Postsecondary Disability Service Providers' Perceived Usefulness of a Model Summary of Performance

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Abstract

This study investigated postsecondary disability service providers' perceived usefulness of a Model Summary of Performance that was constructed for a student with a language-based learning disability. The 298 participants were asked to consider the content within the (a) student's test scores, (b) rationale for accommodations, (c) history and/or use of accommodations, (d) report writer's recommendations, and (e) student input sections of a Model Summary of Performance, and then to rate each section regarding the perceived usefulness of the information for making accommodation decisions. Analysis of variance was used to determine if the perceived usefulness of each section varied as a function of the disability service providers' (a) highest degree earned, (b) discipline or field of study, (c) source of training for the interpretation of disability documentation, and (d) years of experience in postsecondary disability services. Overall, regardless of status within each group, disability service providers rated each part of the Model Summary of Performance as at least very useful. One significant group difference was discovered as disability service providers with less than five years experience perceived the report writer's recommendations to be more useful than those with greater than 10 years of experience. Limitations and implications of the present study, as well as areas for future research, are discussed.

Keywords: Summary of performance, disability service providers

In 2004, the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act ([IDEA] Federal Register, 2006) changed the purpose of documentation for students with disabilities from outcomes-oriented to results-oriented (Sitlington & Clark, 2007). As part of this philosophical shift, IDEA (2004) requires Local Educational Agencies (LEAs) to provide students with disabilities who exit secondary education due to graduation or exceeding the age of eligibility for services a summary of their academic achievement and functional performance, including recommendations to assist students in reaching their postsecondary goals. This transition document is referred to as a Summary of Performance (SOP) and must include a summary of academic achievement, a summary of functional performance, and recommendations for helping the student meets his or her post school goals (§300.305(e)(3)). Specific guidelines do not exist regarding what information should be included in a student's SOP. Therefore, state educational agencies (SEAs) have independently developed forms and policies to guide school districts (Cortiella, 2007, p. 97).

Based upon a review of example SOP forms provided by the National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center (NSTTAC), the Nationally Ratified Summary of Performance Model Template is the most comprehensive. This template was developed by the National Transition Assessment Summit ([NTAS], 2005) over a two-year period and represents the collaborative efforts of secondary and postsecondary specialists, as well as representatives from numerous professional organizations. The Model SOP Template (SOP Template) prompts educators to include information regarding the student's (a) general background; (b) postsecondary goals; (c) summary of academic performance (e.g., reading, math, written language and learning skills) as well as cognitive and functional skills; (d) recommendations to assist the student in meeting postsecondary goals; and e) student input (National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities [NJCLD], 2007).

One context in which SOPs can provide valuable transition information is when a student seeks educational accommodations at a college or university. In postsecondary educational environments, Disability Service Providers (DSPs) determine what accommodations are reasonable for students with disabilities on a case-by-case basis, based upon the "functional impact" of the student's documented disability (Madaus, 2005; Wilhelm, 2003). For example, a DSP may determine that extended time to take exams is reasonable for a student with a learning disability, but that the functional impact of the same type of learning disability for another student does not qualify him or her for extended time. These judgments may be different among DSP professionals who have varying education, sources of training in disability services, and years of experience.

In a 2001 nationwide survey, DSPs reported an assortment of fields of study regarding their educational backgrounds. These disciplines included counseling/psychology (35.7%), education (28.9%), disability services (15.8%), vocational/adult (5.4%), and arts and science (14.2%; Whelley, Stodden, Harding, & Chang, 2001). In a similar survey, 23% of DSPs indicated that they had earned degrees in fields such as law, music, and reading (Dukes & Shaw, 2004). Similarly, the highest completed degrees of DSPs also differ. In a sample of personnel in disability services (n=485), 18% reported that they had earned a doctoral degree, 73% earned a master's degree, 7% earned a bachelor's degree, and 2% indicated that they had earned some other highest degree completed degree (Madaus, Banerjee, & McGuire, 2009). The DSPs in the same sample also indicated that they received training in interpreting disability documentation from conferences (65%) or an academic program (27%). Eight percent of the participants reported that they received no training at all (Madaus, Banerjee, & Hamblet, 2010). Furthermore, Madaus, Banerjee, and McGuire (2009) found that the majority of the DSPs reported more than 10 years of experience (59%), while 28% indicated having 5 to 10 years of experience, and 13% reported having less than five years of experience.

Differences in training and experience among DSPs are particularly relevant to explore because of the influence these factors may have upon the accommodation decisions they make. In particular, 53% of DSPs have reported that their "professional judgment" significantly impacts their conclusions regarding what postsecondary accommodations are reasonable (Gormley, Hughes, Block, & Lendman, 2005). The study's findings reported that DSPs indicated that report writer's recommendations, the rationale for previously provided accommodations, history of use or success of accommodations, test scores, and student input were also influential in their decision-making. The SOP Template includes each of these areas. Further investigation was necessary to explore if factors such as highest completed degree, field of study, source of training in disability services, or years of service impact a DSP's professional judgment when making accommodation decisions.

The usefulness of an SOP for accommodation decisions depends on the quality of the SOP. A recent study reported that 21% of states have adopted the SOP Template and require its use (Shaw, Keenan, Madaus, & Banerjee, 2010), suggesting that it is an appropriate structure for a well-developed SOP for this study. In 2007, Dukes, Shaw, and Madaus used the SOP Template to create a Model SOP to guide those involved in the transitioning of secondary students, particularly to college. Dukes et al.'s Model SOP was developed for a student with a language-based learning disability (reading and written expression disorders) who is transitioning to college; the participants in this survey rate the usefulness of the parts of the Model SOP for making accommodation decisions (Dukes et al., 2007). As language-based learning disorders account for 80% of learning disability diagnoses (Hudson, High, & Otaiba, 2007), the relevance of this study's results is increased as the content of the Model SOP includes disability-related information commonly seen by DSPs in postsecondary settings.

The present study was designed to contribute to the disability services literature by exploring the extent to which DSPs, one group of intended consumers of the federally mandated SOP, perceived information gleaned from the (a) test scores, (b) rationale for accommodations, (c) history of or use of accommodations (d) SOP writer's recommendations, and (e) student input sections of a Model SOP developed for a high school graduate with a language-based learning disability to be useful when making accommodation decisions. Another purpose of the study was to determine if DSPs' professional characteristics were related to their perceptions of the usefulness of distinct sections of a Model SOP. To accomplish this goal, the present study explored if (a) highest degree completed,

(b) discipline or field of study, (c) source of training on the interpretation of disability documentation, and (d) years of experience in postsecondary were related to DSPs' perceived usefulness of the test scores, rationale for previously used accommodations, history of or use of accommodations, SOP writer's recommendations, and student input sections of the Model SOP for making accommodation decisions. We hypothesized that the perceived usefulness of each section would increase with more education, with a field of study that historically includes disability-related content, with the presence of academic training in the interpretation of disability documentation, and with more years of experience in postsecondary disability services.

Method

Participants and Procedure

In order to survey DSPs on a national level, members of the Association on Higher Education And Disability (AHEAD) were directly emailed by the office of AHEAD's Executive Director on behalf of the researchers. An internet link was provided within a recruitment email for members who were interested in learning more about participating in this study. Three recruitment emails were used to obtain participants in the United States. The nature of the study, confidentiality assurances, and informed consent procedures were explained before participants gained access to the electronic survey. After providing informed consent, potential participants were then asked to affirm that they worked directly with students with disabilities at a postsecondary institution in the U.S. A response of "no" exited the respondent from the survey and a response of "yes" granted access to the survey. The actual survey was administered and data were collected through the technology services of AHEAD. The raw data were stored by AHEAD within a secure, password-protected computer database accessible only to the technology service personnel. At the conclusion of data collection, de-identified data were provided to the investigators in spreadsheet format.

Prior to proceeding to analyses, the demographic characteristics of the respondents were examined to determine if each respondent could be appropriately categorized under each independent variable and if each category contained enough participants to be included as a distinct group in statistical analyses. Regarding the independent variable *highest degree earned*, two participants selected "associates degree" and three participants indicated "other." These participants were omitted from the study. With respect to the independent variable *discipline or field of study*, only four participants selected "vocational/adult" as the focus of their educational program. Rather than omit these participants, they were combined with the "counseling/ psychology" category, as these fields are also helping professions whose training programs commonly include vocation-related content. The "counseling/psychology" category was then renamed "mental health/vocational." Ten participants selected "other" in response to their discipline or field of study. Because the "other" category included an open space on the survey to specify a field of study, these narrative responses could be examined to determine if they could be included in other categories within discipline or field of study variable. For example, open-ended responses such as "social work" were included in the "mental health/vocational" category and "special education" were included in the "education" category. Finally, seven respondents indicated "no training" in response to the question eliciting their previous training in interpreting disability documentation. These respondents were omitted from analyses because a group of seven participants is statistically insufficient to compare to the other categories under the *level of training* variable.

In cooperation with AHEAD, DSPs across the country examined the effectiveness of the Model SOP for determining accommodations for a student identified with a specific learning disability. Almost 300 DSPs completed the survey and, overall, the DSPs thought the SOP was very useful to extremely useful. The response rate for this study cannot be precisely calculated as it is unknown exactly how many of the 2,459 AHEAD members with known email addresses at the time of the survey literally received and read the recruitment email or how many DSPs failed to meet inclusionary criteria (e.g., did not work in a postsecondary setting in the U.S). From the available information, the best approximation of total membership of DSPs who participated in this study is 12%. Table 1 and Table 2 provide information regarding the institutional affiliations and professional characteristics of the study's participants. Most of the participants were employed at research institutions (38.3%) or public institutions (66.1%) and were employed at colleges or universities with over 10,000 students enrolled (53.4%). The

geographical area of participants was fairly evenly distributed among the midwest (29.2%), northeast (26.5%), southeast (27.5%), and west (16.1%) of the United States. The majority of DSPs indicated that their highest degree earned was a master's (74.1%). A relatively small difference exists between DSPs with counseling/psychology (38.9%) and education (34.6%) as their discipline or field of study. Nearly half of the DSPs reported that they obtained their training in reading disability documentation at their place of employment. Similarly, almost half of the DSPs have greater than 10 years of experience in postsecondary disability services.

Measures

Gormley et al. (2005) reported that test scores, the rationale for previously used accommodations, the history of use and success of the previously used accommodations, report writer's recommendations, and student input are all influential when DSPs make accommodation decisions for students with disabilities. These factors may also appear in the SOP document required under IDEA for exiting high school students with a disability. Dukes et al. (2007) developed a Model SOP based upon the SOP Template for a high school graduate with a language-based learning disability transitioning to postsecondary education to guide educators as to what type of information would be helpful to include in a SOP. This Model SOP includes headings and detailed information regarding the (a) student's test scores, (b) rationale for accommodations, (c) history, and/or use of accommodations, (d) report writer's recommendations, and (e) the student's input.

The SOP Usefulness Survey used in this study included the complete Model SOP published by Dukes et al. (2007) with the authors' permission. The Model SOP was revised to reflect test score information regarding the *Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children – IV* (Wechsler, 2003). Participants were asked to provide a rating of their perceived usefulness of the information obtained from each of the five aforementioned sections when making accommodation decisions in the postsecondary education setting. To complete this rating, participants used the following five point Likert scale: (1) extremely useful, (2) very useful, (3) somewhat useful, (4) a little useful, and (5) not useful. When interpreting the findings of this study, the reader is reminded that a lower total score corresponds to the perception of greater usefulness and a higher score corresponds to lower perceived usefulness. At the beginning of the survey, participants were asked to respond to 10 demographic questions such as the DSPs' discipline or field of study, highest degree completed, training on the interpretation of disability documentation, years of experience in postsecondary disability services, and characteristics about the institution at which they are employed.

Independent and Dependent Variables

The quasi-experimental design included four independent variables with multiple (nominal data) levels of each independent variable. First, participants were asked to report their highest degree completed: (a) doctorate, (b) masters, (c) bachelors, (d) associates, or (e) other. Second, participants were asked to provide their discipline or field of study: (a) counseling/psychology, (b) education, (c) related disability services, (d) arts and sciences, (e) vocational/adult, or (e) other. Third, participants were asked to report where they had received most of their training for the interpretation of disability documentation: (a) academic program, (b) conferences, workshops, symposia, (c) place of employment, or (d) no training. Finally, participants were asked to provide their number of years of experience in postsecondary disability services: (a) greater than 10 years, (b) 5 to 10 years, or (c) less than five years. The five dependent variables of this study are the ratings by DSPs of the perceived usefulness of the sections of the Model SOP: (a) student's test scores, (b) the rationale for accommodations, (c) the history, and/or use of accommodations, (d) the report writer's recommendations, and (e) the student input.

Results

The primary statistical procedure used in this study was analysis of variance (ANOVA). The statistical assumptions of independence, normality, and homogeneity of variance that are associated with ANOVA were tested prior to the analysis of each research question (Pallant, 2007). Homogeneity of variance was verified using Levene's test of equality of error variance and independence of responses were satisfied given the survey procedure implemented. With respect to normality of the data, the responses of the participants were skewed. That is, most participants rated the perceived usefulness of the sections of the Model SOP to be at least very useful to extremely useful, compared to

Table 1

Institutional Characteristics of Participants

Institution Demographics	*N*	Percent
Level of institution		
Research	114	38.3
Comprehensive	47	15.8
Baccalaurete	40	13.4
Two-year	77	25.8
Vocational	3	1.0
Control of the institution		
Private	98	32.9
Public	197	66.1
Enrollment at the institution		
Fewer than 500 students	1	0.3
500 - 1,999 students	41	13.8
2,000 - 4,999 students	54	18.1
5,000 - 9,999 students	42	14.1
At least 10,000 students	159	53.4
Geographical Area		
Midwestern region	87	29.2
Northeastern region	79	26.5
Southern region	82	27.5
Western region	48	16.1
Other	1	0.3

Note. Vocational = technical, trade, vocational, and professional; Comparisons of total respondents varies slightly due to "no responses" to some questions.

Table 2

Participants' Educational and Work Experience

Characteristic	*N*	Percent
Highest degree completed		
Doctorate	45	15.1
Master's	223	74.8
Bachelor's	24	8.1
Discipline or field of study		
Counseling/psychology	116	38.9
Education	103	34.6
Related disability services	28	9.4
Arts and sciences	49	16.4
Disability documentation training		
Academic program	73	24.5
Conferences, workshops, symposia	72	24.2
Place of employment	144	48.3
Postsecondary disability experience		
Greater than 10 years	143	48.0
5 - 10 years	71	23.8
Less than 5 years	82	27.5

Note. Comparisons of total respondents vary slightly due to "no responses" to some questions.

somewhat useful or not useful at all. However, in studies such as this one where large sample sizes are used, it is permissible to proceed with analyses (Creators of Statistica Data Analysis Software and Services, 2011; Hunter & May, 2003; Sawilowski, 2011). Furthermore, previously published studies that surveyed AHEAD membership also contained a similarly skewed distribution of some data (Brinckerhoff, McGuire, & Shaw, 2002; Gormley et al., 2005; Harbour, 2008; Madaus, 2005; Madaus et al., 2009; Shaw, Madaus, & Dukes, 2009; Whelley, 2002; Whelley et al., 2001).

The first research question sought to discern if DSPs' perceived usefulness of the test scores section of the Model SOP varied as a function of the DSPs' (a) highest degree completed, (b) discipline or field of study, (c) training on the interpretation of disability documentation, and (d) years of experience in postsecondary disability services. In order to analyze this research question, as well as the other research questions, four distinct one-way ANOVAs were computed. To illustrate, highest degree completed was considered the independent variable with doctorate, master's, and bachelor's as the three levels of the independent variable. The dependent variable was the DSPs' perceived usefulness of the test scores section. This ANOVA was not significant, $F(2, 285) = .20$, $p = .82$, $\acute{\eta}^2 = .001$, indicating that DSPs' perceived usefulness of the test scores section of the Model SOP did not vary as a function of highest degree earned. Next, discipline or field of study, with the levels of mental health/vocational, education, related disability services, and arts and sciences, was entered as the independent variable. This ANOVA was

also not significant, $F(3, 288) = .53$, $p = .66$, $\acute{\eta}2 = .006$. The final two ANOVAs for this research question were also insignificant. The perceived usefulness of the test scores section did not vary as a function of the source of the DSPs' disability documentation training, $F(2, 282) = .72$, $p = .49$, $\acute{\eta}^2 = .005$, or DSPs' years of experience in postsecondary disability services, $F(2, 289) = .88$, $p = .42$, $\acute{\eta}^2 = .006$. Table 3 displays perceived usefulness ratings of DSPs for each section of the Model SOP by independent variable.

To investigate if the perceived usefulness of information contained within the rationale of accommodations section of the Model SOP varied as a function of (a) highest degree completed, (b) discipline or field of study, (c) training on the interpretation of disability documentation, and (d) years of experience in postsecondary disability services, consistent with the analysis procedures above, four one-way ANOVAs were conducted. Each of the ANOVAs were insignificant: (a) highest degree completed, $F(2, 285) = .68$, $p = .52$, $\acute{\eta}^2 = .005$; (b) discipline or field of study, $F(3, 288) = 1.53$, $p = .21$, $\acute{\eta}^2 = .016$; (c) training on the interpretation of disability documentation, $F(2, 282) = 1.18$, $p = .31$, $\acute{\eta}^2 = .008$; (d) years of experience in postsecondary disability services, $F(2, 289) = 1.67$, $p = .19$, $\acute{\eta}^2 = .011$.

The third research question explored if the perceived usefulness of the history of use or success of accommodations section of the Model SOP varied as a function of the DSPs' (a) highest degree completed, (b) discipline or field of study, (c) training on the interpretation of disability documentation, and (d) years of experience in postsecondary disability services. Perceived usefulness of this section did not vary as a function of any of the independent variables: (a) highest degree completed, $F(2, 288) = 2.48$, $p = .09$, $\acute{\eta}^2 = .017$; (b) discipline or field of study, $F(3, 291) = .94$, $p = .42$, $\acute{\eta}^2 = .010$; (c) training on the interpretation of disability documentation, $F(2, 285) = .58$, $p = .56$, $\acute{\eta}^2 = .004$; (d) years of experience in postsecondary disability services, $F(2, 292) = 1.83$, $p = .16$, $\acute{\eta}^2 = .012$. The ANOVA for the highest degree completed did approach statistical significance with more education being related to decrease perceived usefulness of this section (see Table 3).

Regarding research question 4, DSPs' perceived usefulness of the report writer's recommendations did not vary as a function of highest degree completed, $F(2, 287) = .86$, $p = .42$, $\acute{\eta}^2 = .006$; (b) discipline or field of study, $F(3, 290) = .05$, $p = .99$, $\acute{\eta}^2 = .000$; or (c) training on the interpretation of disability documentation, $F(2, 284) = .31$, $p = .73$, $\acute{\eta}^2 = .002$. Perceived usefulness of the report writer's recommendations did vary significantly as a function of years of experience in postsecondary disability services, $F(2, 291) = 4.7$, $p = .01$. Approximately 3% of the variance in perceived usefulness of the report writer's recommendations could be explained by years of experience in postsecondary disability services ($\acute{\eta}^2 = .031$). However, this effect size value is less than the recommended minimum eta squared value of .04 that constitutes a practically significant difference, or a weak effect size (Ferguson, 2009). Post hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test indicated that the mean score for DSPs with greater than 10 years of experience ($M = 2.24$, $SD = 1.02$) was significantly different from DSPs with fewer than five years of experience ($M = 1.85$, $SD = .87$). The DSPs with 5-10 years of experience did not differ significantly from either of the other groups. This finding indicates that statistically, DSPs with less than five years of experience found the report writer's recommendations more useful than DSPs with greater than 10 years of experience.

The last research question targeted the extent to which DSPs' perceived usefulness of information included in the student input section of the Model SOP varied as a function of the DSPs' professional characteristics. Perceived usefulness of this section did not vary as a function of (a) highest degree completed, $F(2, 287) = .60$, $p = .55$, $\acute{\eta}^2 = .004$; (b) discipline or field of study, $F(3, 290) = .65$, $p = .59$, $\acute{\eta}^2 = .007$; (c) training on the interpretation of disability documentation, $F(2, 284) = .21$, $p = .81$, $\acute{\eta}^2 = .001$; or (d) years of experience in postsecondary disability services, $F(2, 291) = 1.94$, $p = .15$, $\acute{\eta}^2 = .013$.

Discussion

Gormley et al. (2005) found that test scores, the rationale for previously used accommodations, the history of use and success of the previously used accommodations, report writer's recommendations, and student input are influential when DSPs make accommodation decisions for students with disabilities. A Model SOP has been developed by Dukes et al. (2007) regarding a student with a language-based learning disability. The Model SOP includes headings and detailed information regarding test scores, the rationale for accommodations, history of use of and

Table 3

Descriptive and Effect Size Statistics Regarding Dependent Variables by Level of Independent Variable

Variables	*N*	*M*	*SD*	$\acute{\eta}^2$
Perceived usefulness of test scores				
Highest degree completed				.001
Doctorate degree	45	1.78	0.85	
Master's degree	220	1.79	0.91	
Bachelor's degree	23	1.91	0.95	
Total	288	1.8	0.90	
Discipline or field of study				.006
Counseling/psychology	116	1.75	0.88	
Education	99	1.77	0.84	
Related disability services	28	1.96	1.00	
Arts and sciences	49	1.86	1.00	
Total	292	1.79	0.90	
Disability documentation training				.005
Academic program	72	1.69	0.76	
Conferences, workshops, symposia	72	1.79	0.92	
Place of employment	141	1.85	0.96	
Total	285	1.80	0.90	
Postsecondary disability experience				.006
Greater than 10 years	143	1.72	0.88	
5 - 10 years	68	1.87	0.91	
Less than 5 years	81	1.85	0.91	
Total	292	1.79	0.90	
Perceived usefulness of rationale for accommodation				
Highest degree completed				.005
Doctorate degree	43	1.88	0.85	
Master's degree	221	1.75	0.81	
Bachelor's degree	24	1.67	0.87	
Total	288	1.76	0.82	
Discipline or field of study				.016
Counseling/psychology	114	1.85	0.83	
Education	101	1.73	0.81	
Related disability services	28	1.86	0.93	
Arts and sciences	49	1.57	0.68	
Total	292	1.76	0.81	

Variables	*N*	*M*	*SD*	$\hat{\eta}^2$
Disability documentation training				.008
Academic program	71	1.89	0.80	
Conferences, programs, symposia	71	1.79	0.77	
Place of employment	143	1.71	0.85	
Total	285	1.77	0.82	
Postsecondary disability experience				.011
Greater than 10 years	140	1.82	0.83	
5 - 10 years	70	1.80	0.89	
Less than 5 years	82	1.62	0.70	
Total	292	1.76	0.82	
Perceived usefulness of history of use or success of accommodations				
Highest degree completed				.017
Doctorate degree	45	2.13	0.79	
Master's degree	222	1.82	0.90	
Bachelor's degree	24	1.75	1.07	
Total	291	1.86	0.90	
Discipline or field of study				.010
Counseling/psychology	115	1.94	0.93	
Education	103	1.82	0.85	
Related disability services	28	1.96	1.07	
Arts and sciences	49	1.71	0.82	
Total	295	1.86	0.90	
Disability documentation training				.004
Academic program	73	1.92	0.89	
Conferences, workshops, symposia	72	1.94	0.90	
Place of employment	143	1.82	0.91	
Total	288	1.88	0.90	
Postsecondary disability experience				.012
Greater than 10 years	142	1.96	0.93	
5 - 10 years	71	1.77	0.85	
Less than 5 years	82	1.76	0.90	
Total	295	1.86	0.90	
Perceived usefulness of report writer's recommendations				
Highest degree completed				.006
Doctorate degree	45	2.20	0.97	
Master's degree	222	2.09	0.99	
Bachelor's degree	23	1.87	0.97	
Total	290	1.09	0.98	

Variables	*N*	*M*	*SD*	$\acute{\eta}^2$
Discipline or field of study				.000
Counseling/psychology	114	2.11	0.91	
Education	103	2.08	1.06	
Related disability services	28	2.11	0.99	
Arts and sciences	49	2.06	0.97	
Total	294	2.09	0.98	
Disability documentation training				.002
Academic program	72	2.17	0.92	
Conferences, workshops, symposia	72	2.11	0.96	
Place of employment	143	2.06	1.03	
Total	287	2.10	0.99	
Postsecondary disability experience				.031
Greater than 10 years	142	2.24	1.02	
5 - 10 years	71	1.99	0.89	
Less than 5 years	81	1.85	0.87	
Total	294	2.07	0.96	
Perceived usefulness of student input				
Highest degree completed				.004
Doctorate degree	45	1.67	0.85	
Master's degree	221	1.74	0.90	
Bachelor's degree	24	1.54	0.78	
Total	290	1.71	0.88	
Discipline or field of study				.007
Counseling/psychology	114	1.68	0.86	
Education	103	1.68	0.82	
Related disability services	28	1.71	0.85	
Arts and sciences	49	1.88	1.09	
Total	294	1.72	0.89	
Disability documentation training				.001
Academic program	72	1.65	0.84	
Conferences, workshops, symposia	71	1.75	0.84	
Place of employment	144	1.71	0.90	
Total	287	1.70	0.87	
Postsecondary disability experience				.013
Greater than 10 years	141	1.82	0.94	
5 - 10 years	71	1.61	0.87	
Less than 5 years	82	1.63	0.78	
Total	294	1.72	0.89	

Note. Scores are based on the following five point Likert scale: 1 = extremely useful, 2 = very useful, 3 = somewhat useful, 4 = a little useful, 5 = not useful. Each ή2 statistic refers to the effect size of the overall ANOVA for that IV and DV.

success of accommodations, report writer's recommendations, and student input. The purpose of this study was to examine DSPs' perceived usefulness of information included within a Model SOP and to determine if DSPs' perceived usefulness varied as a function of their highest degree earned, discipline or field of study, source of training in the interpretation of disability documentation, and years of employment in postsecondary education.

The results of this study suggest that the surveyed DSPs find a well-organized and detailed SOP helpful when making accommodation decisions. On average, DSPs rated information related to test scores, rationale for previously applied accommodations, history of use or success of accommodations, report writer's recommendations, and student input at least very helpful when making decisions for postsecondary students. These results, which are based upon a well-developed, comprehensive SOP, appear to support the mandate of IDEA that exiting students with disabilities be provided with documentation that outlines their functional needs and accommodations that may continue to prove helpful in subsequent educational and employment contexts.

The fact that DSPs found the test scores included in the Model SOP to be very helpful is not surprising given the extent to which DSPs are known to work with test scores when making eligibility decisions and subsequent accommodation decisions (Lindstrom, 2007; Ofiesh, Hughes, & Scott, 2004). We hypothesized that those with more education, those who studied in the field of education, those who were trained in reading disability documentation, and those with more years of experience would rate the test scores as significantly more useful. However, these hypotheses were not supported by the data. Perceived usefulness of the test scores did not significantly differ according to the highest degree earned, discipline or field of study, training in the interpretation of disability documentation, or years of employment in postsecondary education.

Another factor that may influence DSPs' accommodation decisions is the stated rationale for previously used accommodations (Gormley et al., 2005). By understanding why specific accommodations were provided in the past, the DSP can determine the circumstances under which the same accommodations may be necessary in the college setting. The study hypothesized that DSPs with more education, who studied in the field of education, who were trained in reading disability documentation, and who had more years of experience would find the rationale for previously applied accommodations more useful compared to others within each grouping. No statistical differences were found among DSPs in this regard.

Similar findings occurred regarding DSPs' perception of data related to the historical use of accommodations and the success of those accommodations when making decisions regarding the eligibility for accommodations in college. The perceived usefulness of this information did not vary by highest degree earned, discipline or field of study, training in the interpretation of disability documentation, or years of employment in postsecondary education. Lindstrom (2007) proposed that knowing accommodations used in the past, and how successfully those accommodations were for the individual, is critical when determining appropriate accommodations for postsecondary students with reading and written expression disorders, explaining that the effectiveness of accommodations varies among students with the same diagnosis. It is interesting to note that a difference regarding highest degree earned approached significance, with DSPs with more advanced degrees finding this section of the SOP less useful than those with less advanced degrees. It could be the case that DSPs with greater education rely more on their own knowledge of what should be effective for a language-based learning disability than on evidence from the student's educational history.

When reviewing the psychoeducational evaluations of postsecondary students, DSPs have indicated that the report writer's recommendations are the most useful section when making service delivery decisions (Ofiesh & McAfee, 2000). It was expected that all groupings of DSPs in this study would find the report writer's recommendations included in the Model SOP to be useful. Although a significant difference was not found regarding highest degree earned, discipline or field of study, or source of disability documentation training, DSPs with greater than 10 years of experience perceived the report writer's recommendations to be less useful than DSPs with less than five years of experience. One might infer from this finding that DSPs with fewer than five years of experience are less confident when making accommodation decisions than those with greater than 10 years of experience. This may then lead the less experienced DSP to rely more upon the report writers' recommendations. Another possible explanation for this finding is that DSPs with greater than 10 years of experience may be more likely

to question the value of recommendations for postsecondary education written by an educator in secondary education due to differences in the nature and rigor of the educational environments. All this said, all groups of DSPs still found the recommendations included in the Model SOP to be at least very useful.

DSPs often consider student input when making accommodation decisions (Gormley et al., 2005; Sharby & Roush, 2009), and this information is included on the Model SOP. In most cases, a postsecondary student either has a face-to-face interview with a professional or completes a questionnaire. However, students are often nervous and may limit the information they share with someone whom they just met. The student input in the Model SOP provides information that a DSP may not obtain during initial interviews. For example, it describes the amount of support the student was provided in high school and the student's perception of the effectiveness of these accommodations. DSPs of all groupings perceived the student input included on the Model SOP to be at least very useful; no differences were found by group regarding this dependent variable. It appears that a detailed SOP may reduce the need for extensive interviewing and eliminate the need for additional questionnaires, regardless of the educational level, discipline or field of study, source of disability training, or years of experience of the DSP.

Implications for Policy and Practice

Under IDEA (2004), the intent of mandating SOPs is to help students with disabilities make a smooth transition from secondary to postsecondary environments. With respect to the transition to postsecondary education, DSPs are the professionals within the college or university that receive the SOP and use it for decision-making. The present investigation found that DSPs perceived the information included in the Model SOP to be at least very useful when making accommodation decisions for a student with a language-based learning disability. This result supports the relevance of the SOP mandate under IDEA in as much as learning disabilities and DSPs are involved. However, the comprehensiveness and level of detail of the Model SOP used in this study are not necessarily representative of the SOPs received by DSPs. IDEA does not provide specific guidelines about what must be included in a SOP. Policy makers may consider requiring the information recommended by the NTAS (2005) and included in Dukes et al.'s (2007) Model SOP to be included in all SOPs given the fact that DSPs, one postsecondary constituency, perceived the information to be useful. State and local education agencies might consider additional training for secondary educators who are charged with writing SOPs to promote the writing of similarly comprehensive SOPs.

As secondary educators are compelled to complete SOPs for transitioning students, it is encouraging that DSPs regardless of degree, discipline or field of study, source of disability training, or postsecondary disability experience are likely to perceive the SOP to be very useful if the SOP is comprehensive in nature. In short, this study provides evidence that DSPs value the result of the labor of secondary educators who produce comprehensive SOPs. Additionally, consistent and significant differences among those within a group (e.g., discipline or field of study, or highest degree earned) could signal the need for rigorous DSP training standards. At least with respect to the perceived usefulness of documentation, the present findings do not suggest this is necessary. Finally, this study only investigated the perceived usefulness of information included on a Model SOP and did not ask the participants to make actual decisions in order to rate their effectiveness. Additional information in this area would inform policy and practice.

Study Limitations and Future Research

The results of this study must be interpreted in light of the fact that the participants only included members of AHEAD, an international organization that includes postsecondary DSPs. It is possible that members of AHEAD are more interested and better informed regarding disability concerns, perhaps through the activities and publications of the organization, than are other DSPs who do not belong to AHEAD. Additionally, DSPs who are members of an international organization may have a more developed professional identity that could foster investment in disability-related information. Future studies should consider recruiting DSPs who are not members of AHEAD. Another limitation of this study is that AHEAD members were recruited through the organization's bank of member email addresses. This may not have resulted in a representative sample of all AHEAD DSPs as only members who provided an email address for increased contact with the organization, a possible indicator of professional connectedness and commitment, would be able to participate. Recruiting only AHEAD members that desired increased contact with the national

organization may be related to the fact that very few respondents reported having no training in the interpretation of reading disability documentation. As a result, the perceptions of DSPs who lacked this type of training could not be measured. Further investigation into DSPs' training on the interpretation of disability documentation, including SOPs, is needed.

As previously stated, this study sought to establish the perceived usefulness of information contained with a Model SOP. Future studies should investigate the extent to which the information contained within actual SOPs, which may vary in level of detail, impact DSPs' accommodation decisions. Furthermore, this study asked DSPs to rate the perceived usefulness of information contained within a Model SOP. It remains unknown, for example, is if there are other categories of information or details that DSPs would find useful if they had been included within the Model SOP. Future studies should explore if there are additional types of information that DSPs believe should be included on an effective SOP and how the inclusion of this information would impact their decision-making.

The findings of this study are limited to the type of information and level of detail contained in the Model SOP for a student with a language-based learning disability. The study did not investigate if there is additional information that DSPs would find useful when making accommodation decisions for students with other disabilities. The SOP Template was developed to be used for students with a broad range of disabilities, but the Model SOP used in this study was designed for a student with a language-based disability. Generalization of these findings to SOPs involving other disabilities should be made with great caution. Further studies are needed to investigate the perceived usefulness of SOPs developed for students with other disabilities, such as Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder or deafness.

Finally, the interpretation of the results of this study is restricted to postsecondary education as the transition setting. Students exit postsecondary education with varying degrees and types of disabilities, and they transition to settings other than colleges and universities, including vocational training programs, the workplace, and residential living to name a few. Future research might study the perceived and actual usefulness of SOPs for professionals who work with persons with disabilities in those contexts.

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