Fall 2005

Impact of Labeling, Legislation, and Accommodations on the Academic Achievement of African American Students with Learning Disabilities

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During the last three decades, public schools have positively contemplated the concepts of mainstreaming, least restrictive environment and inclusion and have begun to serve more students with disabilities in K-12 general education classes (Hicks-Coolick & Kurtz, 1996). There has been a corresponding increase in the number of students with disabilities who attend colleges and universities. However, at the postsecondary level, issues of educating students with disabilities are often different than those affecting K-12 education, and the instructional climate is much more challenging. Therefore, this trend calls for a more systematic method of assessing needed accommodations for diverse learning needs.

The purpose of this study was to explore the impact of labeling, legislation, and accommodations on the postsecondary academic success of African-American students with learning disabilities (LD). An in-depth analysis of the academic interventions and accommodations that postsecondary students with LD received that contributed to their academic success and barriers that LD students experienced in accessing an appropriate postsecondary education were identified.
The participants of the study were three African-American students who were classified as LD and attend Albany State University (ASU), a small public historically Black University (HBCU) in Southwest Georgia (SOWEGA). Participants were interviewed using a two-part survey questionnaire associated with postsecondary success. The interviews were tape recorded to ensure accuracy of description of students’ educational experiences. Further, each participant was observed in an academic setting. Interviews, observations, and field notes were coded and organized.

Through questioning the data and reflecting upon the research objectives, interviews, educational records, and observations, emergent themes relevant to academic interventions and accommodations that the three postsecondary students with LD received that contributed to their academic success were obtained and interpretations discussed with participants. By revealing the academic interventions and accommodations that contributed to their academic success, as well as identifying barriers and issues that they experienced in accessing an appropriate postsecondary education, it is hoped that faculty and staff who work in institutions of higher learning will take into consideration the suggested recommendations for increasing the success of students with LD on their campus. Specifically for the participants, their stories will help other students with LD to examine their personal and professional lives. Finally, findings of this study will offer practical implications for educators to improve instruction and create equal opportunities for students with LD.

INDEX WORDS: Labeling, Legislation, Accommodations, Academic achievement, Postsecondary African American students, Learning disabilities
THE IMPACT OF LABELING, LEGISLATION, AND ACCOMMODATIONS
ON THE ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT
OF POSTSECONDARY AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS
WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES

by

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A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of Georgia Southern University
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

STATESBORO, GEORGIA

2005
THE IMPACT OF LABELING, LEGISLATION, AND ACCOMMODATIONS ON THE ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT OF POSTSECONDARY AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES

by

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Electronic Version Approved:
December 2005
DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the late Mrs. Mamie Jane Hunt Huckaby (Gram’mama), a true matriarch who taught me the value of education.

This dissertation is also dedicated to my husband, John, and my children, Chasen, Kelsey, Kensley, and Jasmyn. I Love You All!

This dissertation was completed in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Thanks be to God!
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to extend my warmest appreciation to Dr. Ming Fang He, my dissertation chair. While swamped with many other obligations and students, you never rushed me and were always thorough and efficient in reviewing my work. Your dedication to my progress and encouragement for excellence will never be forgotten.

Committee members, Drs. Dorothy Battle, Theodore Pikes, and William Reynolds – Your kindness made this intellectual endeavor less painful and your erudition made it more absolute. A special thanks to Dr. Pikes - Even though you left ASU, you did not abandon my research. This allegiance is greatly appreciated.

Participants – I hope you find that this work has helped you find your voice and speaks of those experiences you want shared in support of enhancing the educational experiences of fellow African American postsecondary students with learning disabilities.

Albany State University (faculty, staff, and students) – The spoken and unspoken words of encouragement, empathetic stories shared, emailed prayers and sentiments, and claims of success let me know that I am truly blessed to coincide with such a supportive group. An exceptional thanks to Drs. Patricia Jenkins and Carolyn Rollins for your proofreading and editing. A year’s worth of lunches at the Ram’s Place could not repay you for this labor. A special thanks to Dale Rose, my dedicated student assistant, who kept me organized, taught me computer skills, listened to me talk to myself, etc., etc., etc. You were a God-send this year! Appreciation is also extended to Dr. Claude Perkins for bringing me on board at ASU and encouraging me to pursue a doctorate; and Drs. John Culbreath, Wilburn Campbell, Portia Shields, and Ellis Sykes for supporting me through the process.
Last but not least, I must acknowledge my family. John, my husband and best friend, I confer upon you my degree as your honorary doctorate because you deserve it just as much as I. How did I ever deserve anyone as kind, generous, hard-working, family-oriented and dedicated as you? I will always love you.

Chasen, Kelsey, Kensley, and Jasmyn – Over the past years while I have been going to school, you all have grown so much, and in so many ways. No mother has ever been more proud of her children than I am of each of you. I love you guys!

Lillie– Thanks for being such a good Mother and Granny. I can always count on you and know that you will do whatever it takes to support your children and grandchildren.

Hollis – I truly believe you are a misplaced philosopher. Your words of wisdom and educational philosophy have always served as motivation for my educational career.

Jacque’ – From afar I know that your wind has always been beneath my wings. I love you Sis.

Chris – You’re next. Can you dig it my brother?!!

Evelyn, Dorothy, Matilda, and Danyal – For being surrogates to my kids and supporting my family in any way that you could, I will never forget your generosity.

Mr. and Mrs. John Fields, Sr. – Thanks for all of your support and encouragement. As in-laws, you are the Best of the Best.

Malcolm, Martin, Chloe’, Weseley, and Alexis – The future is yours!
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

There is an increasing number of students with Learning Disabilities (LD) who have attended postsecondary educational institutions over the last decade. With this growing trend, disability professionals in postsecondary institutions have had to learn to provide services and accommodations beyond physical access for students with disabilities. For the first time on postsecondary campuses, colleges have had to address issues such as assessment, documentation, identification, and alternative approaches to providing instruction and accommodations for students with disabilities. Questions regarding identification of a student with a learning disability must be answered, and the admissions process for admitting individuals with LD into colleges and universities must be evaluated. Additionally, student and faculty attitudes must be assessed and the climate of the institution appraised; all to enhance the potential for success of students with LD who are new to college campuses.

Not since 1954, when the Supreme Court ended segregation with its decision in Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, has the educational environment undergone such an extreme challenge (Irons, 2002). Fifty years later, the school systems of the United States are still struggling to provide an equitable education for minorities. For ethnic minorities with disabilities, the struggle is further compounded. Will 2054 find postsecondary educational facilities still struggling with the ordeal to admit and appropriately educate students with learning disabilities? For minority students, will ANY decade find postsecondary educational facilities proportionally admitting and educating their brothers and sisters? It is hoped that this study, and replications of those
similar to it, will assist institutions in their struggle to meet the needs of the LD population finding its way onto their grounds, especially those populations inclusive of minority students.

The uniqueness of school-age students with LD spans all boundaries. It is a minority group that includes both sexes, does not discriminate along socioeconomic and ethnic lines, and is one in which many of whom may hold membership at same point due to accident, illness or aging. However, when these same factors are considered while analyzing groups of students with LD in postsecondary settings, drastic changes are imposed upon this statement. Although substantial changes have taken place to improve access to higher education regardless of such factors as age, gender, ethnicity, disability and socioeconomic status, efforts to enroll college students in proportions that mirror society and its changing face have fallen short.

The data on disproportionality is relatively new since states were not required to collect special education data by ethnicity and ethnicity until the IDEA was reauthorized in 1997 (MacMillan & Reschly, 1998). Additionally, the disability categories and ethnic groups of greatest concern appear to be those of emotional disturbance and mental retardation as it relates to African American and Hispanic students. However, while these two disability categories are of greatest concern for individuals monitoring disproportionality within ALL disability groups, LD joins the ranks when the focus shifts to examining numbers of minority students entering postsecondary institutions.

An increased understanding of a group of individuals is the first step toward developing means to assist their progress. While Fonoisch and Schwab (1981) found that direct experience with students with disabilities helped to reconcile negative attitudes
toward them, information about the ways in which students with disabilities cope with their environments might also be helpful. As labeling of many students with disabilities causes stigmatization and attributes to the development of poor self-concept, many lack the needed skills to navigate their educational setting. Increasing faculty and staff members’ knowledge of the characteristics regarding students with disabilities has benefits in that it creates opportunities for understanding and allows for appropriate provision of accommodations. Thus, the major focus of this study is to investigate the dissemination of major issues relating to the academic needs of students with LD on college campuses.

At the very least, information found in this study about African American students with LD should increase the awareness of the needs of disabled students and the ways in which campuses meet, or fail to meet these needs. It is hoped that educators, administrators, counselors and other staff review these findings, in order to gain new insights, do away with old stereotypes, and increase sensitivity to varying disabled student characteristics and experiences. With this understanding, university service providers will modify or expand existing programs and/or develop new ones that incorporate and reflect needs and experiences of students with disabilities.

**Context of the Study**

Over the past 30 years, federal legislation such as the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and Section 504, the Vocational Amendments Act of 1976, the 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Individual with Disabilities Act of 1990 (IDEA), and the Carl Perkins Vocational and Technology Education Act has mandated equal opportunities for students with LD to receive transition services, accommodations, and academic
remediation (Vogel, 1993a). These services have substantially improved standardized test scores, academic averages, and graduation rates of students with learning disabilities. Thus more and more high school students with disabilities are now experiencing success in Preschool-12 academic settings and continue their education in postsecondary institutions.

Since 1976, the number of college freshmen with LD has increased “tenfold,” resulting in this group of students becoming the fastest growing group of college students with disabilities receiving services at the postsecondary level (Norlander, Shaw, & McGuire, 1990). In 1986, 29% of students with a disability had enrolled in postsecondary education; in 1994 45%; and, in 1996, 6% to 9% of all undergraduate students reported having a disability with LD being the most prevalent disability reported, with 29% to 35% of those reporting a disability (Henderson, 1998). Between 1988 and 2000, LD was the fastest growing category of reported disability among students. By 2000, two in five freshmen with disabilities, 40%, cited a learning disability compared with only 16% in 1988 (Heath Resource Center, 2001).

Slightly more than half of students reporting disabilities attended public postsecondary institutions. Another 42% attended independent colleges and universities, and 4% chose Historically African American Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) (Heath Resource Center, 2001). According to the Heath Resource Center in 2001 (p. 21), a summary of the Cooperative Institutional Research Program’s (CIRP) national survey of full-time college freshmen with LD attending four-year institutions revealed that students with LD were most likely to:
• Be from white/Caucasian families (81% versus 72%).
• Be 19 or older (45% versus 37%).
• Be from families whose income exceeded $100,000 (42% versus 30%).
• Have parents who were college graduates (65% versus 55%).
• Have earned “C” or “D” averages in high school (17% versus 12%).
• Expect that they will need special tutoring or remedial work in English (28% versus 19%), reading (18% versus 11%), and mathematics (41% versus 36%).
• Consider majoring in arts and sciences (20% versus 15%).
• Rank themselves lowest on math ability (31% versus 38%), intellectual self-confidence (51% versus 57%), academic ability (42% versus 57%), and writing ability (34% versus 42%).

The purpose of the CIRP survey was to provide a profile of first-time, full-time freshmen at the beginning of their college experiences and track the trends that emerged as a result of the findings. In regards to individuals with disabilities, beyond increased access to postsecondary institutions, various other factors surfaced to support the increase in the population of students with LD on college campuses. Until approximately 15 years ago, it was quite possible for students with and/or without disabilities to finish high school with a general diploma and get a job that would provide support for himself or herself, as well as a family (Gilmore, Bose, & Hart, 2001). Today, that has changed. With the deletion of the general high school diploma option and the inclusion of high stakes testing as a requirement for receiving a vocational or college preparatory diploma, many students with and without disabilities are facing difficulties meeting graduation requirements. Now, many general labor positions require at least a two-year college
diploma, and most skilled labor jobs require significant computer ability with training provided by local colleges. As a result, these students hurdle the task of graduating from high school, see the urgent need for obtaining postsecondary educational training, and enroll in colleges and universities in record numbers (Gilmore, et al., 2001).

As the population of students with LD increases, many institutions have taken great strides to address their needs. Recent literature reflects, while students with LD are being admitted to colleges and universities, many institutions of higher education were lagging in their efforts to understand and provide adequate services to students with learning disabilities. Further, while increases were indeed recorded, there was a disparate gap in the number of White and African American students that comprised these statistics (Heath Resource Center, 2001). In addition, there was evidence suggesting that many students who enrolled in postsecondary institutions had difficulty completing their program of study (Mull, Sitlington, & Alper, 2001). This held true even more so for minority students with learning disabilities.

Yost, Shaw, Cullen, and Bigaj (1994) reported that many colleges and universities offered little more than a generic list of support services available to students with disabilities. They adopted a “one-accommodation-fits-all” approach and allowed students to fend for themselves. Rather than collaborate with students and work together to determine their needs, the trend on many campuses was to provide a list of what accommodations were offered and imply that these were finite.

Supporting the growing trend, West, Kregel, and Getzel (1993) found postsecondary students learned how to cope with provided services instead of finding ways to become more proactive and seek out additional services that may be needed for a
successful educational and social experience. Many students entered the postsecondary educational environment with scars of ridicule, learned helplessness, and low self-esteem imposed upon them in the K-12 school setting. For still other students, the implications of being labeled and educated in special education settings have had detrimental effects on their abilities to be self-motivated and owners of their education. Therefore, they have developed a pattern of operating within a defined framework rather than venturing outside of a prescribed zone and “leaving the educational box.” There is no doubt that these patterns transitioned with the student to postsecondary settings and became a perpetual continuation of learning in the same “comfortable” manner.

Still, those students with LD who did seek out additional supports, argued that institutions were unresponsive to their needs, often avoided their responsibilities of providing support services and accommodations, and questioned the authenticity of their disability (Vogel & Adelman, 1990). There is a large segment of professionals who continue to question whether learning disabilities are real or mere “gimmicks” to get accommodations. Students with LD and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) sued Boston University for unfair treatment under the ADA, the Rehabilitation Act, and Massachusetts state law. Judge Patricia Saris ruled against Boston University mainly because of statements made by Jon Westling in his 1990 speech to the Heritage Foundation in which he referred to the increased number of students with learning disabilities as a “genetic catastrophe” (Shalit, 1997, p. 16). Judge Salis, using these comments, stated that Westling was “substantially motivated by uninformed stereotypes” about students with LD (Shalit, 1997, p. 16). Unfortunately, his views are still shared by many who are in positions to make policies for those they misunderstand.
Another issue facing students with LD enrolled in postsecondary institutions was their lack of awareness of their rights and responsibilities as college students. While research indicates that students with LD who knew their rights and responsibilities were better prepared to succeed in postsecondary school, few were equipped with this knowledge. Currently, the fact still remains that great numbers of minority students graduating from both high school and college are first generation graduates. In his article, “Rise of the African American Middle Class,” Robert Harris (1999) reported that about 86 percent of African Americans from 25 to 29 years of age have graduated from high school, a rate comparable to that of whites. In 1980, 8 percent of African Americans were graduating from college, still less than half the white rate of 17 percent. About a third of African American high school graduates attend college and 13 percent graduate. Although the gap is narrowing, white students attend college at a higher rate (about 42 percent) than African Americans, and about 23 percent graduate. (p. 1)

As first generation high school graduates, who advises them of important application dates, financial aid procedures, or required prerequisite tests and courses for college? With no one before them having experienced what they desire to experience, how will these students know what is available for them to ask for to meet their needs? How will this LD student learn what rights and responsibilities pertain to them in the postsecondary educational environment?

In postsecondary institutions, students with LD have additional responsibilities beyond what they experienced as high school students. Unlike high schools, postsecondary institutions are not required to provide a free and appropriate public
education (FAPE). Rather, postsecondary institutions are required to provide appropriate academic adjustments and accommodations. While the Office for Civil Rights (OCR) in the U.S. Department of Education provides information to students and their parents and explains the rights and responsibilities of students with disabilities who are preparing to attend postsecondary schools, it is extremely important that this resource and those like it are widely publicized. The office also explains the obligations of postsecondary schools to provide academic adjustments, including auxiliary aids and services, to ensure that the school does not discriminate on the basis of disability.

For a variety of reasons, statistics reveal an increasing number of students with LD are enrolling in college. Some are successful, but many are not. The National Center for Education Statistics (1999) found that 52% of students with LD versus 64% of students without disabilities received their first degree or were still enrolled. Murray, Goldstein, Nourse and Edgar (2000) found that 80% of students with LD who attended postsecondary institutions had not graduated after five years, compared to 56% of students without disabilities.

It is important that colleges and universities that admit students with disabilities understand why some students with LD complete college while others do not. Vogel and Adelman (1990) surveyed a national sample of 502 postsecondary institutions and found that the proportion of students with learning disabilities ranged from .5% to almost 10%. Although all students in college experienced new learning conditions, students with LD were at greater risk for failure because of their inherent learning disabilities (Lerner, 1997). Their ability to self-assess strengths, deficits, interests, and values was often
impaired, and they found decision making to be a difficult and problematic process (Cummings, Maddux & Casey, 2000).

Brandt and Berry (1991) reported that academic preparation, personal/social skill development, and individualized transition planning were common problem areas for students with learning disabilities attending college. McGuire, Madaus, Litt, & Ramirez, (1998) also reported,

College-bound students with learning disabilities fail to understand that they will face a different set of demands within a postsecondary setting. They soon become overwhelmed by the amount of assigned material as well as the fast pace of instruction. Many lack the skills and strategies that are necessary for managing and self-monitoring their learning in a variety of contexts. (p. 96)

When enrolling in a postsecondary institution, students with LD often moved from an environment where they were carefully guided to a setting where they were expected to achieve on their own (Brinckerhoff, Shaw, & McGuire, 1992). On the campuses where these students with LD were identified, the factors that had a significant impact on the success of those students with LD ranged from the size of the student body, the type of institution, the institution’s Carnegie classification, and whether the institution offered graduate degree programs.

The intent of this research was to determine which factors significantly impacted the lives of three students with LD who attend ASU. By revealing the academic interventions and accommodations that contributed to their academic success, as well as identifying barriers and issues that they experienced in accessing an appropriate
postsecondary education, it is hoped that their stories will help to influence future policies and accommodations adopted not only on this campus, but also on those similar to it. Optimally, faculty, staff, and administrators who work in institutions of higher learning will take into consideration the suggested recommendations (adapted from Shaw, McGuire, & Brinckerhoff, 1994) for increasing the success of students with LD on their campus.

**Research Questions**

The general research question was: What impact does the implications of labeling, legislation, and accommodations have on the success of African-American postsecondary students with learning disabilities at Albany State University?

Specific research questions were:

- What implication did the LD label have on the academic success of students entering into the postsecondary educational environment?
- What knowledge did participants have of specific laws governing their matriculation?
- What academic accommodations, supports, and services did the participants use in postsecondary education?
- What barriers did students with LD identify in postsecondary educational settings?
- What level of involvement did the participants demonstrate in designing their postsecondary academic accommodations?

In selecting the research topic, I regressed to my autobiographical roots as the source. Coming from a background in English education, I always thought, and was taught, that
one writes best about what one knows. Combining this rule of thumb with my special education expertise, I determined that I would write stories about students with disabilities who had seemingly overcome huge obstacles. In my present position at a historically Black college/university (HBCU), I also considered the available population, minority students. Thus, my research topic and theoretical framework were formulated.

The first phase of my research focused on the specific population under study and relevant cultural issues that contributed to their postsecondary studies. The second prong consisted of determining the specific phenomenon to be studied, as well as the best means of presenting the data collected. In considering the type of data to be presented, I immediately thought of stories as a means of relaying this vital information to my audience. However, mere stories would not justly inform others of the struggles and accomplishments that make up the lives of the population under review. Using critical case studies allowed me to draw from the insight of those students who have experienced college life as an African-American individual with a learning disability. Rather than simply relying on prior studies of individuals with LD on other campuses, this design allowed me to document the stories of those students with LD who have “phenomenologically lived” in the ASU environment. These case studies will hopefully serve as models for other minority students with LD to follow in their pursuit for appropriate access to postsecondary education accommodations.

**Autobiographical Roots of My Inquiry**

My desire to study the accommodations and barriers of students with LD in postsecondary education rose from my prior and continuing personal and professional experiences with LD students. I spent three years as a high school special education
teacher prior to becoming an instructor of special education in higher education. In both arenas, I have been instrumental in the leadership of implementing the inclusive model for providing educational services. My personal exposure to students receiving special education services and a review of inclusion research, lead me to the belief that schools implementing inclusive educational programs are more effective in reaching students than schools who are closer to the segregated end of the continuum. With this in mind, I have carefully followed the research addressing successes of special education students, especially those students with learning disabilities.

During my first year as a high school special education teacher, I was assigned to a resource room for students with learning disabilities. Previously having taught in a general education classroom, I was a bit skeptical of which pedagogical skills that I already possessed would need to be modified to reach students with learning disabilities. While I did have to differentiate my teaching style, I made even more changes in my counseling and motivational strategies. Why? Because in my special education classes, what I faced was not a classroom of students who could not achieve, but a group of young adults who had been taught, told, and treated as if they would never make any significant accomplishments once leaving high school with their “special education diploma.”

As I began motivating my students, instilling some self-determination and erasing the learned helplessness, I discovered some very bright and talented students. These same students, who declared technical or labor vocations in their initial transition plans began to consider the possibility of pursuing a postsecondary education and earning a college
degree. More importantly, they began to work along the general curriculum guidelines as their nondisabled peers.

After leaving the high school arena and entering the higher education arena, I found that I had not left my students with LD behind. I found them in many of the classes I was assigned to teach. More importantly, I found them performing well. I began to record their names and asked them to come by and talk with me as they continued with their studies. To my surprise, they did. They came when they were doing well, or when they had problems; when they passed a major test, or when they failed. They would especially come by when they graduated (with an invitation and gift expectation). Their stories became my classroom examples and now my research topic.

Understanding the issues surrounding LD has occurred through both my personal experiences, review of the literature, and conversations with other educators. I liken this to Eisner’s (1998) concept of connoisseurship that he describes as "the means through which we come to know the complexities, nuances, and subtleties of aspects of the world in which we have a special interest" (p. 68). My past experiences as a high school special education teacher, post secondary special education instructor, and observer in high schools and post secondary institutions allowed me to recognize the accommodations and strategies, as well as practices of effective college professors, contributing to the success of students with learning disabilities. I have seen both effective and ineffective accommodations and instruction in postsecondary institutions. These observations and prior knowledge have allowed me to better analyze data gathered through the written responses of students, verbal and non-verbal messages of students and instructors, and atmospheres of the classrooms I observed.
Limitations of the Study

This research study recognized that the definition of students with LD is very broad. While the application of the law to the definition forces certain characteristics to be identified before accommodations can be received, the study must account for human error in making the final determinations. Additionally, as individuals outside of Georgia enter with documentation of their disabilities, the variations in discrepancy formulas and other means of determining eligibility between states must be accounted for. There was also recognition that there may be significant variations in how the disability affects students depending on their own individual intellectual strengths and weaknesses. Some participants felt more confident than others in their abilities to advocate for accommodations and will have more information to share with the researcher.

This study also took into consideration the student’s right to privacy. Some students may have elected not to disclose certain portions of their interviews. If, for example, students would prefer not to have certain parts of their interview recorded, the request was granted. In other cases, participants may have elected to not disclose the information to the researcher.

Significance of the Study

It was anticipated that the findings of this study would serve as a catalyst for change in the types and amounts of accommodations received by the African American students with LD at ASU. The Student Disabilities Program at ASU will have recommendations for creating and implementing new programs to ensure students are initially oriented and systematically assisted during their matriculation at the university. Additionally, professors will have material to review when determining if their courses
are adequately constructed so as to be modified, allowing a student with LD to successfully complete the course. Further, the findings of this research are important for secondary school personnel in preparing students to transition into postsecondary institutions. Finally, this research will put students and parents on alert to the information needed for the successful completion of a postsecondary educational program by a minority student with a LD. It will serve as a starting point for questions to ponder when deciding future career plans and options beyond high school.

It is hoped that this study will yield several findings that can be used to further our understanding of minority college students with LD and to inform future student affairs practice. As student affairs professionals attempt to evaluate existing programs and services, there is much to be learned from the meaning students make of their college experience when faced with a learning disability. Counselors, academic advisors, and other student affairs personnel engaged in counseling and advising relationships with students must understand the unique identity development issues faced by students with LD. The timing of a student’s disability diagnosis, the amount of support and stigmatization the student experiences, and the attributes of a student’s personality that impact self-determination all work to shape student success. When students with LD fail to meet the expectations of higher education faculty and staff, it is important that college and university personnel reflect on the conditions that have shaped the students’ development and make essential changes.

Further, if the ultimate goal of postsecondary education is to empower students to become independent learners, students must be taught to identify and advocate for their
own needs, to think creatively and independently when making decisions about their college experiences, and to effectively disclose the nature of their LD when necessary.

Finally, and perhaps more importantly, it is hoped that findings from this study will effectively inform practice. There is a great need for increased collaboration among student affairs and academic affairs offices. College and university personnel should think creatively about the ways services are being organized and ways that delivery of these services can be improved so as to ensure the “reasonable” success of their learning-disabled student population.

Established goals and objectives will be developed. As the institution develops and evaluates its strategic plan, the Disabilities office should ensure that its mission is included. The catalog disclaimer, which professes that the institution does not discriminate on the basis of age, ethnicity, gender, or disability, should be more than mere ADA compliance. Active policies should be put in place and monitored to ensure that all departments and faculty (a) know about, and (b) adhere to the legislation.

Data-driven program changes will be created. “Let the data drive you. Don’t drive the data,” (Culbreath, 2004) is acceptable research and program development protocol. In both creating and re-evaluating programs for postsecondary students with LD, disabilities coordinators should carefully consider what current research suggests are best practices, rather than convenient listings. Rather than continuing to provide accommodations void of assistive technology, student-initiated methods, and other out-dated avenues, institutions must look to research for effective, current means of meeting students’ needs.

Educators will adjust to maximize student success. A one-size-fits-all approach to providing accommodations for students does not work. What supports the success of one
student may not work for another. Therefore, a variety of accommodations must be available to postsecondary student with learning disabilities. Additionally, the entire structure and design of disabilities programs must be periodically evaluated and adjusted to strengthen any weak points. As the student population changes and the university’s mission and focus shifts, it becomes even more important for disabilities coordinators to take another look at their programs and redesign as needed.

Faculty will foster student self-determination. Students with learning disabilities must be afforded choices so that they can learn to take responsibility for their own lives in a postsecondary setting. If the disability coordinator, faculty and staff always provide the options for students, students will never begin to self-initiate conversations about their needs.

University personnel will think out of the box. Knowing that students with LD learn in a different way authenticates the call for establishing a disabilities program that is unique and challenging. While ensuring that all legal parameters are covered, disabilities coordinators should also strive to validate the individual learning styles of their constituents by developing programs that allow for flexibility and individualization as needed.

Collaboration will occur. Understanding that students with disabilities seek help for academic problems from departmental advisors, academic advisors and faculty members, as well as from disabled student services offices, supports the need for faculty and staff to have an understanding of the needs of students with disabilities on campus. Too often faculties have been considered the enemy. Disability coordinators are deferred to as the experts on postsecondary students with LD and are considered to have the final
word on accommodations. Institutions must develop a collaborative perspective that gives faculty just as much credence in working with students with LD.

Information will be shared with nondisabled students about their disabled peers. Stovall and Sedlacek (1983) recommended orientation programs that inform nondisabled students about problems of students with disabilities. A further step would be the development and provision of workshops that examine feelings, fears and prejudices on nondisabled students about students with disabilities. However, there is also a need for more research conducted by student personnel professionals concerning students with disabilities. Unless we continue to do research, our thoughts and actions may be influenced more by stereotype than fact.

Faculty and staff development opportunities will be provided. Effective disabilities coordinators see and emit the need for all campus faculty and staff to be trained in recognizing and responding to the needs of postsecondary students with LD. As such, they take the lead in developing and conducting professional development workshops, seminars, information newsletters, etc. which help to develop skills and foster commitment and professionalism in the education environment.

Everyone will be empowered. Individuals who are knowledgeable about an issue feel more confident in discussing and dealing with the issue in question. Students with LD must first be educated as to the implications their labels carry. They must be made to feel competent in discussing their strengths and advocating for support in addressing their weaknesses. Similarly, faculty and staff must know the general characteristics of a postsecondary student with LD and what is expected of them in facilitating the student’s educational pursuits.
Use of students as the experts for advice will be valued. Students with LD have learned many strategies that help them to be successful in various tasks. What better way to support the successfulness of students than to allow them to use what they know works? Therefore, we should turn to the students with LD to seek what accommodations to make on postsecondary campuses.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In this section, I have reviewed six major bodies of literature: (a) definitions of LD; (b) legislation affecting the transition into and education of students with LD in postsecondary institutions; (c) disproportionate labeling of students with LD; (d) accommodations for postsecondary students with LD; (e) studies of postsecondary students with LD; and (f) curriculum design for postsecondary students with LD.

Defining LD: A Challenging Task

Samuel Kirk first coined the term learning disabilities in 1962 to address the range of disability characteristics demonstrated by the population (Lerner, 2003). Since that time, the controversy still exists as to exactly what characteristics an individual with this disability possess. Perhaps Lerner (2003) provides the most accurate analogy in her reference to LD as an umbrella category under which many individuals are able to access needed services. The complexity of the definition problem can be clearly seen when reviewing the following facts about LD from the Coordinated Campaign for Learning Disabilities (2001):

- Fifteen percent of the U.S. population, or one in seven Americans, has some type of learning disability, according to the National Institutes of Health.
- Difficulty with basic reading and language skills are the most common learning disabilities. As many as 80% of students with learning disabilities have reading problems.
- Learning disabilities often run in families.
• Learning disabilities should not be confused with other disabilities such as mental retardation, autism, deafness, blindness, and behavioral disorders. None of these conditions are learning disabilities.

• Learning disabilities should not be confused with lack of educational opportunities like frequent changes of schools or attendance problems.

• Children who are learning English do not necessarily have a learning disability.

• Attention disorders, such as Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and learning disabilities often occur at the same time, but the two disorders are not the same.

As the field of special education struggles to operationalize a term that is utilized to describe so many individuals, it becomes of dire importance for postsecondary institutions to accomplish this task. At the postsecondary level, institutions must establish eligibility for services under Section 504 and the ADA, not the IDEA. Because these two pieces of legislation lack specification as to the definition of LD, colleges and universities have a difficult time determining who does or does not qualify for accommodations. Therefore, postsecondary institutions must develop a viable operational definition for LD and utilize it in admissions procedures, as well as in determining eligibility for accommodations and other services.

Although the definition in federal law governs the identification of and services to individuals with LD, there are variations between states (Lerner, 2003). In an attempt to clarify the identification, some states specify an intelligence range. Others use a model of a discrepancy between potential and achievement, sometimes quantifying the discrepancy using test scores. These slightly different definitions are indicative of a lack of clear
consensus about exactly what learning disabilities are. Because learning disabilities cannot be seen, the exceptionality often goes undetected. Therefore, recognizing LD is more difficult than defining the disability because the severity and characteristics vary.

The federal government defines learning disabilities in Public Law 94-142, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA) (1975), as amended by Public Law 101-76, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (1990) with the following definition:

Specific learning disability means a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, which may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations. The term includes such conditions as perceptual handicaps, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia. The term does not include children who have problems that are primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor disabilities, or mental retardation, emotional disturbance, or of environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage.

The Board of Regents Interagency Committee on LD (1999) defines a learning disability as:

A heterogeneous group of disorders manifested by significant difficulties in the acquisition and use of listening, speaking, reading, writing, reasoning, or mathematical abilities, or of social skills. These disorders are intrinsic to the individual or presumed to be due to central nervous system dysfunction.
The National Joint Center for Learning Disabilities (NJCLD), composed of nine organizations with a major interest in learning disabilities, including the Association on Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD), American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, Council for Learning Disabilities, and National Association of School Psychologists, defines LD in its own definition:

Learning disabilities is a general term that refers to a heterogeneous group of disorders manifested by significant difficulties in the acquisition and use of listening, speaking, reading, writing, reasoning, or mathematical skills. These disorders are intrinsic to the individual, presumed to be due to central nervous system dysfunction, and may occur across the life span. Problems in self-regulatory behaviors, social perception, and social interaction may exist with learning disabilities but do not, by themselves, constitute a learning disability. Although learning disabilities may occur concomitantly with other disabilities (e.g., sensory impairment, mental retardation, serious emotional disturbance), or with extrinsic influences (such as cultural differences, insufficient or inappropriate instruction), they are not the result of those conditions or influences (NJCLD, 1990).

In Hammill’s 1990 review of 11 major definitions of learning disabilities, he found seven conceptual elements identified in those definitions that include:

1. *Existence throughout the lifespan.* While individuals with learning disabilities may learn coping strategies and develop intelligences that will greatly improve their potential-achievement ratio, the learning disability will never cease to exist. It is a life-long condition that the learner will have to continually adapt to.
2. *Intraindividual differences.* There exists an unequal comorbidity of performance in specific skills within individuals with learning disabilities. Those who usually display severe weaknesses in reading skills excel in mathematics.

3. *Central nervous system dysfunction.* With regards to more severe learning disabilities, the causation can often be ethnicity to a problem in the central nervous system.

4. *Problems with learning processes.* For students with learning disabilities, disruptions in memory, attention, or cognition contribute to their poor performance skills.

5. *Specification of academic, language, or conceptual problems as potential learning disabilities.* The majority of definitions for learning disabilities include academic, language, or conceptual problems as manifestations of the disability.

6. *Other conditions as potential learning disabilities.* Some definitions for learning disabilities include other conditions such as social skills, spatial orientation, and motor abilities as potential manifestations of a learning disability.

7. *Coexisting or excluded disabilities.* Comorbidity of disabilities often exists within individuals who have learning disabilities.

Considering the wide variations in definitions, it appears that there is no clear and widely accepted definition of "learning disabilities." Because of the multidisciplinary nature of the field, there is ongoing debate on the issue of definition, and there are currently at least 12 definitions that appear in the professional literature. These disparate definitions do agree on certain factors:
1. The learning disabled have difficulties with academic achievement and progress. Discrepancies exist between a person's potential for learning and what he actually learns.

2. The learning disabled show an uneven pattern of development (language development, physical development, academic development and/or perceptual development).

3. Learning problems are not due to environmental disadvantage.

4. Learning problems are not due to mental retardation or emotional disturbance.

Hammill’s review (1990) and the NJCLD (1990) definition address many of the important conceptual issues that relate to the information most needed by postsecondary institutions and the adults they serve. Therefore, the combination of these two will help professionals in their attempt to operationalize the definition of learning disabilities and apply it to admissions and eligibility criteria.

**Legislation Affecting the Education of Students with LD**

The Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA), P.L. 94-142, was signed into law in 1975 and provides the guidelines and regulations for special education service delivery throughout the United States (Brinckerhoff, McGuire, & Shaw, 2002). In 1983, the programs under the Education of the Handicapped Act (EHA) were amended by PL 98-199, expanding special services to preschool aged children. In 1986, EHA was amended through PL 99-457, lowering the age of eligibility for all children with disabilities to 3 years of age. This law established the Handicapped Infants and Toddlers Program (Part H), which was directed to the needs of children, from birth to their third birthday.
Amended in 1990 and 1997, the name of the EAHCA law was changed to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 1990. Additionally, transition services and assistive technology services were now required to be included in an IEP. Rehabilitation counseling and social work were included as related services under the law. Further, the rights under the law were expanded to more fully include children with autism and traumatic brain injury.

IDEA guarantees a free appropriate public education (FAPE) and governs the provision of special education services to students with disabilities in elementary and secondary schools. The school is responsible for identifying students with disabilities, for providing all necessary assessments, and for monitoring the provision of special education services. These special education services, which are described in detail in a student's Individualized Education Program (IEP) and Individualized Transition Plan (ITP), range from providing slight accommodations for students to significantly altering the requirements of the standard high school academic program.

Complicating current secondary school transition efforts is the lack of awareness among parents and educators regarding the policy contrast between IDEA at the secondary level and ADA and Section 504 at the postsecondary level. Many secondary schools lack a formal structure to assist students in planning to adjust to secondary and postsecondary education (Stodden, Galloway & Stodden, 2003). They do not tailor the delivery of services and instruction toward strengthening the links between secondary and postsecondary education. The result is that students are caught by surprise when the level of service provision drops off and/or is not automatically extended in post high school settings (Stodden, Conway, & Chang, 2003). The lack of knowledge about
differences in their rights, services, and funding has the effect of discouraging or possibly even excluding students with disabilities from higher education.

It is important that postsecondary service providers become familiar with IDEA for several reasons (Brinckerhoff et al., 2002). Many high school students with learning disabilities and their parents expect that aspects of IDEA will continue in postsecondary institutions. However, IDEA does not apply to higher education. Colleges and universities do not offer "special" education. Under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Section 504) and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), colleges and universities are prohibited from discriminating against a person because of disability.

Another area of transition planning relates to eligibility for services and determination of reasonable accommodations. Colleges expect students with LD to provide recent (i.e., less than 3-year-old) documentation of the learning disability and assessment data that justify requested accommodations. It is therefore recommended that a complete psycho-educational battery be completed in the sophomore or junior year that can be used for those purposes as well as to request accommodations on the SAT or ACT examinations.

Section 504 was the first federal civil rights legislation designed to protect the rights of individuals with disabilities (Brinckerhoff et al., 2002). It provides for the rights of both children and adults. The statute states in part: “No otherwise qualified individual with a disability . . . shall, solely by reason of his or her disability, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance . . .” (29 U.S.C. 794). In order to be determined disabled under Section 504, individuals must meet the following
eligibility criteria: they must (a) have a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life functions, (b) have a history of such impairment, or (c) be regarded as having such impairment, and (d) be deemed to be “otherwise qualified” despite the disability (Brinckerhoff et al., 2002).

The ADA was signed into law on July 26, 1990, as P.L. 101-336. Its intent is to provide equal opportunities for people with disabilities. The ADA expands the provisions in Section 504 to include areas such as private businesses, nongovernment-funded accommodations, and services provided by state or local governments. The definition of an individual with a disability under the ADA is identical to the definition of Section 504. Divided into five parts, ADA covers employment, public services, public accommodations, telecommunications, and miscellaneous provisions; all of which have significant effects on students with learning disabilities in higher education (Brinckerhoff et al., 2002).

The IDEA, Section 504, and the ADA balance each other in a variety of ways to ensure equal access to educational opportunities for individuals with disabilities. Because of these legislative mandates, institutions must provide reasonable modifications, accommodations, or auxiliary aids which will enable qualified students to have access to, participate in, and benefit from the full range of the educational programs and activities which are offered to all students on campus. A decision regarding the exact accommodations to be provided are made on an individualized basis, and the college or university has the flexibility to select the specific aid or service it provides, as long as it is effective.
The literature reviewed in this section described legislation pertaining to both students with LD in grades K-12, as well as those in postsecondary education. A link to the importance of knowing the difference between the two groups was clearly made. Additionally, the significance of identifying the different levels of responsibility placed upon students at the varying levels was also made.

The review showed that many parents of students with disabilities have learned the basics of the IDEA. However, as students, with the assistance of their families, prepared for the transition from secondary school to postsecondary settings, they often discover their lack of familiarity of the protections provided by the ADA and Section 504. At the college level, the prescriptive IDEA was not applicable. While two civil rights laws, Section 504 and the ADA, provide for equal access for "otherwise qualified" students with disabilities, exactly how equal access applied to instruction was less clear (Brinckerhoff et al., 2002). This obscurity often provided difficulties for students with LD unless they were adequately prepared for the transition.

As part of the transition services required for students receiving services under IDEA, high schools must counsel parents and students that the burden of identifying the student’s disability and needs shifts after high school. Once in college, it becomes the student’s responsibility to identify him or herself as having a disability. They are expected to initiate the request for accommodations and to provide acceptable documentation. They also need to know that the level of services provided in postsecondary settings will differ from those provided in the K-12 setting.

To the same end, college and university officials need to be aware of potentially erroneous student expectations. They should be proactive in communicating the policies,
practices, and procedures for students with disabilities that attend their institutions. Not adhering to this may result in student complaints. By simply effectively communicating, incoming students will better comprehend the services they are entitled to and the procedures for obtaining them.

**Disproportionate Labeling of Students with LD**

After defining learning disabilities and providing an operational interpretation of that definition, Brinckerhoff et al. (2002) ask if it is “… logical to ask if and when it is appropriate or necessary to label students” (p. 128). Labeling is the process by which members of society assign specific descriptors to address those who vary significantly from the norm (Hardman, Drew & Egan, 2002). In education, labels are used to identify and provide services for students with learning, physical, and behavioral differences. Kauffman, Lloyd, Baker and Riedel (1998), discussing the need to label students who have learning and behavior differences, argued that “either all students are treated the same or some are treated differently. Any student who is treated differently is inevitably labeled . . . Labeling a problem clearly is the first step in dealing productively with it” (p. 12).

Education professionals maintain that labeling is important in order to determine who is eligible for services, and to what extent should those services be provided. On the other side of the arena, parents and advocates assert that labeling serves as a means of ridicule and degradation for those labeled. Presently, in order to receive services under IDEA, Section 504, or ADA, individuals must be assessed and found to have characteristics that significantly impair their achievement abilities.
Proponents of labeling contend that the use of labels helps professionals communicate effectively with one another and provide a common ground for evaluating research findings. Another reason for the continued use of labels is that some funding is contingent upon the numbers and types of individuals who are deemed eligible to receive special education services. A third reason is that labeling helps identify the specific needs of a particular group of people and helps planners determine degrees of needs and set priorities for services when societal resources are limited (Hardman et al., 2002).

Those in opposition to labeling believe that labels are based on ideas, not facts. “When we create or construct labels, we do so within particular cultural contexts. That is, someone observes particular behaviors or ways of being and then describes these . . . with a label” (Kliweer & Biklen, 1996, pp. 83-84). Therefore, while labels have been the basis for developing and providing services to people, they can also promote stereotyping, discrimination, and exclusion (Cook, 2001; National Council on Disability, 2000). For this reason, the process of labeling students with disabilities has been ridiculed since its inception.

Given the heterogeneous nature of learning disabilities, the problem with definition, and the difficulty of determining eligibility, labeling has been a concern for a long time (Dunn, 1968; Johnson, 1962). Additionally, when ethnicity is factored in as a component, the problem of labeling is compounded. Beginning with Brown v. Board of Education, litigation and enforcement under civil rights law has been essential to improving racial equity in education (Losen & Orfield, 2003).

A review of national data from the U.S. Department of Education (OSEP, 2000) for the 1998-99 school year revealed that African American students, who made up
14.8% of the student population, accounted for 20.2% of the students in programs for students with disabilities. The discrepancies for African American students fell primarily in the high incidence categories (e.g., mild mental retardation or serious emotional disturbance) (NCSPES, 2002). This data indicated that African American students were 2.9 times as likely to be labeled mentally retarded (MR), 1.9 times as likely to labeled seriously emotionally disturbed (SED), and 1.3 times as likely to be labeled as having LD. Even more alarming was data from states such as Virginia where African Americans were reported as 20% of the population but constituted over half of the students in programs for the mildly retarded (EMR) and that Alabama certified four times as many minorities as EMR than whites (Ladner & Hammons, 2001).

Losen and Orfield (2003) stressed that the concern with the overrepresentation of minorities would be mitigated if the evidence suggested that minority children reaped benefits from more frequent identification. However, overwhelming data indicated this was not the case. Many minority children did have disabilities but were at risk of receiving inappropriate and inadequate services and unwarranted isolation. Osher and Webb (2000) pointed out that, for some children, receiving inappropriate services might have been more harmful than receiving none at all. For others, not receiving help early enough may have intensified learning and behavior problems. As reported by Oswald and Coutinho (2001), the disproportion in labeling and providing adequate services between minorities and whites created dramatic differences in what happened to minority students with disabilities after high school:
In the 1998–1999 school year, over 2.2 million minority children in U.S. schools were served by special education (U.S. Department of Education, 2000). Post–high school outcomes for these minority students with disabilities were strikingly inferior. Among high school youth with disabilities, about 75 percent of African American students, as compared to 47 percent of white students, were not employed two years out of school. Slightly more than half (52%) of African Americans, compared to 39 percent of white young adults, were still not employed three to five years out of school. In this same time period, the arrest rate for African Americans with disabilities was 40 percent, as compared to 27 percent for whites. (Wagner, D’Amico, Marder, Newman, & African American, 1992, p. 271)

Many rationalize the fact that minorities are over-represented in special education classes because minorities are far more likely than whites to grow up in extreme poverty and be exposed to risk factors (McNally, 2003). However, Orfield (2003) said the poverty argument is refuted because the mentioned health factors were just as strongly associated with disabilities such as blindness, deafness, and multiple and severe disabilities, yet there was equal representation. Orfield further added that within the over-representation statistics, African American boys far outnumbered any other gender or ethnicity exposed to the same economic conditions and environment.

Orfield (2003) said that the blatant racial disparity occurring in special education programs was “segregation within segregation.” Asa Hilliard, professor of urban
education at Georgia State University believes the growth of special education, with a disproportionate number of African Americans parallels the growth of desegregation:

Special education, the way it's operated, makes things worse. If you call a kid retarded who's not or say that he's learning disabled and he's not, and you separate him out for special instruction, which isn't special, that just compounds the problems. Everybody in school knows who the kid is. They have nicknames for them. Sometimes they isolate them and stick them in Quonset huts on the back of the school. If they're treated poorly, all kinds of bad things happen as a result. If you keep sentencing kids to classes where their achievement doesn't change and it's pointed out to you that achievement does not change, and in fact it sometimes gets worse, the disproportion will continue to have negative consequences. (McNally, 2003, p. 5)

Traditionally labeling has been used to determine who is actually entitled to receive specialized services. When funding issues become concerns for service providers, labeling becomes even more important as those with more severe disabilities move to the higher priority list than do those with more mild disabilities. Additionally, when working within and between interdisciplinary teams, labeling serves as a means of operationalizing disabilities so that each member has a perspective of the physical, medical, social/emotional, and intellectual characteristics of the individual under discussion.

However, following the desegregation of schools, there is a large segment of both the majority and minority population that feel labeling has been used as a means of re-
segregating classrooms. In a society where ethnicity is so strongly related to individual, family, and community conditions, it is extremely difficult to know what part of the labeling inequalities are caused by discrimination within the school or disparities between the ethnicities. While the scope of this research did not attempt to depict a definitive contributory link to racial discrimination, the research did suggest that unconscious racial bias, stereotypes, and other ethnicity-linked factors had a significant impact on the patterns of identification, placement, and quality of services for minority children, and particularly for African American children, that significantly impacted their postsecondary experiences.

**Accommodations for College Students with LD**

A learning disability cannot be cured or fixed; it is a lifelong issue. They are lifelong conditions presumably caused by dysfunction in the central nervous system, and learning disabled students exhibit a range of intelligence from low-average to gifted (Vogel, 1993b). With the right support and intervention, however, individuals with learning disabilities can succeed in school and go on to successful, often distinguished careers later in life. "Learning disabilities do not impair the potential to learn; rather they impair the process of learning" (Rose, 1993, p. 136). Included in this section are types of accommodations typically available at postsecondary institutions for students with LD. All, some, or none of the accommodations listed may be used by students.

**Admissions Accommodations**

Since 1993, the number of colleges in the United States and Canada offering comprehensive services to students with LD has grown to over 1,200 (Brinckerhoff et al., 2002). Faced with the threat of losing federal funding, many campuses have adopted a
"lenient and open admissions policy toward LD students, making it relatively easy for such persons to be accepted" (Skinner & Schenck, 1992, pp. 369-70). This pressure to admit virtually all students comes primarily from Section 504 which states that “. . .no otherwise qualified handicapped individual shall, solely by reason of his handicap, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal assistance . . .”

The most important term in the legislation is the term “qualified.” Students with LD must demonstrate they are qualified for admissions to a particular program or institution before there is consideration of the role of accommodations in reducing the impact of their disabilities (Grossman, 1997; Scott, 1997a). Institutions are not required to alter or waive legitimate, essential academic and technical standards when those requirements are directly related to program goals and objectives and are applied in a nondiscriminatory fashion, even if that produces an adverse affect on students with disabilities (Heyward, 1999, Scott, 1997a; HEATH, 1995).

Technical standards are nonacademic requirements for admission or participation in a program. They include health and strength requirements, residency or full or part-time status, letters of reference, personal traits, participation in extracurricular activities and preservice or professional experiences, and compliance with the student code of conduct, among others (Scott, 1997a; Wells & Hanebrink, 1997).

Academic standards include passing all required courses, completing all requirements within classes, participating in internships and other service learning experiences, meeting GPA requirements, attending class, adhering to deadlines for degree
completion, etc. From admission to graduation, students with LD must remain qualified, even though standards progressively increase.

Essential functions are elements considered fundamental to performance of a job or academic requirement. According to Wells and Hanebrink (1997), essential functions in higher education include learning, demonstration of skills and personal strategies, and participation in the classroom environment, laboratory activities and fieldwork. They are the basic skills required for practice and professional certification or licensure (Wells & Hanebrink, 1997). Students with LD who do not meet essential functions are not otherwise qualified and are not accommodated under the law (Grossman, 1997).

**Academic Accommodations**

To obtain services, students with LD must disclose their disabilities to the appropriate campus personnel provide all documentation required by the institution and specifically request academic accommodations (Scott, 1997a; HEATH, 1995). Self-identification is a major legal change in how services are accessed and is often intimidating to students with LD who were accustomed to their parents' advocacy and were passive participants in the IEP process (Heyward, 1999; Scott, 1997a). Legally, parents who had argued vigorously for their children in public school are no longer permitted to (a) register their children for disability services, (b) receive reports about their children's academic progress and use of accommodations and (c) demand new or additional services (Vess, 2003). For students with LD, the need for self-advocacy and assertiveness is perhaps the first step in their attempt to gain independence.

Disability-related legislation has promoted the creation of campus support service offices for students with disabilities to support students’ endeavors to become successful
in postsecondary education environments. These offices assure that reasonable accommodations for classes and campus services are provided. Some institutions have a single counselor to take responsibility for disability issues. In those institutions, staff members provide advice and letters to professors verifying that a student request for accommodations is justified. Few other accommodations may be provided. At other schools, multiple staff members coordinate services and accommodations for students with disabilities so that the educational environment provides supplementary support and additional staff is prepared to teach them about self-advocacy (Youth Advisory Committee NCD, 2003). Although a number of guides to postsecondary education support services exist and campus resource information is increasingly available, it is difficult for students with disabilities to find accurate and complete information to determine which institutions are best for meeting their needs.

Student services vary according to service goal priorities, size of institution, and specific degrees granted by the institution (Bursuck, Rose, Cowen, & Yahaya, 1989). Two-year institutions tend to provide more personalized services and a greater number of services to students with disabilities than four-year postsecondary institutions (National Center for the Study of Postsecondary Educational Supports, 2000). In particular, two-year schools have been found to typically provide greater assistance to students with disabilities in the areas of academic accommodations, assistive technology, counseling, tutoring, and assessment (Bursuck et al., 1989). Two-year college students have expressed more satisfaction in terms of support services and physical access and have reported fewer barriers than four-year college and university students (West et al., 1993).
Students with LD may not need classroom accommodations every term. For example, a student with a disability in math learning would not need accommodations during a semester in which he or she was not registered for math-related courses. Finally, accommodations are prospective, meaning there is no reverse of poor grades or other indicators of academic jeopardy accrued before accommodations were implemented or changed (Vess, 2003).

Postsecondary institutions are not obligated to provide accommodations of a personal nature or those needed for personal study or to enhance personal competency (Heyward, 1999). Examples of personal services include remediation, tutoring, psychological evaluation, care attendants and coaches, personal computers and software, wheelchairs, readers for personal pleasure or study, typing papers, wake up calls, monitoring academic progress or personal conduct, personal counseling, etc. (Heyward, 1999; Wells & Hanebrink, 1997). Students with LD are entitled to use all services such as career advising, stress management and test taking workshops, and use of technology labs provided to the general student population.

There is no guarantee under the ADA and 504 that students with LD will succeed in higher education, even with accommodations (Wells & Hanebrink, 1997). Postsecondary accommodations are outcome neutral (Heyward, 1999). In higher education, accommodations and services are described as effective when they achieve their nondiscriminatory goal and provide access to programs and activities to qualified students with LD. To enhance the benefit of the accommodations, the postsecondary student with LD must also put forth a concerted effort to be successful.
More than half of students with disabilities have reported that they were reasonably satisfied with campus support services (West et al., 1993). Some challenges they have reported were connected to services and accommodations related to their specific disabilities. Furthermore, lack of services or inadequate services, lack of awareness of services, lack of sensitivity from professors and school personnel, and social isolation were also reported as general barriers to postsecondary education for students with disabilities (West et al., 1993). Students with disabilities have suggested that services should be more coordinated, that administrative processes should be simplified and clarified, and that services should be focused on individual needs (National Center for the Study of Postsecondary Educational Supports, 2000).

Under the ADA and 504, all accommodations and services are designed to promote equal educational opportunity and access to students with LD. They are identified by matching specific manifestations of the disability, demands of the class or activity and potential accommodations (McGuire, et al., 1998). Higher education institutions are required to provide accommodations only after there is a specific request, appropriate documentation is submitted and there is a reasonable amount of time to review the documentation and the appropriateness of the requested accommodations (Heyward, 1999; McGuire et al., 1998). Accommodations provided attempt to level the academic playing field and do not provide students with LD with a competitive advantage in admissions, meeting academic and technical requirements, and socializing. They are selected on a case-by-case analysis and may include various strategies, techniques, devices, and/or individuals.
Studies of Postsecondary Students with LD

Several studies have been conducted with students identified with LD and other disabilities in postsecondary educational institutions. The findings of these studies were used to show strengths and weaknesses in both individual and institutional areas. Follow-up research studies indicated what efforts have been directed at utilizing existing data to increase the potential for success of students with disabilities in postsecondary education.

Cooperative Institutional Research Program Survey

Since 1966, a national survey of first-time, full-time college freshmen has been administered to a large sample of students every year. This survey is administered by the Cooperative Institutional Research Program, cosponsored by the American Council on Education and the Graduate School of Education of the University of California at Los Angeles (ACE–UCLA). The purpose of this survey is to provide a profile of freshmen at the beginning of their college experiences. Responses are collected from a sample of accredited institutions and are weighted to reflect the national cohort of freshmen. Students are asked to report whether they have any of the following disabilities: speech, orthopedic, learning, health-related, partially sighted or blind, or other. Those students reporting disabilities are then asked to comment on whether or not they had registered with the Student Support Office and afforded modifications. Findings from the study indicate that while large numbers of students with disabilities are entering colleges and universities, a disparaging amount are actually seeking assistance and experiencing success. Implications for this study support the need to better inform disabled students of their options for support in postsecondary institutions.
Fourquean

Fourquean, Meisgeier, Swank and Williams (1991) conducted a study of three follow-up transition projects from a large school district near Houston, Texas, which involved data collected on 258 young adults with LD who exited the district’s four high schools from 1986 to 1990. Interviews with high school graduates diagnosed with LD and their parents using telephone surveys were used to determine how they managed the obstacles of postsecondary adjustment and how to improve special and vocational education and transition programs. The results indicated that three years after graduation, a subgroup of the 55 former students with LD who had enrolled in college, 36% were continuing their education on at least a part time basis. The author suggested students found college more demanding than expected. Students who were not successful had academic deficits in math and reading with scores in the fourth or fifth grade level. The parents, according to the author, believed low self-esteem, lack of self-esteem, lack of self-confidence, lack of study skills, social stigma and embarrassment were factors that interfered with educational achievement.

Hicks-Coolick and Kurtz

Hicks-Coolick and Kurtz (1996) interviewed nine postsecondary school counselors in Georgia with an open-ended interview guide. The authors found that accommodations and services were being offered to students with LD but in varied degrees ranging from disability support services to comprehensive programs with more staff and structured services. Findings indicated that high school students with LD were better prepared for the transition to postsecondary school if they had the following: (a) an understanding of their disability, (b) an awareness of available services, (c) had received
accommodations in postsecondary schools, (d) an awareness of legal rights, (e) the ability to assertively speak for oneself.

**Minnesota's Postsecondary Enrollment Options**

Lange and Ysseldyke (1987) documented the participation of students with disabilities or special needs in Minnesota's Postsecondary Enrollment Options (PSEO). PSEO allowed students in 11th and 12th grade to take college and technical school courses for credit. The 77 participating postsecondary institutions were surveyed. Eight percent of the reported participants were students with disabilities or special needs with the majority being students with LD. However, all disability and special needs groups were represented. The majority of students with disabilities attended technical colleges. Implications for students with disabilities and their programs justified introducing LD students to college experiences as early as possible to ensure a successful transition.

**National Council on Disability Transition Study**

The National Council on Disability (2000), in its study on transition, stated that actions to promote a smooth transition from secondary to postsecondary education had not met the goals of federal laws and initiatives, such as IDEA and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. The Council attributed this to a number of factors, including the methods of transition planning, as well as inadequate allocation of resources (NCD, 2000). Also, evidence showed that there was a failure of secondary and postsecondary schools to establish avenues of communication and coordinate their efforts. Adding to the difficulty of transitioning, state and local education agencies across the United States were currently experiencing a shortage of qualified personnel to serve children and youth
with disabilities. According to the Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities, some 3000 more teachers are needed to teach special education in higher education (CCD, 2003).

**The National Postsecondary Student Aid Survey**

The National Postsecondary Student Aid Survey (NPSAS) 2000 was a nationally representative survey of students attending postsecondary education institutions during the 1999-2000 academic year. Samples included approximately 50 thousand undergraduate students and 11 thousand graduate students, representing about 16.5 million and 2.3 million students, respectively. Questions pertaining to financial aid, sociodemographic, employment, and related postsecondary education topics were asked. Highlights of the NPSAS 2000 (p. 3) are as follows:

- Students reporting disabilities represented 9.3% of all undergraduates.
- As compared to nondisabled students, students with disabilities were more often female, white, and married with dependent children.
- The parents of students with disabilities were more often likely to have less than a high school education than parents of students without disabilities.
- Students with disabilities were more often financially independent than nondisabled students.
- As compared with nondisabled students, students with disabilities were less likely to attend four-year colleges.
- The majority of students with disabilities attended full-time.
- Students with disabilities were older when first enrolled in postsecondary education.
The NPSAS 2000 provided increased opportunities for disability and postsecondary education research. Disability issues that need further examination were identified. Further, research toward differences between study findings in the context of reported disabilities and the extent to which students needed and received services and accommodations during their postsecondary education experiences were explored.

The studies focused on in this study showed trends pertaining to growth in the population of students with disabilities on college campuses, characteristics of students with LD currently attending postsecondary institutions, bridges and barriers affecting successful transitions from high school to postsecondary education, as well as other issues faced by postsecondary students with LD. The findings of these studies were used to show strengths and weaknesses in both individual and institutional areas. Additionally, the research studies indicated what efforts have been directed at utilizing existing data to increase the potential for success of students with disabilities in postsecondary education.

**Curriculum Design for Postsecondary Students with LD**

Faculty, staff and students play a key role in creating an environment, not only in the classroom, but campus-wide, that allows students with disabilities to succeed. Stronger efforts on the part of colleges and universities to educate faculty and staff would significantly enhance the likelihood of academic success of students with disabilities. Unfortunately, faculty and staff development programs focusing on the disabled campus population are under funded, non-existent, haphazard and/or do not represent effective instructional methods. Consequently, disability awareness programs tend to be underfunded and neglected. A survey by Stebnicki, Stofle, & Glover (1998), indicated
that nationally only about one-quarter of all disability service office program coordinators had special budget allocations to promote disability awareness on their campuses.

On most postsecondary campuses, little importance is given to increasing the knowledge base of faculty and staff to teach students with disabilities. Faculty, staff and administrators without disabilities are frequently not equipped to offer students with disabilities full access to the most rigorous coursework possible. In addition, training on how to accommodate disabilities is not available at every postsecondary education institution. Faculty do not have regular or easy access to the technical assistance and training that they might need and the assistance to customize specific coursework for the student and disability in question. This portion of the literature review was devoted to those institutions that have made a concerted effort in creating an overall educational environment that encourages a close working relationship between students with disabilities and campus personnel.

**Universal Design for Instruction Project**

Over the last three years, the Center on Postsecondary Education and Disability at the University of Connecticut has been engaged in designing a new model for disability access in the classroom: Universal Design for Instruction (UDI) (McGuire, Scott, & Shaw, 2003). UDI is an approach to teaching that consists of the proactive design and use of inclusive instructional strategies that benefit a broad range of learners including students with cognitive disabilities. By using inclusive instructional design features, faculty create learning environments that are responsive to diverse learners and minimize the need for special accommodations and changes.
The foundation of this project was the joining of UDI and cutting edge practices in the field of faculty development. Learning communities, an approach to faculty development designed to maximize faculty motivation and investment, is established representing different disciplines and drawn from divergent types of institutions of higher education. These learning communities develop and field-test materials to orient faculty to inclusive instruction based upon UDI principles. Widespread dissemination of orientation materials and instructional products via Facultyware, a website specifically designed for faculty, assures their availability for postsecondary institutions committed to enhancing the instructional environment for students with cognitive disabilities and other diverse learners. Major project objectives include:

1. To establish five to seven learning communities for the purpose of enhancing instruction for students with cognitive disabilities and other diverse learners by implementing UDI.

2. To collaborate with the learning communities to identify and develop orientation training materials and approaches to orient faculty to inclusive instruction.

3. To support each learning community in developing and implementing a plan of action to integrate UDI principles into faculty instruction and develop instructional products.

4. To refine, pilot, evaluate, and package orientation training materials on inclusive instruction and UDI in a variety of formats and media produced in collaboration with the learning communities and targeting diverse faculty and staff at a broad range of postsecondary institutions.
5. To package instructional products and methods developed by the learning communities that represent diverse disciplines in different types of postsecondary settings using high quality and easy to access state-of-the-art technologies.

6. To distribute orientation training materials and instructional products and methods nationally through an existing internet resource, Facultyware, as well as through extensive outreach with constituent group professional organizations, conferences, and publications.

New York State Task Force on Postsecondary Education and Disabilities

In the fall of 1998, the top leadership of the state’s higher education sectors convened with the Board of Regents and the New York State Education Department to address the issue of enhancing access to higher education for individuals with disabilities in New York State. From this meeting, the Task Force on Postsecondary Education and Disabilities was developed and charged with developing a global vision and strategies to enhance access and encourage full participation of individuals with disabilities in postsecondary education (Report of the Task Force on Postsecondary Education and Disabilities, 2000).

To accomplish this goal, the Task Force on Postsecondary Education and Disabilities developed a vision: all students with disabilities who had acquired knowledge and skills to benefit from a higher education experience would have full access and opportunity; and a mission: to develop a set of strategies for higher education to enhance full participation of individuals with disabilities (Report of the Task Force on Postsecondary Education and Disabilities, 2000).
To accomplish its mission, the Task Force created individual focus groups to develop strategies in five key areas: preparation and readiness for college-level study; funding streams; assistive technology and other supports; student success and employment, and more specific to this literature review, faculty education and instruction. The goal created to enhance faculty education and instruction was to ensure that faculty and staff has access and the incentive to utilize the resources they need that will enable them to teach and work more effectively with students with disabilities. Toward this end, the Task Force recommended strategies thought to be effective in efforts to meet its target (Report of the Task Force on Postsecondary Education and Disabilities, 2000, pp. 10-13).

The New York State Education Department, in conjunction with postsecondary education institutions, faculty and staff professional organizations, co-sponsored regional professional development seminars/workshops highlighting innovative teaching, effective accommodation practices and model student disability support programs. Additionally, the New York State Education Department, with the four education sectors, created a website through which colleges and universities could disseminate and share information on the ongoing training and professional development of all faculty, staff, administration, professional and support staff in working with and teaching students with disabilities. In this manner, faculty and staff received greater awareness of assistive technology benefits, options and available campus supports. Further, New York State, through this partnership, created clear avenues whereby faculty could access general and specific disability-related information and technical assistance in teaching students with disabilities. Faculty included accessibility issues when designing new courses and
programs of study. Colleges and universities explored the creation or expansion of work-study opportunities and/or credit-bearing possibilities in order to build a system of mutual and natural supports among all students in all aspects of college life, from coursework to extracurricular activities. Perhaps more importantly, postsecondary education systems worked with professional organizations and unions representing faculty and staff to ensure that providing services to students with disabilities became a standard feature of professional training and development.

Within five years of the implementation of the suggested strategies, the Task Force expected very specific outcomes (Report of the Task Force on Postsecondary Education and Disabilities, 2000, p. 13). The percentage of universities and colleges that included professional development and technical assistance to faculty and staff in the area of teaching and providing services to students with disabilities in their planning and assessment processes would increase. Also, the number of faculty and staff who reported favorably that they had access to professional training courses would increase.

**Assistive Technology**

Assistive technology is a tool for making the learning environment more accessible and for enhancing individual productivity (Day & Edwards, 1996). As students with learning disabilities attend college in increasingly large numbers, the impact of assistive technology on their ability to successfully complete postsecondary education is being recognized (Raskind, 1994; Raskind & Scott, 1993). In many institutions, faculty members rely on assistive technology to help meet the educational demands of these students. Additionally, assistive technology that enables individuals with learning disabilities to compensate for reading, organization, memory, or math deficits are
increasingly being made available at more affordable rates. For students with learning disabilities, the technologies available include word processors and outlining software programs. Also available are variable speech-control tape recorders, optical character recognition systems, listening aids, speech-synthesis/screenreview systems, speech-recognition systems, data managers, and talking calculators. These devices can enhance the individual's learning abilities by helping the student overcome deficits (Day & Edwards, 1996).

According to Garner and Campbell (1987), circumventing deficits is one of the two major purposes of assistive devices and is referred to as the compensatory approach. In this approach, an individual is helped to perform a specific task using assistive technology. For example, when a student is provided and listens to a taped version of the book that is to be read for English class in order to correctly answer comprehension questions about the material, his or her aim is to bypass a reading disability, not to learn to read. If, instead, the student wishes to improve his or her reading, the student might use a computer program to practice phonics skills. In this example, using assistive technology to learn to read exemplifies the second major purpose of assistive technology and is referred to as the remedial approach (Garner & Campbell, 1987). The purpose of this approach is to improve areas of deficiency.

Greater independence and relief from anxiety were benefits noted by Barton and Fuhrmann (1994) for students with learning disabilities who used tools to enhance limitations placed upon them by their disability. Other writers have noted a heightened sense of self-esteem in students with disabilities who gained competency with technology (Raskind, 1994), a reduction of reliance on others and a move toward independence.
(Brown, 1989), and a regaining of a sense of control leading to vocational success (Reiff, Gerber, & Ginsberg, 1992).

As increasing numbers of students with varied learning needs enter postsecondary education programs, there becomes a greater need to design innovative instructional methods that ensure equal academic contact. To provide students with disabilities access to a quality postsecondary education, teaching methods and instructional material must be considered. While many faculty members are required to make individual academic accommodations and modifications for the rapidly increasing number of students with disabilities entering into their classrooms, they are often unprepared to address the variety of students' learning needs. To empower faculty with the skills and supports necessary to teach these students, several projects have been initiated on postsecondary campuses. This section of the literature review focused on those attempts to level the playing field or students with disabilities in the postsecondary classroom.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to critically investigate the educational and social experiences of African-American students with LD at ASU. As my inquiry began to unfold, I examined relevant literature and searched for a comprehensive theoretical framework on which to build my study. However, after struggling with various methodologies, what I found was that there existed no preconceived theoretical framework that could be use to conclusively analyze my research. To adequately pay homage to the voices of the underrepresented African-American students with LD on the campus of ASU, the prong of critical inquiry had to be instituted. Utilizing the philosophies of individuals such as Lisa Delpitt and Asa Hilliard, the critical aspect of my inquiry was explored.

Further, a second component of the theoretical framework of the study was Max van Manen’s hermeneutic-phenomenology, which “is a philosophy of the personal, the individual, which we pursue against the background of an understanding of the evasive character of the *logos of other*, the *whole*, the *communal*, or the *social*” (1990, p. 7). This framework was particularly relevant for my dissertation research that is “exploratory or descriptive, that assumes the value of context and setting, and that searches for a deeper understanding of the participants’ lived experiences of the phenomena” (Marshall & Rossman, 1995, p.39).

Finally, as a third component of my theoretical framework, I chose case studies as my research methodology. Case studies help others understand people’s lives, stories, behaviors, organizational functioning, social movements, or interactional relationships
(Strauss & Corbin, 1990). It is hoped that a greater understanding of the students in this research will lead to a more compassionate response to ALL students who not only look like them, but who also learn like them.

**Theoretical Framework--Hermeneutic-Phenomenology**

As I formalized my research topic and began to further think of my theoretical framework, I became increasingly aware of past experiences as a high school special education teacher I was carrying with me that influenced the questions I anticipated asking. In Clandinin and Connelly's (1993) terms, these were to become the stories I would be living as a researcher in entering the research. In doing this, my hopes, visions and aspirations for the future of inclusion at ASU became increasingly attainable, partly based on the prongs of my framework, critical inquiry and cases studies that dealt with researching and reporting the lived experiences of the students in my study, who happen to be African-American. However, the hermeneutic-phenomenological prong of my research served as the strand that most significantly allowed me to analyze my data. This research method allowed me to utilize my prior knowledge to make meaningful connections between my research participants and the ideas, rules, practices, and thoughts about accommodating African-American students with disabilities on college campuses.

**Historical Development of Hermeneutic-Phenomenology**

Understanding hermeneutics and the distinctions between hermeneutics and phenomenology leads into a debatable topic that is living out the controversy in practice and theory today (Noules, 2002). There is always a piece of phenomenology present and intertwined in hermeneutics but, whereas Husserl suggested attending to the phenomenon itself and describing it as richly as possible, hermeneutics argues that experiences of
something are not isolated but are eventful, ongoing, emergent, forming, and generative (Jardine, 1994). Hermeneutics without phenomenology is interpretation without context, without situating in it in the world. Phenomenology without hermeneutics has a ring of pretension that something has never been thought of previously (Jardine, 1994).

Hermeneutics is derived from the Greek verb *hermeneuein*, which means to say or interpret (Grondin, 1994). The practice dates to the 17th century when it was introduced by the theologian Johann Dannhauer and has been described as the practice and theory of interpretation and understanding in human contexts (Chesla, 1995); the science, art, and philosophy of interpretation (Grondin, 1994); and the "discipline of thought that aims at (the) unsaid life of our discourses" (Grondin, 1995, p. x).

The 17th century theories of hermeneutics were inspired by a combination of rationalism and divinatory ability, and focused on a style of interpretation guided by strict rules and methods for proper discernment of meaning, yet still influenced by the belief that understanding is inspired from a holy source (Noules, 2002). Despite the emergence of romantic and classical hermeneutics throughout the 18th century, the prevailing focus was on methodical interpretation of older materials (Palmer, 1969). The 19th century was focused on searching for a way to methodologize the human sciences, while the 20th and 21st centuries have served to expand the methodology into a deeper understanding and questioning of the phenomenon being analyzed (Noules, 2002).

Throughout this historical transformation, Noules (2002) makes note of some philosophers that stand out as distinctively, directly and indirectly, connected to the theory and practice of hermeneutics. Augustine was a theologian and philosopher who had a significant influence on contemporary hermeneutics. Augustine was attributed
credit by both Heidegger and Gadamer for the development of theories of the enacted meaning; for the universal claim of hermeneutics that one can never say all that lies in inner speech; for the forgetfulness of language; and for the place of tradition in language (Grondin, 1994; Palmer, 1969). The rise of hermeneutics as a science coincided with the rise of Protestantism (Palmer, 1969). In this movement, Martin Luther became a central figure and, although he had great influence on church history and ideas, it is debatable if he himself actually developed any theory of hermeneutics (Grondin, 1994).

Friedrich Schleiermacher has been considered the father of contemporary hermeneutics (Grondin, 1995; Palmer, 1969). Though he wrote many manuscripts, he never published his own work on hermeneutics. Others published one piece from 1829, and a series of Schleiermacher’s lectures were similarly published in 1838 (Grondin, 1994). It was through his lectures that Schleiermacher’s influence on hermeneutic thought and practice gained its audience. Schleiermacher left an important legacy of three themes in hermeneutics: the place of creativity in interpretation, the role of language in understanding, and the movement between part and whole in the process of interpretation which later became known as the hermeneutic circle (Coltman, 1998; Palmer, 1969; Smith, 1991). Schleiermacher, who viewed himself primarily as a theologian, saw interpretation both as being loose, as in casual reading and understanding, and as being strict in the rigorous, methodological, and reconstructive science of hermeneutics, a technique which, when correctly applied, leads to a "right" interpretation. Heidegger saw Schleiermacher as having taken the vital idea of hermeneutics that Augustine offered and reducing it to a technique (Grondin, 1994).
Wilhelm Dilthey became familiar with Schleiermacher’s work through one of Schleiermacher’s students, August Bockh, and in 1860 he received the Schleiermacher Foundation award for an essay on hermeneutics (Grondin, 1994). Dilthey taught and wrote on hermeneutics, with a focus on both being an historian of hermeneutics and developing a methodology for understanding in the human sciences (Coltman, 1998; Gadamer, 1984; Palmer, 1969). His focus in later years appeared to shift from hermeneutics to a descriptive school of psychology that influenced, and was influenced by, the emerging phenomenological studies of Husserl (Grondin, 1994). Dilthey’s work became a precursor in the search for an existential, or interpretive, rethinking of philosophy. His view of interpretation as an artful understanding of expressions of life was constrained within an epistemological methodology, submitting to his more classical orientation to hermeneutics (Grondin, 1994). Dilthey was one of the first to suggest that written language is a superior form of communication, predating both Derrida’s (1978) critique of Western culture’s phonocentrism (the privileging of speech over writing) and Ricoeur’s (1981) emphasis on hermeneutics as textual interpretation.

Edmund Husserl disclaimed his work as hermeneutic, occupying a "traditional antihermeneutic position" (Caputo, 1987, p. 53) that was more concerned with phenomena themselves than with any interpretation of them (Grondin, 1995). Husserl is attributed with being the identifier of phenomenology and introduced the notion of "life-world", or Lebenswelt, a term that characterizes our sense of a world that is present without our recognition or actions (Smith, 1991). Phenomenology often begins with a case of something, but along the way the case is forfeited. It makes a claim to knowing without contingency and, as a result, the case disappears or gets lost in the demand for the
extraction of an essence (Jardine, 1994). Phenomenology asserts that once an essence is uncovered or determined, we can always know what will happen next and the theme no longer needs the instance (Jardine, 1992, 2000, 2002).

Martin Heidegger, a student of Husserl, brought the ontology of the subject and the "something" which Husserl disclaimed back into the "experience-of-something" (Caputo, 1987; Jardine, 1994). For Heidegger, experience was already out in the world; experience is not a thing, but a movement in the world. As a result, understanding is deeply entrenched in the profound ontological makeup of Da-sein: care, existence, temporality, and being (Heidegger, 1996).

In *Being and Nothingness* (1943), Jean-Paul Sartre developed his conception of phenomenological ontology. For Sartre, the practice of phenomenology proceeds by a deliberate reflection on the structure of consciousness. Sartre's method is in effect a literary style of interpretive description of different types of experience in relevant situations, a practice that does not really fit the methodological proposals of either Husserl or Heidegger, but makes use of Sartre's great literary skill (Smith, 2003).

Maurice Merleau-Ponty joined with Sartre and Beauvoir in developing phenomenology. In *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945) Merleau-Ponty developed a variety of phenomenology emphasizing the role of the body in human experience. Unlike Husserl, Heidegger, and Sartre, Merleau-Ponty looked to experimental psychology (Smith, 2003). Merleau-Ponty rejected both associationist psychology, focused on correlations between sensation and stimulus, and intellectualist psychology, focused on rational construction of the world in the mind. Instead, Merleau-Ponty focused on the "body image", our experience of our own body and its significance in our activities.
In this research, I based my understanding and formulation of hermeneutic-phenomenology on the literature reviewed of a more recent philosopher, Max van Manen (1990). Utilizing this philosopher’s interpretive approach to understanding the nature of the phenomenon under study allowed for the involvement of the researcher in making clear the meaning of a particular lived experience, and generating a pedagogical thoughtfulness in the researcher’s readers. The aim of hermeneutic-phenomenology is to create a dialogical text that resonates with the experiences of readers while, at the same time, evoking a critical reflexivity about their own pedagogical actions (Geelan & Taylor, 2001). As such, the researcher expects readers of the research to gain a deeper level of understanding for individuals with LD and evoke eagerness to spring into action; advocating for change on college campuses.

In searching for a more meaningful way of knowing about and representing experiences of both teaching students with LD and reporting their stories, van Manen's hermeneutic-phenomenological approach surfaced as a viable method of providing the researcher with the ability of effectively accomplishing those goals. Drawing on the work of Husserl, Heidegger and Merlau-Ponty, this approach combines a phenomenological concern for describing our ways-of-being-in-the-world with a hermeneutic concern for interpreting the social-symbolic world (Geelan & Taylor, 2001).

In the field of education, hermeneutic inquiry is most often conducted with an orientation towards re-constructing co-participants' intended meanings, which are then interpreted in relation to the researcher's theoretical predisposition. In contrast, phenomenology focuses the researcher on immediate experience without being obstructed by pre-conceptions and theoretical notions, and drives the researcher to an
understanding of the essential nature of social phenomena through the pursuit of questions such as 'what does it mean to be a teacher?', 'how does a teacher meaningfully experience the activity of teaching?' (Geelan & Taylor, 2001). As researchers, when we raise these questions, gather data, describe a phenomenon, and construct textual interpretations, we do so as researchers who stand in the world in a pedagogic way which van Manen indicates requires “a phenomenological sensitivity to lived experience...a hermeneutic ability to make interpretive sense of the phenomena of the lifeworld...play with language in order to allow the research process of textual reflection to contribute to one's pedagogical thoughtfulness and tact” (1990, pp.1-2).

The writing of hermeneutic-phenomenological research involves the production of a text that Geelan & Taylor (2001) purports establishes a representation of the researcher's lived experience in narrative form which aims to open up, in an indirectly teachable way, questions of pedagogy directed at the following:

- **Orientation.** The text should be oriented to answering the question of how the researcher as educator stands in relation to life: what are the valued beliefs that shape the educator's lifeworld?
- **Strength.** The text should be committed to a strong pedagogical perspective that addresses the question of how we should be and act with children.
- **Richness.** The text should provide rich and thick descriptions of the exploration of experiential phenomena that cause the reader to be engaged, involved and thoughtfully responsive.
Depth. The text should enable the reader to explore the depthful character of their pedagogical nature beyond what is immediately experienced, to appreciate the inherent complexity, ambiguity and mystery of life.

For me, the application of the hermeneutic-phenomenological strand of my theoretical framework embodies a personal reflection that I often impose upon the pre-service teachers I teach. In paraphrasing the Golden Rule, I admonish each of them to “Teach each child as if he/she were your own. If you practice this management style, then you will be an effective educator.”

In encompassing Van Manen’s statements, Geelan and Taylor’s (2001) textual applications, and my personal reflections within my research, utilizing the hermeneutic-phenomenological perspective approach allowed me to analyze and report my findings in an empathetic manner. It is hoped that readers will put aside the stereotypes, prior perceptions, and personal opinions regarding individuals with disabilities and view my participants as merely students in pursuit of a postsecondary education. Without comparing one student with a disability to another, rationalizing the pros and cons of providing accommodations to some and not others, or attempting to isolate the causation of the student’s disability and previous modifications; just give the student an opportunity to learn.

As a research method, hermeneutic-phenomenology is concerned with the qualities, values, and impressions of experiences. While academic modifications was a significant focus point for my research, social interactions and self-advocacy skills were also important avenues of consideration in my study. In becoming a hermeneutic-phenomenologist, I have been able to focus on all aspects of the lived experiences,
commonalities and shared meanings of my participants. In doing this, I presented to the readers a comprehensive view of the participants’ lives through their eyes. A more accurate picture of their emotions, reactions, and impressions was obtained. In placing the reader in the participant’s “shoes”, it is hoped that any recommendations for systematic change on the campus that arose from the research would be more eagerly received and implemented.

**Methodology--Case Studies**

For Yin, the case study is when ‘a 'how' or 'why' question is being asked about a contemporary set of events over which the investigator has little or no control (1994, p. 9). Yin (1994) provides a definition of case study, as follows:

A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and the context are not clearly evident. (...) the case study inquiry copes with the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interest than data points, and as one result relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulation fashion, and as another result, benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis. (p. 13)

Within his definition of case studies, Yin (1994) also listed several examples of appropriate research designs. The methods are general, exploratory, explanatory, and descriptive case studies.
In exploratory case studies, fieldwork, and data collection may be undertaken prior to definition of the research questions and hypotheses. Pilot projects are very useful in determining the final protocols that will be used. Survey questions may be dropped or added based on the outcome of the pilot study.

Explanatory cases are suitable for doing causal studies. In very complex cases, the analysis can make use of pattern-matching techniques.

Descriptive cases require that the investigator begin with a descriptive theory. What is implied in this type of study is the formation of hypotheses of cause-effect relationships.

Case studies have also been analysed by Stake. For him the case study definition concentrates on the object to be studied rather than the methodological approach taken. What is important for Stake (1994) is what can be learned from the case:

Case study is not a methodological choice, but a choice of object to be studied. We choose to study a case. The name case study is emphasized by some of us because it draws attention to the question of what specifically can be learned from a specific case. (p. 236)

Eisenhardt provides a third viewpoint that includes the perspectives of both Yin and Stake: “The case study is a research strategy which focuses on understanding the dynamics present within single settings” (1989, p. 534).

Finally, Patton provides the following definition which is not far from Yin’s description of case study as a research strategy: “The case study approach to qualitative data is a specific way of collecting, organizing and analyzing data” (1990, p. 384).
For my research purposes, I drew heavily upon Yin’s (1994) definition of the case study as both a research process and an outcome. While obtaining the case studies themselves was part of the method of obtaining research data, the case studies also framed anticipated results expected from the study. Thus the participants’ stories were both the problems studied, as well as the solutions. It was these solutions that I hoped to divulge and highlight.

I also drew heavily upon Yin’s (1994) six techniques for organizing and conducting successful case study research. These stages are as follows:

- Determine and define the research questions
- Select the cases and determine data gathering and analysis techniques
- Prepare to collect the data
- Collect data in the field
- Evaluate and analyze the data
- Prepare the report

Determine and Define the Research Questions - Stake (1994) and Yin (1994) identify the first step in case study research as the establishment of a firm research focus to which the researcher can refer over the course of study of a complex phenomenon or object. The researcher established the focus of the study by forming questions about the situation or problem to be studied and determining a purpose for the study (Soy, 1996). The research object in a case study is often a program, an entity, a person, or a group of people. The researcher investigated the object of the case study using a variety of data gathering methods to produce evidence that leads to understanding of the case and answers the research questions.
The research conducted in this study will discern which issues plague African-American students with LD at Albany State University (ASU), a unit of the University System of Georgia. Specifically, students will disclose information on the following topics: (a) What are the specifics of their learning disability labels and what level of understanding do they possess about the placement process they underwent in diagnosing these disabilities? (b) How knowledgeable are they of the legislation that supports their efforts in obtaining a college degree? (c) Do they possess the knowledge of their rights and responsibilities and advocate for needed accommodations.

Select the Cases and Determine Data Gathering and Analysis Techniques - The second step of case study research is the design phase. During this phase, the researcher determines what approaches to use in selecting single or multiple cases to examine and which instruments and data gathering approaches to use. When using multiple cases, each case is treated as a single case. As with this research, three separate case studies were presented, and the analysis of each case has been used as information contributing to the whole study.

A key strength of the case study method involves using multiple sources and techniques in the data gathering process (Soy, 1996). The researcher determined in advance what evidence to gather and what analysis techniques to use with the data to answer the research questions. Data gathered is normally largely qualitative, but it may also be quantitative. Data collected for this study is largely qualitative and was analyzed using the hermeneutic-phenomenology methodology.

Tools to collect data can include surveys, interviews, documentation review, observation, and even the collection of physical artifacts. The researcher must use the
designated data gathering tools systematically and properly in collecting the evidence (Soy, 1996). Specific collection tools for this research included surveys, interviews, journals, and observations. Steps were taken to ensure the systematic and proper collection of all evidence.

Prepare to Collect the Data - The third phase of case study research involved the advanced design of a documented and systematic mode of handling large amounts of data. Because case study research generates a large amount of data from multiple sources, systematic organization of the data is important to prevent the researcher from becoming overwhelmed by the amount of data and to prevent the researcher from losing sight of the original research purpose and questions documented and systematic fashion (Soy, 1996). Researchers prepare databases to assist with categorizing, sorting, storing, and retrieving data for analysis. Additionally, in order to ensure timely and accurate data collection, case study researchers should establish clear protocols and procedures in advance that include time deadlines, formats for narrative reporting and field notes, guidelines for collection of documents, and guidelines for field procedures to be used. As an organization method for this research, specific themes derived from previous studies were pre-selected by the researcher and utilized to create both the survey and interview document. These themes were also used to organize and report collected data.

When conducting the actual research, Soy (1996) maintains that researchers must realize that they need to be good listeners who can hear exactly the words being used by those interviewed. They should also be able to ask good questions and interpret answers. Following the collection of the data, they should be able to review documents looking for facts, but also reading between the lines and pursuing collaborative evidence that seems
appropriate. Researchers need to be flexible in real-life situations and not feel threatened by unexpected change, missed appointments, or lack predictable interviews. More importantly, researchers must be aware that they are going into the world of real human beings who may be threatened or unsure of what the case study will report regarding their participation. Therefore, researchers should be reassuring that the research will yield only actual facts as reported by the participant. The researcher for this particular study is aware of these specific qualities and feels competent in being able to take on these characteristics during the data collection phase of the research study.

Collect Data in the Field - The fourth step of the case study research process is the actual collection of data. The researcher must collect and store multiple sources of evidence comprehensively and systematically, in formats that can be referenced and sorted so that converging lines of inquiry and patterns can be uncovered (Soy, 1996). Researchers carefully observe the object of the case study and identify causal factors associated with the observed phenomenon. Data collected in this specific study has been tape-recorded and transcribed. Transcription notes were utilized to form the specifics of three case studies that were organized according to both predetermined and emergent themes. As the research progressed, the addition of questions to interviews was necessary and manipulation of data collection methods implemented. However, when changes were made, these were documented.

Evaluate and Analyze the Data - The fifth stage of case study research was the evaluation and analysis of data. In this step, the researcher examines raw data using many interpretations in order to find linkages between the research object and the outcomes with reference to the original research questions (Soy, 1996). The researcher relied on the
“voices” of the participants, as well as observations of the participants, when interpreting the data. In this regard, the integrity of the validity and reliability of the findings were maintained.

Throughout the evaluation and analysis process, the researcher must remain open (Soy, 1996). As researchers categorize, tabulate, and recombine data to address the initial propositions or purpose of the study, and conduct cross-checks of facts and discrepancies in accounts, the researcher is more willing to move beyond initial impressions to improve the likelihood of accurate and reliable findings. In this case, the researcher realized the importance of the need to fairly analyze the data to produce reliable conclusions answering the original "how" and "why" research questions.

Prepare the Report - In the final stage of case study research, the final report is prepared. Researchers should strive to report the data in a way that transforms a complex issue into one that can be understood, allowing the reader to question and examine the study and reach an understanding independent of the researcher (Soy, 1996). Because case studies present data in very personal ways, the report may lead the reader to apply the experience in his or her own real-life situation. Therefore, researchers should pay particular attention to displaying sufficient evidence to gain the reader’s confidence that all avenues have been explored, clearly communicating the boundaries of the case, and giving special attention to conflicting propositions.

Through the case study prong of my framework, the overall increase in the numbers of students with LD attending colleges and universities, especially those of color, was examined. More specific to ASU, it was hoped that the study participants helped shed insight as to the context under which they were experiencing success on this
particular campus. My study focused on three individual students with learning disabilities as I sought to describe their experiences, accommodations, and lives.

Yin (1994) stresses that a case study occurs "within its real-life context" (p. 23) and this is an important emphasis in my study. I have not only listened to the voices of the students participating in my study, but I have also observed them in their classrooms to gain an understanding of the context within which they learn. As the methods of Stake (1995), Simmons and Yin (1994) suggest, I have developed a theoretical framework through my review of the literature, but I have not used it while collecting data so I can, as Clandinin and Connelly (1994) propose, be "open to a rich and sometimes seemingly endless range of possible events and stories and . . . be prepared to follow leads in many directions" (p. 417). Following in this path, I haven’t guided the research, but allowed the research to guide me.

**Data Collection Methods**

One of the many dilemmas I faced in documenting my research journey and findings was to find a form or forms that could be used to justly describe the experiences of the identified research participants without bringing the myriad of issues plaguing the field of special education into context. LD has been recorded to affect up to 15% of the school-aged population, spanning all ages, ethnicities, socioeconomic levels and genders (Lerner, 2000). With such a large population being impacted, it is hard to determine which variables to isolate and consider as having significant effects on the identification and education of this population. When considering specifically African-American students with LD, it is even harder to determine which culturally-responsive factors contribute to the disparity between academic achievement within this population.
Additionally, while there has been a significant increase in the last ten years in the number of students with LD attending colleges and universities, professionals in the field are concerned about the lack of success and academic failure rate of these students (Synatschk, 1995). Sitlington and Frank (1990) found that one year after graduation from high school only 6.5% of the 50% of students with LD who had enrolled in some type of postsecondary setting were still in school. What limited information has been provided in the literature indicates that there is reason to be concerned about degree completion by students with LD. However, what was lacking in the literature was information identifying factors contributing to success for college students with LD. Knowledge of these success factors might provide critical information in the accommodation of LD students in the postsecondary environment. Therefore, in searching for an effective methodological form, I found a method that explored the functional characteristics of the postsecondary environment, as well as provided information and key questions that assisted educators, students, and administrators in identifying factors that may contribute to the student with LD's chances for academic success.

Utilizing the theoretical framework of my study as a guide for data collection, various qualitative methods of data collection were used. Before discussing data collection procedures, a school portraiture of ASU was provided to present a context from within the study would be conducted. The collection methods included: a reflective journal of the researcher, participant selection, participant survey, reflective journals of the participants, participant interviews, classroom observations of the participants, and the.
School Portraiture

Information used to sketch the school portraiture of Albany State University (ASU) was obtained from the 2001-2004 edition of the ASU Undergraduate Catalog. ASU is a historically African American institution in Southwest Georgia. The institution was established in 1903 as the Albany Bible and Manual Training Institute. It was supported by private and religious organizations to train African American youths in southwest Georgia. In 1917, it became a state-supported two-year institution and was renamed Georgia Normal and Agricultural College. In 1943 it became a four-year institution and was named Albany State College. The Board of Regents approved the current name, Albany State University, in June 1996. Although the university has seen many transitions, it continues to fulfill its historic mission of an HBCU while also serving the educational needs of an increasing diverse student population.

Twenty-four counties comprise the Albany State University Service Area. These counties are referred to as the Southwest Georgia (SOWEGA) region of the state. The counties in this region are: Baker, Brooks, Calhoun, Clay, Colquitt, Crisp, Decatur, Dougherty, Early, Grady, Lee, Miller, Mitchell, Quitman, Randolph, Seminole, Stewart, Sumter, Terrell, Thomas, Tift, Turner, Webster and Worth.

Through its collaborative efforts, the University responds to the needs of all of its constituents and offers educational programs and service to improve the quality of life in Southwest Georgia. Not only is the university one of the largest employers in SOWEGA, but it also prepares a large percentage of the employees hired by the areas businesses. Additionally, the activities sponsored by ASU bring quite a bit of revenue to the local area, making it an economic asset to the community.
Albany State offers seven undergraduate degree programs of which the most popular majors are biology, criminal justice, computer science, education management and nursing. The University offers six advanced degrees: a master of science in criminal justice, a master of public administration, a master of business administration, a master of science in nursing, a master of education in 11 majors, and an education specialist degree. The University offers an array of social opportunities for students through departmental organizations, bands, choirs, religious groups, honor societies, several major Greek and honor sororities and fraternities, and ROTC. An NCAA Division II school, Albany State's intercollegiate sports include men's sports in football, basketball, baseball, track and field, cross-country, and women's sports in basketball, volleyball, cross-country and track and field.

Both traditional and non-traditional students comprise the 3,150 student population, with approximately 60 percent fitting the traditional 18-22 year-old student profile. About 40 percent of the students live in campus housing, while 40 percent are older adults. Sixty percent are women. 94.4% of the population was African Americans. Additionally, 98% of the full time, first time undergraduates enrolling in the university received some form of financial aid. ASU has a 7.8% graduation rate within four years, 19.4% within five years, and 25.6% within six years (ASU Office of Institutional Research and Planning).

To be eligible for admission into the university as an undergraduate student, the following high school requirements must be met:
• Coursework - 4 English Credits, 4 Mathematics Credits, 3 Science Credits, 3 Social Science Credits, 2 Foreign Language Credits, 2 Additional Academic Units

• Assessments - 430 Verbal/400 Math SAT Scores, 17 English/17 Mathematics ACT Scores

Currently, approximately 3% of the ASU student population has declared disabilities with learning disabilities comprising the largest identified group (ASU Counseling and Testing Center). Students with a disability admitted to the University must register with the Counseling and Testing Center in order to establish their disability and become eligible for university accommodations.

The purpose of the Albany State University Counseling and Testing Center is to assist students in their total development by providing services and programs that facilitate intellectual, emotional and social growth (ASU Counseling and Testing Center). The Center seeks also to aid students to develop effective personal communication skills and behaviors. All records kept by the staff of the Counseling and Testing Center remain confidential information and will be disclosed to a third party only with the student's written permission.

**Reflective Journal of the Researcher**

An important element of the study was the integrity of the data. During the study, the researcher surveyed a potential pool of participants, selected and interviewed three research participants, reviewed the reflective journals of research participant, and observed participants in academic settings. These procedures were recorded in the researcher’s journal and were used in the development of the individual case studies. Due to the researcher’s close affiliation with both the nature of the research and institution in which the data is collected, the researcher made every effort to ensure
subjectivity of information presented. Descriptive rather than interpretive data recordings 
made in the researcher’s journal assisted in these efforts. Only after all data were 
gathered did interpretation of the facts ensue.

**Participant Selection**

Students identified with LD were solicited to participate in the research study. 
Students were informed of the study through flyers distributed at the Counseling and 
Testing Center and through personal contacts made by the staff. All interested 
participants were referred to me. Psychological and educational assessment information 
was validated in order to assure an appropriate sampling of students and identify their 
specific learning disabilities.

For this study, all participants were undergraduate, African-American college 
students with an identified specific learning disability (SLD). It was preferred that the 
students participating had disclosed their disability to the Counseling and Testing Center 
of ASU, but it was not mandatory. There were no age limitations imposed on 
participants. Additionally, both male and female students were allowed to participate in 
the research.

**Survey Questionnaire**

Once a final list of potential participants was prepared and cross-checked for 
eligibility requirements, each individual was contacted to determine the best time and 
location for the administration of the survey. Prior to the administration of the survey, 
informed consents were gained and confidentiality and anonymity guaranteed for each 
participant. Participants were told that all information collected as a result of the surveys 
was confidential and data were reported in aggregated as well as on an individual basis.
They were assured that discussion of specific cases would be reported in such a way as to protect their anonymity.

Data obtained from the initial survey served a two-fold purpose; to determine which three participants were selected to participate in the formal interview for the study, as well as to identify the categories that were of most significance to students with LD at ASU. These categories were used to comprise the formal interview document.

As the purpose of the research was to determine the factors that contributed to the success of African-American students with LD at ASU, the researcher was careful in selecting the final three participants to control for specific cultural dynamics. Specifically, variations in socio-economic status, parental involvement, gender, GPA, major, and perceived strengths and weaknesses was used in the selection process. Ranges of high, medium, and low were also used as gauges in these areas. The researcher attempted to create a slate of participants to represent the variations sought. Additionally, the researcher attempted to control for attrition. Therefore, students selected were also those who expressed a sincere interest in both continuing their studies at ASU, as well as continuing to participate in the study.

**Participant Profiles**

The profiles included in this chapter are brief introductions to the participants and their families. The biographical sketches were composed from the information reported by the participants on their survey instrument forms. A more in-depth profile will be included in Chapter V. The names of the students have been changed to protect their privacy.
Kensley is a twenty-two year-old African-American male who lives with his mother and father. He is an only child. His father is retired from the military. His mother has never worked outside of the home. They are considered to be a middle-class family. His parents moved from Columbus to Albany while Kensley was a student at ASU in order to be more involved with his studies. They are extremely involved and much of his success is attributed to their participation. Kensley is an Early Childhood Education major and desires to teach kindergarten students. Currently he has a GPA of 3.01. Kensley is a good tester and passed all of the standardized tests required of his major. He relies heavily on technology to assist him in his studies and personal management. Kensley’s weaknesses are in time management, pacing, organization and reading.

Kelsey is a twenty-one year-old African-American female who lives in the dorms on campus. Her mother resides in Lithonia, Georgia with her seventeen-year old sister. Kelsey’s father lives in Detroit, Michigan. They are considered to be a low middle-class family. Her parents are not very involved in her postsecondary studies, and were also not very involved in her secondary studies. Kelsey is a psychology major and desires to go to graduate school upon graduation from ASU. Currently she has a GPA of 2.78. Kelsey is a moderate test-taker. Although she has passed the required Regents test, she did not pass the PRAXIS I exam, which caused her to change her major from Special Education to psychology. Kelsey writes well and uses this as her major means of expression and learning. Her weakness is in the area of reading comprehension. Although not diagnosed as Attention Deficit, Kelsey struggles to remain attentive when reading a vast amount of information and thus struggles to answer comprehension questions and recall information for later application.
**Jasmyn** is a twenty-six year-old African-American female who lives with her mother and father. She has no siblings. Her father is a well-established farmer. Her mother is a nurse. They are considered to be upper middle-class. Her parents are very concerned with her studies. However, they want to foster her independence by allowing her to maintain in control of her post-secondary educational experiences. Jasmyn is a Nursing major and desires to work in pediatrics after graduation from ASU. Currently she has a 3.45 GPA. Jasmyn is not a very good test-taker. Due to perceptual problems, she struggles to understand abstract information and thus has difficulty problem-solving. Jasmyn works very diligently on organization and note-taking as a means of facilitating her educational experience.

**Reflective Journals of the Participants**

Following the survey, the three participants selected to complete the interview instrument were asked to keep weekly reflective journals in which they record information pertaining to their educational and social activities. Topics to be suggested for inclusion in the journals may include, but are not limited to, discussions of academic successes and failures, accommodations made in classrooms, strategies used to learn new information, and opportunities provided for social interaction. These journals were used to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon being explored. Journals were also an unintimidating means of collecting data that allows for a richer understanding of the setting and the group being studied through their reflection on and analysis of everyday events.
**Participant Interviews**

Interviews are one of the most important sources of case study information. Information obtained from the interviews of the three participants selected were used to develop comprehensive case studies which in turn will be coded and analyzed to provide strategies for enhancing the academic success of students with LD at ASU.

A review of literature to determine which type of instrument would be developed for this research shows that there are several forms of interviews that are possible (Yin, 1994):

- In an open-ended interview, key respondents are asked to comment about certain events. They may propose solutions or provide insight into events. They may also corroborate evidence obtained from other sources.
- The focused interview is used in a situation where the respondent is interviewed for a short period of time, usually answering set questions. This technique is often used to confirm data collected from another source.
- The structured interview is similar to a survey, and is used to gather data in cases such as neighborhood studies. The questions are detailed and developed in advance, much as they are in a survey.

The interview instrument developed for this study replicates that of a structured interview, but allows for open-ended responses. Components of the instrument were derived from relevant studies addressed in Chapter II. Similar findings that emerged in the literature reviewed were compiled and transformed into interview questions. The components became the themes upon which the data was analyzed and recorded. While specific questions were addressed to the participants, the researcher allowed participants to add other information they felt was relevant to the study.
As with the survey, informed consent was gained and confidentiality and anonymity guaranteed for each participant. Participants were told that all information collected as a result of the interviews was confidential and data would be reported in aggregated as well as on an individual basis. Because the interview participants were the major focus of the study, they were assured that discussion of specific cases would be reported in such a way as to protect their anonymity. Pseudonyms reflecting the names of my own children (Kensley, Kelsey, and Jasmyn) were assigned to each participant. Additionally, specific identifying information was reported in such a way as to not make the true identity of the participant known.

Each participant was interviewed individually. Due to the length and nature of the interview questions, the researcher felt that a group interview may have become too timely and would have compromised the depth and honesty of participant responses. Prior to the interviews, each participant was provided a copy of the interview instrument and encouraged to give some thought to the questions to be discussed. Interviews lasted approximately one hour. Interviews went longer, depending on the answers given by the participants, and the addition of any extra information they considered significant. Each was audiotaped with prior permission of the participant. Participants were given the option to stop the tape at any time during the interviews. Interviews were transcribed in full and participants were asked to review the transcript after the interview. Participants were encouraged to make any additional notes they felt would reflect the integrity of their responses.
Summaries of the specific sections of the interview document are as follows:

- The first section of the interview gathered demographic information from the participant. This information was used to create profiles of the type of student with LD typically attending ASU.
- The second section of the interview gathered data specific to the LD label. This information ascertained how the participant learned of his or her specific disability, the amount of knowledge held regarding the specific disability, as well as gained a perspective of how the participant views him or herself in relation to the disability.
- The third section of the interview gathered family data. This data was used to compare with literature reviewed regarding specifics of LD causation, as well as the leading rationale for students with LD attending postsecondary institutions.
- The fourth section of the interview posed questions regarding the participants’ college experiences. Questions in this section sampled issues such as why the decision was made to attend college, what preparation were made to transition into postsecondary education, what has the college experience been like, etc. This section provided a mini “satisfaction survey” of the participants’ experiences at ASU thus far.
- The fifth section of the interview established how the participant forms semester schedules. Basic management strategies will be gathered from this data.
- The sixth section of the survey speaks to the accommodations the participant has received. High school and college accommodations are discussed compared, and
their effectiveness to the participant analyzed. This important section provides the basis for the research study.

- The seventh section of the interview determined the degree of stress postsecondary education has placed on the participant. While all college students experience some level of stress, it is of particular importance to the researcher to determine whether the participants felt the amount of stress they experience is greater than that of their nondisabled peers.

- The eighth section of the survey dealt with the social relationships the participants have. The level of comfort the participants had with their peers, friends, and significant others regarding disclosure of their disability and/or receiving and giving assistance is gathered from data disclosed in this section.

- The ninth section of the interview developed a self-profile of the participant by retrieving information regarding their perception of themselves. Empowerment issues were discussed, as well as disempowering events. Data gathered from this section is particularly relevant to the participant as they further develop emerging leadership qualities in the postsecondary arena.

- The tenth and final section of the interview focused on participant achievement. The goal of postsecondary education is to strengthen academic and employment skills and talents individuals possess. This study proposed to determine which factors hinder a student with LD from accomplishing that goal. Information obtained from this section creates a picture of the participants’ present level of performance and distinguishes what accommodations can be put in place to enhance their postsecondary success.
**Classroom Observations of the Participants**

Following the participant interviews, the final phase of the data collection was direct observation of the individual participants. Direct observation occurred when a field visit was conducted during the case study and was as simple as casual data collection activities, or formal protocols to measure and record behaviors (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). Participant observation ensured the researcher was an active participant in the events being studied and provided unique opportunities for collecting data.

The researcher individually observed each participant in an academic setting that varied according to the participants’ schedules. Observations were recorded in the researcher’s journal to be used in the final analysis and formulation of participant case studies. During the observations, the researcher attempted to compare and contrast observed behaviors with the responses self-disclosed in the interview. A variation in interview responses and observation data was divulged in the data analysis.

**Data Management and Analysis**

All data gathered remained confidential and was kept in a locked file cabinet in my office at ASU (ACAD 244M). Surveys, journals, interview tapes and observation instruments were quickly analyzed and stored. Taped interviews were transcribed by the researcher and promptly coded for reporting.

I tested for significant associations among the data gathered from the participants’ responses in their interviews and journals that addressed their perceptions of their disability label, legislation affecting their college experiences, accommodations afforded, personal independence, and social engagement. I also analyzed for significant associations among the data and participants’ responses to interview questions and
journal entries that addressed their perceptions of the quality of the instruction they received, the quality of their preparation to enter a career, and factors associated with stress, family, and the overall college experience.

Following Corbin and Strauss’s (1990) recommendation for the analysis of narrative data, each case was analyzed for major themes and reviewed to determine other categories within the themes. The major themes from each case were reviewed for similarities and common relationships. Lastly, implications and recommendations for educators that emerged from the data were obtained.

**Confidence in the Study**

Lincoln and Guba (1985) proposed four constructs for measuring the confidence of a researcher in his or her qualitative study: credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability. Based on these constructs, a variety of research techniques were used to ensure a high confidence level in the research performed:

- **Credibility** - an indicator of how well the subject of the study was accurately identified and described by the inquiry. Credibility (identification) was gained through application of the ADA definition to each participation profile and (description) allowing each participant access to transcription notes following each interview.

- **Transferability** – the applicability of one set of findings to another setting. Transferability was achieved through triangulation of data by using a variety of data collection methods.

- **Dependability** – a measure of the researcher’s ability accounted for changes in the phenomena under study and to adapt the design of the inquiry as understanding of
the setting is refined. Comparing initial and concluding interviews to determine potential discrepancies in emerging themes ensured dependability.

- Conformability – a measure of the researcher’s objectivity. Triangulation of the data to validate research findings ensured reliability rather than objectivity in the research study.

Having applied Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) constructs, the researcher had high confidence in the research performed. Additionally, having thoroughly researched and followed best practices of researchers utilizing identified strands of my theoretical framework (case studies and hermeneutic-phenomenology), there was also high confidence in the research results. Finally, the researcher also had high confidence that the research findings were effective in instituting change in practices and outcomes for students with LD on postsecondary campuses.
CHAPTER IV
DATA PRESENTATION: SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE RESPONSES

This research investigated the impact of labeling, legislation, and accommodations on the success of African-American postsecondary students with LD at ASU. Utilizing a critical hermeneutic-phenomenological theoretical framework, an in-depth case study analysis of the academic interventions and accommodations that postsecondary students received that contributed to their academic success, and barriers that students experienced in accessing an appropriate postsecondary education, were identified and addressed. Using a structured interview document, African-American students with LD were able to react to questions prompting responses regarding both obstacles faced and supports utilized as they matriculate through ASU.

This is the first of two chapters in which data collected is been presented. This chapter includes a summary of aggregated data reflecting responses received from the initial survey questionnaire administered to ten African-American students with LD at ASU. Also included in this chapter is an expansion to the school portraiture presented in Chapter III.

After reviewing this data, the three participants for the in-depth case studies were selected. A review of this data also led to the compilation of emergent themes around which the case studies were developed. Expanded profiles of those participants are provided in Chapter V. Participant interviews and my reflections on them are also presented in Chapter V.

As a means of summarizing each research phase, I have included entries from my reflective journal. My journal entries were written following each stage of the study as a
means of data analysis to help guide me on the progress and direction of the research. All of my journal entries are printed in italics.

**Expanded School Portraiture**

Albany State University (ASU), the university in which I conducted my research, is one of three post-secondary educational institutions in Albany, Georgia. ASU is a historically African American regional institution in southwest Georgia that offers undergraduate and graduate liberal arts and professional degree programs, and a wide range of outreach programs to the community. Albany Technical College is a public post-secondary institution of the Georgia Department of Technical and Adult Education which provides technical education and training support for evolving workforce development needs of Southwest Georgia. Darton College is a two-year community-oriented institution within the University System of Georgia. Its principle mission is to provide educational programs, services, and opportunities to citizens of southwest Georgia.

ASU was established in 1903 as the Albany Bible and Manual Training Institute, supported by private and religious organizations to train African American youths in southwest Georgia. In 1917, it became the state-supported, two-year Georgia Normal and Agricultural College. In 1943 it became a four-year institution and was named Albany State College. The Board of Regents approved the current name, Albany State University, in June 1996. Albany State offers seven undergraduate degree programs, six master’s degrees, and an education specialist degree. The University offers a Board of Regent's engineering transfer program and a dual degree program in engineering with Georgia Tech. Both traditional and non-traditional students comprise the 3,150 student population, with approximately 60 percent fitting the traditional 18-22-year-old student
profile. About 40 percent of the students live in campus housing, while 40 percent are older adults. Sixty percent are women. Over ninety percent are African-Americans. About 3% have declared a disability.

According to the Fall 2004 Office of Institutional Research and Planning data report, 11% of the first time freshmen at ASU required learning support services. The composite Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) of the cohort was 934. The mean GPA was 2.87. Over 84% received the HOPE Scholarship. ASU has a retention rate of 87%.

Over the past two years, ASU has increased its passing rate on the Regent’s exam to 84%. The Regents exam is a standardized test required of all degree-seeking students enrolled in Georgia’s public colleges and universities. Tests are scored by a panel of state experts in the areas of Reading and Writing. To pass this test, students must earn a score of 61 on the Reading Comprehension portion and 2 on the Writing Sample.

Additionally, the passing rates for other standardized tests such as PRAXIS I, PRAXIS II, and the Nursing Board of Examiner’s Test have also increased for first time test takers. The PRAXIS series is a standardized test required of all students seeking initial certification in any field of education. PRAXIS I measures reading comprehension, writing, and mathematics skills. The required composite score to pass this exam is 526. Exams such as the PRAXIS II and the Nursing Board of Examiner’s Test are major-specific exams with varying modes of completion and scoring.

Traditionally ASU has served as an institution which educated the African-American population in the southwest Georgia area, regardless of certain specified criteria such as GPA, SAT scores, etc. Therefore, many students were given access to postsecondary education, but had to enroll in developmental studies courses to bring
them to the same level as their peers entering with the requisite SAT and GPA. Because of this, many students with disabilities chose ASU for postsecondary education because they could easily fit into the established environment.

As the state of Georgia moved more in the direction of changing the status of colleges to universities, Albany State have to begin to recognize the mandated assessment and GPA requirements. Additionally, the state has also mandated that students, who do not graduate from high school with a college preparatory diploma, must attend a technical or community college before transferring to a four-year college or university. Therefore, many students who would have selected ASU as their first choice for postsecondary education cannot. Those who are able to move directly into the university are among a group of students who are more academically prepared. Whether disabled or not, the students are rising to the expectations of passing tests and maintaining acceptable GPAs.

In specific regards to why the students participating in my research chose to attend ASU, the reasons vary. Kensley and his parents visited during campus visitation and were convinced that the atmosphere of the HBCU would be very supportive of his specific needs. Kelsey wanted to major in Special Education and ASU was one of the few regional institutions that offered this specific degree. A counselor at her school was familiar with the university and suggested it to her

**Survey Questionnaire**

Ten students who entered ASU and registered with the Office of Counseling and Testing as having LD were solicited to complete a two-part survey questionnaire regarding their disability. Dr. Stephanie Harris-Jolly, Disabilities Coordinator, consented to distribute and retrieve the survey questionnaire to students in her registry. It was
explained to her that three students would be selected from the pool of survey questionnaire participants to serve as the foci for my case study research. Therefore, she coded the survey questionnaires in order to be able to identify the student if chosen as a potential case study participant. Within two weeks, eight survey questionnaires had been completed and returned to me.

Dr. Harris-Jolly confirmed that a very small percentage of students who enter the university actually register their disability with her office. She also stated that many who do register do not participate in many activities in which their disability is the focus. Therefore, she advised that the survey questionnaires received were probably all she would be able to provide. As I was familiar with an additional two students who had disclosed their disabilities to me, the final two survey questionnaires were administered to these students. Both actually also became case study participants.

The survey questionnaire administered was an instrument I developed using various components of instruments used in several studies I reviewed in compiling my literature review. The two-part survey questionnaire was divided into a demographic section and a specific question section. The following demographic data was collected: age, gender, ethnicity, years at ASU, major, and career choice. The specific questions section gathered data in the following areas: demographic data, the LD label, family, college experiences, class schedule, accommodations, stress, social relationships, self-perception, and achievement. Presented in this chapter is a summary of the survey questionnaire findings. A comprehensive table of all responses appears in the appendix.
Demographic Data

Of the ten students completing the survey questionnaire, demographic data was obtained regarding age, gender, ethnicity, years at ASU, Major, and Career Choice. The average age of the students was twenty-one years of age. Seven of the ten students were female, the other three male. All ten students identified themselves as African-American. Students completing the survey questionnaire had been at ASU for an average of three years. Identified majors for the participants included education, nursing, psychology, social work, and English. All students wanted to pursue careers in their respective major areas.

As the focus of the study was on undergraduate, African-American students, the age and ethnicity demographic components were greatly anticipated. Based on gender research regarding the disparity between African-American females and males in colleges and universities, the overwhelming number of females to males in the pool was also expected. Further, as ASU has the third highest retention rate among regional colleges and universities in the state of Georgia, it was also within expectation that the students had been at the university for at least three years. Finally, based on admission trends for specific department majors at ASU, the identified majors and career choices were also within expectation.

The LD Label

Eight questions were posed to the participants regarding aspects of their reaction to having been labeled as having a learning disability. All students knew what their specific learning disability was. While diagnosed with a specific learning disability, the participants either agreed or strongly agreed that they had a positive view of themselves
as a student. Wide variations were recorded regarding the participants’ reactions when they were first made aware of their disability, positive college experiences, and their perception of benefits gained from being placed in special education classes during formative school years. The majority of the participants reported within the agree range as having, had positive formative school years, knowledge and utilization of strengths, as well as knowledge and strengthening of weaknesses.

Because these students had self-disclosed their specific learning disability, it is within reason that they would report that they either agreed or strongly agreed that they knew what their disability were. However, I had doubts concerning the extent to which many of the participants know about their disability (causation, overall affect, needed accommodations).

Realizing that the participants met high school and college entrance requirements, their optimistic responses of themselves as positive students is not surprising. However, because of the negative stigma attached to special education and the labeling process, I somewhat anticipated the wide variation in responses received regarding their reaction to their label and being placed in special education.

Regarding the variation pertaining to their positive college experiences, I anticipate that factors such as financial aid concerns, “bad” professors, testing, and other issues contribute more to these variations than pure academic difficulties. The reported agreement to having knowledge of strengths and weaknesses, as well as having had positive formative school years fell within my expectations. On average everyone answers in the affirmative regarding self-knowledge and personal reflection.
Family

Five questions were used to determine the participants’ thoughts regarding their respective families’ reactions to their specific learning disabilities. Only one student reported that an additional family member has a disability. Overall, participants answered within the agree range that family members have been important to their academic success, relate positively to their specific learning disability, and provide support regarding their disability. Two students reported that they were either undecided or somewhat agreed that they have been discouraged by their family members because of their disability.

While many people think that “disabilities breed disabilities”, this is not the case for LD. Therefore, the low number reported for an additional family member having a disability is not surprising. Even when families are not supportive and encouraging, in most instances students still report in the affirmative. However, for a student with a disability to master requirements and desire to pursue a college degree, there exists some motivating factor or support system, which more than likely is the family. Therefore, the agreement reported regarding these facets is not unexpected. However, realizing that some students recognize both too little and too much assistance from families, the undecided and somewhat agree answer regarding discouraging family members is also within expectation.

College Experiences

This section of the survey questionnaire was one of the largest. Ten questions regarding different aspects of college experiences were posed to the participants. Seven of the questions received wide variations in participant responses. Those pertained to (a)
being prepared for the transition from high school to college, (b) notification provided to professors of their disability, (c) family members who have completed college, (d) positive first year college experiences (e) college preparation, (f) thoughts of college as an educational goal, and (g) the importance of a college education to their family.

Students were polarized on points regarding the disclosure of their disability to college officials. All students either agreed or strongly agreed that a college education is important to them and that college is different from high school.

Issues of transitioning into and preparation for college are extremely important issues which most researchers agree needs to be enhanced. Successful transitions into postsecondary institutions depend upon the knowledge of the students, parents, teachers, and counselors regarding requirements and how to help the student master these. Additionally, this preparation greatly impacts the first year college experiences of the student. As this widely varies from individual to individual, there were no surprises that the variation was reflected in the participants’ responses to these items.

Regarding the variations in responses to professor notification of the student’s disability, it is unclear whether professors indeed received notification of students’ disabilities and either did not provide accommodations, did not know how to provide accommodations, or did not understand what they were receiving.

Due to the large number of first-generation college graduations disclosing themselves during graduation ceremonies each year, it was fairly shocking that there was such a large variation in this area. I assumed that most students would have disagreed that immediate family members have college degrees. However, it can be rationalized that for these students representing this traditionally underrepresented population to be
attending college, there must be a positive correlation with a support system which strongly recognizes the importance of a college degree.

Reflecting back upon my experiences with high school students with LD and their negative perceptions of themselves and their postsecondary options, coupled with the positive LD students I was introduced to in my university classes, I can accept the wide variations reported by students regarding though about college as an attainable goal. What seems only a dream to some is thought of as a must to others.

The polarization of students regarding the disclosure of their disability can be attributed to the fact that some of the participants were recruited by me following their self-disclosures in my class in order to complete the targeted number of survey questionnaires desired. Therefore, those provided by the Department of Counseling and Testing would have agreed that they disclosed their disability to the university, while those recruited by me may have not disclosed their disability to university officials.

Lastly, the participants’ presence at the university reflects their agreement that a college degree is important. Also, research combined with common sense provides rationale to support that there exist vast differences in high school and college.

**Class Schedule**

Seven questions were posed to participants regarding their management of class scheduling. Students either agreed or strongly agreed to all but one question to which they either somewhat disagreed or disagreed. The questions to which the students either agreed or strongly agreed related to specific strategies for completing writing, reading, math, science, social science, or career-oriented assignments. Participants either
somewhat disagreed or disagreed to having specific mechanisms for managing their schedule of classes.

For most students with disabilities, routine becomes a way of life. Therefore, I would have expected nothing less than the responses received regarding defined strategies for attacking academic related subjects.

In regards to managing their class schedules, I was a bit surprised by these responses. Upon entering the university, students are assigned to an academic advisor who provides a program checksheet with all needed courses outline for program completion. Additionally, the course catalog and advisors provide suggestions on when courses should be taken and in what sequence. Further, classes are sequentially numbered to correspond to a student’s classification to further help guide them on when to take specific courses. Therefore, I attribute the responses received to the participants’ feelings toward the university scheduling process rather than the management of their personal schedules.

Accommodations

Accommodations are also a large component of the survey questionnaire administered to the participants. Ten questions were presented in this section to ascertain the participants’ reactions to the accommodations available and/or provided by ASU. Of the questions posed, students agreed or somewhat agreed that they used accommodations in high school and have used technology as an accommodation in college. All other questions in this section were answered within the disagreed or undecided range. Those questions pertained to (a) successful use of accommodations in college, (b) remedial classes taken in college, (c) use of support systems at ASU, (d) awareness of support
systems at ASU, (e) awareness of support systems unavailable at ASU, (f) system of steps to take when facing difficulties in classes, (g) professor provision of unsolicited accommodations, and (h) awareness of rights as an LD student at ASU.

**Stress**

Students were asked three questions designed to ascertain the level of stress they have experienced in the postsecondary setting. Participants reported that college is not stressful for them and does not hinder their academic progress because they also overwhelmingly report that they have no mechanism for dealing with stress.

*It is my opinion that students feel stress is reserved for older individuals who have work and family issues as stressors, rather than college students in the prime of their life with little obligations. It is this misconception of what stress is that I feel distorts the answers reported in this section.*

**Social Relationships**

Five questions were posed to students to determine the extent of social interactions on the participants’ postsecondary success. Students answered the majority of the questions in the disagreed range and only one in the agree range. Friend/significant others were not made aware of participants’ disabilities. Participants had no friends who had learning disabilities. Additionally, participants did not feel their relationships had been affected by their disability. Finally, participants did not feel they had been denied opportunities because of their disability. Students answered in the affirmative to having a group of helpful peers.

*While many students thought their academic success might have been affected by not disclosing their disability to university officials, I can only assume that very few*
thought it necessary to inform their peers of their disability. Once again, with the negative stigma attached to disabilities, students perhaps do not discuss their disabilities with peers/significant others because they do not want to isolate themselves or call attention to their disability with those who may not understand and treat them as “normal”. The participants who reported that they have no friends with disabilities may indeed have friends with the same identified disability and have just not disclosed it to them, as they have not disclosed their disability to their friends. Further, with both sides not disclosing their disabilities, neither knows if difficulties in their relationships may have been caused by an aspect of the other’s disability or not.

Fortunately, participants reported that they did not feel their disability had caused them to be denied any opportunities. While I would like to think that this is so, I still wonder how many were denied opportunities because of attributes associated with their disability that they were possibly not aware of.

A characteristic I always look for in a friend is one who is helpful in various situations. I can only assume that this applies across the board for most individuals. Additionally, helpful was not operationalized and participants more than likely interpreted this term in several ways. I imagine that few actually thought of academic helpfulness in responding to this item.

**Self-perception**

To determine their perception of themselves as students, participants were asked four questions. All of these questions were answered in the affirmative. Participants had positive images of themselves, thought others had positive images of them, felt there were situations in which they felt confident, and know who/what helps to empower them.
Answers provided in this section were not surprising in that almost everyone thinks of him or herself positively and hopes that others view them in the same light. Additionally, being in control of themselves and identifying those persons or things that help to facilitate this power is also a positive correlation with a positive self-image.

**Achievement**

The final section of the survey questionnaire dealt with participant achievement. Students had to answer six questions designed to measure their reactions to academic achievement. Students either agreed or strongly agreed to the importance of good grades, feelings of happiness when good grades are received, the establishment of future career goals, and preparation for assessments. Participants were not satisfied with their GPA and did not seek accommodations for tests.

In order to meet the requirements for college entrance, students had to have had a minimum GPA that was predicated by receiving good grades and minimum test scores. Therefore, feeling of happiness at receiving good grades and preparing for exams are not only common sense; but, also imbedded reactions to academic success.

In choosing a major upon admission to the university, participants had made career choices that were reiterated in the demographics section of the survey questionnaire. As students with disabilities may not have been adequately prepared for their first year of college, they may not have experienced a level of academic success that was pleasing to them. Once a student lowers his or her GPA, it is very difficult to increase it to higher levels. Therefore, it is understandable that many participants may have had this experience and are not satisfied with their GPA.
In regards to seeking accommodations for testing, it is once again that desire to not single themselves out that I feel drives the students’ responses that they did not seek testing accommodations.

Survey Questionnaire Summary

This survey questionnaire summary further addresses the participant responses to the specific questions section of the instrument. Additionally, the summary discusses how the survey questionnaire data was used to identify the three interview participants presented in Chapter Five. Finally, the participant responses to the survey instrument were used as a means to identify emergent themes upon which interview data will be developed to answer my specific research questions. These themes are also presented in Chapter Five.

Participant Responses

A review of literature, coupled with experience, led to the anticipation of the majority of the responses provided by the participants. Based on research, experience, and observations, there were few surprises gained following the aggregation of the survey questionnaire data. A detailed synopsis of each section of the instrument follows.

The Learning Disability Label

Research presented in my Literature Review (see details in Chapter II) addressed the pros and cons of labeling. While labeling provides a means of identifying who is eligible for services and what those services are, it also serves to single an individual out as “different from the norm.” In this regard, labeling has a propensity for calling unwanted attention to individuals with disabilities that may be potentially harmful to their self-esteem.
As a high school teacher of students with LD, I have witnessed this first hand. Students either run to the resource class or slip in past the tardy bell so that nondisabled peers do not know they are receiving specialized services. Students refuse to attend field trips or lie down in the seats on the buses when exiting and returning to the school campus so as not to be identified. While my students may have been assigned only one segment of special education services and had all other academic and elective courses within the general education curriculum, they were still self-conscious about being labeled and pulled out for this help.

Based on this knowledge, I understand why some students want to leave their label behind if they have the opportunity to do so. These are those who do not self when entering into postsecondary education. Further, I can also sympathize with those participants who responded with negative reactions to learning of their disability label and those with negative formative school experiences. Because school experiences often affect how one perceives education as an adult and how parents react to invitations of parental involvement, it is important that schools foster improved relationships between educators and ALL of their constituents.

*Family*

Regarding family, it is so important that parents support ANY child in their postsecondary educational endeavors. It becomes even more important to support the child if he or she has a learning disability. As illustrated in the following poem by Dorothy Law Nolte (1972), children indeed will live what they learn.
"Children Learn What They Live"

If children live with criticism, they learn to condemn.

If children live with hostility, they learn to fight.

If children live with fear, they learn to be apprehensive.

If children live with pity, they learn to feel sorry for themselves.

If children live with ridicule, they learn to feel shy.

If children live with jealousy, they learn to feel envy.

If children live with shame, they learn to feel guilty.

If children live with encouragement, they learn confidence.

If children live with tolerance, they learn patience.

If children live with praise, they learn appreciation.

If children live with acceptance, they learn to love.

If children live with approval, they learn to like themselves.

If children live with recognition, they learn it is good to have a goal.

If children live with sharing, they learn generosity.

If children live with honesty, they learn truthfulness.

If children live with fairness, they learn justice.

If children live with kindness and consideration, they learn respect.

If children live with security, they learn to have faith in themselves and in those about them.

If children live with friendliness, they learn the world is a nice place in which to live.

(Nolte, 1972)
While survey questionnaire participants responded that their families related positively to their learning disability and were important factors in their academic success, some also responded that family members were a source of discouragement. For a child with a learning disability, his or her world may be filled with individuals who criticize and ridicule them. They will also encounter numerous situations in which they face hostility and shame. It is incumbent upon parents to provide a loving, nurturing environment in which children are praised, shown tolerance, and provided encouragement. Most importantly for children with a disability, from the home, children should experience a sense of security and approval.

**College Experiences**

In my Autobiographical Roots (see details in Chapter I), I share that my research topic was born out of the differences in educational goals and self-esteem I perceived in the students in my postsecondary educational classes, as opposed to those in my high school classes. While I found my high school students to be intelligent, their expectations of themselves, their educational capabilities and career goals were very low. Very few expressed a desire to further their education beyond high school. When I entered into the postsecondary educational arena, I found just the opposite. Students in my classes informed me of their learning disabilities, were confident, and had very high expectations for their future.

Participants completing the survey questionnaire provided responses that demonstrated a mixture of the two types of students I had been exposed to. Variations in their responses to the questions in the College Experiences section of the instrument were extreme. While most reported that they valued a college education, preparation for the
transition and their first year experiences were very different. Information presented in my Literature Review (see details in Chapter II), supported this phenomenon.

Many students with disabilities and their parents were not knowledgeable of the differences in legislative mandates regulating education in the K-12 setting, as opposed to that in the postsecondary educational arena. These differences greatly affected how students were identified for services, the services available, and how services were delivered. Students had to notify the appropriate personnel in postsecondary institutions of their disability, rather than being identified by the personnel. Further, no longer could material be modified. Only available accommodations could be provided to support postsecondary student success. Finally, students owned their educational experiences in postsecondary institutions. Professors did not remind, coax, provide second chances, or give study guides. Therefore, students with learning disabilities in the postsecondary environment had to learn to manage time and classes, as well as to organize and study.

**Class Schedule**

While college student advisors cautioned students of time constraints, course difficulty level, and other potential factors that may have affected their success when selecting classes, the scheduling decisions were ultimately left to them. Beyond knowing what classes entailed, students with learning disabilities must really have had a strong sense of their strengths and weaknesses in order to create realistic schedules. If not, they set themselves up for failure.

Many students with learning disabilities spent their first year establishing effective methods for handling the large amount of reading and writing required in courses. Additionally, they struggled to discern when to add science, math, and social
science courses to the schedule equation. Alarmingly, however, was the fact that some students with disabilities had no systematic method of scheduling courses and found themselves struggling because of their class selections.

_Accommodations_

Accommodations students with learning disabilities used, or failed to use, in postsecondary educational environments was perhaps the most important aspect of this research. A philosophy that most special educators prescribe to is that, “All children can learn; not on the same day or in the same way.” While some students were visual learners and would prefer a PowerPoint presentation, others were auditory learners and had to record lectures for additional review. Yet still others were tactile learners and had to write information to master it.

Students with LD who entered into postsecondary institutions must know what learning methods work best for them. The students must then go one step further and notify the professors of classes so that accommodations can be made. Participant respondents to my survey questionnaire, just as many other students with learning disabilities, found this to be very difficult.

So many students with learning disabilities have been ridiculed and humiliated by other teachers that they found it intimidating to approach a professor and ask for accommodations to be made in their classes. Yet, another population of students did approach professors and asked for accommodations and the requested assistance was not provided. Still, other students were unable to discern what accommodations worked for them and asked for nothing. Regardless of the scenario, accommodations were the key to
“which day and which way” a student with a learning disability learned information needed to be successful in the postsecondary setting.

**Stress**

The stress related with going to college can be difficult for any individual. For a postsecondary student with a learning disability, the stress may become overwhelming. Entering into a new environment in which they may or may not have been prepared for, combined with issues of financial aid, books, housing, student organizations, etc., was quite challenging. As young adults, many had not developed effective methods for coping with stress. This often led to other problems that not only affected their academics, but also jeopardized their enrollment at the university. Counseling and testing departments on college campuses must become more proactive in their attempts to educate students with disabilities on how to cope with stress and related problems.

While participant respondents did not identify stress as a factor affecting their postsecondary educational experiences, this in itself may be an anomaly. Participants, just as many other college students, may not have recognized the stress factor as the causation for many concerns. Therefore, they had not adequately identified strategies to address the issues that may have been impeding their academic success. Without addressing the cause, an effective solution may never be found, ultimately ending in student failure.

**Social Relationships**

Friends and social relationships for students with learning disabilities could be potentially very different for those without disabilities. As many students with learning disabilities were sensitive about others finding out about their disability and ridiculing them, they were sometimes very introverted and had difficulty making and maintaining
relationships. Others were just the opposite and would do anything to fit in with the crowd.

Because just focusing on the academic component of college was somewhat overwhelming, some students with learning disabilities had little time to join student organizations, socialize in the student center, or attend weekend games and other events. Those students in this situation may have felt that they failed to get the overall college experience. Further, because many employers want to see more than academics reflected on employment applications, these students also may get overlooked for employment opportunities.

When students reached their junior year of college and began their professional-level coursework, they began to have classes with the same students and were sometimes forced into relationships because of class requirements. For some students with learning disabilities, this was their first socialization encounter since their enrollment. Because they had hopefully learned time management strategies and had identified accommodations to assist in mastering their academics, these new relationships were more important than some fathomed. In some cases they provided the incentive for the student to work harder to complete degree requirements. For others, a study partner for exit exams and other requirements was found. Still for others, just the companionship was enough to help the student overcome old scars of ridicule and develop a new-found sense of pride and accomplishment.

**Self-Perception**

The self-perception of many postsecondary students with learning disabilities has been shaped by their prior school experiences. Students who have had positive
experiences moved into the postsecondary environment with a positive self-perception. On the other hand, students who have had negative experience brought a negative self-perception with them into the postsecondary setting.

As parents are their child’s first teacher, but not their only teacher, *Three Letters From Teddy* (Ballard, date unknown), details how one teacher “resolves to make up to Teddy what (she) had deliberately deprived him of - a teacher who cared” (p. 2). Too often teachers do not realize how much of an influence their comments and actions, or the lack of, affects their students. Like Teddy, sometimes students with a learning disability will experience a moment in which a teacher tells them, “You made it and you did it yourself! In spite of those like me and not because of us, this day has come from you” (Ballard, date unknown, p. 3.). More often, however, students with LD will be overlooked, blended into the class, pitied, ridiculed, or humiliated. Regardless of the action, students in this latter group will only have these experiences on which to build their self-perception.

*Achievement*

Who does not like to achieve, make good grades, or be recognized for their efforts? More importantly for the participants in my research was the question of who had. Students with LD who experienced a measure of success strove harder to continue in this pattern. They studied harder for tests, completed class assignments, and attended class regularly. On the other extreme, students who were unsuccessful on course assignments gave up prematurely. The student did not attend class following the academic failure, did not seek tutoring, or ask for assistance from the professor. In the long run, he or she may eventually drop out of college.
Of significant concern to the researchers reviewed in my Literature Review (see details in Chapter II), was that many students with LD had little difficulty entering into postsecondary institutions, but had significant challenges completing their program of study. This gap must be bridged and data reported if postsecondary institutions are to continue to recruit students with disabilities to their campuses.

The results of the survey questionnaire provided a means of providing information needed to determine which students completing the instrument would be identified as interview participants. As the purpose of the research was to determine the factors that contribute to the success of African-American students with LD at ASU, the researcher was careful in selecting the final three participants to control for specific cultural dynamics. Specifically, variations in socio-economic status, parental involvement, gender, GPA, major, and perceived strengths and weaknesses was used in the selection process. Ranges of high, medium, and low were also used as gauges in these areas. By utilizing the demographic data received from the survey questionnaire, the researcher has attempted to create a slate of participants to represent the variations sought.

Additionally, the researcher used the data received from the specific questions section of the survey questionnaire to identify a variation of students who would be able to provide a range of comments to support the emergent themes discussed in Chapter V. After aggregating all data, the researcher reviewed each section of the instrument and identified three interview participants whose responses provided the widest range of variance. In this regard, a full picture of the postsecondary experiences of the African American students with LD who attend ASU was formatted.
Finally, in utilizing the information obtained from the survey questionnaire in the interview participant selection process, the researcher attempted to control for attrition. Students selected were also those who expressed a sincere interest in both continuing their studies at ASU, as well as continuing to participate in the study.
CHAPTER V

DATA PRESENTATION: PARTICIPANT INTERVIEWS

The purpose of this study was to use the voices of African American students with LD, who attend Albany State University (ASU), to determine the impact of labeling, legislation, and accommodations on their postsecondary success. Ten students completed a two-part survey questionnaire in which demographic data was gathered and specific questions regarding the students’ learning disabilities were answered. Using the results of this survey questionnaire, three students were selected to complete an in-depth interview in which data for further analysis of the general and specific research questions could be obtained. The general research question was: What impact does the implications of labeling, legislation, and accommodations have on the success of African-American postsecondary students with LD at ASU? Specific research questions were:

- What implication did the LD label have on the academic success of students entering into the postsecondary educational environment?
- What knowledge did participants have of specific laws governing their matriculation?
- What academic accommodations, supports, and services did the participants use in postsecondary education?
- What barriers did students with LD identify in postsecondary educational settings?
- What level of involvement did the participants demonstrate in designing their postsecondary academic accommodations?
In this second chapter of data presentation, I have included expanded participant profiles to provide a full picture of the interview participants used in this research. They were chosen for their diversity in gender, socio-economic background, level of parental involvement, academic achievement, testing abilities, and region of the state originating from. Presented in this chapter is a transcript of their voices regarding implications affecting their academic success at ASU as an African-American student having been previously labeled and educated as an individual with LD. These transcripts are organized into the research themes that emerged from the aggregated responses of participants to the survey questionnaire. The themes are presented in the areas of (a) transition planning, (b) accommodations, (c) self-perception, and (d) student advisement. Each theme is presented in bold text and analyzed using reviewed literature, interview responses, participant reflective journal entries, or information obtained from observations of the interview participants.

Expanded Participant Profiles

The profiles included in this section are expanded from those presented in Chapter III. They include demographic information recorded in their interview, as well as information gained from classroom observations and reviews of their files created by the Office of Counseling and Testing. The names used for individual participants are pseudonyms and are derived from the names of my own children, Kensley, Kelsey, and Jasmyn.

**Kensley** is an average-looking, medium-complexed young man with a slightly husky build. He has a round face that is accentuated with a short haircut. His nearsightedness is corrected with glasses that frame his wide eyes. Kensley speaks with a
northern accent that is interrupted with a slight lisp. He is always well-groomed, which fits well with his good manners. Kensley works well with peers in his classes and seems to make friends easily. While not a “class clown”, he does seem to enjoy making others laugh.

Kensley entered ASU from High School in Columbus, Georgia. His Freshman Admission Index score was 2250. His composite SAT score was 750. He passed the Regents Test the first time with a score of 64 on the reading comprehension and 2 on the writing segment. As an Early Childhood Education major, he is also required to take PRAXIS I and PRAXIS II. He obtained a passing PRAXIS I score on the second attempt with a composite of 531. He had to retake the math portion of the test and was able to increase his initial score of 171 to 176. Kensley passed PRAXIS II on the first attempt with a composite of 287.

While Kensley maintained an undergraduate GPA of 3.01, he was required to complete an extra semester of student teaching due to difficulties in maintaining classroom management, as well as difficulties in planning and implementing instruction. To assist in classroom management, his grade level was changed from third to kindergarten. To facilitate instructional planning, Kensley was given several suggestions utilizing his strength, technology, as a strategy for planning. Kensley has since graduated from ASU and has begun graduate studies in the area of Early Childhood Education.

Parental involvement was both a strength and weakness for Kensley. During his sophomore year at ASU, Kensley’s parents moved to Albany from Columbus to ensure he was receiving an appropriate education at the institution. However, their involvement at the post-secondary level especially that of his mother, served as a crutch upon which
Kensley relied on heavily. Having observed his demeanor, both alone in the classroom
and in the company of his parents in a meeting, it is noted that there was a marked change
in his assertiveness and ability to express his concerns.

Kelsey is a very cute, tawny-colored young woman with deep dimples. Her long
African American hair frames her face in a perfect bobbed style. Her smile is infectious
and is used often. Kelsey is very “bubbly” and seems to have many friends of both sexes.
She is very talkative and livens the classroom discussion with her participation. Although
she has a very petite structure, her personality makes her seem larger than her frame.

Kelsey entered ASU from High School in Atlanta, Georgia. Her Freshman
Admission Index was 2585. Her composite SAT score was 990. She passed the writing
portion of the Regents Test the first time with a score of 2, but had to retest on the
reading comprehension section. Due to the comorbidity of attention deficit hyperactivity
disorder (ADHD) with her LD, she was allowed to retake the reading comprehension
component of her Regents exam with the nontraditional students. In this setting, she was
able to quietly read the questions aloud. She passed the retest with a score of 68.

Upon admission to ASU, Kelsey declared Special Education as her major due to
her prior experiences with Special Olympics and other volunteer activities with
exceptional students. As an Education major, she is required to take PRAXIS I before
being admitted to the Professional Education Unit. After four attempts, she was still
unable to obtain a passing composite score. Strategies use to prepare for the exam
included tutoring, enrolling in the developmental studies reading and writing courses, as
well as seeking independent advice from previous teachers. Her closest composite score
was 519. Although she expressed a sincere desire to teach, she could not afford to
continue taking the standardized test and enrolling in courses which were not on her curriculum sheet. Therefore, she changed her major to Psychology and is slated to graduate in December 2005.

Kelsey states that her mother was happy to learn she decided to pursue a college degree, but never really gave much support to help her make the transition from high school to college. Additionally, she says that her mother would visit the school for required meetings or special occasions, but never showed a great deal of interest in volunteering or making initial school contacts. I have never met Kelsey’s mother. However, I have talked to her briefly on the telephone. After introducing myself, she did have knowledge of who I was and of my relationship with her daughter.

**Jasmyn** has a dark, smooth complexion and a stocky build. She sports a short, neat haircut that accentuates her beautiful face. Behind small-framed glasses, she has small sad-looking eyes that seem to reflect frustration found in both Jasmyn’s past and present. She is overall not a very talkative individual. She has a close-knit group of friends, most of whom are members of her sorority, Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. (AKA).

Jasmyn fluctuates from being a very quiet, reflective young lady to a student filled with questions that are never answered in a manner she understands. I was introduced to the questioning side of Jasmyn her second day in my classroom. I was attempting to explain the difference between perception and sensation to students enrolled in my Foundations of Learning and Motivation class, and Jasmyn could not grasp the difference between these concepts. Using examples, classmate interpretations, and textbook references, she still could not grasp the difference. At the end of the class, she stayed
behind to explain to me her learning disability and asked me to be patient as it may take her longer to grasp some concepts. I immediately ensured her that I would do everything in my power to facilitate her learning style. I also kept her information in my files for consideration as a potential participant in my study.

Jasmyn is a local student and entered ASU from High School in Leesburg, Georgia. Her Freshman Admission Index was 2455. Her composite SAT score was 940. She passed the Regents exam on the initial administration with a 2 on the writing portion of the Regents Test and a score of 64 on the reading comprehension section.

Upon admission to ASU, Jasmyn declared Nursing as her major due to her desire to help others and make a difference. As a nursing major, she is required to take the Nursing Board of Examiner’s Test before graduating and receiving her license. Currently the Nursing program at ASU has undergone major realignment efforts to better facilitate the pass rate on this exam of all its students. One program instituted has been the Summer Boot camp designed to provide an intense summer study session in which students are exposed to the types of questions on the test, time constraints associated with the test, as well as other general strategies for completing the exam. Jasmyn is participating in this program this summer.

Jasmyn’s parents are very involved in her educational career. However, her father seems to have the most influence on her. She has made several references to how his philosophy of education has shaped her decisions. Additionally, she alludes to the fact that he takes care of most of the family affairs. Since Jasmyn’s parents have to pay for the portion of her education that the HOPE scholarship does not cover, Jasmyn’s parents are very involved with her advisor in making sure her semester schedule is correct, as well as
ensuring she is doing well in her currently scheduled courses. As Jasmyn is a Nursing major and only took my class as an elective, I have not had the opportunity to have extensive interaction with her parents. However, I did have the occasion to speak to her father the semester of her enrollment in my class.

The overall reported academic success of Kensley could be closely attributed to his parents’ level of involvement in his studies. From creating his viable transition plan in high school, to carefully selecting an institution of higher learning, to helping develop study habits for testing and reading, Kensley’s parents isolated all other factors as potential barriers to his attaining a postsecondary education.

However, in relation to Kensley’s ability to put his education into practice, he will probably always face challenges to whose origin can also be ethnicity to his parents’ involvement. Rather than allowing him to face some of the difficulties and failures associated with attaining a postsecondary degree, they chose to step in shelter him from many of the harsh realities of the real world. Because of this, when he does attempt to be independent, it is questionable if he will be successful.

While Kelsey came to the university with a plan of action to attack her postsecondary educational experiences, she was unfortunately not successful at attaining her first choice. Had Kelsey been aware of the amount of testing required in the major she initially chose, perhaps she and her counselor would have instituted testing strategies into her transition plan before enrolling in ASU to help build this skill. However, she was able to refocus her efforts and choose a second path that is somewhat in line with her desired goal. Upon the completion of her first degree, she will still be able to pursue
certification in the area of Special Education and use her psychology background as a means to further understand the population with whom she works.

It is predicted that Jasmyn will successfully complete her studies and become an excellent nurse. Modeling the work ethics espoused by her father, she will attack the workforce with as much forethought and energy as she has her postsecondary educational studies. Also, her extra efforts in preparing for her exit licensure exam, coupled with the mass exertion put forth by the department to ensure its students are successful, are all favorable indicators that she will meet the requirements for her RN degree.

**Emergent Research Themes**

As the data from the ten participants who completed the survey questionnaire was aggregated, themes began to emerge which provided a means for me to begin to analyze the data and further structure my research. Students with learning disabilities who experienced the greatest level of postsecondary success were prepared for the transition from high school to college. In order for students with learning disabilities to be successful in postsecondary educational institutions, they must know what accommodations work best for them, advocate for the availability of these accommodations on their campus, and be provided these accommodations by their instructors. Students with learning disabilities who had a positive self-perception performed better in the postsecondary education arena. Comprehensive student advisement was mandatory for the postsecondary success of students with learning disabilities.
Transition Planning

Transition planning is mandated in IDEA. This mandate includes the development of an individualized transition plan and ensures that planning is initiated in middle school, usually by age 14, and continues through high school. Transition planning provides an array of student-centered activities designed to facilitate the student's movement from school to post-school activities, including postsecondary education. Transition planning for students with learning disabilities must remain flexible and reflect the developmental and educational needs of the students at different grades and times. It also must reflect a clear understanding of the learning disability, as well as the specific abilities and needs of the student.

More importantly, transition planning helps individuals with learning disabilities understand their strengths and weaknesses, have a clear understanding of their disabilities and the impact of their disabilities on their lives, and are able to set-up and implement an action plan with realistic goals. Furthermore, it provides them with a strong sense of control over career-related events and helps them to make a conscious decision to take charge of their own lives.

Yet, many individuals with learning disabilities have had experiences that affect their ability to make decisions regarding their own careers. For some students, the major focus of high school is on academic remediation rather than on career exploration and preparation. In this situation, the student may have been academically prepared for postsecondary education, but has no idea of entrance requirements or career fields in which to major in.
Kelsey admitted that she wanted to attend college, but she had no idea which school to attend, or what to major in. She felt “lost” when she got to the campus. She eventually declared education as her major but felt she may not have done so if she had been informed of the amount of standardized testing involved. If these career options had been discussed with her earlier, her transition plan could have included test preparation skills which could have helped her overcome the testing barrier which eventually caused her to have to change her major.

Still for some students with learning disabilities, their parents and educational professionals often have low expectations for them. These low expectations often mean that the student's needs and interests are not taken seriously. Therefore, students often develop low expectations for themselves as individuals. They may feel that they have no control over what becomes of them, develop an excessive fear of failure, and may lack any kind of goal orientation.

While parent support is a strength for Jasmyn, she also disclosed that there were instances in which her parents were also discouraging to her educational endeavors. Also, when asked if good grades are important to her, she replies, “Extremely.” Jasmyn also admits that she sometimes cries if she does not receive a good grade on an assignment. Because previous failures before her diagnosis have caused her to develop such high academic expectations, she has now become obsessed with academic performance.

Finally, for minority students, emphasis on self-determination throughout the whole special education process in general, and in the transition process in particular, reflects the cultural values of the special educators from the dominant culture. Emphasis on these values has increased the quality of life for most people with disabilities, but
special educators need to acknowledge that not all cultural groups will prioritize these values in the same way. Many children from a particular cultural group may not have goals of financial and residential independence within a year of graduation, or may not feel comfortable going to college away from home immediately following high school.

In looking for a college to choose, Jasmyn thought of other schools and received scholarship offers from many institutions. However, ASU was ultimately her choice because of its proximity to her home. Additionally, while all interviewees desired to graduate and be professionally successful, none of the three interviewees mentioned home ownership, savings, or retirement planning in association with future plans.

In an interview conducted by Hitchings, Luzzo, Ristow, Horvah, Retish, & Tanners (2001) of 97 college students who had been identified with learning disabilities, students reported that only slightly more than 20% were involved at all in their own transition planning. Most did not have any specific career goals, could not describe their disability, and did not know how their disability could affect their future job performance.

Lehmann, Basset and Sands (1999) did a qualitative study that explored high school students' participation in transition activities from multiple perspectives. Specifically, they wanted to find out what transition-related activities were taking place; how students, mothers, and teachers are involved in the transition process; and what teachers and mothers think are the barriers to greater student involvement.

Both teachers and mothers saw self-determination as a necessary skill that students needed in order to achieve future goals. However, teachers and mothers interpreted terms differently. Teachers concentrated their efforts on specific tasks, such as
career interests and job-seeking skills. Mothers were teaching independent living skills, encouraging their children to form friendships, procuring jobs and communicating with schools. Mothers who were overly involved saw themselves as "case managers" of their children's futures, and their heavy-handed approach often complicated the transition process and deterred students' self-determination (Hetherman, 2003).

Similar to the study of Hitchings, Luzzo, Ristow, and Retish (2001), students seemed to have little knowledge or interest in defining and working on what they wanted to do after completing high school. They were passive recipients of the transition activities being conducted and managed by their teachers and mothers. Students were not involved in transition activities where they could make choices, and had no opportunity to practice self-determination skills.

Neither Kelsey nor Jasmyn indicated any level of involvement in their transition planning. Haphazard efforts were made to prepare them for entrance into postsecondary education. Specifically, Jasmyn stated, “I didn’t prepare and I was in for a shock. My mom had always organized things for me and now I was on my own. I crashed by third quarter.”

However, Kensley stated, “My parents, teachers, and counselors helped me prepare for college.” A true transition plan does take the ideas of each of these entities and creates a collaborative product that is individualized for the student in question. Therefore, an effective transition plan can be one factor attributed to the level of success Kensley has experienced. On the other hand, however, the amount of involvement his mother has in his educational career can also account for the low level of self-determination he emits and his feelings that he is sometimes “treated like a child.” By not
allowing him more ownership in his education, Kensley’s mother may be handicapping his professional career in which she will have a more limited role.

In regards to their career goals, they each had eventually made a career choice and were in the process of completing requirements toward reaching these goals. Further, none of the participants felt that opportunities had been denied because of the disability. However, as each does recognize potential weaknesses, this response may change when they move into the workforce which is much more competitive and involves financial gains and losses.

In order for students to be successful in postsecondary education, educators and parents must recognize the need for better self-assessment skills among students with learning disabilities who want to transition from the secondary to the postsecondary education environment. While planning their transition in secondary school, students must be made aware of the differences that they will experience when entering postsecondary school, such as differences in instructional time, class size, teaching and examination methods.

All participants agreed that college is indeed much different from high school. Kensley says, “teachers expect you to do your work by yourself.” Kelsey admits the workload is much more difficult. Jasmyn equates the difference to independence. “In high school teachers push you and your parents made you do your best. In college you do things because you want to. No one is going to make you.”

For many students with learning disabilities, participation in postsecondary education is appropriate. However, to achieve this goal, comprehensive transition planning is essential. The primary objective of this planning is to help the student select,
access, and succeed in a postsecondary education program. The result of effective
transition from a secondary to a postsecondary education program is a student with a
learning disability who is confident, independent, self-directed, and in actual pursuit of
career goals. A student with a learning disability can succeed in the transition from
secondary to postsecondary education settings if the student, parents, and professional
personnel work together to design and implement effective transition plans.

A postsecondary institution requires that a student with a learning disability
register with the office that provides support services for students with disabilities in
order to receive accommodations. At ASU, it is the student's responsibility to request
services and provide all necessary support documentation required of the institution.
After a student discloses his or her disability to the appropriate personnel, their office
confirms the student's disability and eligibility for services and accommodations. If the
student is found eligible for accommodations, each semester course instructors receive a
letter from the office detailing recommended accommodations for the student. However,
the student with a disability is responsible for meeting all course requirements using only
approved accommodations.

The primary responsibility for implementing accommodations falls on the
shoulders of the student with disabilities and many are unprepared for this role. High
school faculty and parents hinder students with disabilities when they do not allow them
to speak and act for themselves. Intervention must take place at the high school level in
order for students with disabilities to successfully advocate for themselves in college.
Most of these students already know from experience what works best for them and with
the help of the established policy and procedure of the disability support office, can relay learning skills to a professor.

**Advocacy for Accommodations**

While the participants interviewed in my research mentioned multiple accommodations, it was clear that each developed an individual set of strategies that enabled him or her to succeed. For some participants, this system included various study strategies, organizing their time to enable them to find the large blocks they needed to complete their reading, and analyzing their own difficulties to be able to overcome them.

All participants attributed a portion of their postsecondary success to their ability to use varied accommodations. Study and time management strategies included, but were not limited to, methods of learning to study; note taking; identifying key points when reading and preparing for tests; library skills; and the use of daily, weekly, and monthly calendars. Among the accommodations reported were the use of computers, word processors, and books on tape. Others included planning techniques, such as time management, and setting work priorities. Most of the participants in this study had previously learned some accommodations in their elementary or secondary careers.

Kelsey explained:

I learned to compensate for some of my learning problems, but for others, I was still working it out. I knew I had learning disabilities. I knew that was why I couldn't do things the same way other people did them, but I didn't necessarily know how to work it out. (Interview with Kelsey, Gaiters-Fields, 2005)
Jasmyn cultivated friendships with persons in her classes whom she would invite to lunch. During lunch and after explaining about her learning disability, she would bring up the current work being done in class and turn the conversation toward the reading required for class, notes she had missed, or lectures that she hadn't understood. She said she did this because it was difficult, if not impossible, for her to listen and take notes at the same time. She explains:

I started to write things and stopped when I got lost and thought, "What am I going to do?" Luckily, a girl in my dorm was in my class, and I looked at her notes and I said, "She’s got all the things I don't have." And it worked to my advantage. I used her notes and I started asking people if I could photocopy their notes. I've always had at least one friend in the class. It helps to be in a sorority because you meet a lot of people, and you have a lot of sisters who have taken classes already or been in class with you. (Interview with Jasmyn, Gaiters-Fields, 2005)

By photocopying someone else's notes and comparing them with their own notes, students with the same difficulties as Jasmyn could determine whether they missed anything important during lectures.

The students indicated that another accommodation they used was taking a reduced load of courses. Students who used this strategy usually took four or, occasionally, three classes a semester, as compared to five classes, which is normally considered a full course load at ASU. This strategy provided the flexibility that is important if students must invest additional time and effort in their studying to compensate for disabilities.
Most of the participants used various types of equipment such as computers, tape recorders, calculators, etc. Kensley, who used multiple strategies to succeed at reading, described his approach to completing his work:

For reading I need time, just give me time, and I can get it. If I read it slowly, then I can understand what is going to be discussed, whereas if you assign a book on Thursday and make it due Tuesday, I won't get much out of the book. (Interview with Kensley, Gaiters-Fields, 2005)

He also explained that he uses margin notes, as did the other participants:

I check in the margin for those things in the text that I think are important information. And then I go back, and I write a question out for what was discussed, and then in my own words I answer it underneath, and that way I could quiz myself. (Interview with Kensley, Gaiters-Fields, 2005)

Students also indicated they used outlining and note cards, as well as mnemonic techniques. Jasmyn explained this way:

If I have a list of terms or subcategories to use, I usually use mnemonics. Using the first letter of each one and make up a little saying or something like that or see if it spells half a word, I'll use that. It depends on what I'm trying to learn. I think I've found what works best for me in certain instances. (Interview with Jasmyn, Gaiters-Fields, 2005)

Another really helpful accommodation was preplanning. For Jasmyn, who relied heavily on her mother for organization, this was an extremely significant task for her to accomplish:
I now carry a calendar around, and I go through all my syllabi and plan out when the exams are and what reading has to be done. I don't always get it all done. Right now I'm behind in a couple classes. But, I know what I need to do and I have it in little pieces…chunking, the term that Mrs. Fields uses. Keeping me from getting overwhelmed, if I have a list of eight chapters that I need to do by next Saturday, that's overwhelming for me. I have to break it up; I have to start with chapter one. If the chapters are really long, I do sections of chapters, stuff like that. Self-awareness, I guess that was a big thing, knowing how long I need to do something.

When I started the program, I couldn't plan out how long I needed to read a chapter. How long I needed to work on something. Now, I take note of the time it takes me, so I get a better idea of how to plan. (Interview with Jasmy, Gaiters-Fields, 2005)

Most of the participants also indicated that they could not be employed during the academic year because of the amount of time necessary for them to complete their academic work. One participant, Kelsey, who worked at a job, did confess that it was extremely difficult, but necessary to help support herself financially.

Several of the participants also mentioned a system of checking with other students about professors from whom they should take classes. They tried to find professors who were fair, who would make the necessary accommodations for students with learning disabilities, and whose lectures were keyed to the assigned text. The option of selecting these professors was possible because ASU is a small university and students who preregister generally get the classes they desire. Kelsey indicated that selection of
professors was a major "success" strategy for her: "I learned to cope by getting the right teachers, those who let me compensate for my learning disability."

While my participants did feel comfortable using accommodations, each reported that this was not done without both internal and external struggles. A continuum existed relating to the degree of comfort the participants displayed about using the various accommodations. Kensley had been told that students with LD were "cheating" or not really working if they used reasonable accommodations, such as extended time for tests and the use of a word processor for exams. Kelsey was constantly told in elementary and secondary school that if she would only work and study harder, she could overcome her learning problems. Accordingly, in the university setting, she continued to believe that asking for help was analogous to admitting she hadn't worked hard enough. Kensley initially felt the same way:

If I got an A, I wanted to get it under the same circumstances as everybody else. Because I felt like maybe I was cheating in my work if I had an advantage that other students didn't. After a while, though, I realized that I am at a slight disadvantage, anyway, so it just balances out. Now that doesn't bother me at all anymore; and, like I said, with the extra time in exams, sometimes I use it. I am always prepared to use this accommodation, like I will get there early, or I will have the option to stay late. (Interview with Kensley, Gaiters-Fields, 2005)

Jasmyn still analyzes and reflects about why she needs help and why it may sometimes be difficult to request assistance. She noted this:
I think that the hardest thing is to...know when I need more help and when I can do it on my own. I am an individual, and I don't like someone else doing things for me, or even doing things with me, and it was very hard to get to the point to say, "I need help learning to memorize things." I want to be able to do it on my own, and I was constantly being told that I was smart enough to do it on my own, and it was frustrating to realize that I have to do extra to get to the same point that other people can get to just by reading it. (Interview with Jasmyn, Gaiters-Fields, 2005)

Although the students mentioned multiple learning and accommodations, it is clear that each selected the particular strategies that worked best for him or her. For each participant, an individual system was developed, sometimes by the individual student and sometimes collaboratively by the student and a counselor from the Office of Testing and Counseling, which enabled him or her to succeed using a combination of accommodations.

**Self-Perception**

The early educational experiences of the students interviewed for this research strongly influenced their self-perception of themselves. During the interviews, all of the participants recalled negative and, in many cases painful, memories of elementary and secondary school experiences in which teachers accused them of being lazy because of their abilities and disabilities.

Dedication was needed to succeed in a challenging university system, and many students emphasized their strong belief in their own potential and a willingness to go to
great lengths to realize that potential. The majority believed their capacity for hard work was their greatest asset. Jasmyn stated:

I don't define it by learning disability. I use the term learning difference. 

As far as I'm concerned, everybody learns in a different style. What makes those that have a diagnosed learning difference special is that it's diagnosed. *(Interview with Jasmyn, Gaiters-Fields, 2005)*

To fully understand how students with learning disabilities shape their self-perception, it is necessary to discuss how individuals connect themselves to their label. Orientation of the learning disability is the part of self-perception that relates to a participant's sense of identity. The degree to which the learning disability was integrated into the students' sense of self resulted in the disability taking on an external, an internal, or a hidden quality. An external orientation implied that the disability existed outside of the student, exerting its influence and creating a force to be managed or directed. An internal orientation meant that students had specific thoughts about how the learning disability "lived" in them and became a part of everything they did or said. A hidden orientation meant that the learning disability was less than obvious, not only to others, but to the students themselves. At times, students had little to say about their disability and the role it played in their lives. These students did not deny that the disability existed, but they did not view it in terms of an external or internal orientation.

Condition of the learning disability is the part of self-perception that defines participants' perceptions of the nature of their learning disability. The nature of condition is revealed in three levels. At the first level, unattributed condition, students were beginning to build a basic knowledge of their learning disability but were unable to
articulate its characteristics. There was an awareness that the disability existed, but an uncertainty as to its form and duration. At the second level, permanent condition, students had developed an understanding of their disability, but had not learned strategies to compensate for its effects. Participants described a time when they feared their disability would prevent them from achieving their full potential, a hopeless time for students when it seemed that they would never gain control of their lives. At the third level, modifiable condition, students came to realize that their learning disability could be managed and that they could succeed. With coping mechanisms and compensatory strategies in place, participants were able to develop their self-esteem and increase their self-efficacy.

Jasmyn recalls:

I thought about what it would be like if I hadn't been diagnosed and things would be very different. The diagnosis helped me to see that I could succeed and it made things understandably frustrating, instead of just frustrating. Maybe it was the light at the end of the tunnel, you know, there is an end there and you will get to it, while your tunnel may not be as straight as others. (*Interview with Jasmyn*, Gaiters-Fields, 2005)

Impact of the learning disability is the part of self-perception that illuminates the extent to which participants felt their lives were affected by their disability. Students experienced the impact of their learning disability at three distinct levels: limited, pervasive, or undefined. For students who describe a limited impact, the learning disability is perceived as affecting only certain aspects of their lives. These students are able to identify the areas most affected and are also able to identify areas that were not
affected. Kensley remarked, "My strengths are definitely in the arts. . . . My weaknesses are definitely reading and memorization. I am more of a visual/perceptual person."

Students who describe a pervasive impact seem to feel the presence of their learning disability in each and every aspect of their lives. These students are, at times, overwhelmed by this effect and often felt powerless to change their situation. Jasmyn agrees that she is sometimes very overwhelmed by small things that should not affect her.

Some students are also unable to define the impact of a learning disability on their lives. An undefined impact means that either a student does not feel the impact, or that the student cannot distinguish specific areas where the impact is felt. These students often attribute the undefined impact to the severity of their particular learning disability, claiming that their disability is less severe than others, and therefore the impact is not as clear. Because there are numerous factors affecting Kelsey’s academic success, it is unclear how much is attributed to her disability or other concerns.

Although participants experienced varying degrees of support, each also experienced a certain level of stigmatization associated with the learning disability (see details in Chapter II). Stigmatization led to a feeling of hopelessness, and at times a loss of self-confidence, for students who were singled out or labeled as different. Students who experienced a high degree of stigmatization were more likely to allow the learning disability to define their weaknesses, rather than their unique learning style. These students also tended to view their disability as a permanent condition that would continue to affect every aspect of their academic and social lives.

Stigmatization began in childhood, for most participants. Many remembered incidents from their past in which their difficulties with learning led to teasing from other
children or lack of understanding on the part of teachers. Kelsey recounted, "I remember having a lot of trouble in math and getting picked on for it. It was not a positive experience." Sometimes the strategies that students developed to improve their learning led to stigmatization. Kelsey further explained, "I had to stop myself from thinking out loud sometimes, because people would look at me like I was crazy. I did it while I was working on problems or something." Early diagnosis seemed to reduce the level of stigmatization experienced by participants. These students were getting more of the support they needed from family and teachers. Further, these students were able to understand their feelings of difference and to attribute them to neurological symptoms that were outside their control.

Stigmatization, whether real or imagined, continued throughout each participant's adult life. As adults, students who had difficulty expressing their thoughts and feelings usually experienced a higher degree of stigmatization. Also, students who had difficulty describing the specifics of their learning disability were most often misunderstood. Kelsey commented, "When I try to explain myself to instructors they have no idea what I'm talking about and they look at me like I'm weird or crazy or something." Participants shared stories from their college experiences in which they felt singled out or labeled in front of their classmates. Jasmyn related one such experience:

I explained to one teacher that I had a learning disability and needed longer time for my tests and I needed to take them somewhere privately. .well, the first exam he made this big ordeal in front of the whole class, where everyone knew that I had a learning disability and I was very angry about that. (Interview with Jasmyn, Gaiters-Fields, 2005)
At times, participants were able to use their negative experiences with stigmatization to develop a deeper motivation to overcome perceived obstacles. Perhaps the most moving account of feeling stigmatized came from Jasmyn. She described her father's initial reaction to her learning disability diagnosis:

My father told me that you should try not to let people put that label on you, that label of a learning disability. He said you already have a label as a woman, and then as a African American woman. Don't let people put one more label on you that is going to hold you from succeeding and that is going to make people expect less from you. (Interview with Jasmyn, Gaiters-Fields, 2005)

Disclosure was also a critical issue for participants in this study. Unlike other disabilities, particularly certain physical disabilities, students reported that their learning disability was not obvious to others. This meant that participants could make choices about disclosing their disability, and could maintain some degree of control over its impact. However, it also meant that students were faced with some difficult decisions about disclosure on a regular basis. At times, students were pleased that their learning disabilities were not obvious because an undisclosed disability reduced the likelihood of stigmatization. At other times, students wished their learning disabilities were more obvious so that others would have a deeper understanding of the difficulties that students with learning disabilities encounter. Students made choices about disclosing their learning disability in a variety of settings, but the most common settings for disclosure were academic life and social life. Jasmyn explained:
As far as the educational side, I always disclose, just to have something to fall back on. I don't want to take any chances. As far as socially, it might as well come out, as opposed to me being embarrassed. I tell people from the beginning. It's just something that I have to do. (Interview with Jasmyn, Gaiters-Fields, 2005)

The determination and motivation of each of these students was quite clear in their interviews. Their commitment to hard work, to follow through on what they needed to accomplish, and their self-initiative was clear. In fact, many of the participants reported that they became more committed to graduate because of their learning disability.

One of the participants had to be flexible about choices and change her major in order to succeed in a university setting. For those who must spend hours reading what students without learning disabilities can read in minutes, the pursuit of a liberal arts degree remains challenging, even with the use of accommodations. One did major in liberal arts and used many accommodations. However, another selected a major in an area that enabled her to tap into her strength and succeed without the hours of reading required in the liberal arts curriculum. Kelsey's learning disability created problems for her in testing, so she altered her career goal by choosing a psychology major:

I came into school as an education major, eventually, and I found that my learning disability hindered me, especially in the math. I was able to pass the required math class, but could not pass the math section of PRAXIS I to get admitted into Teacher Education. I decided to change my major to
psychology so that I could graduate. I will probably seek certification after graduation. (Interview with Kelsey, Gaiters-Fields, 2005)

As unique individuals, participants displayed a set of inherited and acquired characteristics that helped to shape their experiences and their reactions. It is impossible to separate the individual from the learning disability. Not only did it affect the core category of self-perception, it also influenced other conditions which directly affect the overall success in postsecondary education.

**Formal and Informal Support Systems**

Students in this research received academic and social support in a variety of forms and from a variety of sources. Perceived academic and social support shaped the reactions that participants developed toward their disability and affected their postsecondary educational success. Students who experienced a high degree of support were better able to define the nature and condition of their disability, and had developed a strong self-perception. Students who did not experience a high degree of support were struggling to make meaning of their disability or choosing to ignore it. The most common sources of support for students were: parents and family; teachers, educators, or faculty members; advisors, support services personnel, new student orientation staff; and significant others.

Family support took many forms, and was often related to time of diagnosis. Parents were better equipped to deal with the difficulties associated with a learning disability when the specifics of the disability were identified early. Kensley stated, "In third grade, I was having a lot of problems with schoolwork. I would not be able to do it on paper in school, then I would come home and my mother would ask me the same
questions verbally." Kensley's mother assisted him in developing strategies and advocated for him when he was too young to speak for himself. He went on to say, "My mom actually had to fight a good bit in elementary and middle school for a while so that I was able to receive some accommodations."

Some students related the amount of support they received at home to their parents' level of education or choice of career. Socioeconomic background and geographic region influenced familial support, as well. Jasmyn commented, "My mom and dad graduated from college and they understand how common my disability is."

In some instances, students felt the amount of support received by parents was TOO much. All too often parents try to hold on when they should be letting go, and when they hold on too long, they contribute to an unsuccessful postsecondary experience for their child with a learning disability. The role of a parent is to help educate their child concerning career opportunities and postsecondary education opportunities, and to help develop their child's disclosure and self-advocacy skills. Parents need to emphasize that it is the child's responsibility to arrange for any needed accommodations, and to foster adult-to-adult communication and cooperation. This pro-active training needs to begin early so that when their children with learning disabilities leave high school, parents let go of their advocacy responsibilities and students become their own competent advocates.

Kensley comments that while he appreciates the support his family gives him, he wishes they would sometimes, “just chill.”

Beyond parents, another important source of support for students was the encouragement and understanding that came from teachers and college professors. Although support from educators was difficult to measure, participants were able to
speak about their perceptions of the level of support they were receiving. This perceived support influenced the students' reactions to and acceptance of their learning disability. For the most part, students spoke positively about their interactions with faculty, but each student recounted at least one negative experience. Jasmyn said, "I've had one or two instances where professors weren't so understanding." Kensley recalled:

I had one professor, he yelled at me in class. I was kind of shocked. But then I met this other professor and everything changed. It was like I had someone at the college that I had a contact with, and I felt more of a sense of well-being. (Interview with Jasmyn, Gaiters-Fields, 2005)

Based on the responses obtained from the survey questionnaire, four emergent themes were formed. The themes were (a) transition planning, (b) accommodations, (c) self-perception, and (d) formal and informal supports. These themes are used in Chapter V as a means to further analyze the remaining data that includes the interviews, participant observations, and the interview participant reflective journals.

In reporting the interviews of the three participants, I have tested for significant associations among the data gathered from the participants’ responses in their interviews and journals that address their perceptions of their disability label, legislation affecting their college experiences, accommodations afforded, personal independence, and social engagement. I also analyzed for significant associations among the data and subjects’ responses to interview questions and journal entries that address their perceptions of the quality of the instruction they received, the quality of their preparation to enter a career, and factors associated with stress, family, and the overall college experience.
CHAPTER VI

REFLECTION AND CONCLUSION

Postsecondary success for African American students with LD will become more likely when educators make sure that students and parents are prepared. Since not all students are privy to educated parents, educators need to assure that students are exposed to equal and inclusive educational opportunities in order to obtain the necessary basic skills for postsecondary success. Listening to the voices of the participants, the “basic skills” which each possesses or lacks was exposed and its relationship to the students’ postsecondary academic success was examined.

Research Findings

In this chapter, I summarize six theoretical and methodological findings emerged from my dissertation: (a) While labels have been the basis for developing and providing services to minority students, they can also promote stereotyping, discrimination, and exclusion against them. (b) The lack of knowledge about differences in their rights and services has the effect of discouraging or possibly excluding students with disabilities from higher education. (c) Students with disabilities are able to better access accommodations when higher education institutions provide appropriate services. (d) Self-efficacy is a necessary trait to enhance the academic success of students with learning disabilities in the postsecondary educational setting. (e) Lack of sensitivity from professors and school personnel was the most reported secondary barrier to postsecondary education for students with learning disabilities. (f) While case studies are an effective method of obtaining data for recommending pedagogical changes, a more in-
depth methodological analysis of participants’ lives is needed to invoke enhancement of their total life quality.

This research investigated the implications of labeling, legislation, and accommodations on the academic success of African-American postsecondary students with LD at ASU. Utilizing a critical hermeneutic-phenomenological theoretical framework, an in-depth case study analysis of the academic interventions and accommodations that postsecondary students received that contributed to their academic success, and barriers that students experienced in accessing an appropriate postsecondary education, were identified and addressed (see details in Chapter III). Using a structured interview document, African-American students with LD were able to react to questions prompting responses regarding both obstacles faced and supports utilized as they matriculate through ASU (see details in Chapter IV). In Chapter IV, their responses were organized into themes that emerged. The researcher examined raw data, using many interpretations in order to find linkages between the research object and the outcomes with reference to the original research questions (see details in Chapter III).

Through my review of the literature, I developed a three-prong theoretical framework comprised of phenomenology, hermeneutics, and case study methodology that provide the necessary foundation for my data collection. I held on to this theoretical framework as I conceptualized my research, collected, analyzed, and wrote about the data. I was "open to a rich and sometimes seemingly endless range of possible events and stories and . . . be prepared to follow leads in many directions" (Clandinin and Connelly (1994, p. 417). Instead of guiding the research, I allowed the research to guide me. Yin (1994) stresses that a case study occurs "within its real-life context" (p. 23). In my
dissertation inquiry, I not only listened to the voices of the student participants, but also observed them in their classrooms to gain an understanding of the context within which they learn.

**Finding 1: Labeling Implications**

While labels have been the basis for developing and providing services to minority students, they can also promote stereotyping, discrimination, and exclusion against them. *(Finding 1)*. The educational system's response to students whose academic achievement levels differ from their peers is to label, segregate and create an “Other” category. In the construction of an other, then, "us" "them" relations are validated. This leads to a feeling of hopelessness and/or a loss of self-confidence for those placed in the “other” category.

Sarason (1982) observes, that the recognition, understanding, and acceptance of diversity are among the most important experiences any person can have. The celebration of diversity and difference in a climate of tolerance, respect, and gratitude makes inclusion "an opportunity and a catalyst for building a better, more humane and democratic system" (Bunch, 1999, p. 7). As schools are the institutions in which cultural pluralism and character education are emphasized, it is deplorable that these are the very same settings in which children with mild disabilities are first identified, labeled, and placed into an environment of cultural overrepresentation and character assassination.

The educational system's response to difference in class, ethnicity, gender, religion and exceptionality results in the creation, and subsequent marginalization, exclusion, and devaluation of difference *(Finding 1)*. The results of this study suggest that the education system must respond to difference in more appropriate ways. Thus, it is
the researcher’s recommendation that it is necessary to re-examine and interrogate the Special Education model in terms of labeling and its use. Further, it is imperative that university professionals carefully consider the implications that students who enter postsecondary institutions with affixed labels carried with them from the k-12 system.

For varying reasons, Kensley and Jasmyn, research participants, chose to disclose their disability upon admission to ASU. The final participant, Kelsey, however, did not do so. Kensley and Jasmyn were only slightly stigmatized by their label because they had both natural and formal supports to explain and balance their opinions of themselves rather than being labeled. Because Kelsey had fewer supports and even more negative peer reactions, she has been stigmatized the most by being labeled and placed in the “other” category.

Upon admission to ASU, Kensley disclosed his disability because his parents thought that it would be helpful for him to get the services he needed.” Based on his prior experience, Kensley agreed to this disclosure, although he did not specifically request any additional assistance beyond what had been offered.

Since Kensley had so much support from his parents and other responsible adults in his life, he built up his trust in adults to shape his education. Nevertheless, Kensley was still cautious about peers learning of his disability. That was the reason why Kensley never disclosed his disability to his peers at ASU. Kensley explained:

In high school, I never fit in. I wasn’t picked on, but I wasn’t made to feel that I belonged either. In college, it’s different. I make people laugh and they like me. We all get together and study and it’s because we want to, not because I need help from someone. If I told everybody that I had a
disability, they might think something was wrong with me and stop liking me. (*Interview with Kensley*, Gaiters-Fields, 2005)

Similar to Kensley, Jasmyn had some positive experiences with adults in her life assisting with educational decisions. Therefore, she, too, disclosed her disability to the Counseling and Testing Center at ASU. However, she only disclosed her disability to peers and others she trusted. Jasmyn recounted her difficulties in developing relationships with peers and adults before being labeled and decided to be proactive rather than reactive in responding to those on whom she may have to rely at a later date:

Before I was labeled with a learning disability, I didn’t know what was going on with me. I had been told I was lazy, stupid, clumsy, and everything else. I started to believe those things. Even though I was still told some of those things after I was labeled, I felt I could defend myself by telling them I had a disability. Sometimes my friends didn’t understand why I couldn’t do things as fast as they could. I did, too. After finding out I had a learning disability, I could explain this to them and they would help me instead of laugh at me. (*Interview with Jasmyn*, Gaiters-Fields, 2005)

Society's rejection and exclusion of people with a disability denies them access to positive relationships with others in a classroom community of tolerance and acceptance (*Finding 1*). This was what Kelsey experienced in her educational career:

I always felt I was different. For as long as I can remember, I always needed help in school. When I asked my mother for help, she would get frustrated and I would, too. My teachers were the same way. Sometimes
they would just let me pass and I really did not understand the material. I was labeled with a learning disability and all the kids in my class were told that I needed “special” help. This made me feel really stupid. When I came to ASU and they didn’t ask me about a learning disability, I didn’t tell them. (Interview with Kelsey, Gaiters-Fields, 2005)

Labels amplify a child's negative aspects, causing others to think about the child only in terms of inadequacies or defects (Finding 1). They may cause others to react and hold low expectations for a child based on the label, resulting in a self-fulfilling prophecy or the development of a poor self-concept. When peers are aware of the child’s label, they may reject or ridicule the labeled child. This was true in Kelsey’s case. It also validated Kensley’s decision not to inform his peers of his disability.

Hallahan & Kauffman's (1994) observation that labeling damages self-concept and motivation to learn, as well as resulting in others (teachers and peers) viewing the student differently--negatively--is echoed in Stainback & Stainback's assertion that labeling is "detrimental and leads to the deindividualization and stereotyping of students" (1987, p. 67). That was supported by Kelsey’s reaction to being labeled and her refusal to self-identify when given the choice.

While numerous issues exist surrounding the labeling of the general population, minority students face a unique challenge; that of disproportionate overrepresentation. A disproportionate number of children from minority culture groups have been inaccurately labeled intellectually disabled. The three participants in this study were African American students educated in schools in which the population was at the minimum 60% White. In recalling the composition of their resource classes, however, participants reported that the
composition drastically changed. All participants reported that resource classrooms were overwhelmingly comprised of minority students, especially males.

The issue of disproportionate representation of ethnic and culturally diverse students in special education was first raised by civil rights advocates, educators, administrators and policy makers who found it puzzling that children from ethnic minority backgrounds and those with limited English proficiency were overrepresented in classes for the mentally retarded (Harry, 1994; Luft, 1995; Markowitz, 1996). The phenomenon of disproportionate placement in special education was further supported by Dunn, who documented disproportionate numbers of African American, American Indian, Mexican and Puerto Rican students in classes for the mildly retarded in California (Harry, 1994; Luft 1995; NASDSE, 1994, 1995). Because of these reports, further research was conducted to either substantiate or refute these findings. Having long been substantiated, causation and correction of this problem are still issues of debate (see details in Chapter II).

Legal battles in the 60s and 70s charged that special education was a cover for segregation and cultural bias in assessment. The court cases of the 70s found many of the public schools' assessment practices prejudicial, supporting the mandate for nondiscriminatory assessment procedures in the civil rights legislation of Section 504 and requirements for nondiscriminatory testing and classification, and the procedural or due process safeguards against misclassification in the passage of Public Law 94-142, the Education for All Children Handicapped Act (EAHCA) of 1975 (Jacob-Timm & Hartshorne, 1998) (see details in Chapter II).
While legislative action has helped to decrease the incidences of prejudicial labeling of minorities as disabled, the fact remains that disproportionate placement has continued (Reschly, Kicklighter & McKee 1988; Harry, 1994). Numerous arguments have been proposed to explain it and equally numerous attempts have been presented to address or redress the problem (NASDSE, 1995). Among those arguments, disproportionate placement is still most closely attributed to discriminatory identification and assessment practices.

Hilliard (1999) suggests that the continuing overrepresentation among culturally and linguistically diverse students in the Mentally Retarded and Learning Disabled categories raises serious questions about the validity of regular education, the validity of assessment and the validity of special education as now constituted. Moreover, Hilliard raises the fundamental question of whether placement in special education in fact results in beneficial practices and improved outcomes for children (see details in Chapter II).

While all the participants felt that they needed support, Kensley and Kelsey both expressed that, as Hilliard (1999) suggests, had instruction in the general education classroom been differentiated, they would have been just as successful.

I don’t really think the resource teacher did anything the regular teacher couldn’t do,” said Kelsey. “Sometimes when I went the resource room, we did stuff that was real easy. I would have rather stayed with my friends who could have helped me do what they did. (Interview with Kelsey, Gaiters-Fields, 2005)

In my general education teacher training, there was little mention of inclusion or diversity. Special education curricula focused on the continuum of placements and the

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need to teach the child on his/her cognitive level. In my general education coursework, different learning styles and abilities were not addressed either. We were advised to refer students with learning differences for evaluation and placement into special education.

In the secondary education setting, I soon discovered that while my colleagues (other teachers and administrators) seemed to embrace a culture of tolerance, acceptance, and respect for difference, actual practices were, in fact, exclusionary. I experienced how the system labeled and treated special education students to create “Otherness”. I observed that learning in special education was compartmentalized with little or no communication between the resource teacher and classroom teacher. Despite my repeated efforts to have special education students in my class participate in meaningful learning experience, limits and restrictions were still imposed by administrators based on their perceptions of students’ lack of ability.

After enrolling in a special education program of study, I thought the perceptions and assumptions of students’ abilities would change. Unfortunately, I found that there was little difference in the attitudes of general education teachers and special education teachers toward students with disabilities. It was only after I was employed in the postsecondary environment and witnessed the academic success of students with disabilities in my classes, did I really begin to believe that there was hope for improvement in educating and demanding greater expectations for this population, despite the connotations of their labels. As I searched for the autobiographical roots of my dissertation inquiry (see details in Chapter I), this optimism began to take shape.

In light of the findings of this study, it is proposed that teacher education and training must be re-conceptualized. The pedagogical practices and overall structures of
teacher training programs do not adequately prepare teachers to recognize and meet the needs of diverse learners. Beginning teachers, and even many veteran teachers, are not equipped with the ability to plan and implement inclusionary practices and strategies. Had the participants in this study been in general education classrooms with teachers possessing inclusionary skills, there would not have been the need to pull out for instruction. Mercer, Lane, Jordan, Allsopp and Eisele (1996) observe "by limiting the focus of preparation programs to either students with disabilities or students without disabilities, we have limited the scope of choices in instructional methodology" (p. 234). Thus, creating a more culturally responsive instruction for this population to reach their best potential is often not a reality.

Additionally, because the majority of teachers, both in early childhood and special education, are White, many schools are not open to discussion regarding the labeling of minority students. More discouragingly, many do not recognize the necessity in doing so. As such, we find teachers who are not culturally equipped to “teach other people’s children” (Delpitt, 1985). In many instances, this cultural barrier leads to an educational barrier in which the teacher misdiagnoses the child and forces a label upon the child. Thus, the isolation process begins.

We cannot conclusively say that the participants in my study and the other labeled minority students in their predominantly majority school were identified solely because of their ethnicity. However, I definitely recommend that every school district needs to closely monitor the placement and assessment practices.

Whether a label imposed on a student with a true disability or forced upon a minority student for lack of culturally responsive practices, labels have the propensity to
become life-long fixtures with potentially negative effects (Finding 1). A student with strong to moderate natural and formal supports and/or positive self-images of themselves, such as Kensley or Jasmyn, may be affected by being labeled and imposed upon by educational decisions. Subsequently, students, such as Kelsey, who have few supports and are the object of ridicule from supports and peers, are significantly stigmatized by labeling. Only by bringing these educational issues to the forefront and creating arenas in which they are considered valid, can positive changes occur and students with disabilities be valued for their differences rather than marginalized.

**Finding 2: Postsecondary Rights and Responsibilities**

Regardless of stigmatism or poor self-concepts, many students labeled with learning disabilities find themselves “worthy” of postsecondary education and enter only to find other obstacles in their way. Namely, the lack of knowledge about differences in their rights and services has the effect of discouraging or possibly even excluding students with disabilities from higher education (Finding 2).

The three participants in this study reported that they were shocked at the difference between secondary and postsecondary education. Kensley stated that he had been told what to expect and he was not ready for the change yet.

When I got to ASU, I was in a totally different world. I had always relied on my teachers and others to help keep me stay on track, keep organized, and stay ready for what to expect. The teachers here don’t do that. You have to do everything by yourself. (*Interview with Kensley*, Gaiters-Fields, 2005)
Both Kelsey and Jasmyn confided that they were not told of what changes to expect after leaving high school. They felt as if they were tossed in the wind and allowed to go with the flow. Since Jasmyn was much older than the other participants when diagnosed, she remembered a small amount of information about laws and requirements that schools had to serve students with disabilities. However, she was not aware of the difference in laws applicable to individuals pursuing postsecondary education.

I had always been treated fairly, almost a little too “special” in high school. I thought it was because teachers knew they had to help me. It seemed like the teachers were scared. I remember them talking to my parents about laws and things but didn’t pay too much attention. When I decided to go to college, I thought the same thing would happen. Wrong! (Interview with Jasmyn, Gaiters-Fields, 2005)

Evidence shows that endeavors to promote a smooth transition from secondary to postsecondary education have not met the goals of federal laws and initiatives. Further complicating current secondary school transition efforts is the lack of awareness among educators and parents themselves regarding the policy contrast between IDEA at the secondary level and ADA and section 504 at the postsecondary level (Brinckerhoff, et al., 2002). Many secondary schools lack a formal structure to assist students in planning to adjust to the difference in laws governing secondary and postsecondary education. As a result, students, their parents and other supporters often feel overwhelmed when the level of service provision drops off and/or is not automatically extended following high school (Finding 2).
Surprised is not the word for it. I failed miserably my first semester at ASU. I didn’t know if it was because I was on my own and not studying like I should have been or because my learning disability was causing me to not understand the material. I thought about telling my teachers about my disability, but didn’t. I finally worked it out on my own and started doing better. (*Interview with Kelsey, Gaiters-Fields, 2005*)

Kelsey is not alone. Other participants in this study and many other students nationwide were not aware of what to expect when they left the k-12 setting. While copies of parental rights and responsibilities were passed out in IEP meetings and signed by all involved parties, little else was done to ensure understanding. Since many high school teachers feel that they are not affected by what happens to a student after he/she graduates, they prepare the students for what does affect them. Similarly, because many postsecondary faculty members feel that students with disabilities are not on their campuses, they do not need to learn to deal with them. There is urgency for high school teachers and educators collaborate in the transition planning process to ensure that everyone knows what to expect when those students with such learning disabilities as my participants appear in their classrooms.

Transition planning is mandated in IDEA which includes the development of an individualized transition plan based on a student’s future educational, social, vocational, and independence needs (see details in Chapter II & Chapter IV). Planning is initiated in middle school and continues through high school. Therefore, transition planning for students with learning disabilities must remain flexible and reflect the developmental and educational needs of the students at different grades and different times.
Transition planning and services focus on a coordinated set of student-centered activities designed to facilitate the student's movement from school to post-school activities, including postsecondary education (Brinckerhoff, et al., 2002). During the development of the plan, the students' participation, along with support from other team members, is central to transition planning and decision-making. This includes asking the student to identify preferences and interests and to attend meetings on transition planning. Since a student’s success in postsecondary educational settings depends on the student's level of motivation, independence, self-direction, self-advocacy, and academic abilities developed in the high school, student participation in the transition plan is essential (Brinckerhoff, et al., 2002). Additionally, this participation would equip students with the necessary knowledge to anticipate postsecondary expectations so that they would prepare themselves accordingly.

A major challenge for many students with disabilities was how services and accommodations were planned and provided as they moved from high school to the postsecondary setting (Finding 2). According to IDEA, schools are responsible for identifying students with disabilities, and a team creates an IEP that provides for the educational strategies and accommodations of the specific student (see details in Chapter II). By contrast, postsecondary institutions are subject to the ADA, under which students themselves must inform school officials of their disability, provide documentation, and propose viable options for accommodations. Such self-advocacy is often especially hard for culturally diverse students due to cultural values against disclosing personal challenges and/or asking for help, a lack of experience or confidence in dealing with
persons perceived to be of higher status, and other related factors (Ladner & Hammons, 2001).

In recognizing that there are several reasons why students with LD may not be ready for the drastic difference between secondary and postsecondary education, postsecondary institutions need to be proactive in their efforts to address this growing population. While little can be done regarding admission criteria and other regulated requirements, institutions can do a lot to change the climate of the campus.

Postsecondary faculty, administrators, and support personnel often lack the awareness, attitudes, skills, and knowledge necessary to effectively support students with disabilities. This lack may be even greater with regard to diverse students with disabilities. To correct this injustice, efforts to increase the proportion of faculty and other personnel who can serve as role models and mentors for students with LD, including those who are culturally and linguistically diverse, can be strengthened (Ladner & Hammons, 2001). Increasing the proportion of faculty and other personnel of diverse backgrounds also helps enhance the cultural competency of postsecondary institutions.

While ASU is an HBCU with a very diverse faculty, staff, and administration population, much can be done to provide accommodations for students with disabilities. Participants in the study noted that while they were not prepared for the drastic changes they encountered in transitioning into the postsecondary environment, they felt their instructors were not prepared for them either. Jasmyn noted that while she disclosed her disability not only to the Disabilities Coordinator, but also to her instructors, little was provided unless she specifically asked for an accommodation.
While there is an institutional committee developed to provide professional development and sensitivity training for faculty and staff regarding students with disabilities at ASU, it is not active. No meetings were held for the 2003-2004, nor the 2004-2005 academic years. There was no mention of disability policy other than the standard faculty handbook and student catalog disclaimer that professed that ASU did not discriminate based on disability. This definitely has to change if ASU is to become more sensitive to the academic success and needs of its disabled student population.

A final recommendation emanating from this research is the need for a closer relationship between secondary and postsecondary institutions. From this collaborative relationship should surface (a) larger numbers of students with learning disabilities who are motivated to further their formal education beyond high school; (b) effective transition plans prepared for students with LD planning to attend postsecondary educational institutions; and (c) students with learning disabilities who arrive on college campuses knowledgeable of their rights and responsibilities and are ready for the challenge (see details in Chapter I).

**Finding 3: Access to Postsecondary Accommodations**

For many students with learning disabilities, participation in postsecondary education is appropriate. Students with disabilities were able to better access accommodations when higher education institutions provided appropriate services. (Finding 3). As students with LD endeavor to access postsecondary education, they may find that circumstances vary significantly from college to college, and from state to state (Brandt & Berry, 1991). Each college provides differing levels of and types of support. Some institutions employ a simple counselor to take responsibility for disability issues.
In such institutions, staff members provide advice and letters to professors verifying that a student request for accommodations is justified. Little else may be provided. At other schools, multiple staff members coordinate services and accommodations for students with disabilities so that the educational environment provides supplementary support and additional staff is prepared to teach them about self-advocacy. This occurs in very few instances. Ultimately, without a thorough understanding of what is to be expected in the transition from secondary to postsecondary institutions, youth with disabilities find themselves with additional disadvantages (Mull et al., 2001b).

This limited access to information regarding the availability of support is a major factor that eventually discourages or excludes many students with disabilities from continuing their schooling. While some of the research literature suggests that students with disabilities are unaware of the availability of services and do not access them, findings of this research suggest that the availability and access are in question (Brinckerhoff et al., 1992). Furthermore, technology may also be limited in number or availability (Brown, 1989). For instance, there was either no access to or impractical or unfeasible utilization of technological supports at ASU. This was potentially detrimental to the academic success of Kensley, a participant in my study, because he relied on heavily on this accommodation. Had Kensley not been able to afford his personal supports, his academic success would have been greatly affected.

A national survey was developed and distributed to postsecondary students with disabilities from the National Center for the study of Postsecondary Educational Supports (NCSPES). The survey demonstrated while supports such as testing accommodations, note-takers, personal counseling, and advocacy assistance were requested and extended
with some regularity, disability specific scholarships, assessments and evaluations, assistive technology, and study abroad opportunities were rarely offered to students with disabilities (Stodden, Whelly, Harding & Chang, 2001). The survey reiterated that equal access and reasonable accommodations were still an issue for individuals with disabilities attempting to persist in higher education. The most basic needs pertaining to their activities of daily living, including physical access, were unmet.

In order to be considered for any accommodations, a student must first establish eligibility under ADA and Section 504 (Lerner, 2003). An individual is covered under the ADA and Section 504 when the individual has an impairment that substantially limits a major life activity (see details in Chapter II). In an academic setting, the disorder must substantially limit a student’s ability to participate equally in activities associated with learning and/or demonstration of specific skills or knowledge. Unlike the K-12 system, postsecondary institutions do not have a duty to identify students with disabilities. Rather, students are responsible for disclosing the presence of a disability, providing adequate disability documentation to the institution, and requesting accommodations in a timely manner (Scott, 1997b). They also are responsible for abiding by the accommodation procedures of the specific institution in which they are enrolled.

The purpose of disability-related accommodations also changes in a postsecondary setting. The educational institution becomes responsible for providing an opportunity for a student’s educational success, rather than meeting an obligation to provide a free and appropriate education such as the requirement of the K-12 setting (Scott, 1997b). Accommodations are customized for each student to the extent that the specific impact of the disability is appropriately accommodated. Postsecondary disability
service providers are responsible for assessing eligibility for services that provide equal access to educational activities.

Because the educational goals and objectives of IDEA differ from the ADA and Section 504, students may also receive accommodations in high school that may or may not be appropriate or cannot be provided through disability services in college settings (see details in Chapter II). Many services provided in high school continue to be provided in college. These accommodations may include extended test time, audio presentation of reading materials, sign language interpreters, assistive listening devices, adaptive computer technology, etc. However, accommodations such as open-book exams, clarification of test questions, and modified assignments may not be applicable (Garner & Campbell, 1987). Knowing that an accommodation may not be maintained at college, students might be able to develop alternative and additional skills at high school in order to be successful in their future studies. Conversely, when a student requests an accommodation in a postsecondary setting and does not receive that accommodation in high school, the supporting documentation needs to be especially clear in substantiating the need (Scott, 1997b).

A final step in qualifying for accommodations is an interview with disability services staff either in the year prior to enrollment or shortly after the student arrives on campus. During this interview, the student will have an opportunity to gather information about campus policies and procedures regarding disability services. In addition, the intake process allows an opportunity for the student to take responsibility for and ownership of her/his educational experience, a critical component in managing a disability at the postsecondary level (Sitlington & Frank, 1990).
Finding 4: Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy was a necessary trait to enhance the academic success of students with learning disabilities in the postsecondary educational setting (Finding 4). In order to access postsecondary education, students with LD must first successfully complete a recognized program of academic study in secondary education and receive appropriate transition planning. However, in many cases, this is not the prescribed program of study for exceptional students. During secondary school, the emphasis is often on providing youth with disabilities with perspective, specialized services and supports focused specifically upon remediating learning or behavior deficits experienced by the student. There is a tendency for secondary schools to place students with LD in special classrooms where they may receive substandard secondary curricular content.

In high school, each of the three participants expressed a desire to attend college and each faced difficulty from teachers because of their wishes. Kensley said he was asked if his decision to enter college was his own or the desire of his parents. Likewise, Jasmyn, too, was questioned as to why she wanted to attend college.

For Kelsey, she said some teachers told her she was not going to be able to attend college and should think of something else to do after high school. When she faced difficulty passing the Georgia High School Graduation Test (GHSGT), she said she almost gave in and began looking at programs at local technical schools for Preschool Education. When she finally passed all parts of the test, she told herself that she might as well go to a four-year college without being worry about transferring in a few years.
When Kelsey reflected on the sections of the GHSGT that were most difficult for her (Math and Writing), she said that these were also classes in which she was sent to the resource room for instruction in.

I remember the resource teacher told my mother that we would be doing the same thing that the other students in the regular classes would be doing. She would just help us with the work and show us different ways to do it. That was not what happened. We would do stuff that was easier than what my friends were doing in their classes. They were doing stuff to help them with the test. We didn’t. When I didn’t pass, I had to get some books from one of my friends to help me study so I could pass. (Interview with Kelsey, Gaiters-Fields, 2005)

Oftentimes, secondary school students are left with inadequate direction and counsel due to a lack of coordination among teachers and counseling staff (Hicks-Coolick & Kurtz, 1996). In addition, teachers, career counselors, administrators, family members and students themselves possess low expectations and a limited sense of opportunity, such as in Kelsey’s case. Consequently, she was left with a sense of failure before she had even fully begun to explore her interest and aspirations regarding postsecondary education.

More importantly, students with disabilities were often not successful advocates for and/or in postsecondary education because they were not active participants in the decision making process regarding their educational careers (Finding 4). They often left secondary school without advocacy skills and without knowledge of the impact that their disability has upon their learning or of the related assistance which could help mitigate
this impact (Hicks-Coolick & Kurtz, 1996). Furthermore, they were without an understanding of how to negotiate postsecondary settings, where the focus was on providing “reasonable accommodations” rather than detailing services focused upon meeting individual needs (see details in Chapter II & Chapter V). Therefore, students with disabilities were leaving the secondary education setting without the essential skills of access to higher education: self-determination and self-advocacy (Brandt & Berry, 1991). Without the skills of self-advocacy and self-determination, students with disabilities seeking secondary education found this an extremely difficult goal to achieve (Finding 4).

For instance, Kelsey’s mother supported the decisions she and others made regarding her daughter’s education. As a result, she was not very instrumental in pursuing answers for her daughter’s learning difficulties. Kelsey mimicked this behavior and took on a passive role in managing her education. Although she knew that she wanted to go to college after high school, she had no idea of which to attend or what needed to be done to get there. Fortunately, her high school counselor provided suggestions for her to follow which landed her at ASU. However, her counselor provided her with little else and she had no idea of what to do when she got on campus.

Similarly, Jasmyn said that everything fell apart when she got to ASU. She used to depend on her mother for guidance and organization, but vowed she wanted to take ownership of her education when she graduated from high school. While she attempted to do so, she failed miserably because she had not been adequately prepared for what to expect, nor had she gained any experiences in doing so.
Kensley, on the other hand, did not face such drastic failures in his first semester. However, it was not due to his motivation or ability to advocate for himself. Formal and informal supports for Kensley continued throughout college, lessening the blow for him of the differences between secondary and postsecondary education. Little-by-little, he gained the confidence and ability to seek what was needed for his academic success. Unfortunately, he admitted that he felt handicapped because of his approach and wished that he had faced some failures on his own rather than successes because of others.

My parents and I were very nervous about me beginning college. They really helped me a lot with registration, talking to my teachers, and organizing my schedule. I didn’t have to do much at all. When I talked to other friends who were having problems, I didn’t have any to talk about. I really couldn’t join the conversation. I don’t wish that I could have had problems. I just wish that I could have tried to get myself started by myself. (Interview with Kensley, Gaiters-Fields, 2005)

Finding 5: Faculty and Staff Attitudes

Lack of understanding and sensitivity from professors and other school personnel was the most reported secondary barrier to postsecondary education for students with learning disabilities (Finding 5). A major problem is the insufficient quantity of staff members handling huge caseloads to accommodate disabled students. These understaffed conditions in many academic institutions undermine the provision of appropriate support to people with disabilities (Fonsoch & Schwab, 1981). For this reason, educational supports and services are rarely individualized according to a
student’s needs, and more often, supports are offered as a menu of programs, associated with disability type, rather than being student specific (see details in Chapter II).

While ASU has a relatively small number of students with disabilities who have self-disclosed, the ability of the staff to handle this population is hindered because of other factors. There is no separate office or individual responsible solely for handling disability cases. The Office of Counseling and Testing, which handles the provision of accommodations for students with disabilities, is also responsible for providing services to the overall student population. As the population becomes more diverse and general students bring in numerous issues, their workload is compounded and little focus can be placed on individualization for any student or student services. Consequently, even students who disclose their disability do not receive tailored accommodation plans and sometimes face classes in which professors have not been notified of their disability.

This leads to another factor affecting the academic success of postsecondary students with LD. Faculty members and other academic personnel in postsecondary education settings are often unaware of disability needs and supports (Fonosch & Schwab, 1981). The limited awareness of the needs of people with disabilities prevents professors from providing the most suitable approach to enhancing the access and ability of students to learn. Moreover, the lack of proper background in managing students with disabilities needs may cause even more misunderstanding, conflict and eventually lead to students dropping out.

Kensley said it was not uncommon for him to be in a class in which the instructor did not know he had a disability.
I remember being in a math class during my first semester and I did not understand what the professor had gone over. I went to his office after class and asked for additional help. The instructor said he did not have time and suggested taking better notes for studying later. I asked him if he had received a note about my disability in which I had requested additional instructor assistance. He said he had not. When I asked the counselor about it, she said the letters had not gone out yet. This happened a couple of times my first year. After that, I quit asking about it. (Interview with Kensley, Gaiters-Fields, 2005)

Further affecting the ability of faculty and staff to provide effective programs of study for students with disabilities are perceptions and lack of training that are important components of the provision of support services (Finding 5). Flick-Hruska and Blythe (1992) suggest that the elimination of attitudinal barriers is critically linked to the knowledge and support of faculty and staff who provide student accommodations. In general, they suggest that staff and faculty must view students with disabilities as individuals instead of labeling them by their disabilities. They should expect students with disabilities to meet the same standards as their peers after the necessary accommodations have been made. They should also view the situation as a learning experience rather than a problem.

The participants in my study felt that the teachers who had been made aware of their disabilities, either through the Counseling and Testing Center or by themselves, treated them “differently” than other students.
Jasmyn recalled that she had experienced teachers who either physically or verbally expressed their “surprise” at how well she performed in class, or either “accused” her of cheating.

I remember taking a test in one of my classes that most students failed. I passed with an A. The teacher wrote “See Me” on the top of my paper. When I went to talk to her, she told me how proud she was of my performance and asked how I did it. She told me that I should keep up the good work. The next time we took a test, I noticed her watching me very closely. Since I get distracted easily, I kept looking up at her and found her continuing to look at me. Before the test was over, she had gotten up and came near my desk to look around. I was so embarrassed. Because everyone knew I had made a good grade on the first test, some asked me if I had cheated. I know the teacher thought I had, but I didn’t. (Interview with Jasmyn, Gaiters-Fields, 2005)

Kensley remembered getting an A in a class that he knew he should have had at least a C.

Almost every day after class my teacher would ask me if I had understood everything or had any questions. When I got back tests or papers with written answers rather than multiple choices or matching, I know she had just given me credit for anything. I have always had problems with writing and just knew I would make a bad grade on my first test. I didn’t. When I looked at my paper and looked back at what the answers should have been, they didn’t match but she didn’t mark them wrong. This happened
all the time. I got an A in the class. (*Interview with Kensley, Gaiters-Fields*, 2005)

Kelsey, for instance, did not formally disclose her disability to campus officials. She did confide that she had told some instructors about her disability and had received mixed responses. She remembered the following negative encounter very well.

One time I was having a really hard time in a class and told the professor I had a learning disability. He asked me what that meant. When I tried to explain it to him, he just looked at me. He finally responded that if I was in his class he would have to do just what the rest of the students did and exactly how he said to do it or I should drop. I dropped the class. (*Interview with Kelsey, Gaiters-Fields*, 2005)

Udvari-Solner (1996) observes that "the presence of a student with . . . disabilities often becomes the catalyst for teachers to examine critically instructional purpose, methods, and outcomes for all children" (p. 245). Britzman (1991) asserts that "to retheorize our practices . . . we attend to the double problem of changing ourselves and transforming our circumstances" (p. 239). Unfortunately, pre-service and in-service teacher education does not extend strongly to examining ways in which teachers understand their practices. Teachers must engage in reflective practice and reflective dialogue through which "individuals are stimulated and encouraged to review, critique, and question the context of their classroom practices" (Udvari-Solner, 1996, p. 247). Educators must be aware of their own practice if they wish to enhance student learning.

To this end, colleges should ensure that the faculty has appropriate professional development opportunities so that they are equipped to address the needs of students with
disabilities. Udvari-Solner (1996) notes that "improved classroom practice . . . requires significant innovation and change in daily instructional approaches" (p. 245). This improvement begins with the awareness of diverse student needs and the possibilities of creative pedagogies that empower teachers and students. Faculty need to embrace the fact that choices that promote learning rest on the provision of a variety of experiences and instructional strategies, an expansive pedagogical repertoire, and a flexible and responsive instructional design and implementation (Fonosch & Schwab, 1981).

**Finding 6: Case Study Limitations**

The data gathered in this case study research sufficiently supported implications for pedagogical changes for students with LD enrolled in postsecondary education. However, a limitation to the study was the scarcity of information to support implications for changes to enhance the overall quality of life for the participants (Finding 6). Case study methodology captures data that is useful in making educational decisions to inform practice about a specific phenomenon. In this research, the data clearly determined the need for (a) examining labels as a means of determining who is eligible for services; (b) ensuring students and parents are knowledgeable of the differences in their educational rights and responsibilities in the postsecondary environment; (c) enhancing students’ access to accommodations in higher education institutions; (d) fostering self-efficacy as a necessary trait to enhance the academic success of students with learning disabilities in the postsecondary educational setting; and (e) promoting sensitivity from professors and higher education toward students with learning disabilities. However, in order to gain this information, a more detailed approach to addressing the participants had to be taken.
As indicated in the Methodology section of my research (see details in Chapter III), each participant was interviewed individually. Prior to the interviews, each participant was provided a copy of the interview instrument and encouraged to give some thought to the questions to be discussed. However, indications perceived during the interview process left the researcher doubtful that prior thought had been given to the instrument questions. While participants were encouraged to make any additional comments to enhance their stories, few additions were provided.

When initially interviewed, participants provided cursory responses to the open-ended questions. During the data collection, the researcher realized that additional information was needed in order to provide confidence in the study. As the research progressed, second round interviews were necessary.

Referring to Yin’s (1994) definition of the case study, the researcher had to “rely on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulation fashion” (p. 13). The researcher had individually observed each participant in an academic setting. Observations were recorded in the researcher’s journal and used in the data analysis. During the observations, the researcher attempted to compare and contrast observed behaviors with the responses self-disclosed in the interview. When a variation in interview responses and observation data was divulged in the data analysis, the researcher recorded the observation. Follow-up with the participants were conducted and the additions in their interview comments recorded.

As Soy (1996) reiterates, a key strength of the case study method involves using multiple sources and techniques in the data gathering process. Even though the researcher determined in advance what evidence to gather and what analysis techniques to use with
the data to answer the research questions, additional information had to be gained to make meaning of the data collected.

As the phenomenon of students with LD attending postsecondary education is relatively new, there is little research that predicts outcomes or details follow-up studies of these students after they exit the university setting and enter the workplace or graduate school. As research in these areas increase, multiple factors are to become the foci. In this regard, follow-up to this case study would be enhanced and provide a more in-depth view of the case study participants.

While there has been great progress in including and education students with LD, significant challenges remain. Now that children with learning disabilities are participating in postsecondary educational opportunities, the critical issue is to place greater emphasis on improving student performance. Despite progress, educational achievement for students with disabilities remains less than satisfactory (see details in Chapter 1). The students served are very diverse and represent a broad range of abilities. Many students, without appropriate interventions or supplementary aids and services, are failing courses and dropping out of school. Further, while students are attending colleges and universities, enrollment in postsecondary education is still too low. And, while employment rates are improving, they are still unsatisfactory. Results for students with learning and emotional disabilities are particularly poor and these students are the largest percentage of all students served. In some cases, children with disabilities are not identified and served. Moreover, minority students are often inappropriately identified or served. In other cases, particularly with African-American children, students are over-identified and placed in overly restrictive settings (see details in Chapter II).
It is my hope that this research has a positive impact on the future of education not only for students with disabilities at ASU, but for those seeking a postsecondary education at any institution. Specific to ASU, I hope suggestions and recommendations for creating and implementing new programs to ensure students are initially oriented and systematically assisted during their matriculation at the university are executed. As a member on the university’s disability’s committee, I will use this research to revitalize and necessitate professional development and training for all involved in the academic success of students with learning disabilities on the campus of ASU. I sincerely hope that this research has implications for university or college professors when they determine whether their courses are adequately constructed or modified to allow students with learning disabilities to have equal educational opportunities to reach their highest potential.

Further, the findings of this research are important for preparing students to transition into postsecondary institutions. Students and parents who have access to this research will be provided first-hand information on how to access and approach a postsecondary educational program. The voices of the three participants provide students, who were once in their shoes, a starting point for questions to ponder when deciding future career plans and options beyond high school. More importantly, I hope the necessity for students with disabilities to gain their own voices is a vital point gained from this research. As the ultimate goal of postsecondary education is to empower students to become independent learners, students must be taught to identify and advocate for their own needs, to think creatively and independently when making
decisions about their college experiences, and to effectively disclose the nature of their LD when necessary.

While this research was conducted at an HBCU, it has significant implications for majority institutions regarding admitting and accommodating minority students with disabilities. As postsecondary professionals attempt to evaluate existing programs and services, there is much to be learned from the meaning students make of their education before and during their college experience. Counselors, academic advisors, and other student affairs personnel engaged in counseling and advising relationships with students must understand the unique identity development issues faced by minority students with LD. The timing of a student’s disability diagnosis, the amount of support and stigmatization the student experiences, and the attributes of a student’s personality that impact self-determination all work to shape student success.

When students with LD fail to meet the expectations of higher education faculty, it is important that college and university personnel reflect on the conditions that have shaped the students’ development and make essential changes. This brings about the great need for increased collaboration among student affairs and academic affairs offices. College and university personnel should think creatively about the ways services are being organized and ways that delivery of these services can be improved so as to ensure the “reasonable” success of their learning-disabled student population. For after all, students learn what they are told and taught.
Students Learn What They Are Taught
(A Voice for my Participants)

In preschool my teachers said,

Learn your ABCs and 123s or else your parents won’t be proud of you.

So I sang my songs and recited in unison with all the other kids.

I learned that pretending makes Mommy and Daddy smile,

When I could have learned that working in groups is helpful.

In elementary school my teachers said,

Prepare for your tests or you won’t pass your classes and will have to be referred for extra help.

So I studied and tried, but still failed miserably.

I learned that I don’t like to be different,

When I could have learned that everybody learns differently.

In middle school my teachers said,

You’re too dumb and lazy to be in my class. You will never amount to anything. Go out to your “special” room.

So I was loud, disruptive, and always the class clown.

I learned that it’s better to have my friends laugh with me than at me,

When I could have learned to share my frustrations in a positive manner.

In high school my teachers said,

Not college; maybe you can find a more realistic goal for your future.

So I waited for graduation and remained undecided.

I learned it’s simple to take the easy way out,

When I could have learned that it takes more work for some to realize their dreams.
In college my instructors said,

How did you ever get here? This is strictly an academic environment.

So I partied and settled for poor grades.

I learned something is better than nothing,
When I could have learned that there was a purpose for me beating the odds.

In graduate school my professors said,

A doctorate degree requires ardor; for it is the pinnacle of your educational career.

So I read and wrote and defended.

I learned curriculum was created to be challenged,
When I could have learned that it is challenging creating curriculum.

As I contemplate my life I say,

Teach each child as if he or she were your own.

If so, they will learn,

Valuing people’s differences are important, regardless of what the difference may be.

Not knowing is okay, not wanting to know is unacceptable.

My voice is powerful; I must learn to use it wisely.

My knowledge is powerful; I must learn to use it wisely.
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APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

Research Protocol for Research Utilizing Human Subjects

1. **Purpose.** A. Briefly describe in one or two sentences the purpose of your research. B. What questions are you trying to answer in this experiment? Please include your hypothesis in this section. The jurisdiction of the IRB requires that we ensure the appropriateness of research. It is unethical to put participants at risk without the possibility of sound scientific result. For this reason, you should be very clear on how participants and others will benefit from knowledge gained in this project. C. What current literature have you reviewed regarding this topic of research? How does it help you to frame the hypothesis and research you will be doing?

A. The intent of this research is to determine which factors have significantly impacted the lives of three students with learning disabilities (LD) who attend Albany State University (ASU). By revealing the academic interventions and accommodations that contributed to their academic success, as well as identifying barriers and issues that they experienced in accessing an appropriate postsecondary education, it is hoped that their stories will help to influence future policies and accommodations adopted not only on this campus, but also on those similar to it.

B. The following research questions will be addressed in this study:
   1. What implication does the LD label have on the academic success of students entering into the postsecondary educational environment?
   2. What knowledge of specific laws governing their matriculation do students with LD have?
   3. What academic accommodations, supports, and services do students with LD use in postsecondary education?
   4. What barriers do students with LD identify in postsecondary educational settings?
   5. What level of activity do students with LD demonstrate in designing their postsecondary academic accommodations?

C. I will review five major bodies of literature: (a) definitions of LD; (b) legislation affecting the transition into and education of students with LD in postsecondary institutions; (c) disproportionate labeling of students with LD; (d) accommodations for postsecondary students with LD; and, (e) studies of postsecondary students with LD. The identified areas of research will help me to understand how past and current labeling, legislation, and accommodations have influenced the success of postsecondary students with LD. This understanding will better assist me in evaluating the data obtained from my participants, reporting findings, and publishing outcomes and recommendations such that change will be effected to better prepare and support students with LD that desire to attend postsecondary institutions.

2. **Describe your subjects.** Give number of participants, approximate ages, and gender requirements (if any). Describe how they will be recruited, how data will be collected (i.e., will names or social security numbers be collected, or will there be any other
identification process used that might jeopardize confidentiality?), and/or describe any inducement (payment, etc.) that will be used to recruit subjects. Please use this section to justify how limits and inclusions to the population are going to be used and how they might affect the result (in general).

Students identified with LD will be solicited to participate in the research study. Students will be informed of the study through flyers distributed at the Counseling and Testing Center and through personal contact with the staff. All interested participants will be referred to me. Psychological and educational assessment information will be obtained in order to assure an appropriate sampling of students and identify their specific learning disabilities.

Using the survey data previously gathered, three individuals will be selected to participate in the in-depth research project. As the study seeks to look at traditional college students, it is anticipated that the participants will range in age from 18 to 23 and will represent both male and female genders. These individuals will complete a structured interview expounding on the issues addressed in the initial survey.

Prior to the interview, informed consent will be gained and confidentiality and anonymity guaranteed for each participant. Participants will be told that all information collected as a result of the interviews will be confidential and data will be reported in aggregated as well as on an individual basis. They will be assured that discussion of specific cases will be reported in such a way as to protect their anonymity.

3. **Methodology (Procedures).** Enumerate specifically what will you be doing in this study, what kind of experimental manipulations you will use, what kinds of questions or recording of behavior you will use. If appropriate, attach a questionnaire to each submitted copy of this proposal. Describe in detail any physical procedures you may be performing.

*Interviews:* Each participant will be interviewed (interview attached) twice, once at the beginning of the study and again at the conclusion of the study period. Interviews will last approximately one hour. Each will be audiotaped with prior permission of the participant. Participants will be given the option to stop the tape at any time during the interviews. Interviews will be transcribed in full, and participants will be asked to review the transcript after each interview. Participants will be encouraged to make any additional notes.

*Reflective Participant Journals:* Following the initial interview, participants will be asked to keep weekly reflective journals in which they record information pertaining to their educational and social activities. Topics to be suggested for inclusion in the journals may include, but are not limited to, discussions of academic successes and failures, accommodations made in classrooms, strategies used to learn new information, and opportunities provided for social interaction. These journals will be used to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon being explored. Journals are
also an unintimidating means of collecting data that allows for a richer understanding of the setting and the group being studied through their reflection on and analysis of everyday events.

*Observations:* Direct observation occurs when a field visit is conducted during the case study and can be as simple as casual data collection activities, or formal protocols to measure and record behaviors (Glesne and Peshkin, 1992). Participant observation makes the researcher into an active participant in the events being studied and provides unique opportunities for collecting data.

During the study, the researcher will observe participants in academic settings. These observations will be recorded in the researcher’s journal and will be used in the development of the individual case studies.

*Data Management and Analysis:* All data gathered will remain confidential and will be kept in a locked file cabinet in my office at the university. Surveys, journals and observation instruments will be quickly analyzed and stored. Taped interviews will be transcribed by an ASU staff member and promptly coded for reporting.

I will test for significant associations among the data and subjects’ responses in their interviews and journals that address their perceptions of their disability label, legislation affecting their college experiences, accommodations afforded, personal independence, and social engagement. I will also analyze for significant associations among the data and subjects’ responses to interview questions and journal entries that address their perceptions of the quality of the instruction they received; the quality of their preparation to enter a career; and factors associated with personal independence and social engagement.

4. **Research involving minors.** Describe how the details of your study will be communicated to parents/guardians. If part of an in-school study (elementary, middle, or high school), describe how permission will be obtained from school officials/teachers, and indicate whether the study will be a part of the normal curriculum/school process. Please provide both parental consent letters and child assent letters (or processes for children too young to read).

This section is not applicable to my study.

**Deception.** Describe the deception and how the subject will be debriefed. Briefly address the rationale for using deception. Be sure to review the deception disclaimer language required in the informed consent. Note: All research in which deception will be used is required to be reviewed by the full Board.

This section is not applicable to my study.
Medical procedures. Describe your procedures, including safeguards. If appropriate, briefly describe the necessity for employing a medical procedure in this study. Be sure to review the medical disclaimer language required in the informed consent.

This section is not applicable to my study.

Risk. Is there greater than minimal risk from physical, mental or social discomfort? Describe the risks and the steps taken to minimize them. Justify the risk undertaken by outlining any benefits that might result from the study, both on a participant and societal level. Even minor discomfort in answering questions on a survey may pose some risk to subjects. Carefully consider how the subjects will react and address ANY potential risks. Do not simply state that no risk exists, until you have carefully examined possible subject reactions.

Participation in the study has the potential to cause a minimal degree of personal discomfort as the study requires that participants address issues of disabilities, labeling, differences, discrimination, and their personal attitude towards these issues.

Many students enter the postsecondary educational environment with scars of ridicule, learned helplessness, and low self-esteem transferred from the K-12 school setting. For still other students, the implications of being labeled and educated in a special education setting have had detrimental effects on their ability to be self-motivated and owners of their own education. Therefore, they have developed a pattern of operating within a defined framework rather than venturing outside of a prescribed zone. There is no doubt that these habits transition with the student into the postsecondary educational environment and become a perpetual continuation of learning in the same “comfortable” manner.

Still, for the population of students with LD that do seek out additional supports, they argue that institutions are unresponsive to their needs and often avoid their responsibilities of providing support services and accommodations (Vogel, & Adelman, 1990). There is a large segment of professionals who continue to question whether learning disabilities are real or mere “gimmicks” to get accommodations.

The study will provide a voice for this underrepresented population that will allow their concerns heard and addressed. Information found in this study about students with LD should increase the awareness of the needs of disabled students and the ways in which campuses meet, or fail to meet these needs. It is hoped that educators, administrators, counselors and staff review these findings, in order to gain new insights, do away with old stereotypes, and increase sensitivity to varying disabled student characteristics and experiences. It is hoped that with this understanding, university service providers will modify or expand existing programs and/or develop new ones that incorporate and reflect needs and experiences of students with disabilities. This should not only illustrate better service provision, but should assist the transition of disabled students by educating nondisabled students.
INFORMED CONSENT

My name is Kimberly Fields, a doctoral student at Georgia Southern University in the Department of Curriculum Studies. I am seeking to complete the proposed research as partial fulfillment for the Doctorate of Education Degree in Curriculum Studies from GaSou.

The purpose of this study is to explore academic interventions and accommodations that learning disabled (LD) postsecondary students received that contributed to their academic success and to identify barriers and issues that LD students experienced in accessing an appropriate postsecondary education. It is hoped that the study will present the issues and its findings will offer practical approaches to improving instruction for students with LD.

Participation in the study has the potential to cause a minimal degree of personal discomfort as the study requires the participants to address issues of disabilities, perceived weaknesses, discrimination, limitations, and oppression.

All activities will be completed during the Spring Semester 2005. The questionnaire will take about fifteen minutes to complete. Only the researcher, Kimberly Fields, and the project supervisor, Dr. Ming Fang He, will know the identity of the participants. No information that will identify you will be shared. Pseudonyms will be used to represent all study participants.

Participants have the right to ask questions and have those questions answered. If you have questions about this study, please contact the researcher, Kimberly Fields, by phone at 229-420-1045 or by email at kimberly.fields@asurms.edu, or Dr. Ming Fang He, the project supervisor, by phone at 912-871-1546 or by email at mfhe@georgia southern.edu. For questions concerning your rights as a research participant, contact Georgia Southern University Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs at 912-486-7758.

There will be no compensation for participation in the study. Participation in the study is strictly voluntary. You may end your participation at any time by notifying the researcher. No explanations for discontinuation will be required or expected. There will be no penalty of any kind for choosing not to participate in the study.
You must be 18 years of age or older to consent to participate in this research study. If you consent to participate in this research study and to the terms above, please sign your name and indicate the date below.

______________________________________  _____________________
Participant Signature     Date

I, the undersigned, verify that the above informed consent procedure has been followed.

______________________________________  _____________________
Investigator Signature     Date
I, ______________________________ (participant) agree to participate in the qualitative study conducted by Kimberly Fields (researcher) of Georgia Southern University. I understand that this research is to be used in the researcher’s doctoral dissertation, An Inquiry into the Implications of Labeling, Legislation, and Accommodations on the Success of Postsecondary Students with Learning Disabilities at Albany State University (Albany, GA. In this study, the researcher will use life experience interviews to explore academic interventions and accommodations that learning disabled (LD) postsecondary students received that contributed to their academic success and to identify barriers and issues that LD students experienced in accessing an appropriate postsecondary education. You will be asked to share life experiences and personal views in writing through the completion of a survey questionnaire. The researcher will code all data received and analyze at a later time. Estimates of the time required for your participation in the study is approximately 30 minutes for survey questionnaire completion.

I give permission for my survey questionnaire to be collected. All materials will be held in strict confidence and will be kept in a secure location. I also understand that analysis of survey questionnaires and notes are the property of the interviewer and will not be released to a third party without my written permission. I understand I will not be identified in any way in connection with these responses. Because the study involves my own interpretation of my strengths and weaknesses, I will have the opportunity to read and approve the analysis of the data before it is published and to request that particular information not be used in the published report. I have the right to refuse to answer any questions and to withdraw at the study at any time. I understand that withdrawal from this study will in no way affect my services or enrollment in Albany State University. Participation in this study is voluntary and consent for participation can be discontinued at any time. My name will not be used in the published report due to confidentiality issues. Upon completion of the research, if I desire a copy of this report, I will receive one. There is no anticipated risk to me due to participation in this study.
Completion of this consent form and its return will indicate permission to use the data obtained in the subsequent survey questionnaire in the study.

Participant’s signature ___________________________ Date ____________________

Researcher’s signature ___________________________ Date ____________________

*If you have questions about this study, please contact the researcher, Kimberly Fields, by phone at 229-420-1045 or by email at kimberly.fields@asurms.edu, or Dr. Ming Fang He, the project supervisor, by phone at 912-871-1546 or by email at mfhe@georgia southern.edu. For questions concerning your rights as a research participant, contact Georgia Southern University Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs at 912-486-7758.*
ASU Professor:

I am Kimberly Fields (researcher) of Georgia Southern University. I understand that this research is to be used in the researcher’s doctoral dissertation, *An Inquiry into the Implications of Labeling, Legislation, and Accommodations on the Success of Postsecondary Students with Learning Disabilities at Albany State University (Albany, GA)*. In this study, the researcher will use life experience interviews to explore academic interventions and accommodations that learning disabled (LD) postsecondary students received that contributed to their academic success and to identify barriers and issues that LD students experienced in accessing an appropriate postsecondary education. You will be asked to share life experiences and personal views orally, during audiotaped interviews. The researcher will take notes during the interview and transcribe the audiotape at a later time. Estimates of the time required for your participation in the study is approximately 1 hour for taped interviews.

I give permission for my voice to be recorded. All materials will be held in strict confidence and will be kept in a secure location. I also understand that tapes and transcripts of interviews and notes are the property of the interviewer and will not be released to a third party without my written permission. I also give permission for the researcher to conduct classroom observations. I understand that field notes kept by the researcher on these observations will be available for my review. Relevant journal entries may also be collected for use in this study. I grant permission for my journal to be used. I understand I will not be identified in any way in connection with these entries. Because the study involves my own interpretation of my strengths and weaknesses, I will have the opportunity to read and approve the analysis of the data before it is published and to request that particular information not be used in the published report. I have the right to refuse to answer any questions and to withdraw at the study at any time. I understand that withdrawal from this study will in no way affect my services or enrollment in Albany State University. Participation in this study is voluntary and consent for participation can be discontinued at any time. My name will not be used in the published report due to confidentiality issues. Upon completion of the research, if I desire a copy of this report, I will receive one. There is no anticipated risk to me due to participation in this study.
Completion of this consent form and its return will indicate permission to use the data obtained in the subsequent interview in the study.

Participant’s signature ___________________________ Date ____________________

Researcher’s signature ___________________________ Date ____________________

Use of Pseudonym:
For confidentiality purposes, I understand that pseudonyms will be used for all participants in this study.

_____ I wish to be called by the pseudonym ________________________________

_____ I choose to have the researcher select a pseudonym for me.

If you have questions about this study, please contact the researcher, Kimberly Fields, by phone at 229-420-1045 or by email at kimberly.fields@asurms.edu, or Dr. Ming Fang He, the project supervisor, by phone at 912-871-1546 or by email at mfhe@georgia southern.edu. For questions concerning your rights as a research participant, contact Georgia Southern University Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs at 912-486-7758.
ASU Faculty Member:

My name is Kimberly Fields, a doctoral student at Georgia Southern University in the Department of Curriculum Studies and Instructor in the College of Education at Albany State University. I am currently making plans to complete my dissertation, *An Inquiry into the Implications of Labeling, Legislation, and Accommodations on the Success of Postsecondary Students with Learning Disabilities at Albany State University (Albany, GA)*, in order to obtain a Doctorate in Curriculum Studies. This phase requires that I develop, implement, and analyze a research study of my choice. I have elected to conduct a study that will benefit students, faculty, staff, and administrators of Albany State University.

In this study, the researcher will use life experiences to explore academic interventions and accommodations that learning disabled (LD) postsecondary students received that contributed to their academic success and to identify barriers and issues that LD students experienced in accessing an appropriate postsecondary education. As such, I am requesting permission to observe a participant/participants in your class. Three African American students with learning disabilities will be selected to participate in the study. Their participation is strictly voluntary. The participants may also elect to withdraw from the study at any time. Participating in or withdrawing from the study will not affect the participant’s enrollment in your class. Extensive steps will be taken to ensure the anonymity of all the students and their responses. Permission to participate in the study will be secured from the students before the observation is conducted. I will take notes during the observation and transcribe the notes at a later time. Observations will in no way interfere with your instruction or detract from your instructional time. There are no requirements for you to fulfill in association with this observation. Estimates of the time required observations is approximately 45 minutes.
Completion of this consent form and its return will indicate permission to use the data obtained in the subsequent classroom observation in the study.

Faculty Member’s signature ___________________________ Date ______________

Researcher’s signature ___________________________ Date ____________________

If you have questions about this study, please contact the researcher, Kimberly Fields, by phone at 229-420-1045 or by email at kimberly.fields@asurms.edu, or Dr. Ming Fang He, the project supervisor, by phone at 912-871-1546 or by email at mfhe@georgia southern.edu. For questions concerning your rights as a research participant, contact Georgia Southern University Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs at 912-486-7758.
Dr. Ellis Sykes:

My name is Kimberly Fields, a doctoral student at Georgia Southern University in the Department of Curriculum Studies and Instructor in the College of Education at Albany State University. I am currently making plans to complete my dissertation, *An Inquiry into the Implications of Labeling, Legislation, and Accommodations on the Success of Postsecondary Students with Learning Disabilities at Albany State University (Albany, GA)*, in order to obtain a Doctorate in Curriculum Studies. This phase requires that I develop, implement, and analyze a research study of my choice. I have elected to conduct a study that will benefit students, faculty, staff, and administrators of Albany State University.

In this study, the researcher will use life experiences to explore academic interventions and accommodations that learning disabled (LD) postsecondary students received that contributed to their academic success and to identify barriers and issues that LD students experienced in accessing an appropriate postsecondary education. As such, I am requesting permission to administer survey questionnaires to ten African American students with learning disabilities at Albany State University. Research participants will be selected from this pool. Participants will be interviewed, observed in academic classes, required to submit a reflective journal. Their participation is strictly voluntary. The participants may also elect to withdraw from the study at any time. Participating in or withdrawing from the study will not affect the participant’s enrollment in Albany State University. Extensive steps will be taken to ensure the anonymity of all the students and their responses. Permission to participate in the study will be secured from the students before the observation is conducted. Participation in this study will in no way interfere with instructional time for the participants or me. Additionally, conducting this research will in no way interfere with my duties or responsibilities.

If you have questions about this study, please contact the researcher, Kimberly Fields, by phone at 229-420-1045 or by email at kimberly.fields@asurms.edu, or Dr. Ming Fang He, the project supervisor, by phone at 912-871-1546 or by email at mfhe@georgia southern.edu. For questions concerning your rights as a research participant, contact Georgia Southern University Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs at 912-486-7758.

Yours truly,

Kimberly Fields  
Graduate Student – Curriculum Studies  
Georgia Southern University
APPENDIX B

Survey Questionnaire for Participants with Learning

Demographic Data

Age
Gender
Race
Years at ASU
Major
Career Choice

The Learning Disability Label

1. I know what my specific learning disability is.
   - Strongly Agree
   - Agree
   - Somewhat Agree
   - Somewhat Disagree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly Disagree
   - Undecided/Not Applicable

2. I have a positive view of myself as a student.
   - Strongly Agree
   - Agree
   - Somewhat Agree
   - Somewhat Disagree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly Disagree
   - Undecided/Not Applicable

3. When I first become aware of my learning disability I reacted positively.
   - Strongly Agree
   - Agree
   - Somewhat Agree
   - Somewhat Disagree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly Disagree
   - Undecided/Not Applicable

4. My formative school years were positive.
   - Strongly Agree
   - Agree
   - Somewhat Agree
   - Somewhat Disagree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly Disagree
   - Undecided/Not Applicable
5. My college experiences have been positive.
   - Strongly Agree
   - Agree
   - Somewhat Agree
   - Somewhat Disagree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly Disagree
   - Undecided/Not Applicable

6. I am aware of and utilize my strengths.
   - Strongly Agree
   - Agree
   - Somewhat Agree
   - Somewhat Disagree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly Disagree
   - Undecided/Not Applicable

7. I am aware of and try to strengthen my weaknesses.
   - Strongly Agree
   - Agree
   - Somewhat Agree
   - Somewhat Disagree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly Disagree
   - Undecided/Not Applicable

8. I benefited from being placed in special education classes during my formative school years.
   - Strongly Agree
   - Agree
   - Somewhat Agree
   - Somewhat Disagree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly Disagree
   - Undecided/Not Applicable

**Family**

9. Other members of my family have disabilities.
   - Strongly Agree
   - Agree
   - Somewhat Agree
   - Somewhat Disagree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly Disagree
   - Undecided/Not Applicable

10. My family has been important to my academic success.
    - Strongly Agree
    - Agree
    - Somewhat Agree
    - Somewhat Disagree
    - Disagree
    - Strongly Disagree
    - Undecided/Not Applicable
11. My family members relate positively to my learning disability.
   - Strongly Agree
   - Agree
   - Somewhat Agree
   - Somewhat Disagree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly Disagree
   - Undecided/Not Applicable

12. My family members provide support regarding my disability.
   - Strongly Agree
   - Agree
   - Somewhat Agree
   - Somewhat Disagree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly Disagree
   - Undecided/Not Applicable

13. My family members have been discouraging because of my disability.
   - Strongly Agree
   - Agree
   - Somewhat Agree
   - Somewhat Disagree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly Disagree
   - Undecided/Not Applicable

**College Experiences**

14. I have always thought of college as an educational goal.
   - Strongly Agree
   - Agree
   - Somewhat Agree
   - Somewhat Disagree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly Disagree
   - Undecided/Not Applicable

15. I was prepared for the transition from high school to college.
   - Strongly Agree
   - Agree
   - Somewhat Agree
   - Somewhat Disagree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly Disagree
   - Undecided/Not Applicable

16. I disclosed my disability when I first applied for college.
   - Strongly Agree
   - Agree
   - Somewhat Agree
   - Somewhat Disagree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly Disagree
   - Undecided/Not Applicable
17. All of my professors have been notified of my disability?
- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Somewhat Agree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
- Undecided/Not Applicable

18. A college education is important to me.
- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Somewhat Agree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
- Undecided/Not Applicable

19. A college education is important to my family.
- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Somewhat Agree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
- Undecided/Not Applicable

20. Members of my immediate family have completed college.
- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Somewhat Agree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
- Undecided/Not Applicable

21. My first year of college was positive.
- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Somewhat Agree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
- Undecided/Not Applicable

22. College is different from high school.
- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Somewhat Agree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
- Undecided/Not Applicable
23. I was prepared for college.
   - Strongly Agree
   - Agree
   - Somewhat Agree
   - Somewhat Disagree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly Disagree
   - Undecided/Not Applicable

Class Schedule

24. I have a strategy for managing my schedule of classes.
   - Strongly Agree
   - Agree
   - Somewhat Agree
   - Somewhat Disagree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly Disagree
   - Undecided/Not Applicable

25. I have a specific process for writing papers that has been successful.
   - Strongly Agree
   - Agree
   - Somewhat Agree
   - Somewhat Disagree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly Disagree
   - Undecided/Not Applicable

26. I have a specific process for reading assignments that has been successful.
   - Strongly Agree
   - Agree
   - Somewhat Agree
   - Somewhat Disagree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly Disagree
   - Undecided/Not Applicable

27. I have a specific process for math assignments that has been successful.
   - Strongly Agree
   - Agree
   - Somewhat Agree
   - Somewhat Disagree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly Disagree
   - Undecided/Not Applicable

28. I have a specific process for science-related assignments that has been successful.
   - Strongly Agree
   - Agree
   - Somewhat Agree
   - Somewhat Disagree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly Disagree
   - Undecided/Not Applicable
29. I have a specific process for social science assignments that has been successful.
   - Strongly Agree
   - Agree
   - Somewhat Agree
   - Somewhat Disagree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly Disagree
   - Undecided/Not Applicable

30. I have a specific process for career-oriented assignments that has been successful.
   - Strongly Agree
   - Agree
   - Somewhat Agree
   - Somewhat Disagree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly Disagree
   - Undecided/Not Applicable

Accommodations
31. I used successful accommodations in high school.
   - Strongly Agree
   - Agree
   - Somewhat Agree
   - Somewhat Disagree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly Disagree
   - Undecided/Not Applicable

32. I have used successful accommodations in college.
   - Strongly Agree
   - Agree
   - Somewhat Agree
   - Somewhat Disagree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly Disagree
   - Undecided/Not Applicable

33. I have taken remedial classes in college.
   - Strongly Agree
   - Agree
   - Somewhat Agree
   - Somewhat Disagree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly Disagree
   - Undecided/Not Applicable

34. I have used supports at ASU and found them helpful.
   - Strongly Agree
   - Agree
   - Somewhat Agree
   - Somewhat Disagree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly Disagree
   - Undecided/Not Applicable
35. I am aware of available supports at ASU.
   o Strongly Agree
   o Agree
   o Somewhat Agree
   o Somewhat Disagree
   o Disagree
   o Strongly Disagree
   o Undecided/Not Applicable

36. I am aware of supports that are unavailable at ASU.
   o Strongly Agree
   o Agree
   o Somewhat Agree
   o Somewhat Disagree
   o Disagree
   o Strongly Disagree
   o Undecided/Not Applicable

37. I have a system of steps to take when I have difficulty with a class.
   o Strongly Agree
   o Agree
   o Somewhat Agree
   o Somewhat Disagree
   o Disagree
   o Strongly Disagree
   o Undecided/Not Applicable

38. My teachers provide accommodations without me asking for them.
   o Strongly Agree
   o Agree
   o Somewhat Agree
   o Somewhat Disagree
   o Disagree
   o Strongly Disagree
   o Undecided/Not Applicable

39. I am aware of my rights as an LD student at ASU.
   o Strongly Agree
   o Agree
   o Somewhat Agree
   o Somewhat Disagree
   o Disagree
   o Strongly Disagree
   o Undecided/Not Applicable

40. I have used technology as an academic support.
   o Strongly Agree
   o Agree
   o Somewhat Agree
   o Somewhat Disagree
   o Disagree
   o Strongly Disagree
   o Undecided/Not Applicable
**Stress**

41. College is stressful for me.
   - Strongly Agree
   - Agree
   - Somewhat Agree
   - Somewhat Disagree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly Disagree
   - Undecided/Not Applicable

42. I have a method for coping with stress.
   - Strongly Agree
   - Agree
   - Somewhat Agree
   - Somewhat Disagree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly Disagree
   - Undecided/Not Applicable

43. Stress has affected my academic performance.
   - Strongly Agree
   - Agree
   - Somewhat Agree
   - Somewhat Disagree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly Disagree
   - Undecided/Not Applicable

**Social Relationships**

44. My friends/significant others are aware of my learning disability.
   - Strongly Agree
   - Agree
   - Somewhat Agree
   - Somewhat Disagree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly Disagree
   - Undecided/Not Applicable

45. I have friends with learning disabilities.
   - Strongly Agree
   - Agree
   - Somewhat Agree
   - Somewhat Disagree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly Disagree
   - Undecided/Not Applicable

46. My learning disability has affected my relationships with friends/significant others.
   - Strongly Agree
   - Agree
   - Somewhat Agree
   - Somewhat Disagree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly Disagree
   - Undecided/Not Applicable
47. I have a group of helpful peers.
   - Strongly Agree
   - Agree
   - Somewhat Agree
   - Somewhat Disagree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly Disagree
   - Undecided/Not Applicable

47. I have been denied an opportunity because of my disability.
   - Strongly Agree
   - Agree
   - Somewhat Agree
   - Somewhat Disagree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly Disagree
   - Undecided/Not Applicable

**Self-Perception**

48. I have a positive view of myself.
   - Strongly Agree
   - Agree
   - Somewhat Agree
   - Somewhat Disagree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly Disagree
   - Undecided/Not Applicable

49. I think other people have a positive view of me.
   - Strongly Agree
   - Agree
   - Somewhat Agree
   - Somewhat Disagree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly Disagree
   - Undecided/Not Applicable

50. There are situations in which I feel confident.
   - Strongly Agree
   - Agree
   - Somewhat Agree
   - Somewhat Disagree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly Disagree
   - Undecided/Not Applicable

51. I know who/what helps to empower me.
   - Strongly Agree
   - Agree
   - Somewhat Agree
   - Somewhat Disagree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly Disagree
   - Undecided/Not Applicable
Achievement

52. I am satisfied with my GPA.
   - Strongly Agree
   - Agree
   - Somewhat Agree
   - Somewhat Disagree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly Disagree
   - Undecided/Not Applicable

53. Good grades are important to me.
   - Strongly Agree
   - Agree
   - Somewhat Agree
   - Somewhat Disagree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly Disagree
   - Undecided/Not Applicable

54. I feel happy when I receive a good grade.
   - Strongly Agree
   - Agree
   - Somewhat Agree
   - Somewhat Disagree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly Disagree
   - Undecided/Not Applicable

55. I have established future career goals.
   - Strongly Agree
   - Agree
   - Somewhat Agree
   - Somewhat Disagree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly Disagree
   - Undecided/Not Applicable

56. I prepare for assessments.
   - Strongly Agree
   - Agree
   - Somewhat Agree
   - Somewhat Disagree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly Disagree
   - Undecided/Not Applicable

57. I seek accommodations for tests.
   - Strongly Agree
   - Agree
   - Somewhat Agree
   - Somewhat Disagree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly Disagree
   - Undecided/Not Applicable
APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
APPENDIX C

Interview Questions for Participants with Learning

Demographic Data

Age
Gender
Race
Number of years at ASU
Major
Career Choice

The Learning Disability Label
What is your specific learning disability?
How do you see yourself as a student?
How and when did you first become aware of your learning disability? What was your reaction to the label?
What were your formative school years like? Your college years?
What do you think are your strengths? Your weaknesses?
Were you placed in special education classes during your formative school years? What kind? What was the experience like?

Family
Do any other members of your family have disabilities? What kind?
How important has your family been to your academic success?
How do your family members relate to your learning disability?
How have your family members provided you support?
How have your family members been discouraging?

College Experiences
Why did you decide to attend college?
Why did you decide to attend ASU?
How did you prepare for the transition from high school to college? Who helped you in this transition?
Did you disclose your disability when you first applied for college?
Have all of your professors been notified of your disability?
How important is a college education to you? Your family?
What members of your immediate family have completed college?
What was your first year of college like?
How is college different from high school?
Do you think you were prepared for college?
Class Schedule
How do you select classes?
Describe classes in which you feel most comfortable. Why?
Describe classes in which you feel least comfortable. Why?
What’s your strategy for managing your schedule of classes?
What is your process for writing papers? Has this been successful?
How do you manage the reading that is required? Has this been successful?

Accommodations
What accommodations did you use in high school?
What accommodations have you used in college?
Have you taken any remedial classes in college? Which classes?
What kind of support have you used and found helpful at ASU?
What kind of support have you used and found not useful at ASU?
What kind of support are you aware of available to you at ASU?
What kinds of support are you aware of that would benefit you but is unavailable at ASU?
What steps do you take when you have difficulty with a class?
Do your teachers provide accommodations for you without you asking for them?
Are you aware of your rights as an LD student at ASU? How did you learn what they are?
What people have been most helpful to you in getting you through college? Why?
Have you used technology as an academic support?

Stress
How stressful is college for you?
What causes you the most school-related stress?
How do you cope with the stress of school?
Do you feel stress has affected your academic performance? How?

Social Relationships
Are your friends/significant others aware of your learning disability? How were they informed?
Do you have friends with learning disabilities? How did you find this out?
Has your learning disability affected your relationships with your friends/significant others? How?
What are your helpful peers like?
What is your life like socially?
Have you ever been denied an opportunity because of your disability?
**Self-Perception**
How do you view yourself?
How do you think other people view you?
In what situations do you feel confident? Why?
In what situations do you feel less competent? Why?
Who/What helps to empower you?

**Achievement**
What is your GPA?
To what extent are good grades important to you?
What is your reaction when you receive a good grade? A bad grade?
What do you predict for your future?
How do you prepare for assessments?
What type of assessment is easy for you? Difficult?
Have you taken the Regents exam? Did you pass any/all parts?
Do you seek accommodations for tests?