreting services and community resources they were receiving. Johnson and Fann interviewed nineteen Deaf/hard of hearing college students in the community college setting that had interpreters as a form of accommodation. Their findings showed that many of the students were not happy with the quality of their interpreters and it made the quality of their services decline to some degree (2022). On top of that, historically there have been issues with access to classrooms for deaf students, as the language barriers make it challenging, showing that this has been an ongoing issue for accessibility. In 2005, it was found by Marschark and colleagues that deaf students had issues with accessibility to classroom content because of their language barriers and did not understand the content on the same level of their hearing peers (2005). This poses a major challenge and accessibility issue in classroom pertaining to language and the support an entire population is receiving.

A lot of literature showed difficulties with communicating with faculty as previously shown. This seems to be a common theme in academic space. As previously shown, many students have had issues with accessibility due to issues with faculty relationships and problems understanding their lesson plans. This seems to be a prominent issue that needs to be addressed as it is causing issues in people's education and comprehension of their assignments. It is up to

school faculty to in this situation to speak with their students come to a collaborative understanding in the end.

Stigma was another common theme. As mentioned before, college students often do not self-disclose due to the stigma around receiving accommodations. Unfortunately due to inaccurate peer perceptions, it has been found that a lot of the times their peers view their accommodations as an “unfair advantage”, especially if the individual has a non-apparent disability (Deckoff-Jones and Duell, 2018). This is not the case, as many individuals may have an invisible physical disability and they need their accommodation for classroom tasks. This has especially been the case for those who have invisible physical disabilities as they had the highest rate of having their academic accommodations being deemed as “inappropriate” for their condition (Deckoff-Jones and Duell, 2018). This is unethical as disability does not have a “look”. Some people’s may be non-apparent and that should not affect the quality of the services they receive or the perception of their peers towards their services.

Ultimately, there is a lot to know about accommodations as it pertains to the classroom. Accommodations obviously have some benefits such as making GPAs higher, allowing more people to feel comfortable in the testing environment, and providing some level of physical accessibility to classroom spaces. But there are still some areas where they need a lot of work, such as accessibility in other spaces, such as historical issues with classroom spaces, communication barriers, and stigma from peers to due to academic accommodations being deemed as “inappropriate”. The literature was more detailed on what specific issues were than specific strengths, showing that researchers tend to be more detailed on issues than they are on things that are not viewed as a problem.

Researchers would go into more detail about what the issues were and why they were issues, while with the areas they did well in, they would typically only put the percentage and

follow up with a short reasoning. Literature was also specific to particularly vulnerable populations, such as people who are Deaf/hard of hearing and those who are physically disabled. Literature on issues to accessibility heavily referenced disabilities with physical hinderance, rather than issues for those who have I/DDs. Understanding issues in detail is crucial, as it gives more insight to pressing issues.

### **Critical Analysis of Housing and Social Accommodations:**

The biggest commonality I found in the literature for this section is that the majority of the scholarly journals were focused on talking to students about their lived experience with access to spaces within education. Having accessibility and fixing issues with it requires people o listen to those who struggle with acquiring access in the first place and it seems that researchers and authors are moving in that direction. From what students were saying, post-secondary programs and housing offices seem to be putting their best foot forward to meet needs. There was some notable literature about faculty and student relationships that caused some hinderance that will be addressed later, showing that some of the issues to access are about human error, not the spaces themselves. That is not to say though that there are not still physical accessibility issues on campus. The only article found on the matter talks about perceptions of accommodations creating barriers, but that just shows there is a need for more research on dormitory accommodations and how people with physical disabilities feel the spaces could be improved. The analysis in this section will start off speaking on post-secondary programs and their benefits.

One of the biggest praises of social supports in post-secondary education such as their programs specifically created for people with disabilities is the fact that friends, families, and faculty have seen students independence skyrocket in comparison to when they first came to college. This accommodation doubles as both a social and housing accommodation, as they

often have people come to their living space as extra assistance in learning independence skills or help them navigate the campus community (Prohn et al., 2018). In King and colleagues' study they found that students had a newfound sense of independence. Being taught new skills and having people show them how to live by themselves through university support made a huge difference. Services such as these programs also made them feel like they had a place where they belonged in the community (2023). Gaining independence is essential to transferring to adulthood and leading a life on your own. However, college students with disabilities need communities like these and direct support to teach them the necessary skills for living by themselves.

Another benefit that is co-occurring with their new sense of independence is that they have a reduced need for one-on-one support throughout the week. Prohn and colleagues found in their study that the longer to utilize disability support services in their program, the less they would need them towards the end of their education because they were able to be more independent (2018). People with intellectual/developmental disabilities are capable of living independently and of doing a lot of great things. They just need the support to help jumpstart their journey. Seeing results like these shows us that colleges are trying their best to push students in the right direction.

With these programs being implemented, there are still some drawbacks to their implementation. One that was discovered by Grigal and colleagues was that some post-secondary programs still have issues with their staff's expectations of students. Some of them treat their students as if they are not competent or capable, resulting in attitudinal barriers (2012). This circles back to the idea of human error, such as low expectations and poor attitudes towards helping individuals who have disabilities being the cause for the majority of the issues found within literature. On top of that, Francis and colleagues found that in some cases university staff

outside of these programs would make students feel dehumanized and sometimes flat out refuse to implement their accommodations (2019). While this problem does not pertain to the post-secondary programs themselves, it still poses a huge issue because it breaks legislation and makes students feel unempowered in social spaces such as the classroom.

Another issue that was prevalent in both the housing and social spaces were the presence of interpersonal conflicts with roommates because of issues they had with that individuals disability. Wilke and colleagues found that in some university spaces, students did not have a way to pick a roommate who was compatible and accepting of their disability. One of the students reported facing derogatory behavior from her roommate as well due to her disability (2019). Feeling unwelcome in your own space can set the tone for a miserable experience when you are living by yourself at college. Having a supportive roommate makes all of the difference during this experience. Additionally, in the earlier mentioned King and colleagues study students reported having interpersonal conflicts with their roommates despite the support from their programs (2023). While this is pretty normal among college students, it is still important to have supportive roommates and housing to foster that sense of community.

Community exists in the classroom, campus life, and most importantly the residence hall. Residence halls are like the anchor for campus life and activities. Literature surrounding studies around the spaces actual accessibility were scarce. But there were still obstacles for students with physical disabilities in housing spaces. Vaccaro and Kimball spoke to residential directors who worked with people who have physical disabilities to meet their accessibility needs. Sometimes their peers would see their accommodations as “unfair practices” because they would get things such as single rooms or receive transportation help, causing community tension (2019). This is a wildly untrue misconception, as these bigger rooms and extra assistance allow full immersion

into campus life. It's a tool used to create equity, not a divide between peers in the university setting.

So far, it seems that colleges are doing a good job in their post-secondary programming and planning. Students are getting the support they need and it is allowing them to do things on their own without the presence of support all of the time. Students are growing in their confidence as well because they feel a higher sense of acceptance when they have higher levels of accessibility because they are able to participate fully in their communities. These programs give them a space to be themselves and try new experiences in their communities. There are still setbacks unfortunately, like attitudinal barriers at certain institutions and denial of services, which have the opposite effect and often leave students feeling stuck and dehumanized.

It was disappointing to see little to no literature around accessibility of housing spaces. It is an existing issue and needs to be explored more by scholars. There were significant issues around people's perceptions and treatment of people who have intellectual and physical disabilities in on campus housing, however. Having the right roommates and residential staff to aid these students would be ideal, as community matters greatly and people deserve to be accepted and seen as human, regardless of disability status. They should not be harassed for their disability status or have their accommodations seen as "unfair". Additionally, if they are having roommate conflict, they should have someone who could teach them how to navigate it.

### **Benefits of a CTRS in the University Environment**

Ideally, students go to college so they are able to learn skills necessary to obtain a degree so they are able to support themselves and learn valuable skills pertaining to independent living. People who have physical and intellectual/developmental disabilities often need some extra assistance and education to master these skills. They need help learning how to do activities of daily living (ADLs) independently, such as cooking, cleaning, and utilizing transportation across

their town or campus. Often times, they also face intimidation when it comes to advocacy and communication with peers, teachers, and staff where they may need to demonstrate assertion.

A CTRS could help students who have disabilities on college campuses face their challenges head on. Oakes and colleagues found that higher education programs have adopted the concept of having a CTRS on their staff to help students over the past couple of decades (2018). Their skill sets and expertise may be just what the college community needs. They have the expertise to implement programs that can help with independence, improve communication and understanding between the community and individuals with disabilities, and teach students the necessary social skills to navigate the college setting and handle adult responsibilities (Oakes et al., 2018).

Oakes and colleagues had one of the strongest pieces of literature on the subject, as it directly addressed the presence of a CTRS in the university. It probably the only piece in existence on a CTRS working in a post-secondary educational setting. Their paper talked about how a lot of university spaces need a CTRS to plan activities that could teach people who have disabilities their necessary skills for independence through activities. They then go on to give an example of an activity that the CTRS developed surrounding communication and interpersonal communication skills with outdoor adventures. They explained that the CTRS followed the APIED process, assessing clients before and after the trip. The CTRS then went onto partner with outdoor adventures where they planned a weekend outdoors. The CTRS implemented, taking the students on the trip. After the trip, he evaluated student attitudes and found an increase in confidence and communication skills, and he documented throughout (2018).

This is a great example of using the APIED process to improve skills that accommodations may not be able to strengthen. By working with outdoor adventures, the CTRS saw better social outcomes in students which was seen to be an issue in literature. If a CTRS was

on staff to work with students to improve relationships with their faculty and roommates, potentially improving them and removing some of the barriers that were previously there regarding communication.

Another benefit is that the majority of CTRS look at their client from a strengths-based scope, access to a CTRS as a resource could be highly beneficial to the student. Heyne and Anderson describe the strengths-based model of practice as seeing someone as a whole unique person, with talents, aspirations and life goals rather than as their diagnosis or disability (2012). These plans typically include broader goals that apply to their wellbeing during and after college. In a school setting, a lot of these goals have to do with the students' academic or social, social, and emotional success (Oakes et. al., 2018). The CTRS has a responsibility to help the student meet those goals under their scope of practice. In that case, they could work with the client to make academic and social success plans.

These plans could lay out all of the accommodations they would like to advocate for and directly address any issues students could be experiencing in the classroom. This could particularly applied to Deaf and hard of hearing students. The CTRS could not directly fix their communication issues, but they could aid in advocacy for different tutors or help them make an academic so they can better comprehend the material. Since the CTRS usually does a baseline assessment, they could use that data to help the students advocate for their needs and potentially reduce the risk of faculty not taking their accommodation needs seriously.

The concept of person-centered planning could also reduce feelings of dehumanization they feel from faculty, as they would have autonomy in their planning process. PCP is a concept that directly practices the strengths-based model. McCausland and colleagues say that person centered planning in community settings is where a person who has a disability identifies what they are interested in doing with their life and creates a plan so they can do so (2021). The

purpose of this planning method is to promote as much autonomy as possible and allow people who have disabilities to make decisions about what they would like their future to look like.

McCausland and colleagues show in their study that CPC leads to planning for careers or identifying social opportunities that may be better centered to the students' needs (2021). This method of planning could help them plan what they would like to get out of their college experience and life after college. From there, the CTRS and student could pick interventions to make small steps towards meeting the overall goal (boosting confidence to get a job, making friends, etc.).

Intellectual/developmental disabilities are not the only types of disabilities a CTRS could help with living independently. Planning and treatment from a CTRS could have many positive outcomes for helping people who have acquired/traumatic brain injuries as well. Gregory and colleagues did studies on students who have had brain injuries and were attending university at the time. They were measured ninety to one-hundred and eight days in with the functional independence measure scale (FIM) and the functional assessment measure (FAM) to measure progress after being treated by a CTRS. They worked on motor, social and cognitive skills. It was found that after the ninety to a hundred- and eighty-day period of treatment post injury that there were improvements in their independence (2018). With tremendous improvements in independence, it has shown that working with a CTRS could help people who have an A/TBI succeed in college. Additionally, the CTRS could expand from just helping people with intellectual/developmental disabilities like in the Oakes study and have the potential to expand to helping people who have acquired injuries as well. They could work on adjustment to life after college and functional independence just like Gregory's team did in this study.

In addition to social pursuits, it has been shown that activities a CTRS facilitates can help with areas such as working memory and learning outcomes for people who have

acquired/traumatic brain injuries. These interventions have especially been helpful in treating their underlying conditions and improve outcomes in memory. Velikonja and colleagues found that the most effective way to deliver memory interventions to people who have traumatic/acquired brain injuries is to do so through using solid visuals and practicing retrieval. These processes, while helpful, need to be done repeatedly to be fully effective (2023). A CTRS could meet weekly with the student and play memory or quiz games to try to strengthen and restore their working memory. These interventions have the potential to reduce challenges in their academic life.

Literature suggests there are ways to involve a CTRS in the crux of student and campus life. They can provide community support for students by strengthening their social skills and helping them plan for the future. They would also be able to make academic plans that include specific outcomes they would like to see from their classes and accommodations the CTRS has helped the student identify, providing resource education. This way, they have attainable goals to work towards in their college education and they are able to better plan what they would like to study and do after college.

## **Conclusion**

Having a CTRS in the university space could be highly beneficial, as there is an increasing need for disability services and accommodations do not necessarily cover every aspect of student need. While they certainly have the potential to be a helpful tool, they do not account for certain student needs. University spaces serve a large range of people who have disabilities. Their needs diverse, as their disabilities vary, posing a variety of different challenges during their time in college. Literature has shown that having a CTRS could potentially improve advocacy for accommodation services, help students navigate interpersonal conflicts social

accommodations do not account for, and improve educational outcomes for students who may experience issues with memory and independence.

Much of the literature from this review suggests that accommodations, when successful, have the potential to help students succeed in their academic careers and serve their intended purpose. They are in place due to barriers disability might create for the individual, making them a highly needed service. Their purpose can be achieved by utilizing proper planning, having the support of the right staff, and adapting and finding effective strategies that fit individual needs. Sometimes universities fall short and deliver ineffective services or the delivery of their accommodations are ineffective due to human error. Negative attitudes from peers and staff and poor delivery have the potential to ruin the experience of receiving accommodations. Many students struggle to get the accommodations they need due to these attitudes and the stigma it creates, making their social and academic lives tough.

Effective academic and social accommodations lead to better outcomes in their academic performances and social lives. Many students are seeing improvement in their grades and academic confidence when they are using accommodations such as extended time on testing. Additionally, students who are enrolled in support programs such as ICS and utilize their individualized supports to learn independent living skills are seeing higher independence, showing an increase in need for support services like these. Highly effective services are improving lives and learning outcomes so that people who have disabilities will be able to live independently and thrive in their academics.

Ineffective accommodation strategies have the potential to pose issues for the thousands of students enrolling in post-secondary education programs. The negative literature from this review found that barriers can be posed by negative attitudes from support staff and teachers, making it more challenging to communicate with people who are supposed to be helpers in the

community. There were other areas accommodations cannot control in the social space either, such as roommate conflict, but there are ways to help improve the situation. Social support from a CTRS could fill in these gaps, as they could do interventions to aid with interpersonal conflict and develop confident advocacy skills using the data the CTRS has from the evaluation.

Additionally, certain spaces and accommodations are not designed with certain types of disabilities in mind. The studies on traumatic brain injuries and the deaf community were great examples of this, as it shows that obstacles can sometimes be posed by a mix of disability and error in design. This is where something like the success plans CTRS make with their clients to improve their academic outcomes could potentially meet their needs, because as stated previously many of these plans. Although, there were some areas in literature that a CTRS could not address, such as the inaccessibility of public spaces. This is an issue that should be taken to higher-up officials with the assistance of the school's disability support staff.

Kind community and academic support paired with effective accommodation strategies is a recipe for student success of students who have disabilities. It was shown in the studies that students were able to have better college experiences rate when they had services that pertained to their needs and people around them who were rooting for them. On top of that, a lot of students saw benefit from utilizing interventions from a CTRS in areas that their accommodations were not helping with. Because of these outcomes, it can be determined that having a CTRS on staff could be beneficial for post-secondary education programs. The supportive, person-centered nature of their services and their effectiveness would pair perfectly with effective accommodations to provide students with better outcomes so they can thrive during and after their college career.

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