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**Faculty Perceptions on Working with Students with Learning Disabilities**

Ashley Jezik

College of Student Affairs, Eastern Illinois University

2022

### Abstract

Students with specific learning disabilities in higher education have been rapidly increasing. Legislation has been a large factor in the equality in education for individuals with disabilities making it easier to attend higher education. College students with disabilities have the hard and important choice of self-disclosing their disability, with many choosing not to. A main role for faculty is to support their students. This qualitative study aims to identify the knowledge faculty have about this student population and how they work with their disability services office. The research shows that faculties knowledge on students with disabilities are solely based on their own experiences. Participants want to support their students with disabilities, but find it easier to help the students when the student self discloses to them. The study shows that the participants need more support from their institution.

**Key words:** Disability, specific learning disability, IEP, faculty

### Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to all students with disabilities who have felt like their disability holds them back from their educational goals. Do not let your disability detour you from chasing your dreams, no matter how crazy and far out they are. Chase your dreams no matter what!

### Acknowledgments

I want to give a huge thank you to my Thesis Advisor Dr. Dianne Timm. I am so thankful for the time we have spent creating this study. You have taught me more about my self and the world in the last two years then I could have imagined. Thank you for pushing me, encouraging me, and guiding me through the tough times that master programs and life can bring. But most of all, thank you for becoming someone I look up to and someone who I hope I can call a friend and a mentor. Thank you, thank you, thank you!

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

High school graduates with specific learning disabilities (SLD) who decide to attend post-secondary institutions are at a large disadvantage (Cole, et al., 2015). Students with (SLD) need additional help with academic skills including, study habits, reading the text materials, finding errors in writing assignments, taking notes during class, comprehension of lessons, processing given information, and working with higher anxiety than those without SLDs (Carlson, et al., 2007). The U.S Department of Education in 2006 reported that the percentage of SLD in secondary education had tripled accounted for 11% of undergraduate students (Joyce & Rossen, 2006). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) in 2019, the number of Students with SLD participating in postsecondary education had increased to represent 19.4% of all enrolled college students. (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019).

As the number of students with SLD continues to increase in post-secondary environments it is critical that the faculty are able to adapt to make appropriate and timely accommodations for students. It is also essential for faculty to be able to understand students' accommodation requests. Students with learning disorders who have disclosed and used their accommodations while attending college have been shown to thrive more in college than those that did not disclose nor use their accommodations (Denhart, 2008). Faculty can best help their students with disabilities by being educated and understanding of the needs of their students.

Though there are countless reasons to why a students with SLD may choose not to disclose their SLD, a main reason could be psychological (Cole, et al., 2015). It has been

reported that 40% of high school students that were in special education courses choose not to disclose and use their accommodations in college (Newman, et al., 2005). It is important to understand why students with SLD choose to disclose in college and there is much that has been studied related to this. One explanation is that some students feel that they do not need to disclose or want to admit their disability (Barnard, et al., 2010). Others identify that they believe they will be shamed by professors or faculty members, and some have negative thoughts towards a colleges Disability Student Services (DSS) (Barnard, et al., 2010).

Not disclosing a disability or seeking support can have a large impact on the learning accomplishments of a students with SLD in post-secondary education (Barnard, et al., 2010). This choice may determine whether they stay enrolled in a 4-year college or if they graduate (Barnard, et al., 2010). This study aims to investigate faculties' opinions, thoughts, and knowledge regarding accommodations and students with disabilities.

### **Personal Statement**

I am extremely passionate about students with disabilities for a number of reasons. The main reason is because I am a student with a disability. I was in kindergarten when I was diagnosed with a learning disorder, sensory disorder, and attention deficit disorder. My parents pushed me to know my worth and understand that my disabilities do not define me. Although my disabilities do not define me, I have had my own struggles with education. When transitioning to college I was scared that because of my disabilities I would not succeed. I did not think a high school student that was in special education classrooms would be capable of passing college level courses.

My freshman year of college I had a huge decision to make. I needed to decide if I wanted to disclose my disability to the school. A large reason I did not want to provide this information was because I did not want my professors to look down on me or think less of my abilities. I also did not want any of my peers to figure out that I was not on the same academic level as them. In the end I did disclose my disabilities to the school, and it was the best choice I could have made. I choose to disclose my disabilities because I knew it was essential to succeed in college. My accommodations created equal opportunities for my learning. However, I had a faculty member ask me what my disability was, and they did not understand why I needed accommodations because they could not see any physical disabilities. Through this experience I began to identify that some faculty have no training or awareness regarding students with disabilities in college and because of this they did not know how to properly support or seek guidance from the office on campus. This experience gave me the passion to educate faculty and staff in higher education about students with disabilities. It amazes me that some faculty and staff have not received training on how to teach students with disabilities or students without disabilities in order to better serve the students in their classroom. I believe it is essential for faculty and staff to be educated on students with disabilities. I also want other students with disabilities to understand how important it is to disclose their disability; and for faculty and staff to understand how essential accommodations are for this population.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative study will be to understand what knowledge and training faculty have about students with disabilities and the expectations for making accommodations. This study will be conducted at a midsized, midwestern, 4-year, public

institution. At this stage of the research, the participants being studied will generally be described as full-time associate or full professors.

### **Research Questions**

1. What do faculty know about students with disabilities and the support they need? Where has this knowledge come from?
2. In what ways do faculty describe their interactions with disability services in gaining insight and providing accommodations to students?

### **Significance of the Study**

Enrollment and retention of students is important, and colleges need to identify a variety of strategies to support student success. The number of students with SLD who are choosing to attend college are rapidly increasing (Newman et al., 2011). An increase in students with SLD has grown due to the social and legislative changes surrounding policies and public opinions on equal education for those with disabilities (Sarid et al., 2020). This study can help identify how faculty view students with disabilities, and their knowledge of support for them in providing accommodations.

Many instructors may not have received guidance or given resources on how to work with SLD (Newman et al., 2011). This study will help identify what some of these challenges may be in order to develop resources, training, and support for faculty and students. This study will provide universities with information on the type of training that may be needed for faculty regarding the process accommodations.

### **Limitations, Delimitations and Assumptions**

This study is aimed at understanding faculty perceptions of students with specific learning disabilities. A limitation of this study can occur because there may be few

faculty members that want to participate, and those that do agree may be interested because they have worked with students who have identified learning disabilities to them. This may not accurately represent all faculty perceptions who have had these experiences. The participants for this study will be associate, or full professors who are employed in their roles full time. This study is being conducted at a medium sized midwestern state university that has a well-established disability services office. This research may not be applicable to institutions who differ in size or resources, but it provides a basic review of how these individuals work with the students as well as the office on campus.

Another limitation to the study may be that faculty will need to be willing to talk about their experiences with students with disabilities and the feelings they have regarding universal design and accommodations. This is why associate or full professors are included because they have been tenured and have demonstrated a level of experience that may lend itself to having had students they have worked with regarding accommodations. The participants responding to questions can answer falsely about their experiences and stories, causing inaccurate data. The interview will be designed to provide participants and opportunity to build rapport with the researcher and the researcher will work to create a safe space to conduct the interview in a way where they can fully share their stories and experiences free of judgement.

### **Definitions of Terms**

*Accommodations.* Students that have disabilities can acquire reasonable accommodations that are created for their specific disabilities and needs. There are different types of accommodations such as physical, academic, and accommodations

instructors must create. There are different types of accommodations for students with SLD to utilize which include, extra time, setting changes, someone to read the test, and alterations to exams and assignments (Longtin, 2014).

***Specific Learning disabilities.*** Are neurological disorders that can make it difficult to acquire certain academic and social skills (Illinois State Board of Education).

***Associate Professor.*** Is one who has typically completed the tenure process with a minimum of five years of teaching experience.

***Full Professor.*** Is one who has tenure, minimum of eight years of teaching experience and is considered an expert in a particular discipline or area at an institution of higher learning (McGowan, 2010). The full professor promotion comes after the tenure and associate professor promotion earlier in the individual's career.

***Universal Design for Learning. (UDL)*** Creates new and flexible ideas that meet the needs of different types of learners (Rose & Meyers 2006).

## Summary

Chapter one conveys a study that aims to understand faculty's opinions and knowledge about students with learning disabilities. This chapter provided information about the purpose and guiding questions for the study. The following chapter will provide a literature review on the history of disabilities, learning disabilities, and students' accommodations and support. Lastly, chapter 2 will end with the theoretical framework that will guide higher educations to understating students with learning disabilities.



## **Chapter 2**

### **Review of the Literature**

This chapter will discuss the major legislation surrounding individuals with disabilities. How a student obtains provider documentation in K-12 education and how their accommodations transition to higher education; as well as how faculty offer support to the students with accommodations. Lastly, theories that prove to be applicable to students with disabilities will be analyzed. The purpose of this study is to explore faculties opinions, thoughts, and knowledge regarding accommodations and students with disabilities. Students with SLD are diagnosed conditions by a physician that may influence students learning (Hadley, 2017). Examples of SLD include reading, math, and writing difficulties. SLD can also be defined as low achievement, unexpected low achievement, and students learning performance (Fletcher, et al., 2007). Children that have poor academics performances can be identified as having SLD. These disabilities create a gap between normal learners and their progression versus those with SLD. (Kulkarni, et al., 2001)

#### **Learning Disabilities**

The diagnosis of SLD became more prominent in the 1960s and 1970s. Parents were starting to become unsettled because their children were struggling to learn in school and they could not understand because their children showed no signs of mental or physical disabilities (Lyon, et al., 2001). SLD became important to educators, parents, and the students, and thus the start of specialized educational services (Lyon, et al., 2001). Specialized educational services helped place students with SLD who did not need special education but required specialized support in the educational setting. (Fletcher, et

al., 2007). Research has found that SLD are the highest population of students with disabilities in college (Lyon, et al., 2001). Studies have found that student with SLD are one of the hardest to determine and figure out in young people and adults, however educators and medical personnel have determined that when children are diagnosed to have SLD, they progress much faster in special education programs (Lyon, et al., 2001).

A study conducted by Lyon, et al., (2001) found that SLDs are caused by a neurobiological element in people (Lyon, et al., 2001). Those that are considered to have a SLD in reading have been found through extensive research to have disruption in the brain's left hemisphere when reading (Lyon, et al., 2001). An MRI can show a short disruption when a person with SLD tries to read (Lyon, et al., 2001). Different brain patterns are shown for a non-impaired reader that do not show up on a person with reading disabilities. Learning involves the retention and processes the information given and the motor plan of how one applies that information. A SLD is not a representation of one specific defect, but a cluster of conditions that affect how one is able to retain, process and create a motor plan for the information they are learning (Cohen, 1991).

### **History of Disabilities Legislation**

There has been a very long and tedious journey for the advocacy of students with SLD. Before the 1970s, students with disabilities were turned away and declined enrollment in their public-school system (Martin, et al., 1996). Students also were declined any accommodations or support from the school system and provided no guidance or help from any teachers. In the 1970s the disability rights movement slowly accumulated an increasing number of members. These individuals created many different local, state, and national statutes that would forbid any type of discrimination relating to

those with physical disabilities (Scotch, 1989). A differential turning point in the disability movement was the *Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Citizens v. Commonwealth* in 1971 and *Mills v. Board of Education of the District of Columbia* in 1972 (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). The courts ruled that every child with a disability has the right to an education (Scotch, 1989). The ruling was affirmed with the equal protection of the 14<sup>th</sup> amendment, which stated in that all persons born in the United States are protected under equal rights (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). The 14<sup>th</sup> amendment helped ensure safety and education for individuals with disabilities. Another act that helped people with disabilities was The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (U.S. Department of Labor,). The act has come to be known as one of the most renowned acts backed by the disability movement, stating that the education system must create equal opportunities for inclusion for people with disabilities (Shyman, 2013). An important aspect of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 is in Section 504. This section clearly states that students with disabilities be granted the same learning opportunities as any other student (Smith, 2001), thus, allowing students with SLDs the support they need in the education system. Prior to these laws a small number of students succeeded the obstacles that faced them when attending college. The barriers students with SLD had to overcome were not only physical, but also caused an inability to participate fully in classroom instruction (Hawk, 2004).

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

### ***Americans with Disability Act***

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was enacted on July 26, 1990 (Parry, 1990). The act states that there will be anti-discrimination for all people who have

physical or mental disabilities (Parry, 1990). Discrimination in ADA is considered failures to create reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities in and out of the classrooms (Parry, 1990). The ADA is applicable to almost every organization, club, institution, and company in the United States except for churches and private clubs (Smith, 2001). Schools that do not need to comply with ADA or Section 505 of the Rehabilitation Act do not receive any federal funds (Smith, 2001). Eligibility for ADA is based on the definition of the disability. Eligibility is not restricted by age and is not given based on specific disabilities. Eligibility is overall based on the life-altering physical or mental disability (Smith, 2001). ADA has numerous titles that help ensure the correct usage and protect those with disabilities.

**Title I: Employment.** Protects any discrimination in the workplace or educational setting for people with disabilities (Smith, 2001). ADA title one mandates that workplaces or academic settings with fifteen or more employees must offer equal opportunities for those with disabilities (A guide to disability rights laws, 2020). Title one helps eliminate any type of discrimination in the privileges of employment or education (ADA, 2009). It also prohibits any questions to potential and current employees or students (ADA, 2009). If employees or students choose to disclose their disabilities, the workplace or institution must comply with title I and offer appropriate accommodations (A guide to disability rights laws, 2020). Meaning, they must grant reasonable accommodations to the employee or student in any way possible to offer the equal opportunity (A guide to disability rights laws, 2020).

**Title II: State and Local Government.** Eliminates any discrimination in local governmental places, which include schools (Smith, 2020). Title II prohibits colleges

from denying students with disabilities attendance, benefits, participation, programs, services, and activities (Hawk, 2004). Other benefits of title II are, educational buildings need to offer architectural accommodations for people with disabilities if the program is not accessible (A guide to disability rights laws, 2020). Any programs that are not easily accessible because they are placed in older buildings must be moved to an easier to reach area for those with disabilities (A guide to disability rights laws, 2020). Public entities do not need to make changes if they undergo a huge financial loss (A guide to disability rights laws, 2020). Title two Public Transportation ensures that colleges that offer public transportation adhere to accommodations for students with disabilities. All public transit must be set with an easily accessible manner (A guide to disability rights laws, 2020).

**Title III: Public Accommodations.** This title forbids private colleges from discrimination of students with disabilities. Although private colleges are their own, they must follow ADA policy's (Hawk, 2005). Title II also, handles the issue of barriers that exclude people with disabilities in public buildings (Roger, 1996). Educational buildings that fail to comply with accessible entry methods or other means will need to alter to the buildings (Parry, 1990). Examples include, having the disability support office on the third floor with no access to elevators. According to Title II the office must be moved to a more accessible space for students with physical disabilities. If there are any private organization that operates as a business and are a part of the twelve different pieces of ADA title III, the business place must adhere to title three and create an accessible environment for those with various disabilities (Briggs & Sass, 2016).

**Title IV: Telecommunications Relay Services.** Title IV states that post-secondary education has to provide specific software for students with disabilities that

way computer information is accessible (Hawk, 2004). The Guide to Disability Rights Laws, 2020 ensures that those with hearing and speech disabilities can access telephones and television. Title four guarantees that usual telephone companies use telecommunications relay services (TRS).

### ***The Individuals with Disabilities ACT (IDEA)***

The Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) was signed and put into effect in 1975, the law was created for students' kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade (Turnbull, 2005). It was put into effect to regulate the behaviors that correlate between the government and the governed. The IDEA sculpts the action between the governed and government in three ways (Turnbull, 2005). First, funds are given to different state and local educational organizations, and the IDEA helps allocate the funds. This helps allocate resources appropriately across the state and tracks needs so that proper staffing, equipment, and support are provided. Second, the IDEA permits rights to the parents and children with disabilities; that way, they are capable of advocating for themselves. Because of this school districts began to work in partnership with the student and their guardians to identify the best learning environments. This became more formally known as Individual Education Plans (IEP). Third, it helps parents and children with disabilities find agencies that can create accommodations that will benefit them. This helped states realize that some resources may not be practical everywhere and that agencies outside of schools may be better resources than the school and staff there.

In 2004, the act was changed by President George W. Bush but was not finalized until 2006, (Yell, et al.,2006). Starting in 2004 changes were made to the IDEA and were finalized in 2006. The changes led to establishing a new law named the Individuals with

Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEIA) (Yell, et al., 2006). President Bush wanted to ensure that all students with disabilities were provided a free appropriate public education (FAPE) (National Association of School Psychologists). The new law required all public schools to offer special education and other needed services to children aged three through 21. If a student is suspected of having any type of disability, the student will now be provided with an evaluation process. After the evaluation has been done, and if the student qualifies for help, an individualized education program (IEP) is created for the distinctive needs for each student (National association of school psychologists). The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 also provides parents and their children with protection from any issues that can arise between the families and the school district.

#### ***No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)***

Another important piece of legislation is the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) which was a large factor that helped with the IDEA's future changes (Yell, et al., 2006). The NCLB provided the education systems with a financial award based off their students' success each school year (Yell, et al., 2006). The NCLB ensured that students with disabilities receive the same high quality of education as anyone else (Yell, et al., 2006). The NCLB act was set in motion in 2001 (Whitney, et al., 2017). NCLB was the first national law that allowed educational systems to step up for their mistakes and have necessary repercussions shown through the student standardized tests (Whitney, et al., 2017). The standardized test showcased how well the teachers and the schools were educating their students (Whitney, et al., 2017). The NCLB made it essential to provide students with standardized tests in grades three through eight in all learning categories

(Whitney, et al., 2017). After finalizing the NCLB, it was determined that the academic setting had changed for the better there had been gains in reading and math achievement. Through the study, they also found that teachers started to work much harder due to the demand on higher test scores for students (Whitney, et al., 2017). In response to better teaching, the students started to take a greater interest in the subjects taught at school (Whitney, et al., 2017). The NCLB created Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) which were targets that all educational systems in secondary education needed to meet (Whitney, et al., 2017).

### ***Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)***

In December 2015, Every Student Succeeds Act was implemented in place of the NCLB. It is the main education law for public schools in the United States (U.S. Department of Education). The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) changes helped ensure a larger range of success in schools and students; including those who receive special education and lower income schools. The implementation of ESSA produced positive outcomes in secondary and post-secondary education. For example, high school dropout rates are low, and graduation rates are high (U.S. Department of Education). The changes included newer expectations that education needs to meet. These new expectations included teaching students with high order thinking (Harvey, et al., 2016). The next change was that all schools would be measured by different accountability tactics (Harvey, et al., 2016). ESSA also created a much easier way to point out the financial gap between public schools (Harvey, et al., 2016). Lastly, schools implement which different data approaches are the best way to assess their schools and students academically to be more successful (Harvey, et al., 2016).



**Accommodation and College Support**

Students with SLD can choose to disclose or not disclose their SLD (Hawk, 2004). Students that choose to disclose their disability will want to request accommodations. There may be some students who choose not to disclose their disability and they will not receive accommodations. Accommodations must be asked for voluntarily by the student, and the student must identify themselves as a student with SLD or physical disabilities (Vickers, 2010). An ADA advisor or qualified faculty member will then meet with the student to determine what types of accommodations the student may qualify for (Vickers, 2010). After the accommodations are selected for the student, the student is provided with documentation to be given to the student's professors (Vickers, 2010). The student will choose if they want to disclose their accommodations to their professors. The documentation does not have the student's disability on it; it only has the required accommodations described (Vickers, 2010).

The students will need to speak with their college's disability services office (Summers, et al., 2014). There must be evidence that shows the student's disability and how it has affected the student in the past, and it may include a request of documents from a medical professional (Vickers, 2010). Not all accommodation requests from students will be granted. The office of disability support services can deny requests that are not found to be reasonable accommodations (Hawk, 2004). When there is an accommodation that requires an expensive or extensive amount of money and resources the colleges budget, number of employees, and numerous factors can play a part in the decision-making process of the accommodations (Hawk, 2004).

A student's IEP in high school does not follow them into their college education (Vickers, 2010). The disability services offices does not have to grant the same student accommodation based on their K-12 IEP (Vickers, 2010). The student with SLD may ask for accommodations to help ease the limitations caused by the SLD of the individual. These limitations need to be considered obstacles that a person cannot change about themselves and cause completing everyday college demands challenging (Vickers, 2010). Accommodations can be regarded as note-takers, the usage of audiobooks, extra time on exams and assignments, different forms of tests, adjusted course loads, and other quiet locations that the student may use for completing tasks (Summers et al., 2014). For each student their accommodation letter may look different than another's. There are numerous accommodations that can be given to students based on their IEP and their disability.

Students with SLD have different needs than other students. Students with SLD will require accommodations to help students succeed in a college setting. High schools typically do not prepare their students with IEPs for the transition to college (Maddaus & Shaw, 2006). The IDEA of 2004 placed two requirements that were added to a student's IEP by the time the child turns 14 and a half in the state of Illinois. There must be written post-secondary goals annually that can aid in the transition, such as, training or education, and employment, and independent living skills. Secondly part of the transition is to include courses of study that can help reach those goals (Maddaus & Shaw, 2006).

A study was explored to determine why some students with SLD choose not to disclose to their college's disability support services and why some students choose to (Cole, et al., 2015). Fifteen students were selected to be a part of a 30-minute interview.

The researchers found different factors that contributed to why some students disclose their SLD and why others choose to not disclose. Students who did not disclose accommodations explained that they did not want to seem as if their SLD was an excuse, problem, stigma, or a handicap (Cole, et al., 2015). Some said that they did not consider their SLD as a critical disability because it was not as severe as those with physical disabilities.

Another study conducted in 2016 addressed students with SLD at several Universities (McGregor, et al., 2016). More specifically, whether students with SLD status had different experiences based on if they used their accommodations in the classrooms. Only 33% of students with SLD were currently using their accommodations at this time. These students were struggling less with assignments, and reported more contact with faculty (McGregor, et al., 2016). However, the students with SLD also experienced a more challenging time with studies, many more nonacademic barriers to succeeding at university, and less satisfaction with their time at the university than those who did not have a SLD (McGregor, et al., 2016). This study granted educators with an inside perspective of how many students with SLD use their accommodations and the effects of using and not using their accommodations.

Some students may not want to disclose their accommodations. There are multiple stigmas that students who receive accommodations feel, such as being given a more comfortable education; they might not be able to achieve a regular education or feeling as if they will be socially isolated (Hart, et al., 2010). The faculty opinions for students with SLD can be an enormous reason that a student chooses to or not to disclose their SLD (Rao, et al., 2003). Rao, et al. (2003) conducted a study that was to identify faculties

opinions for accommodations at seven different 4-year colleges. There were various responses to the multiple accommodations used in the surveys. An overwhelming number (97.6%) of professors felt that students should use a tape recorder. Fifty-five-point-five percent of professors felt that having different forms of their students' exams should be allowed. In the study it was indicated that 94.3% of professors felt that students should be allowed extra time on assignments and exams. These numbers show that majority of the accommodations are accepted by professors from different colleges.

The faculties' opinions on accommodations and students with SLD can be a prominent reason why students choose to disclose or non-disclosed (Sniatecki, et al., 2015). If a professor has a negative perception of accommodations or students with SLD, the students will not feel comfortable disclosing. The lack of a positive perception towards SLD and accommodation can be simply because of lack of a faculty member's education on SLD (Sniatecki, et al., 2015). A study conducted by Sniatecki, Perry, and Snell (2015) utilized an anonymous online survey of 123 faculty members at a public liberal arts university. This online survey aimed to find if there was a significant difference in faculties opinions and knowledge of students with physical disabilities, SLD, and mental health. The study found that faculty had a higher belief that students with physical disabilities would succeed more than both SLD and mental health (Sniatecki, et al., 2015). The study also found that some faculty have negative perceptions of students needing accommodations; although only 6 out of 123 faculty members held negative ideas of accommodations (Sniatecki, et al., 2015). Stating that accommodations compromise academic integrity while giving an unequal advantage. Faculty also believed that students with SLD and mental health could not be as

academically competitive as those with physical disabilities. Findings from this study also identified an extreme lack of knowledge regarding the college's disability offices. Students with SLD were found to need more additional support from the disability service office due to the faculty's negative attitudes (Sniatecki, et al., 2015). Most importantly, this study's findings suggest that faculty would be positively influenced by mandatory workshops regarding those with SLD (Sniatecki, et al., 2015).

A study was conducted by Zhang et al. (2010) to identify what biases faculty from multiple 4-year universities have on giving accommodations and what factors determine the type of accommodations they will grant students. The study utilized an online survey with 206 faculty members that resided at nine institutions in the southern region. The study found a direct correlation between personal beliefs and the legal responsibilities of an educator granting accommodations (Zhang et al. 2010). If the faculty member had enough knowledge about accommodations, SLD, or the disability services office, they would have more positive outlooks on accommodations. Faculty are also more inclined to accurately support SLD if they had support from different influential offices on campus; Such as the disability service office, administrators, and academic support staff. Zhang et al. (2010) also identified that the staff felt they do not have enough training or knowledge of students with SLD. The faculty members in the study mean score was a 3.11 out of 5 points for supporting accommodations. The study concluded that faculty members are not completely supporting their students with SLD according to the institution's legal requirements.

### **Universal Learning Design**

Faculty have the job of creating an equal learning space for all students. The concept of universal learning design (UDL) is used in various academic settings. UDL is the efforts of those in positions as educators to create an equal learning opportunity and curriculum for all students, including those who have registered disabilities (Rose & Meyer, 2006). Utilizing UDL creates new and flexible ideas that meet the needs of different types of learners (Rose & Meyers 2006). According to Rose & Meyer (2000) “Universal Design for Learning (UDL) has the potential not only to increase access but transform the learning process. However, fulfilling this potential requires careful application of UDL, taking into account the need for flexibility from the very beginning.”

Typical college courses are taught by utilizing lectures and textbooks. Rose et al. (2006) expressed that courses that are taught strictly by utilizing lectures and textbooks are ineffective for different students and content areas. There are multiple ways to teach content to better serve the students in the classroom. UDL is responsible for creating an environment that eliminates the accommodations needed for a student with a disability or takes those accommodations naturally in to the planning of the course. Expecting a student with SLD to focus for an extended period of time and to soak all information from a lecture is a significant barrier. For example, Rose et al. expressed that a professor’s content be available in several types of different learning methods. Technology is a great way to use UDL. Videotaping each lecture and providing the tapes on the course website where it can be found for students at any time is one example. Ensuring there is captions on all video lectures will ensure that students who have hearing disabilities will feel comfortable and welcomed in that specific course.

UDL is not only conducted for students with disabilities, it is set in place to combat the need for accommodations. UDL is used for all types of different learners with different learning styles. McGuire, et al. (2004) conducted an extensive study where students with SLD and faculty were interviewed on their experiences, positive and negative, of college level courses where UDL was utilized. The findings showed that professors who used UDL had greater outcomes for their students, these students expressed that a good college course is created by the professor who allows alternative methods of learning for them. UDL tools provided were advanced notes, multiple explanations of examples, different delivery of content, continual feedback not just written, chapter outlines, reading guides, study guides, questioning techniques during lecture, and adjusting the instruction for students. UDL is created with the intention that all learners will succeed in college courses.

Incoming freshmen need help with their transition to college. For example, financial aid, meal plan, housing, signing up for classes and finding their classes (Holzberg, et al., 2019). Incoming freshmen with SLD need more guidance than incoming freshmen without SLD. Advice from their secondary education can help make the students transition more comfortable. Finding where and how to obtain accommodations and other assistance tools can be an exhausting task. An incoming freshman that has been given the knowledge of how to ask and where to find accommodations and other assistant tools in high school will have an easier transition to college.

A study was conducted to explore the feelings that students have towards disclosing their learning disability by Hong (2015). The students stated that they did not

want to confront their professors about their SLD because they did not want to seem as if they are less capable than the other students (Hong, 2015). Not being able to access the professor's accommodations and help can cause an enormous amount of stress and create the illusion that there is no support system for students with LD (Hong, 2015). This study suggests that students with SLD will not disclose their accommodations to faculty if they are not comfortable in their surroundings or if the instructor does not appear to want to make accommodations. It is the job of higher education professors, faculty, and a colleges disability student services office to give guidance and comfort to SLD. A SLD needs to be reassured that their accommodations do not alter their faculty's perception of them as a student or person. Faculty must do their part in knowing that accommodations create a universal learning environment (Hong, 2015).

### **Students with Learning Disabilities Experiences in College**

A study conducted by Holzberg et al. (2019) assessed the effects of self-advocacy and conflict resolution (SACR) with high school students with SLD. Those of whom would need to learn how to negotiate their academic accommodations for college in the future. Four students were chosen for the study based on their SLD, poor self-advocacy skills, and senior status. Researchers who specialized in SLD created 19 note cards with target behaviors that the student would need to use to negotiate accommodations. Results were found by the number of target behaviors that were accurately used based on the examples. This would ensure that students could use the SACR training. They then needed to find social validity data. The researchers created a six-item questionnaire. The questionnaire was made up of a 4-point Likert-type scale. The results established that the students did find SACR training useful. It had a positive effect on their capability to



clarify their needs and their SLD. The study also found that all the steps were easy to comprehend and overall taught the students to be aware of what accommodations they needed for post-secondary education (Holzberg, et al., 2019). When secondary education prepares the students with SLD to advocate for themselves, they are better suited to handle college accommodation requests. There are some high school special education programs that do not educate or prepare their students in self advocacy. The research conducted indicates the positive effects of preparing students with SLD in self advocacy.

Incoming freshmen with SLD will need a higher sense of belongingness and self-advocacy to excel throughout their four years in college (Fleming et al., 2017). The campus climate may be an indicator of why or why not a student feels comfortable disclosing their SLD, and how they transition. A student with SLD can feel very alone due to the demographics of being a part of the perceived small fraction of learning-disabled students on campus. Fleming et al. (2017) conducted a study to determine how students with SLD feelings of belongingness contribute to a primary factor of overall satisfaction of their college experience. Participants included 325 students who attended different public, 4-year universities. The researchers found through personal interviews the different feelings students have about demographics, belonging, self-advocacy, campus climate, and loneliness (Fleming, et al., 2017). They also wanted to know whether or not students were satisfied with their current college. Results found students with a higher sense of belonging at their college were more certain to enjoy their college choice. In addition, campus climate and the student's self-advocacy created a positive outcome of belonging and student satisfaction. The study found that institutions would benefit greatly from shaping their policy's and campus environment toward thinking of

those with SLD. Overall there should be interventions for faculty/staff. Which can improve disability services to students on campus. (Fleming, et al., 2017).

### **Theoretical Framework**

Three theories will provide the theoretical framework that will guide this study, and aid in understanding the transition of students with SLD to college. Knowing and utilizing these theories will help faculty guide students with SLD development through secondary education. Faculty's role in a student's college experience is to prepare and educate them for four years of their life's. Being capable of identifying students' phase in development is essential to understanding the most effective way to guide them in development. Schlossberg's (1981) transition theory, that provides insight into how individuals move through transitions, like going to college. Ajzen's (1991) theory of planned behavior, which provides insight in to why a student may not disclose or seek assistance for their disability. Gibson's (2006) model of Disability Identity Development, which helps in understanding how individuals come to understand and accept this part of their identity. The theories together help explain how students with identified disabilities transition to college and how faculty can support their students.

#### ***Transition Theory***

Transition theory, created by Schlossberg (1981) examined the different factors that affect many people's ability to manage their transition. (Schlossberg, 1981). According to Schlossberg, a college student who experiences a transition will fall in to one of three transitions: anticipated, unanticipated, and nonevents. An *anticipated* transition is an event that happens expectedly, such as going to college (Schlossberg, 1981). Schlossberg stated that an *unanticipated* transition is an event that is not plotted or

created on purpose, for a college student this could be not doing well in a class they expected to go through with ease. Nonevents are events that are created and scheduled, but do not occur; for a student with a documented disability this could be not being granted the accommodations in college that they were given in high school (Schlossberg, 1981). A transition can happen if there are changes in oneself or the environment surrounding them (Schlossberg, 1981).

Students with SLD transitioning to college are experiencing a whole new education system (Maddaus & Shaw, 2006). The transitions of going to college trigger a transition process for all students. Schlossberg (1981) identified four factors that influence an individual's transition--known as the 4S's-- that help guides a student through the transition period in college, situation, self, support, and strategies. Each of these is further explained below.

Self is about the individual demographics that influence their ability to understand and move through the transition (Schlossberg, 1981). This could include their abilities, identify, skills, and so forth. It could also include their psychological abilities and how they have coped with previous transitions and how they will use those experiences in this new transition (Schlossberg, 1981). For individuals who have a documented SLD their self may be connected to the identify of disability. This may impact how they reach out for support in college, because in high school they may not have had as much control of how they were treated and what they wanted out of their experience, but now they may have greater control. The student may also want to disconnect from the identity of an individual with an SLD and thus seek no support, which will have an impact on their transition.

Situation is whatever the student is going through. For example, it could be the students' first time away from home, the living situation changes, financial stress, and making friends in a new place. It could include sitting in a classroom for the first time knowing that no one in the room knows about their SLD. Some students could be working on a group project with classmates that are unaware of their disability. There are several different situations that students may find themselves in and choose to share or keep private their SLD.

Support is critical to the everyday functioning for humans (Schlossberg, 2008). Support can be a lack of support from family, friends, or faculty. Without support people may become stressed. Having strong positive support systems in place can guide students to a better physical and mental time transitioning to college (Schlossberg, 2008). Age can be a large factor in the support individuals have in certain times of their life's (Killam & Degges 2017). During adolescence through their teenage years most individuals rely on their family members for support. When entering college, the individuals are now emerging into adulthood. These students may not be able to rely on their family members solely because they may not live at home. Guiding students with getting involved and meeting new people will help give them the support they may lack entering college (Killam & Degges 2017).

Strategies are when the student realizes they need to reach out and find different ways to help with the transitions. An example is being able to find centers that can help with the transitions a student is facing. They are used in discovering how the transition will be for the individual transitioning to college. Students with SLD transition to college can be shown by the level of secondary preparedness to transition to college, the people

who are encouraging them, how they feel about themselves, and if the student has asked for help. All of which are also shown through the 4S's.

It is crucial for faculty to understand which transition a student with a SLD is in. If the faculty member can identify which of the 4S's the student is in, they will be more capable of supporting that student. Whether that support is explaining how the accommodation process works, reasonable accommodations, how the class is set for universal design or setting up a support system for that student. Understanding this theory is beneficial for all faculty in better supporting their students in their development and transition to college.

### ***Theory of Planned Behavior***

The theory of planned behavior created by Ajzen (1991) identified why some students with SLD choose not to disclose their disability. The purpose of this theory was to understand why someone behaves a certain way. The three steps identified are attitude toward an act or behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control (Ajzen, 1991). What Ajzen found was that the individual's attitude towards an act, like seeking help was often subject to the norms of the environment and how that would impact their experience especially their ability to control what they were going through. There is a great deal of research that stresses how important it is for students with SLD to disclose and receive accommodations (Cole et al., 2015; Joyce & Rossen, 2006; Barnard et al., 2010; McGregor et al., 2016; Rao et al., 2010; Sniatecki et al., 2015; Hong 2015). It is an enormous change from secondary to post-secondary education especially for students with SLD. The theory of planned behavior helps with the understanding the internal and external factors that help dictate disclosing or not disclosing. Understanding these three

ways to identify the independent determinants of a person's intention are key in connecting them to the right support (Ajzen, 1991).

The acceptance of one's SLD can be shown with the help of internal and external factors. Ajzen, (1991) explained that the internal factors are how an individual accepts and understands their own experience and behaviors and external factors involve the influence of the environment and people in it over the individual. Internal factors for acceptance are if the student understands and accepts that they have a SLD and will require guidance.

The research also aids in understanding the external factors that affect students with SLD (Cole et al., 2015; Joyce & Rossen, 2006; Barnard et al., 2010; McGregor et al., 2016; Rao et al., 2010; Sniatecki et al., 2015; Hong 2015). External factors can aid in the favor of SLD by who the students surround themselves with and whether they have a positive idea of other students with SLD. The student with SLD will know how others in their college environment perceive students with SLD. External factors such as faculty members' willingness to accommodate a student with SLD can determine if a student decided to disclose. A student with SLD may not know how to register for accommodations or where to find the disability services office. These external influences can be a deciding factor in deciding to disclose their SLD. A student with SLD may not want to ask where the office is or how to disclose because of the fear that the question would give their SLD away. As a student is educated and given knowledge of the positive outcomes that come with disclosing their disability a student behavior may alter.

The comfortability and normality that an institution and especially a professor creates for students with disabilities in how they design their lesson plans for all student's

success can provide this population with a higher sense of belonging. In this case a student with disabilities will then feel at ease with the college and their external and internal factors and be able to disclose their disability and need for accommodation with their college. Understanding and acknowledging the importance of creating a safe and supportive space for students with disability is important as a faculty member. Knowing the theory of planned behavior can help faculty identify how to help their students with disability's.

### ***Disability Identity theory***

Gibson, (2006) stated that students with learning disabilities need to be able to accept what their disability is to ask for help. Gibson created the disability identity theory to understand what barriers students go through with understanding and accepting their disability. Students with disabilities are more likely to have experienced systemic institutional victimization at one point in their lives (Gibson, 2006). This alone can lead a student to choose not to disclose their disability when they are in college. Incoming freshmen who have not been to college before will experience plenty of barriers. However, students with disabilities will face increased and extra barriers when entering their college; and these barriers are especially significant for the students who chose not to disclosure during their transition (Headrick, 2020). Disability identity theory helps with the understanding of how a student with SLD comes to accept their own disability. A student with SLD goes through three stages that represent the process of acceptance: passive awareness, realization, and finally acceptance (Gibson, et al., 2016).

The first stage is passive awareness, where the student is taught to disregard their disability, and the student may not associate with peers with disabilities (Gibson, 2006).

The student does not want to be seen as someone with a disability. They may not admit to themselves or others that they do have a disability. A college student may have been taught or forced to not ask for assistance early on and thus when they come to college, they do not seek out support. Passive awareness begins at the beginning of the student's life and may continue into adulthood if not challenged or nurtured to develop (Gibson, 2006).

The second stage is realization and occurs when the student starts to resent their disability (Gibson, 2006). They have feelings of hate towards themselves and their disability and are very insecure. In the realization stage the student is admitting for the first time to having a disability. Some students coming into college may not have required a great deal of accommodation in high school, however as they struggle in college, they may begin to realize that they have a disability for which they need assistance and that they have it as an option. It could also be the student who fully accepts their disability but then realizes that they need some support to succeed at the collegiate level. Realization can occur from the early stages of a person's life and into early adulthood.

Stage three is acceptance, the student or person now embraces their disability and realizes they are no less than other students (Gibson, 2006). Students in the third stage may help other students, disclose their disability, and be open to the accommodations they may need. These are college students who have fully worked to understand themselves and what they need to be successful and are not afraid to seek out the support.

Faculty's understanding of disability identity theory can provide them with the knowledge of where a student with disabilities may be in accepting and identifying with



their disability. Knowing what stage, a student may be in can aid in conversation, classroom experience design, homework, and understanding how to approach universal learning design.

### **Summary**

Post-secondary students with SLD benefit from a variety of different legislation that is put into place to advocate for them. Students with SLD transitioning from secondary to post-secondary education can find the transition very confusing and challenging. In her explanation of disability identity theory, Gibson stated that students with SLD have a harder time with their identity development and can be ignored more than non-disabled students (Gibson et al., 2018). Students with SLD account for a large number of college students. Students that do not disclose their disabilities may struggle more than students without SLD. It is the job of faculty to understand and acknowledge the legislation surrounding SLD and guiding SLD students to a brighter future. Faculty members that can identify and understand students with SLD needs outside of the classroom will be better suited to aid in development and success for this population. The theories written above suggest that students with SLD will need more assistance transitioning, choosing to disclose, and comfortability in the classroom than those that do not have a disability. Faculty that have an understanding of the theories and can apply them accurately will be a better advocate for students with SLD.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **Methods**

The purpose of the study was to understand faculty experiences teaching students with SLD at a four-year public university in the rural Midwest. In addition, this study granted insights into what faculty think about the accommodations that they are required to make for these students, and how they feel about the support and education that their institution and experiences have given them to teach students with disabilities. Lastly, the study explored faculty's understanding of, familiarity with, and application of universal design for learning. This chapter presents a detailed description of the processes that were taken to meet these goals. More specifically, it includes a description of the study's design, sampling processes, processes for data collection, analysis, and treatment, as well as the instrument that has been used.

#### **Design of the Study**

This study utilized a qualitative method. A qualitative method is defined as a study that utilizes the experiences and feelings of participants and the communication between the participant and the researcher to develop similar themes for the data collection (Merriam, 1998). A qualitative study was the best method for this research study because it is designed to capture the thoughts, feelings, opinions, and experiences of faculty who have worked with students through the disabilities service office on one campus. An interview design aided in capturing the thoughts, feelings, opinions, and experiences of faculty. Therefore, a design which includes the use of an open-ended questionnaire best provided the needed data. To recruit participants, an email (Appendix A) was sent to faculty asking them all if they would like to participate.

## **Participants**

Participants were four faculty members at a 4-year, public, midsized, midwestern university. Participants that had responded to the email first were scheduled for an interview. Those responding first were four female professors and two of the participants are chairs of their department. The 4-year, public, midsized, midwestern university has more female faculty than they do men, thus it was more likely to have female participants than male. Therefore, it makes sense that four female faculty responded to the email first. Below is a brief description of the participants. To have been considered for the study they must have been employed at the university and must have taught at a post-secondary institution for at least 5 years. Having experience at the collegiate level is essential because faculty will need to have worked with students with disabilities and their accommodation letters. The disability support office was consulted to assist in identifying participants who represent a variety of departments, programs, and colleges, but most importantly who have worked with students in providing accommodations. Once they had developed a list a random sampling was utilized to develop a smaller list; that list was then contacted by email (Appendix A) and invited to participate. They were instructed to submit times they were available. The researcher found an appropriate location for the interview with each participant. Participants were assigned a pseudonym to protect their identity and other identifiable information has been changed where possible.

**Participant 1.** Jessica identifies as a female. Jessica is an associate professor in the Special Education Department. She has a Doctorate in Special Education, a Master's in Special Education, and a Bachelor of Science in Social Studies Secondary Education.

She currently teaches courses that present content about individuals with disabilities and the legislation that surrounds disabilities. She has had numerous relationships and experiences with working with students with disabilities in her masters, doctoral program, and as a professor. Jessica also helps the disability services office with anything they need.

**Participant 2.** Becca presented as a female. She is an instructor in the college of Health and Human Services. She teaches several undergraduate courses and works with students from their first through last year of college. Becca worked for a large public university for thirteen years in the health center and then health education department for thirteen years. She also worked at a community college and has had experiences with creating accommodation letters for students.

**Participant 3.** Jane presented as a female. Jane has taught at the university for over 30 years. She serves as a chair of her academic unit. She teaches both undergraduate and graduate courses. In her time as a professor, she has also taught health administration. Jane has also had experience with students with disabilities, she disclosed that she has a child with a disability.

**Participant 4.** Maddie is the Chair of her department. She has taught at her current university since 1996. Maddie teaches both undergraduate and graduate courses. She has had numerous interactions with students with disabilities during her time as a professor. She has a Masters in Family and Consumer Sciences and a PhD in Early Childhood Education/ Child Psychology Concentration.

### **Research Site**

This study was conducted at a mid-sized rural 4-year public state school in the Midwest. The university has approximately 8,000 students and approximately 236 tenured faculty members. There are currently 335 students with disabilities that are registered with disability student services and 85 of these students have SLDs. This was the best option for conducting this study because there are 236 faculty members that could be randomly selected to participate in the study. The study only needed 4-5 participants.

Three Interviews were conducted over Zoom where they have been recorded. One participant was an in-person interview, which had also been recorded over Zoom. Participants were instructed to identify a private location where they could freely share information. The researcher was located in a similar location. The participants were told at the beginning of the interview that it will be recorded.

### **Instrument**

Open ended individual interviews (Appendix B) were conducted to get information about faculty's experiences working with students with disabilities, making accommodations for students, and universal design for learning. Creating a semi-structured open-ended interview provided a guide for gathering similar information from each participant. It also ensured consistency and a guide for the interview between the participant and the researcher.

Participants were also given an informed consent document with the email confirmation for the interview. At the beginning of the interview the form was explained again by the researcher and the participant was asked to verbally agree to participate in the study and state verbally that they understand what their participation means.

**Data Collection**

The interviews were conducted over Zoom where they could be recorded. Each recording was transcribed using Otter and then verified by the researcher for accuracy. The participants are identified by a number and all identifiable information (building names, institution name, people's names) are altered to protect their identity. All participants' videos are recorded and stored on a flash drive that is password protected and only the researcher has access to the information.

**Data Analysis**

Each interview transcript has been reviewed by the researcher. During the coding process the researcher divided the information from the interviews into categories based on similar responses to the questions, this is known as primary coding (Merriam, 1998). The researcher read and examined all of the interviews individually, utilizing the research questions for this study as the guides for coding. As key themes emerged the quotes were collected and grouped together. From there quotes and ideas were then grouped in to secondary, and tertiary themes as needed. These themes were allowed to emerge organically as the interview transcripts were analyzed in an effort to fully explore how participants helped answer the research questions.

**Treatment of Data**

After the completion of each interview, names, specific information to the faculty member, and other information have been deleted from the transcription for confidentiality. All transcripts, recordings, and communication between the researcher and participant are stored on a password protected thumb drive that only the researcher has access to. Any hard copies of documents or information are stored in a locked file

cabinet that only the research has access to. All information gathered will be kept for three years. After three years passes all data collected will be destroyed per IRB standards.

### **Chapter Summary**

Chapter three outlines the process that aided in answering the research questions. The design of the study, participants, research site, instrument, data collection, data analysis, and treatment of data has granted the researcher accurate insight into how faculty respond to students with SLD, accommodation process, support, universal learning design.

## **Chapter IV**

### **Analysis**

The purpose of this study was to examine faculty's perceptions on working with students with learning disabilities. This chapter will analyze the findings from the data collected from four faculty members that have taught in post-secondary education for at least five years, granting them experience in teaching students with learning disabilities. The data was collected by interviews where the participants would answer specific questions about their experiences working in higher education, working with disability support services, and working with students with learning disabilities. The one-on-one interviews helped find numerous themes during the coding process to best understand the two research questions. The research questions that were utilized for the study were (a) What do faculty know about students with disabilities and the support they need? Where has this knowledge come from? (b) In what ways do faculty describe their interactions with disability services in gaining insight and providing accommodations to students? This chapter will analyze the themes that best capture the participants experience in teaching students with learning disabilities in post-secondary education. It is important to note here that this research was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, which alters the way that the participants thought about and responded to this study.

#### **Faculty knowledge about and support for students with SLD**

The participants were asked questions about how they have gained knowledge about students with disabilities and what the support process looks like from the classroom perspective. Participants shared many stories of students they have worked with during their role as an instructor in answering these questions. Two themes were



presented from the interviewer's responses which included knowledge, and support provided.

### **Knowledge**

As participants spoke about their knowledge of students with learning disabilities they shared personal stories about what they have learned from working with this population. The participants explained their knowledge by answering questions about the definitions of disability and where this knowledge comes from. They also spoke about how they come to learn and prefer to learn about the student's disability. Lastly, the participants described their own personal definition of what they believe universal design is.

**Personal Definition of Learning Disability.** The participants, when asked to define learning disability explained the many experiences they have had with specific students. The stories told during their interviews showed how they have come to create their own personal definition of learning disabilities through interactions with students. Becca spoke about her experience with teaching students with Dyslexia and ADHD and how those experiences have helped her understand this population. When asked what her definition for SLD Becca stated, "a disability would just be anything that would hinder them from getting the education that they need." Maddie stated, "anything that gets away with typical functioning."

Jane's response was related to her experiences working with and teaching students with numerous disabilities. Jane also disclosed that she has a child with a disability that has provided her with further insight; "I have been adapting as I've talked more with my son." Jane, when asked for the definition stated,

A Disability is anything that interferes with a student's access to learning. That could be physical because they can't get in the building or they can have nowhere to sit in the room. It could be testing environment, in terms of the environment interferes with their ability to perform at their level, they're actually capable of, I mean, any number of things. But in an educational setting a disability is something that interferes with their ability to learn, and it's not something they have control over.

Jessica, who has a background in Special Education, explained that she has had numerous experiences working with students with disabilities and learning about disabilities as well as she has studied this population. She also teaches special education courses at the college level. Jessica explains her own definition, "I like to think of it as just differently abled."

**Learning About a Student's Disability.** The participants were asked questions about their own experiences teaching students with disabilities and what those have been like. The participants responded with different stories about students they have taught with disabilities. They all had stories regarding what they have learned about students' disabilities, and all spoke about the importance of open communication and how beneficial this is from the perspective of the instructor.

Participants shared about how they learned about a student's disability and how they then went on to work with them in the course. Becca shared about a student who came to her on the first day of school and provided an accommodation letter and personally disclosed her learning disability more specifically dyslexia. Becca explains, "she was very open about it. And I think that is helpful. Because I knew that I needed to

make some changes in the class because of it.” Jane talked about a student who self-disclosed to her, after having gone their whole life without accommodations until college and found out through testing that she had a processing disorder. Jane explained,

Actually, she was very upfront with it. She had reached out at the point she couldn’t succeed anymore. I had to read her tests to her, and we would set up a separate time. We also did some outside work in addition to that.

Jane, who has been teaching for over 25 years also spoke about how sometimes she can identify a learning disability before a student discloses it to her. She shared a story about a student that did not provide an accommodation letter in the beginning of the semester, but she noticed the student struggling a bit in class. In the middle of the semester a presentation project was assigned, and the student handed Jane the accommodation letter the day before the presentation. Jane explained, “it was a little frustrating, because it’s like, you’ve known something was going on for several weeks. Why didn’t you at least give me the heads up? Something was going on.” Jane explained that this was a frustrating way to learn about a disability.

**Universal Design Definition.** Part of understanding the participants’ knowledge of students with learning disabilities was gaining in sight into what they know about universal design, a concept of creating classroom spaces where all students can succeed regardless of ability. Participants spoke about their experiences teaching students in the classroom. When asked if they were familiar with the term universal design Becca, Maddie and Jane stated that they were not familiar with the term. After the interviewer explained the definition of universal design Jane and Maddie had provided a different perspective of universal design. Maddie explains, “we call it something different. We

call it expanding complexity in here because some people are at different levels.” Jane spoke about her experience with universal design, “Best practices, design, is often times, truly universal design, but for many years it was called best practices. That was the term we used.”

Jessica stated that she knew the definition of universal design. She spoke about her experience and knowledge on universal design as a special education teacher. She explains, “Universal design for learning, is offering multiple means of presentation, multiple means of expression, multiple means of our methods of evaluating, and it is designed to help the success of every student in that classroom.”

### **Support Provided**

Participants told their own personal experiences on how they support students with disabilities in their classrooms. The participants explained the type of support they provide and how they learned their own methods for support. They also spoke about how universal design is utilized intentionally in their courses and course design.

**What Faculty do to Support the Students.** All participants spoke about how they support and accommodate their students in their classroom, and this was based on their prior teaching experiences with specific students they have worked with over the years. In the above explanation of the participants definitions of disabilities Becca shared that she has worked with students with Dyslexia and ADHD. She explains what she did to support one specific student who had dyslexia?, “I made sure I printed out the slides, I made sure I made it really big for her.” She also stated,

She would come and meet with me, that was one thing we decided, come and sit in here once a week and we will get stuff done. She is actually one of the reasons we started the study hall for our department any students can come in.

Maddie, who teaches XXX explained how she structures her class for her students. She stated, "I don't teach any differently related to accommodations, I just make things available to everyone really." Maddie also spoke about what she does when she knows she has a student with a disability in the class. She explained,

I approach them often, they either email me their accommodations letter, or just hand it to me. I always tell them I want to meet with them. All my Power Points and materials are in D2L. If you need you can videotape. I am often taped.

Jane shared that she has experience working with her son who has a documented disability. She also shared that she has worked with disability services from different institutions and has experiences working with offices that support students with disabilities. Jane shared her experience working with a particularly difficult student and she used her experiences with her son to support her student. Jane explained, "I had a difficult experience with a student who refused to get accommodations. He had a severe stutter." Jane goes on to say that the student with the stutter had a hard time presenting during her class and she wanted to help him. She stated how she knew how to support him,

I was familiar with the speech and hearing clinic because my youngest son had done some speech therapy there. I talked to some people there and they're, like, "yes, absolutely, we can help. This is what we offer." So, I took all that information back to him, and his nonverbal's were like he was insulted. I was

like, "I'm just trying to help, here it is." and then I just kind of left it. I think he spoke to me once the rest of the semester, I think he was embarrassed.

When asked about what Jane knew about learning disabilities, she also spoke about what she does currently in her classes to support her students. The support she described providing is based on prior experiences working with students with different types of processing disorders and the influence of her son,

One of the things that I've recently done is change the font size on my email for readability. Often it is little things like that, that make a difference. I try to make sure that when I am presenting information in the classroom, or virtually, that I have more than one learning style engaged. I don't always get it done, but I try because some of this has really been adapting as I've talked more with my son and how he adapts to things. I try to make sure I have my PowerPoint slides up ahead of time if someone wants to print them off or read through them, they are accessible. One thing I am doing in preparation for next time I teach a graduate class, is to record all my videos and make them shorter and add closed captioning.

Jessica spoke about how she supports her students with disabilities. She explained how her first interaction as a graduate student studying special education and working with a student with a disability helped her better serve her students. Jessica stated,

I would say the first time I actually had a student with a disability, an identified disability, it was a little bit unnerving for me, because I was not sure what I was supposed to do. So, I waited to see if the student would talk to me. Then I realized maybe not because it is college. I then learned very quickly that in a very non

identifying way, I would send a personal email and just say, I am here I want to talk, if you talk to me it can help me figure out what I need to do for you.

Jessica goes on to explain how this interaction helped shape her teaching style for students with disabilities and how support can look differently for all students,

Because of my experiences in school, I think I was less afraid of approaching them individually than some faculty might be. Because of that, without being too probing and without trying to disempower the student with the disability, I would say, this is how I run my class, how does that fit with you? What does this mean to you and how do you want and how do you need me to support you.

**Utilizing Universal Design in the Classroom.** The participants spoke about working with students with disabilities and what they did to support them. When asked about their knowledge and definition of universal design, only Jessica knew about universal design, both Maddie and Jane had an idea of the concept, Becca had never heard of universal design. Jessica was the only participant to explain examples of how she utilizes universal design in the classroom,

I use Power Point and lectures in my classes. I try to provide more information. I try to provide videos when I can. That way it is not me talking the whole time. I really encourage even in big lectures, for students to ask questions. They are supposed to come prepared with questions, and they can send it to me ahead of time so I can make sure that I address the questions. I also utilize D2L for Brightspace for more support. I provide my articles and they can read videos that they watch. I also upload my Power Points so they can have access to it before and after class.

After the definition of universal design was discussed with the participants, the participants were asked if they would feel comfortable utilizing the method. All four participants felt that some training would be beneficial and would help them be able to better support their students. After learning the definition, one participant stated that she currently utilizes universal design. Maddie stated, “I would be comfortable. I feel like I do it, really already.”

### **Interactions between DSS and faculty**

The participants were asked questions about what they believe DSS role to be, their interactions with DSS, type of support they would like to receive from DSS to help better serve their students. Participants shared their experiences working with the staff of this office and students receiving accommodations to formulate key themes. The themes found were DSS providing accommodations, interactions with the office of DSS, and support from DSS.

### **Providing Accommodations**

The participants were asked to share examples of students they have worked with who presented accommodations letters. Participants in this study explained the types of accommodations they have been a part of and what support the office of DSS provided to the students.

**Providing letters for the student to the instructor.** Participants all explained that they learn about the student’s need for an accommodation by the letter students provided them with from DSS, from an email letter from DSS describing the accommodations required, or the student presented it themselves. Teaching in the



department of special education, when asked about how Jessica learns about the student's disability she stated,

Well, a lot of times at [Institution] the accommodation letter kind of alludes to it.

So, I do think in some ways, faculty in special ed. have a little bit of a heads up compared to other faculty, because that is what we do.

Jane spoke about how she had received a letter from a student needing accommodations and that she provided the support without knowing what the disability was. After several weeks she found out from the student that it was a learning processing disorder. Jane explained,

She went through disability services and provided me an accommodation letter.

Which doesn't really tell you the nature of the disorder, it just tells you the student gets these accommodations, the test needs to be administered orally, and it needed to be obviously administered in a different environment, so you have very clear specifications of what as the instructor you were expected to do.

Jane also spoke about how she wanted to better serve her students, but the limited information on an accommodation letter provides difficulty. Jane was referring to the fact that on the actual letter from DSS it does not state the student's disability, only the required accommodations.

**Providing Student support.** When asking participants their perceptions on how DSS supports their students they all expressed that the main responsibility of DSS is to help support the student by creating each an accommodation letter and to have communication with the student. Jessica explains, "Determining what are the appropriate

accommodations are. To me part of that challenge is, determining an appropriate accommodations that does not disempower the student.”

Jane expressed that she feels that another role of DSS is to help the student transition from college. She explained,

I think their second responsibility, which is more challenging, is how do you prepare them for the transition to when they leave college. That is not going to look the same, especially for students who have processing disorders, learning related disorders, and emotional health issues that are capable of being accommodating in learning environments. These can be largely ignored in the real world.

### **Interactions with the Office of DSS**

The participants were asked questions about their own personal experiences with interacting and working with DSS. At their institutions the office of DSS has a small office structure. There is an office manager, alternate media specialist, and the director. The participants shared insights into what kind of support they want from DSS to better serve their students. The participants described interacting with DSS and what type of communication has been utilized. The participants also spoke about their interactions with the director of the DSS office.

Interacting with the Office. The faculty participants were asked about their experiences working with their disability services office. Only positive experiences of working with their current college's DSS office were expressed by the participants.

Becca spoke about her interactions with the office, “I feel like I can walk in the office and

get anything I needed from them.” Jane shared how their DSS office is, “fantastic about transparency.”

Each participant also spoke of their DSS director specifically. Jessica stated, “Our Disability Services Director at [institution], I have nothing but the greatest respect for her. She is fantastic. She's not only fantastic with students, but she's also fantastic with faculty helping answer any questions that they have.”

One participant did state their concern on how the location of their DSS office, in that it is not easily found and even it's location inside the building can be challenging to find. Becca was concerned that this may affect communication for students with disabilities and faculty. Becca explained,

That is part of the issue, if it is hard for me to find I can imagine students already being nervous about going there. And then all of the sudden, you cannot find this place.

Becca goes on to state, “I would say I had not had a negative experiences with the DSS office except for trying to find the office.”

### **Support from Disability Support Services**

Participants stated that the disability support service offices have a role to support faculty. Maddie simply stated, “The thing that has been good is Disability Services is always available, I've always felt supported.” However, she and the other participants could not specifically identify anything specific. When asked what they would like to see they offered many suggestions. Mainly, participants provided recommendations or ideas for ways they would like to be more supported.

**DSS Connecting Faculty.** Jessica and Maddie, spoke about how they would find it beneficial if disability services provided small informal chats, meetings, groups, or workshops to create conversations among faculty about working with students with disabilities. Maddie, who serves as a chair for her department stated,

I mean, little workshops wouldn't hurt, you know, especially, I have a new faculty member right now. I'm working with her, and, we're working together, but she would probably benefit, even new faculty to even know the process of accommodations.

Jessica who is a Special Education faculty member spoke about how it may be beneficial to offer brown bag luncheon conversations for faculty to gather and talk about situations with students and how they can better serve the population of students with disabilities.

**Information about DSS.** Participants were asked what type of further support or training they would like to receive from disability services. All participants identified that disability services has a responsibility to support and educate the faculty as well as the students. The aspect that varied was the type of support and training they would like to have to better serve themselves and their students. Becca, who has had experience at several different types of institutions, spoke about how she would love to have posters, flyers, or Power Points to give to their students and put on university online platform about what disability services does and how important it is for a student to disclose. Becca stated how helpful it would be, "If they [DSS] had a flyer, I could post on D2L a video or something, or get a PowerPoint I could put up for my class when people are walking in." Becca and Jane both had a similar interest in wanting to know the

information and programming that disability services offers. Becca wanted to know about what services are available for her students. Jane stated,

I would like to have a better understanding of the real instructional, real instructionally related resources that I would have at my disposal, to better meet the needs of my students. And to know more about the programming they offer, that's another thing that it's easy to be blind to.

When asked about what instructional support she would like Jane stated,

I would like, I think something that would be helpful, is to have a web based handbook for lack of a better term, but you know, it's like a handbook on Disability Services at [institution], where it's like, Okay, I've got a student with this disability, or I've got a student who's presented these kinds of accommodation requirements, you know, let me look up some techniques or tools that are available to me here, or I have questions about XYZ.

### **Chapter Summary**

By analyzing the responses from the individual interviews it was found that how each of the participants worked with their students and DSS is based on their prior experiences with specific students. Their experiences are how they personally perceive their students and their DSS office on campus. This chapter allows the readers to gain an understanding of faculty perceptions on working with students with learning disability's come to be. In chapter five the discussion of findings will be presented. The chapter will include recommendations for higher education professionals and future research.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Discussion**

Chapter five presents the discussions of the findings from the study on faculty's perceptions of working with students with learning disabilities. Suggestions to faculty, disability support services, students, and institutions will be provided. The purpose of this study was to gain insight into what faculty know about working with students with learning disabilities and their DSS office. Utilizing interview questions participants shared their own experiences which gives us a better understanding on how to educate and support faculty in better serving students with learning disabilities. This chapter will also include recommendations for higher education professionals and future research.

### **Discussion**

Through the interview process the researcher was able to understand how faculty come to learn about and work with students with SLD. Along with this it became clear what role the DSS plays in aiding faculty as they work with students in their classrooms. These are further discussed below.

### ***Knowledge of working with students with SLD***

It was clear from the interviews that the participants, that is the faculty instructors, understanding and perception of disability is formed through their personal experiences they have had over years in their roles. Three of the four participants received no formal training, but utilize their experiences with students with disabilities and their education to make accommodations and support for the student. The one participant who teaches in the special education department has had extensive learning around the topic, especially on the K-12 system of education. Several of the participants

provided definitions that were stories about their interactions with students who presented an accommodation letter and some who did not.

Students with SLD can choose to disclose or not disclose their SLD (Hawk, 2004). The participants identified that when students disclose to them their disability they had an easier time making accommodations for them. One thing the participants spoke about was knowing the students' disabilities and acknowledged that this helps them better support the students and understand why they need to make a specific accommodation. They struggled to understand why that information could not be disclosed. Faculty want open communication and disclosure from students as soon as possible because it makes the support and accommodation easier from their perspective.

Some students may be open to disclosing others may not want too. The process at the institution of this study has the student work with DSS to identify the accommodations necessary. Then, the student receives a letter that they are to take to the instructor. The student is instructed to work with their professor to determine the delivery of the accommodations that will help them complete the course. Documentation that professors receive from the student does not have the student's disability on it, it only has the required reasonable accommodation (Vickers, 2010). Several studies have shown that students perceive faculty to treat them differently once they disclose the need for accommodations, and often they identify faculty treating them this way because of their disability (Cole, et al., 2015; Hart et al., 2010; McGregor, et al., 2016; Roa, et al., 2003; Sniatecki, et al., 2015). With this, the faculty in this study identified that there is some level of assumption related to accommodations, or even to presentation of SLD. They base their knowledge off of what they have experienced and how they have engaged with

previous students. For example, one participant spoke about her own son and his disability and how she saw a student with a similar disability and wanted to offer the student the same support and accommodations as her son and was surprised to find the student resistant to that support. It appears that when faculty experience a student with a disability, they will believe that the next student who has that same disability will require the same solution and accommodations, thus placing them in a category. Along with this, they also identified that if a student is requiring a specific accommodation they assume that they have a specific disability and that it may be the same as a prior student.

Part of the knowledge in working with students with SDL means considering the concept of UDL. All but one participant knew what UDL was, but were not confident that they have done this currently. They indicated that they would need more guidance in knowing how to create a UDL. Faculty who have experience working in special education, like Jessica, were able to identify what UDL was and how to utilize it in structuring their classroom. Her definition is shaped from years of learning and practice with students with learning disabilities. Other participants who had no background in special education were not able to accurately define or describe how they would apply UDL.

The findings from this study showed that the participants with an experience in special education were better able to support their student based on the knowledge that they have through years of learning. The other participants who only have experiences working with students with disabilities shared stories about specific students' disabilities that help shape how they support future students. Faculty with no training or knowledge in special education only know about the disabilities they have encountered teaching or in



their personal lives. Those experiences base how they see other disabilities. However, not all SLD are the same and do not require the same accommodations (Cohen, 1991).

### *Support from DSS for faculty*

It was shown that the participants in this study enjoy working with their college's DSS office from their own personal experiences. All of the participants in this study spoke highly of the relationship with the staff of the DSS and specifically the director in the department. They all spoke about the great experiences of working with DSS at their institution. The frustration was with the process not the people. The participants explained through stories and experiences that they really do not understand the process of accommodations and laws that are set in place to support SLD.

A study conducted by Snaitecki and colleagues (2015) found that faculty members have extreme lack of knowledge regarding the college's disability offices. The participants of this study explained that the DSS office's sole purpose is too create accommodations for SLD. Participants except for Jessica, who has experience as a special education professor, do not understand the support that DSS can offer students and faculty. DSS offices have a larger responsibility then just creating accommodations.

They also spoke about wanting information that could help them better accommodate their students. One participant spoke about an informational booklet that would list how to create a better learning environment based on a student's disability, in a sense working toward creating a universal design for their learning environment. There are numerous accommodations that can be given to students based on their IEP and their disability ( Summers et al., 2014). The participants that did not have a background in

DSS did not understand the concept of students with the same disability needing different accommodations based on their own disability.

When asked about what they wanted from DSS the participants identified training and support to better understand students with different disabilities and the ways they could support them. Participants expressed the need and want for different types of trainings. Although, they want support and training from DSS they do not want mandatory sessions. In another study it was found that if faculty members had enough knowledge about accommodations, SLD, or the disability services office, they would have more positive outlooks on accommodations because they understand their student, which shows the need for trainings (Zhang et al., 2010). All participants gave numerous examples of what they believe could best benefit them as professors.

They expressed that brown bag lunch-ins would be great for faculty to come together and ask questions about situations they have in their classrooms. Participants also want to be able to have conversations with DSS more informally. An example of a informal conversation was to invite the staff to a department meeting where they could address more specific situations or just ask questions and receive information based on current situation..

Participants identified a need to know more. Hand outs, power points, and informational pamphlets was also wanted from the participants that provided information about specific accommodations or disabilities. This would be something they could look over in their own time and when they needed it. Another example was a group chat with all faculty and DSS where they can talk and ask questions about DSS and accommodations. Faculty are also more inclined to accurately support SLD if they had

support from different influential offices on campus; such as DSS. They also spoke about the need for physical information, something they could say in class and put on their syllabi to give to the students on the first day of classes. The explanation from the participants was that physical hand outs could help the faculty better speak about what DSS offers students with disabilities.

The one challenge that was identified was the location and accessibility of the office. One participant shared the challenge of finding the DSS office for the first time. An institution's DSS should be easy and accessible for their faculty, staff, and most importantly students. Another issue that is shown through this participant experience is that the faculty member only visited the office when they needed something from them. They had no idea where the office was, showing the lack of knowledge surrounding the DSS. Faculty do not know about DSS offices or the location until it is needed.

The findings from this study showed that the participants enjoy working with their DSS office. However, they do not know all that DSS can provide for them and their students. Faculty want training and professional development to help them support their students, but they will not attend mandatory sessions. This study provides great insight into the importance and need for faculty resources and trainings of various types. Faculty who do not have experience in special education may not understand that each disability requires different accommodations and that support will look differently for each student.

### **Recommendations**

As the number of students with learning disabilities continue to increase on campuses it is essential that institutions do as much as they possibly can to help faculty better serve this population of students. New faculty start teaching on college campuses

with little to no training. Some may come with their own experiences of working with students with disabilities and some may have worked in special education. These recommendations are made based on this research on faculty experiences working with students with learning disabilities and their colleges DSS office. They are broken down based on the different departments and individuals across campuses.

### ***Faculty***

Faculty have a responsibility to educate their students. Not all students learn the same, come from the same background, or know the same information. Faculty will run into a situation where they are handed an accommodation letter and have never seen one before. It is in the best interest of the student and the instructor to understand the student does not need to disclose and does not need to communicate why they have the letter. If any questions still remain unanswered faculty can reach out to disability services. The instructor can reach out to the student to ask how to make the learning environment more accessible but cannot demand the student to disclose information they do not feel comfortable sharing. Disability services has a role to play in educating and helping faculty work with students with disabilities.

Faculty are aware of what they know and what they do not, and in this study we learned that they would like more information made available to them to support students with SLD. Faculty do not need to attend faculty development meetings, sessions, or trainings. In this study faculty demonstrated and explained the need for resources, training and support. It is suggested that faculty take more responsibility in their professional development and attend the events DSS has and their colleges' faculty development office. To begin with faculty, within their own department may begin

conversations about ways they are working to create universal learning opportunities and then advance to understanding specific accommodations, and so forth.

Faculty also showed that they had no idea of what UDL for a classroom is or looks like. The participants did agree that training on UDL would help them better serve their students and create a greater learning environment. There would be a great benefit for faculty to do research and learn more about universal design. Jessica, the only participant to know what UDL was, shows the importance of UDL and how faculty should attend trainings to better support all students.

### *Students*

Students with learning disabilities are under no obligation to disclose their disability with the institution or their professors. In this study faculty found it easier to support and better accommodate the student when they understood what the student needed and what their disability was.

For students who feel that they need support from their faculty it can be beneficial to disclose not only to the DSS, but to their faculty. By disclosing with their specific instructor they are then able to discuss what their own particular needs are and work together to find the perfect balance of support and accommodation. The study identified that many faculty make assumptions based on accommodation or SLD knowledge and by having an open conversation with an instructor the ability to excel in the class would increase. Open communication between student and faculty will benefit the student in and out of the classroom.

Students with learning disabilities should also note that DSS is not only for receiving accommodation letters. DSS has a role in supporting students with disabilities.

Students should know that they can speak with their DSS director about issues, problems, or concerns they are having. Students need to understand that work with DSS is not a sign of weakness but strength in taking responsibility for their own success.

### ***DSS***

The office of DSS has various roles on different college campuses. The roles that DSS plays on a college campus is essential for the success of students with learning disabilities. In this study, faculty had only positive things to say about the staff in their DSS office. However, when participants were asked about how they would like more support from their DSS office they expressed many different types of resources and trainings they want.

There are many ways that DSS can collaborate across campus to make this information more accessible and adaptable by faculty. It should begin with the orientation of new faculty. The staff of the DSS should meet with these individuals as they begin their time at the institution to discuss their process, services, and how instructors can best support students with accommodation letters.

Developing a website for faculty only that provided information about students with disabilities could be very beneficial for all parties. The website could provide different types of accommodations and why they are needed. Along with that they could talk about the different types of disabilities that may require that accommodation. The website could also inform faculty about different types of disabilities and how they may prevent the student from fully engaging in the coursework. With this they could also share the ways in which their disability may help them succeed in the course as well as what other challenges they may face. Finally, the process for receiving accommodation

letters could be presented in a very clear and concise manner so faculty understand that process. Along with this information a whole section could be laid out to develop a universally designed curriculum and classroom setting. This could be type of “how to” section that would guide faculty in the development of their courses.

Most institutions have a faculty development center of some sort. Partnering with an office like this to identify ways to provide training and support to faculty around the topic of student disability could be quite helpful. These could be formal presentations, informal brown bag lunch discussions, along with newsletters or information packets throughout the year.

The Director of DSS could also work to attend annual college meetings where faculty are typically updated on information and provided insight about different topics. This would be a great opportunity to be seen by faculty, chairs, and deans as well as to provide support for questions or concerns that may be raised from semester to semester. It also keeps an open line of contact between the DSS and departments and colleges.

It would also be helpful for DSS to send the accommodation letter to the instructor as well as having the student provide it in class. On the letter could be a link to the website regarding the information about making the accommodation and resources available. This would help provide support to the instructor with additional information about how to provide the best learning environment for their students. Along with this faculty can be directed to reach out with questions to the staff in the DSS.

This study also showed that faculty do not know the many responsibilities and roles that DSS has on a college campus. DSS offices should reach out to each department and let them know that they are willing to help. Offering a Power Point on the resources

that their offices provides students and faculty can be beneficial for them. Also pParticipants expressed that if DSS provided a PowerPoint or flier with information for students afraid, nervous, or clueless on how to receive accommodations they would hand them out during the school year.

### **Further Research**

This research aimed to investigate how faculty perceive working with students with disabilities and where their knowledge comes from. There are different ways the study can be expanded to build upon this research to help our understanding of faculty perceptions on working with SLD.

One of the limitations to this study is that all of the participants were white women. Participants were randomly selected and the first four to respond became the participants for the study. Future research should include a more diverse set of faculty including men and individuals from different cultural and racial backgrounds.

This study was conducted with 4 tenure faculty members one of whom was a chair of their department. Doing a study like this solely with departmental chairs could provide a different perspective and new insight in to how to support faculty from a position like this. The study would aim to answer the question on how they mentor and educate their new faculty on how they support students with disabilities and how they inform faculty on utilizing DSS.

Studying faculty who are brand new to their roles to see what they know about students with learning disabilities before they begin their teaching experience could be interesting. Or interviewing them as they begin their role and first come in to contact with the accommodations process and tracking them throughout the semester would provide



even more insight in to the way we can continue to improve the student and faculty experiences.

Conducting this study at different types of institutions could also gain interesting and useful data. This study was conducted at a regional public institution. Doing this research at a large land-grant institution or small private liberal arts college would provide different sets of information that could be useful to those working in DSS.

### **Conclusion**

This study was conducted as a qualitative study that aimed to understand faculties' perceptions on working with students with learning disabilities. Four participants shared stories that showcased their own experiences working with students with disabilities and their campuses DSS. This research found that faculty knowledge about students with disabilities is based primarily on prior experiences with students, their own education background, or their personal lives. Faculty also want to work and enjoy working with their DSS, but need more information from DSS. Another finding was that faculty are not provided formal training or education on how to support the population of students with disabilities in preparation to teach at the collegiate level. Faculty want to communicate with DSS and other faculty members about concerns and questions surrounding SLD, but do not have opportunities.



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**Appendix A**  
**Email Invitation**

Hello,

My name is Ashley Jezik. I am a 2<sup>nd</sup> year graduate student in the College of Student Affairs completing thesis under the direction of Dr. Dianne Timm. You have been randomly selected to be a participant in the study on Faculties Perceptions of Students with Learning Disabilities. These interviews will be scheduled based on your availability and can be completed over Zoom or in person based on your preference. You will not be identified as a participant in any part of the process by anyone but myself as the lead researcher. If you would like to accept this invitation, please email me back and we will select a date and time to start the interview.

**Appendix B**  
**Interview Questions**

1. What do you teach and how long have you been here?
  - a. Undergraduate courses?
  - b. Graduate courses?
2. What do you think is the most rewarding part about teaching in the college environment today?
3. What do you think is the most challenging part about teaching in the college environment today?
4. Tell me about your training to be a college instructor.
  - a. As part of your doctorate/terminal degree preparation?
  - b. At this institution?
  - c. Any other training?
5. Tell me about a student you worked with who had a documented disability?
  - a. How did you come to know about the disability?
  - b. What did you do to work with the student?
6. What do you know about the accommodations process for students with documented disabilities?
  - a. Tell me about the first time you dealt with an accommodation process.
  - b. How often have you worked with the disability service office? What has that experience been like?
  - c. What do you like and dislike about this process?
  - d. What would you change about it if you could?
7. You know that this study is about the accommodations process with students with disabilities. I would like to know what your definition of disability is?
  - a. Are you aware of different types of specific learning disabilities? How does this influence your teaching styles?
  - b. What are the steps in the accommodation process?
  - c. What challenges do you think students with specific learning disabilities face in college?

- d. What challenges do you face in providing support for students needing accommodations?
  - i. Can you tell me a time about when you were confused about an accommodations process?
  - ii. Can you tell me a time where you couldn't meet the students request for accommodations?
8. What do you see as disability services responsibility in supporting this population?
  - a. Are you aware of laws related to students with specific learning disabilities? How did you come to know this information?
  - b. What is your role in supporting this population?
  - c. On a scale of 1-10 with 1 being needs a lot of improvement and 10 being we are almost perfect where would you rate your teaching, department, college, university in providing academic support for students with specific learning disabilities? Why?
  - d. What type of further support would you like to receive from disability services?
9. What do you see as disability services responsibility in supporting faculty in the classroom?
  - a. What is this relationship like?
  - b. How would you like to see services provided?
10. Are you familiar with the term "universal design?" If yes, please explain. If no (researcher will explain what it means)
  - a. How have you utilized universal design for your classes?
  - b. Have you received training on universal design? Tell me about that.
  - c. How comfortable are you with utilizing universal design?
11. What further training and support would you like to see in being able to better serve all students, but especially those with specific learning disabilities?
12. As you prepared for this interview were there things you thought I would ask you or that you had prepared to talk about that I haven't addressed?

