

The Journal of Postsecondary Education and Disability: From Past to Present

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Abstract

To recognize the 30th anniversary of the *Journal of Postsecondary Education and Disability (JPED)*, every journal publication was analyzed to determine topics covered and characteristics of the samples studied. This article describes the development of a taxonomy to classify the topical areas examined in the field of postsecondary education and disability, as well as within *JPED*. Results indicate that most articles were concentrated at the program or institution level, followed by articles on students, then articles focused on the development of new constructs in the field, and, last, articles about faculty and non-disability support staff members. Trends over time and implications for future researchers are presented.

Keywords: Postsecondary disability services, research topics, samples, trends over time

Although the *Journal of Postsecondary Education and Disability (JPED)* was first published in the winter of 1987, its origins date back to 1978 and the founding of the Association on Higher Education And Disability (AHEAD), originally known as the Association on Handicapped Student Service Programs in Postsecondary Education (AHSSPPE). In an attempt to promote communication among professionals in the nascent field, the organization published a newsletter called the *ALERT*. As the membership grew, the AHSSPPE leadership established an editorial board to examine the production of a series of monographs and, in the winter of 1983, the first *AHSSPPE: Bulletin of the Association on Handicapped Service Programs in Post-Secondary Education* was issued (Bonney, 1983). Known as the *AHSSPPE Bulletin* (Lesh, 1987), the purpose of early issues was to share information among disability service providers. Issues included sections titled "Speaking Out," "Campus Happenings," "Member News," "Legal and Legislative News," as well as a research-based "Feature" article related to providing disability services. Four volumes of the *AHSSPPE Bulletin* were published between 1983 and 1987.

In 1987, the *AHSSPPE Bulletin* was renamed the *Journal of Postsecondary Education and Disability (JPED)*. Then AHSSPPE President Pat Pierce (1987) commented that, with the change, *JPED* would reflect "the field, rather than association news" and would focus "on academic and scholarly articles as well as practical information from service providers in the field" (p. 2). According to the editor (Lesh, 1987), this change reflected "the growth and development of the field of postsecondary education and disability and will give us, as practitioners, a vehicle for exchange of information that is both theoretical and practical" (p. 1). Additionally, the editor called for "Feature Articles" that were both research- and theory-based, commenting "because ours is a relatively new field, we have a unique opportunity to make an impact by researching *and* writing about the various aspects" (p. 1, emphasis original). In addition, the editor solicited articles that were "Practical Applications from the Field" and presented "innovative and practical programs...of direct practical value to those in the field" (Lesh, 1987, p. 1). "Book Reviews," "Research in Progress," and articles about "Comments, Opinions, and Issues" were also solicited.

Thirty years after the first issue of the *AHSSPPE Bulletin*, and more than a quarter century since being renamed *JPED*, the journal continues its mission to serve as a scholarly outlet for the field of postsecondary disability services. *JPED*'s website states that the journal is:

The leading forum for scholarship in the field of postsecondary disability support services...bringing to the field scholarly publications on a variety of related topics that emphasize research, issues, and trends related to the theory and practice of postsecondary disability services (AHEAD, 2014a).

Currently, the journal solicits articles that include "Research," "Integration," "Innovation," and "Policy Analysis," as well as "Practice Brief Manuscripts" that describe practices that could eventually lead to empirical studies (*JPED* Author Guidelines, 2014).

According to McFarland, Williams, and Miciak (2013), "professional journals provide researchers and practitioners alike a means by which they may stay informed of such trends and issues as well as the latest research" (p. 60) and, in so doing, influence policy, practice, and professional development. Plotner, Shogren, and Strauser (2011) echoed this point, noting, "professional journals play a key role in disseminating knowledge and in the development for content for professional education" (p. 28). Indeed, of the 1,342 published articles on disability and higher education between 1958 and 2012, 25% were published in *JPED*, clearly reflecting the journal's importance as an outlet for scholarly work (Dukes et al., 2014).

Given *JPED*'s critical role as a knowledge disseminator in the field of postsecondary disability services, conducting an analysis of articles published in the journal throughout its history can provide valuable insight into the field as a whole. Such an examination can help to identify trends in research, as well as areas that are in need of additional study (Madaus et al., 2013; McFarland et al., 2013). Additionally, it can help to "identify with whom sufficient research has – or has not – been conducted" (Madaus et al., 2013, p. 2) and to identify evidence-based practices and the populations with which they have been used effectively (Horner, Carr, Halle, McGee, Odom, & Wolery, 2005). Moreover, an examination of this nature can serve as a basis for the development of standards of research on higher education and disability. The 30th anniversary of *JPED* provides an opportune time to conduct such an analysis.

The purpose of this study was to examine the broad and secondary topical areas represented in each article published over the 30-year history of *JPED* ($n = 336$).

Articles were also examined to determine which presented original data (e.g., quantitative or qualitative) and which did not present original data. Of the articles that were data-based, information on the samples used and location of the studies were codified. Finally, trends over time were analyzed.

Method

The results of this study are part of a larger coding project, in which articles ($n = 1,342$) addressing postsecondary education and disability published between 1955 and 2012 were analyzed (Literature Mapping Group, 2014). For the present study, only articles published in *JPED* ($n = 336$) were examined. Hardcopies of volumes 1 to 4 of the *AHSSPPE Bulletin* were located, while issues of *JPED* from 1987 to 2012 were accessed through electronic databases. Volumes 5 to 8 were compiled as a single document resume (Lesh & Ozer, 1990) made available via ERIC, while volumes 9 to 25 were retrieved from the AHEAD website. Each electronic article was uploaded to a cloud server to allow the research team remote access.

Domain Development

No taxonomy exists for organizing the postsecondary disability scholarly literature. Thus, the research team initially identified a set of categories, called domains, which reflected the topics covered in published articles broadly related to disability services in higher education. An initial set of domains and corresponding topics within each (subdomains) were categorized based on a cursory review of relevant articles. Next, articles from 10 issues of *JPED* were reviewed to determine how those articles fit into the initial domains and subdomains. Revisions were made, and the domains and subdomains were examined by two prior editors of *JPED* to capitalize on their broad knowledge of the extant literature in the field. Based upon their feedback, the domains were again evaluated, with two reviewers for each article, through a review of five additional issues of *JPED*. Inter-rater agreement for this review was 100%, and the domain definitions were again refined.

The resulting four domains, their definitions, and corresponding subdomains were sent to a panel of eight former *JPED* editors for content validation. They were asked to rate the extent to which the definitions were clear, the extent to which the subdomains fit into the broader domain (using a 4-point Likert scale), and to provide suggestions related to any missing domains and subdomains. Reviewers indicated they "agreed" or "strongly agreed" that the definitions were clear and that the subdomains fit within the respective

domains. Suggestions related to missing areas or recommendations that terms be clarified were reviewed by the research team. Following this the domain definitions and corresponding subdomains were finalized (see Table 1).

Inclusion and exclusion criteria were also established. To be included in the study, the article had to be about postsecondary education for students with disabilities (broadly considered to include disability programs and services, faculty and non-disability support staff, and constructs). Articles primarily about secondary students in transition, transition-aged programs, non-degree-granting postsecondary programs, or college students without disabilities were excluded from the study.

Instrument Development

The research team used an iterative process to develop the electronic coding instrument (available from the first author on request). An initial pilot instrument was developed based upon a similar coding project related to secondary transition (Carter et al., 2013; Madaus et al., 2013) and adapted for the present study. Articles were coded as to whether they included original data and whether study location, sample size, and participant demographics were reported. Additionally, articles were coded for research methodology, domain, and subdomain categorization. Across the coding sheet, 148 choices were possible. The research team conducted three rounds of pilot coding and instrument revisions to ensure that the directions were clear and the survey skip logic was accurate, and to determine potential errors in the coding process.

Coding Process

Each article was given a unique identification number, which allowed the coding to be linked to the citation and results to be linked to each research team member for reliability calculations. Two members of the research team coded each article with one being randomly assigned as the primary coder. When disagreements in the coding of items were identified, the two coders met to rectify discrepancies. When agreement could not be reached, a third reviewer coded the article. The overall reliability (calculated as percent agreement) was 0.93 and reliability measures for each domain can be found in Table 1.

Several of the initial subdomains were collapsed in order to facilitate analysis. For example, the Student-Level Studies domain included 13 subdomain options. However, because of the relatively small number of articles coded ($n = 336$), several of the subdomains contained cell sizes too small for analysis. Thus, the 13

student-level subdomains with similar themes (e.g., the mainstream technology use and assistive technology use subdomains) were collapsed to form the mainstream/assistive technology use subdomain resulting in a total of eight subdomains for analysis purposes. Likewise, the Program or Institution-Level domain was reduced from 16 subdomains to six; the Faculty or Non-Disability Support Staff-Level domain from seven to three; and the Construct Development-Level domain from seven to three subdomains.

In order to analyze trends over time, the thirty years of the journal were broken into six-year increments resulting in five evenly distributed reporting periods, and enabling each period to have sufficient data points for analysis.

Results

In total, 336 articles published in *JPED* from 1983 to 2012 were reviewed. Fifty-three (15.8%) articles did not meet the inclusion criteria and, therefore, were not included in subsequent analyses. The remaining 283 articles are described. It should be noted that seven articles (2%) met the study's inclusion criteria, but did not fit clearly within the domain/subdomain structure outlined above. Figure 1 shows the number of articles published each year that fit the inclusion criteria. It should also be noted that there were no issues published in 1991 or 1999, and that the number of published articles steadily increased over the past five-year period (2007 to 2012).

Domains/Subdomains

As described above, articles were sorted into broad domains and then respective subdomains to allow for aggregated analyses of topics covered in the journal. Thirty-six percent ($n = 101$) of the articles published in *JPED* were coded as fitting the Disability Program or Institution-Level domain. The majority of these (57.4%, $n = 58$) provided general program descriptions, while 25.7% ($n = 26$) described programs for specific cohorts of students (e.g., students with psychiatric disabilities), and 22.8% ($n = 23$) described institutional compliance or policies. An additional 13.9% described the professional experiences of disability services staff members. Of these, 67 (66%) did not present original data. Of the 34 articles (34%) that presented original data, 76% ($n = 26$) were descriptive quantitative studies while 14.7% were qualitative studies and 9% utilized mixed methods designs. No articles utilized a group or single subject experimental design.

Table 1

Domain Descriptions, Subdomains, and Inter-Rater Agreement

Domain	<i>n</i>	Domain description	Subdomains	<i>n^a</i>	Percent agreement
Student-level studies	92	Articles describe experiences and/or perceptions of students with disabilities in and after higher education.	Experiences, perceptions, knowledge, and attitudes of SWD	62	0.92
			Access, accommodations, adjustments	16	
			Profiles/statistics of SWD and graduates	16	
			Learning/using study skills or learning strategies	10	
			Mainstream/assistive technology use	9	
			Career development	5	
			Self-determination	5	
			Other	2	
Program or institution-level studies	101	Articles describe service provision by the disability services office in a higher education institution. They can also relate to institutional policies and procedures pertaining to students with disabilities.	Description of disability programs	58	0.91
			Programs for specific cohorts	26	
			Institutional compliance, policies/procedures	23	
			Policies and procedures	21	
			Experience, knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, and professional development of disability service providers	14	
			Other	5	
			Other	5	
Faculty/non-disability support staff-level studies	38	Articles describe knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs of faculty and non-disability services personnel to enhance access to higher education for students with disabilities. They can also relate to education or support for faculty and staff in this practice.	Knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, training, and teaching practices of faculty	32	0.96
			Knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, training, and practices of non-disability support staff	9	
			Other	1	
			Other	1	
Construct Development-level studies	45	Articles describe development, evaluation, or validation of a variable that including development/validation of assessment instruments, evaluation metrics, theoretical models of service delivery, standards of practice, or ethics. The variable must be under proposal, in development, or being used in practice to gather empirical evidence.	Conceptual models, service delivery instruction (e.g., Universal Design)	28	0.93
			Other (including disability studies, evaluation metrics, standards of practice)	12	
			Assessment instruments (development, validation, use to develop diagnostic profiles)	5	

Table 1 (Continued)

No clear fit	7	Articles meet criteria for inclusion, but do not meet criteria for domains.	1.00
Does not fit criteria	53	Articles do not meet criteria for inclusion within the study.	1.00
Total	336		0.93

Note. SWD = Students with Disabilities.
^aArticles can fit one or more subdomains.

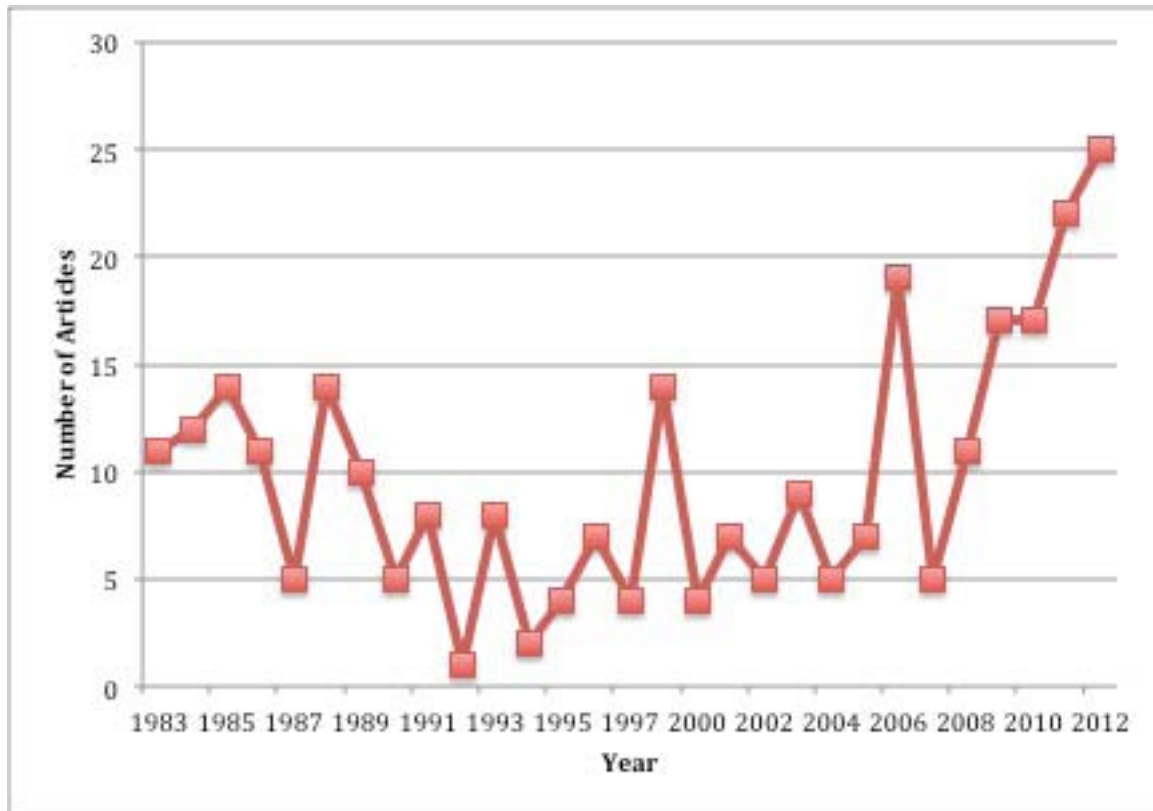


Figure 1. Number of articles meeting inclusion criteria by year.

The Student-Level domain contained the second largest set of articles (32.5%; $n = 92$). The vast majority of these (67.4%; $n = 62$) described the experiences of students, while 17.4% ($n = 16$) focused on student access and accommodations and 17.4% ($n = 16$) reported statistics on students with disabilities. Eighty (87%) of the articles presented original data. Of these, 44% were descriptive quantitative studies and 35% were qualitative in nature. Fourteen percent utilized mixed methods and 4% employed group designs. The Construct Development-Level domain contained 45 (16%) articles. Of these, the majority (62%; $n = 28$) were about conceptual models of service delivery, with 27% labeled as “other,” including such topics as evaluation metrics and standards of practice. Twenty-eight of the Construct Domain-Level articles (62%) did not contain original data. Of the articles that presented original data, 41% were descriptive quantitative and 29% were qualitative studies. Finally, 13% of the articles were coded as the Faculty or Non-Disability Staff-Level domain, with 84% ($n = 32$) of the articles focused on faculty, and 24% on professional staff. Seventeen (45%) did not present original data. Of the articles that presented original data, 57% were descriptive quantitative studies.

Study Demographics

Slightly more than half, or 54.4% of the articles ($n = 154$), presented original data while 45.6% ($n = 129$) were articles that described programs, policies, laws, or other non-data based topics. Faggella-Luby et al. (this issue) present more detail regarding studies with original and non-original data as well as trends over time and by domain. The 154 articles that presented original data were further examined to determine a variety of “demographic” variables, including study setting, sample size, and information about study participants (e.g., disability type, class standing, gender and ethnicity). The vast majority, or 87% ($n = 134$), was conducted in the United States, 8% ($n = 13$) were conducted in Canada, and 4.5% ($n = 7$) were conducted in other countries. Likewise, a majority of the studies (81.2%) were conducted at 4-year universities or colleges in the United States ($n = 125$) versus 27% that were conducted at 2-year colleges in the United States ($n = 41$) and 13% that were conducted at international institutions ($n = 20$). Finally, 64% of the studies ($n = 98$) included college or university students, while 44% ($n = 68$) included non-university students (e.g., faculty, staff) as participants.

Sample characteristics. The sample sizes of the studies featuring students ($n = 98$) were broken into four groups for additional analysis: 1-10; 11-50; 51-

100; and 100+ students. Over a third of the studies ($n = 32$, or 33%) had sample sizes of more than 100 students, followed by studies with 11-50 students ($n = 30$ or 31%) and those with 51-100 students ($n = 21$ or 21%). Each study was also examined to determine the race/ethnicity, disability type, gender, and class standing of the sample members. In order to be counted for analysis, data had to be presented with frequency counts for each category and for each cohort within the category. Studies that reported percentages only were not included. Only 71.4% of the studies ($n = 70$) presented clear information on the disability types in the sample, followed by 52% ($n = 51$) of the studies that provided clear information on the gender of the sample, 22.5% ($n = 22$) on the class standing of the sample, and 18.3% ($n = 18$) on the race/ethnicity of the sample.

All but one of the studies that included clear information about the racial/ethnic makeup of their sample included individuals of European descent (94%; $n = 17$), 50% ($n = 9$) included individuals who were African-American, 33% ($n = 6$) included individuals who were described as Hispanic, and 33% ($n = 6$) included individuals who were categorized as Other. All of the studies that included information on gender ($n = 51$) included female participants while most of the studies (92% or $n = 47$) also included male participants. Of the 22 studies that included information about class standing, only six studies (27.2%) included information on graduate students and six included alumni, while no studies reported information on individuals who had dropped out of college. Students with learning disabilities were in 57% of the studies ($n = 40$), followed by students with orthopedic impairments (37%; $n = 26$), visual impairments (30%; $n = 21$), and hearing impairments (26%; $n = 18$). Twenty-four percent ($n = 17$) of the articles also included students without disabilities. In regard to studies with non-student participants, faculty ($n = 28$) and disability service providers ($n = 26$) were the most represented categories.

Trends Over Time

Domains/subdomains. As noted, most of the articles published in *JPED* were categorized into the Disability Program or Institution-Level domain. This was especially true during the first six years of the journal when an average of 6.5 articles per year were categorized in this domain, compared to the next largest domain, Student-Level studies ($n = 92$), which had an average of 1.7 articles per year during this period. Since then, the relative proportion of Program or Institution-Level articles decreased over time, with the exception of the past six years (2007 to 2012), during which there has been a resurgence in the number of

articles in this domain and with a particular focus on disability service providers ($X = 5$ articles per year). Articles that described general disability service programs were most common, especially in the first six years of the journal ($X = 3.67$). The frequency of these articles dropped over the next 18 years, to an average of less than one per year, and then increasing to an average of 2.83 in the period from 2007 to 2012. The second most common type of article described programs for specific cohorts of students, with an average of approximately one per year published in the first six years. This decreased to an average of 0.2 articles in each year of the three six-year periods that followed, and then increased to average of 2.2 in the period from 2007 to 2012. In contrast, the Student-Level Studies domain steadily increased over time from an average of 1.7 in the first six years of the journal to 5.7 in the last six years (2007 to 2012).

Articles in the Faculty or Non-Disability Support Staff-Level domain were most focused on campus faculty in each of the six-year periods. In fact, articles about faculty increased over time, with five published in the first six-year period and then increasing to eight and fifteen in the last two six-year periods respectively (2001 to 2006 and 2007 to 2012).

Articles categorized within the Construct Development-Level domain were primarily focused on conceptual development (e.g., Universal Design). Eleven articles were published in both of the two recent 6-year periods from 2001 to 2006 and 2007 to 2012.

Study demographics. The number of published articles that featured original data steadily increased over the thirty years of the journal. In the first six-year period, only 17 out of 67 articles featured original data (an average of 2.8 articles per year). In comparison, during the last six-year period (2007 to 2012), 63 out of 98 published articles contained original data (an average of 10.5 articles per year). The number of studies located in the United States increased over time from an average of 2.72 per year for the first eighteen years to 7.1 during the last twelve years. The studies taking place in non-U.S. locations were sporadically included over the last 18 years (an average of less than one per year).

Sample characteristics. As noted, articles with original data were then analyzed for information about sample characteristics. Articles that contained samples of 11 to 50 students increased from a mean of 0.2 during the first six-year period to 2.2 during the period from 2007 to 2012, while the average number of articles with samples of more than 100 students increased from 0.5 in 1983 to 1988, to 2.83 in 2007 to 2012. Articles clearly describing disability categories being studied increased from an average of 0.7 articles per

year in 1983 to 1988, to 5.3 in 2007 to 2012. Likewise, articles that clearly described the gender of the sample members increased from an average of 0.7 in 1983 to 1988, to 3.6 in 2007 to 2012.

Discussion

Areas of Research

Throughout its thirty year history, the greatest percentage of articles published in *JPED* were concentrated in the Program or Institution-Level domain, which describe service provision by the disability services office in a higher education institution, as well as institutional policies and procedures related to students with disabilities. Given the journal's initial focus on sharing information among service providers, it is understandable that the most common type of articles published describes disability service programs in general, followed by those that describe program models for specific cohorts of students and policies and procedures for ensuring institutional compliance. It is interesting that the frequency of these descriptive articles decreased over time, but increased in the most recent analysis period from 2007 to 2012. This is possibly a function of the curvilinear number of articles published in the journal (see Figure 1), but it is also possibly a reflection of articles that described services for cohorts of students that increased in various time periods (e.g., learning disabilities, autism spectrum disorders, psychiatric disabilities, wounded warriors). An important next step for the field will be for researchers to move from descriptive studies to evaluative ones that clearly describe what components of these programs work, with what students, and in what situations.

The next most common set of articles, and the one that has been most steadily increasing over the life of the journal, relates to students with disabilities. Most of these articles describe the experiences, perceptions, and attitudes of students; followed by articles about access, accommodations, academic adjustments, and statistical profiles of students with disabilities. As with articles about programs, most of these articles are descriptive and there is a need for more data-based articles that evaluate practices that work with students. Of particular note is that few articles have been published on the life-long skill area of self-determination. For example, although studies have measured students' experiences related to self-determination, only five articles related to teaching these important skills have been published over the thirty years of *JPED*. It is not clear if this is a function of students arriving on campuses with these skills or if much of the research in this area is published in other journals. Getzel (this issue) provides additional

detail about the importance of self-determination and offers suggestions for researchers to address this paucity of research.

Interestingly, there were no more than two articles per period about learning strategies/study skills for the first four periods, but five were published in the period from 2007-2012. Likewise, there was only one article published about student self-determination in the first 24 years of the journal, but four in the last six-year period. Clearly, rigorous and data-based studies that describe what techniques work, with which students, and in which specific settings in each of these areas would benefit the field.

Articles related to construct development are increasingly emerging in the journal. In fact, 11 articles related to this domain were published in each of the past two six-year time periods analyzed. Many of these articles describe the use of Universal Design (UD) in instruction and in program development; this is likely reflective of Federal grant programs from the Office for Postsecondary Education that ran over the past twelve years and that focused largely on student access via the use of UD models (McGuire, this issue). It could be argued that UD articles could fall into other domains within this taxonomy. However, given the recent emergence of this concept and the relatively scarce empirical evidence base related to its effectiveness (see McGuire, this issue), it was placed into the Construct Development-Level domain. In time, as evidence develops, articles related to UD could be moved into other areas within the domain taxonomy.

Study “Demographics”

Although it is not surprising that the majority of articles that presented original data were based in the United States, the relatively low number of data-based articles published in the journal (13%) from other countries was interesting. The AHEAD website notes that the membership consists of 2,700 members from 11 countries (www.ahead.org/about; 2014). The relative paucity of data-based studies from international locations presents an opportunity for researchers. In addition, there is clearly a need for more studies at the 2-year institutional level. The majority of students with disabilities enroll in 2-year institutions (Newman et al., 2011), yet only 27% of the data-based articles published in the journal examine this setting. This likely reflects both another void in the literature and opportunity for researchers.

Perhaps of most concern is the relatively poor description of the student samples in the methods sections of published articles. Only 45% of the articles clearly described the disability types of the students under study, only 33% clearly reported the gender composi-

tion of the sample, and only 11.7% clearly described the race/ethnicity of the students. This lack of reporting makes it impossible to discern which practices work best with which students. Although some progress has been made in the last six-year period in relation to the inclusion of descriptions of student disability and gender in publications, more attention must be paid to these essential descriptions in future data-based studies. Additionally, of the studies that described the sample, only 50% of the studies had sample members who were African-American and only 33% had sample members who were Hispanic. This is certainly an area that must be addressed in future research.

Limitations

The current results must be considered in light of the fact that the data reported in this study only reflect articles published during the thirty year life of the *Journal of Postsecondary Education and Disability*. Indeed, the articles studied here ($n = 336$) represent 25% of all articles published about disability services in higher education from 1955 to 2012. Thus, a similar analysis with the larger set of articles is warranted to more fully understand the field’s total literature base.

The analysis was framed by the use of the domains and respective subdomains described in this article. Clearly, the knowledge and judgment of the research team shaped the identification, development, and description of these areas; however, content validation was evaluated using an iterative process with frequent feedback from experts with unique knowledge of the extant literature in the field (e.g., a panel of prior editors of *JPED*). It is hoped that this taxonomy of domains will provide researchers with a map of the body of research that can be used in future research. Again, repeating this analysis with the larger body of literature related to postsecondary education and disability is essential.

Summary

During its history, AHEAD has adapted both Professional Standards and Program Standards to guide the professional practice of postsecondary disability services. This current project provides a starting point to develop research standards for the field -- another step in guiding professional practice. This study adds to the extant literature by providing a taxonomy to guide research in the form of the domains and subdomains. The present study and the study by Faggella-Luby et al. (this issue) provide the profession with a baseline by which to determine in what areas research has been conducted in its main professional journal, in which

areas more research is needed, and areas of concern related to study descriptions. It is hoped that the present work provides a starting point for the development of identifying evidence-based best practices and research standards in the field.

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