

Experiences of Students with Physical Disabilities in a Summer Internship Program

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Abstract

Despite higher education becoming more accessible for students with disabilities, these students are often still unable to accomplish one of the most basic goals for obtaining a college degree: successfully obtaining gainful employment after graduation. This article provides an overview of a qualitative study which examined the experiences of college students in an internship program designed specifically for students with physical disabilities. The findings of this study indicate students developed vital skills and competencies which facilitated personal and career development. Through their participation in the internship program, students reported feeling better prepared to enter the workforce after graduating. General career services often fail to address the additional barriers students with physical disabilities face when attempting to secure employment after graduating from college. Through hands-on work experience and exposure to real life work environments, students reported feeling more confident about their abilities to not only get hired, but to thrive in the positions in which they were hired. Intentional efforts designed specifically to enhance the career readiness of students with physical disabilities are integral to the continued success of this population of students.

Keywords: students with disabilities, physical disabilities, internship, employment

While the number of students with disabilities matriculating to college is steadily increasing (Eckes & Ochoa, 2005), they are still struggling to be employed after graduation at the same rate of their able-bodied peers (Oswald, Huber, & Bonza, 2015). With this in mind, Ball State University's offices of Disability Services and Career Services, partnered with Eskenazi Health in Indianapolis to create the Initiative for Empowerment and Economic Independence (IEEI). A goal of the IEEI program is to give students with physical disabilities the opportunity to develop critical personal and career skills which are vital to a successful transition to the working world.

This study focused on how participation in an internship program, specifically one designed for students with physical disabilities, prepares students for a successful transition from college to employment. Schlossberg (1984) discussed how several factors can contribute to successful, or failed, transitions. Individuals who are familiar with their environment, who are confident about themselves and their abilities, and who receive adequate support, are more apt to make

a successful transition. To support the transition of a student with a physical disability from college to employment, the IEEI program gives interns the opportunity to be immersed in true work environments. Interns are able to experience how their disability affects them in the workplace and how they can adapt. Being able to navigate the workplace instills a sense of confidence among interns, as they begin to realize their disabilities do not limit them, despite what they, and others, may think.

Review of Related Literature

This review of related literature grounds this study in Schlossberg's (1984) work on transition as the theoretical foundation; it then provides an overview of the history of students with disabilities in higher education; and concludes with a discussion of the importance of internships that lead to employment.

Transition

Schlossberg (1984) described transition as an

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event, or non-event, which occurs in an individual's life which creates change, especially in the areas of work, family, wellness, and finances. These transitions can be anticipated, unanticipated, or non-event transitions. An anticipated transition is an event in which an individual expects residual change to occur, such as marriage or starting a new job. While anticipated transitions typically have more positive outcomes, each transition type can affect individuals differently based on the amount of stress the transitions cause, as well as the person's ability to manage the stress. Schlossberg identified four factors, the Four S's, which can affect an individual's likelihood to cope with change: situation, self, support, and strategies. Schlossberg's work can be used in relation to a person's transition from college to employment. The transition to employment is a significant life event that brings a great deal of change to a person's life. While the transition is an anticipated event, individuals may still have inadequately prepared to make such a transition. To make a successful transition to the workforce, it is vital for students to possess adequate skills in each of the four categories.

The four S's. *Situation factors* describe how a person evaluates the transition and their control over what is happening in the transition (Patton, Renn, Guido, & Quaye, 2016). The impact this factor holds on an individual depends on how long the situation is supposed to last, if the change is positive or negative, and if there are other challenges which enhance the stressors with this change. *Self-related factors* are personal and psychological incidents which affect transition (Patton et al., 2016). Personal characteristics like age, socioeconomic status, ability, and gender can shape how an individual manages change and goes through transition. Psychological characteristics are how an individual's personality and mindset shapes their transition process. *Support factors* rely upon an individual's social aspect which reaffirms positive support and feedback (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012). The amount of support an individual receives from friends, family, mentors, and outside sources can significantly impact how they handle change. *Strategies* are the ways in which an individual copes with stressors and changes (Patton et al., 2016). This usually refers to an individual's reactions to their environment. Anderson et al. (2012) suggested there were four coping strategies which an individual can use to transition successfully: information seeking, direct action, inhibition of action, and intrapsychic behavior.

Students with Disabilities in Higher Education

The passing of the Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and later the Americans with

Disabilities Act (1990) and subsequent ADA amendments act (2008), paved the way for students with disabilities in higher education. In 2008, more than two million college students in the United States reported having a disability, a significant increase from approximately 1.4 million students who reported having a disability just eight years earlier in 2000 (United States Government Accountability Office, 2009). Of the students who reported having a disability, approximately 29% of them reported having a physical disability, which includes mobility or orthopedic impairments. Colleges and universities across the United States have worked diligently to make their campuses more welcoming to students with disabilities (Getzel & Thoma, 2008). Not only are campuses becoming more physically accessible, but many are now establishing programs designed to address issues of persistence and retention by supporting students who are struggling academically. However, few institutions provide services geared towards preparing students with disabilities, especially those with physical disabilities, for a successful transition to life after college.

More than ever before, a college degree is a requirement for employment, and is evidenced in a study which found a four-year degree is positively correlated with employment rates (Stodden, Dowrick, Anderson, Heyer, & Acosta, 2005). However, while the number of students with disabilities attending college is steadily increasing, college graduates with disabilities are failing to be employed at the same rate of able-bodied graduates. College graduates with disabilities are being employed at a rate of 52.7%, while the employment rate for able-bodied college graduates is 83.7% (Oswald et al., 2015). Further, it has also been estimated that less than 15% of those with physical and communication disabilities who utilize augmentative and alternative communication are employed (Bryen, Carey, & Cohen, 2005).

However, the high rates of unemployment are not indicators of unmotivated individuals, as career aspirations among students with physical disabilities are actually rather high (Babbit & Burbach, 1990). In a study measuring these career aspirations, approximately 15% of study participants reported their ideal employment to fall within the category that encompasses corporate executives and doctors. Moreover, 79% of participants reported their ideal employment to be in the category which includes careers like business managers and educators. In the same study, 95% of participants reported the desire to help others through their careers as being "very important," or "important." To successfully advocate for students with disabilities, it is necessary for career and disability services staff to understand these aspirations.

However, Altschul and Michaels (1994) found some employers struggle to recruit students with disabilities. Recruiters coming to college campuses were not finding students with disabilities interested in the positions for which they were looking to hire. This can be frustrating for employers who come to college campuses hoping to reach students populations which they would have a difficult time reaching otherwise. Students are assisted by professionals with little or no experience of students with disabilities or may work with disability agencies who solely focus on finding entry-level jobs for students, when students may have the qualifications for other employment. Oftentimes, students with disabilities are being pushed towards careers outside of their course of study, and are led to look for employment for which they are extremely over-qualified because of misconceptions about their abilities to work. Further, only 26% of two- and four-year institutions provide specific career services for students with disabilities. Students are not receiving the support they so desperately need in addressing the barriers which they face when attempting to join the working world.

Most work environments are not designed to be accessible for those with disabilities, which can force people with disabilities to work in an environment improperly suited for them (Williams & Mavin, 2015). Some individuals with disabilities ask for accommodations, while others will learn to work without them. For example, using a keyboard can be very difficult for people with physical disabilities (Obringer, Coffey, McFadden, Etheridge & Pounder, 2007). Modifications must be made to provide an adaptive keyboard, and word prediction software can be a helpful tool because it significantly reduces the number of keystrokes needed. Because so much of the working world relies on computers and other form of technology, adaptive technology would be extremely useful for employees needing this type of accommodation.

Career services professionals need to understand the importance of knowing the specifics of reasonable accommodations and undue hardships (Roessler, Hennessey, Hogan, & Savickas, 2009). During a job search, applicants are not required to disclose a disability unless an accommodation is needed to assist in the application progress. Transitioning from higher education to the workplace goes beyond identifying resources for success; it requires identifying interests and skills and applying them to the working world. Those who make it past initial interviews and are hired may still face discrimination based upon a request for a reasonable accommodation. Because individuals with disabilities are not required to disclose their disabilities during the application process, it be-

comes important for career service professionals to prepare students to disclose their need for accommodations during the interview process to prevent problems down the line.

Importance of Internships

A significant amount of career development activities, such as an internship, increases the chances of obtaining desirable employment upon graduation from an institution of higher learning (Blau, Pred, & Andersson, 2015). Fei-Chuan, Ku, Yi-Hwan, Fei-Hung, and Shuo-Shiung (2009) found that internships are an excellent opportunity for students to use theory learned in college courses in an authentic setting related to their field of study. Benefits obtained from internship experiences include networking and authentic job-related experience. "Practicums and internships support skill development, networking opportunities, and relevant experience that can lead to job opportunities" (Oswald et al., 2015, p. 377).

However, interns are not the only ones to benefit from internships, as an internship allows an employer to gain insight and knowledge of the work habits for potential full-time employees (Wesley & Bickle, 2005). The success of interns working independently can predict an individual's professional work style. For example, those who prefer close supervision or working in collaboration with others will be good for employers requiring copious amounts of group work. Moreover, internships are most beneficial to the intern when the project assigned to them is genuinely important to the host organization (Hindmoor, 2010). Meaningful works creates a sense of value for the intern, as the least rewarding internship experience is one self-driven by the intern.

Internships for students with disabilities. Collaborations between career services staff and disability offices are the best option for creating internship opportunities for students with disabilities (Madaus, 2006). Positive relationships and good communication between faculty members, student affairs educators, and career services professionals can create a well-rounded system for locating experiential education, such as internships, for students with disabilities (Nott & Zafft, 2006). It is imperative for these collaborating educators to create policies and procedures aiding the access to internships and practicum experiences for students with disabilities. A good relationship between these professionals will help students to learn skills in self-advocacy, which can help them to successfully gain meaningful employment following graduation. Internships provide an experience for students to interact with a real employment setting, as this allows for the individual to discover their

strengths and weaknesses in employment before entering a job full-time. Papatotiriou and Windle (2012) observed if universities do not invest in opportunities to aid students with disabilities in areas such as employment and accessible transport, they will not have an opportunity to build positive relationships or live a life of independence.

Despite higher education becoming more accessible to students with disabilities in recent years, students with physical disabilities continue to be one of the most marginalized groups in both the educational and professional worlds. In 2003, less than 40% of adults with disabilities between the ages of 16 and 64 conveyed being employed (Stern & Brault, 2005). While higher education has become more attainable, the employment rate for college graduates with disabilities is only 52% (Oswald et al., 2015). It is encouraging that students with physical disabilities are attending college more than ever before, but degrees are rendered meaningless when students are not successfully finding employment after graduation. Career services within colleges and universities provide general resources for career preparation, but only 26% of institutions provide services specifically for students with disabilities (Raue & Lewis, 2011). It is also important for any student to participate in internships and practicums to develop skills, create networking opportunities, and provide relevant experience which could ultimately lead to job opportunities (Oswald et al., 2015). The purpose of the study was to examine the effectiveness of an internship program designed specifically for students with physical disabilities.

Methods

This IRB approved qualitative study was framed as a phenomenological study that “discusses the essence of the experience for individuals incorporating ‘what’ they have experienced and ‘how’ they have experienced it” (Creswell, 2013, p. 37). Phenomenological researchers want to gather information about their subject’s perception of a phenomenon.

Participant Attributes

The population in this study was ten undergraduate students with physical disabilities at Ball State University who participated in the summer internship program at Eskenazi Health in Indianapolis. Participants were recruited for this study using convenience sampling, a non-probability sampling technique, where study participants were selected based on inclusion/exclusion criteria and availability to the researcher (Babbie, 1990). The research team was assisted by the director of the university’s Disability

Services office in identifying students who met the participant requirements. All members of the population were contacted via email and five students agreed to participate in the study. Three of the participants were wheelchair users, and two of the participants had significant visual impairments. Three participants were male, two were female, and all participants were Caucasian.

Data Collection

The data for this interview were collected through a series of semi-structured interviews because the nature of open-ended questions allows study participants to provide honest and extended responses regarding their experiences and viewpoints (Turner, 2010). A panel of experts, consisting of disability services educators and faculty members skilled in qualitative methodology, assisted in the development of an interview protocol. The researcher also utilized peer debriefing through conducting a mock interview. Interviews lasted between 30 and 60 minutes; four of the interviews were completed in person at mutually-agreed upon locations, and one was conducted over the phone. Interview questions were open-ended with the intent of capturing the participant’s perceptions of the benefits of their internship experience. Interviews with the participants were digitally audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim at the conclusion of the interviews and resulted in 51 pages of transcript data. Participants were assigned pseudonyms during the transcription process to maintain their confidentiality.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted in alignment with a phenomenological approach, whereby the research team sorted through the collected data and highlighted specific elements that provided further insight about the phenomenon at hand (Creswell, 2013). Further, analysis was facilitated by a general process of “working with data, organizing it, breaking it into manageable units, synthesizing it, searching for patterns, discovering what is important and what is to be learned, and deciding what you will tell others” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 145). The research team analyzed the transcribed interview data to look for emerging themes and patterns across the participants’ interviews. After the data were divided into categories, interpretations and recommendations were made relative to the success of the internship program preparing students for employment post-graduation. The researchers used Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) approach to establish trustworthiness of the data, establish credibility (prolonged engagement and persistent observation), transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Findings

Five students participated in the study. Brandon, a student who has quadriplegia, was studying computer technology and was placed in an IT department. Brandon chose to participate in the internship program because he was aware of the integral role internships can play in securing a job, and he wanted to gain hands-on experience in the workplace. Paul, a visually impaired student studying public relations and creative writing, was placed in the hospital communications office after expressing the desire to get more writing experience in a professional work environment. Aside from professional goals, Paul was hoping to gain experience “living on [his] own in a city where [he] had never lived before.”

The interns reported developing critical personal and career skills at nearly every phase of the internship process. Before the internships even started, students were required to work with the university’s career center to develop a resume and practice interviewing techniques. Students were asked to evaluate their strengths and weaknesses, as well as to develop their own career goals. This allowed students to truly have autonomy in crafting their future internship experience. They had the opportunity to align their internship experiences with career goals, ensuring the students were completing meaningful work to both them and their employers. Students also gained experience in disclosing their disabilities during the interview process, as well as becoming familiar with how their disabilities would affect them in the workplace. Perhaps the most crucial element of the internship program was the sense of confidence it instilled among the interns. Interns expressed feeling unsure how they would be viewed by coworkers, and were not sure how their disabilities would play into their experience. However, the interns reported feeling an overwhelming sense of acceptance from their coworkers, and had positive outlooks about searching for employment in the future.

Pre-Internship Considerations

While the students were recommended for the internship program, they were still required to go through an interview process. Students reported being asked to provide a resume as part of the interview process, and they were encouraged to utilize services at the university’s career center to develop their resumes. Students also had to complete an additional application for the position. During the interviews, students were asked what they felt their strengths were and, based on their goals, in which department they might like to be placed for their internships. Most students

were placed in departments which aligned with their career goals.

Others whose career aspirations could not exactly be integrated into their internship experience were placed in departments where they could learn transferable skills. One student, Theresa, a student with a visual impairment studying Elementary Education and Special Education, was placed in an institute for professional development. Theresa believed her placement in that department was beneficial to her future career as an educator because “you still write objectives and create presentational aids, and you plan out what you’re going to talk about and what activities you’re going to do in professional development.” She added, “it was basically all the components of teaching, just with adults, rather than children.” Another student, Logan, a Political Science major with cerebral palsy, chose to participate in the internship program because he felt “It’s not enough to just say, ‘hey, here’s my degree.’” Logan expressed interest in writing policy and was ultimately placed in the grants department at Eskenazi. Laura, a student with cerebral palsy studying Psychology, had not identified an exact career path for herself, but knew she wanted to do something that involved counseling. She was placed in a clinic that provided inpatient mental health counseling.

Living arrangements. One of the most significant aspects of preparing themselves for the internship was finding living accommodations for the duration of the program. The hospital partnered with a local university to provide housing for the interns throughout the duration of the program. The cost of housing was covered by the internship program, and interns were able to live in campus apartments free of charge. Three interns, Theresa, Paul, and Logan, lived in the campus apartments. They worked with the program coordinator and the housing director on the accessibility of the apartments, and were provided information regarding the amenities and layout of the apartments.

However, students who relied on attendant care had to decide how that would factor into their living arrangements. Laura and Brandon made the decision to commute to their internships from home. Brandon looked into hiring someone to provide attendant care in Indianapolis, but it proved to be too difficult for him to arrange. He made an hourly commute from home daily where he had help from his mother and a local attendant care service. Laura also decided to make the commute because her mother lived closer to Indianapolis, which made her feel at ease because she knew she could rely on the people who would be transporting her to and from her internship.

Logan, who decided to stay in the campus housing, found a local service to provide attendant care during his internship. However, Logan had a negative experience with the service. Attendants often showed up late or were careless in getting him ready for work. Not only did this make Logan late for work, but there were times where he had been haphazardly dressed, with buttons undone and some articles of clothing on backwards. Logan was embarrassed about the situation and worried how it would reflect on his performance as an employee, but felt that his boss was extremely understanding that some things were beyond his control. Logan learned that in the future, it would be necessary for him to be diligent in finding reputable care so that it would not impact his ability to work. He also came to realize that he will ultimately be the person held responsible for anything that would prevent him from getting to work, making it even more important to hire reputable care workers. The interns' living arrangements played a significant role in their internship experience. Students who had reliable care and transportation, or who were able to get themselves ready for work on their own, did not face the same stress in the workplace as Logan did. An external circumstance caused Logan additional hardship in his internship. While it made it difficult at times, it did not prevent him from ultimately being successful in his position.

Internship Experience

Participants reported being nervous about their internships because of the uncertainty of how their disabilities might affect their jobs. However, it did not take long for the interns and employers to settle into a routine. Employers and interns took the first weeks to gauge what the interns were capable of performing, as well as the time in which they were capable of completing those tasks. Brandon described it as a learning experience for both the employer and the intern. Logan, whose fine motor skills are compromised by cerebral palsy, had more difficulty typing or navigating computer programs than someone who is able-bodied. While it sometimes took Logan longer to complete a task, his disability in no way affected the quality of work he provided. While employers took the time to identify and understand the capabilities of the interns, that did not mean they expected any less of the interns. "They held me to the same standard, but they also made sure that I wasn't jumping into anything that I couldn't handle, or that they were setting me up for failure," Paul said. Gauging the capabilities of interns with physical disabilities helps both the intern and employer know what the intern needs in order to be efficient in the position.

Requesting accommodations. During the time in which interns and employers are gauging the capabilities of interns, it may become apparent that interns need accommodations in order to successfully complete what is asked of them. Brandon typically uses the backside of his hand on a trackpad when using a computer. However, the keyboard at his internship would not recognize his hand, and he was unable to use the computer. Fortunately, Brandon's supervisor ordered a new keyboard as soon as it was brought to his attention. When Theresa started her internship, her computer had been set up with a screen reader before she even walked in the building, and she was immediately able to get to work. She said:

I thought that going into the internship I was going to have to jump through 50 different hoops and educate all these people and figure out my own accommodations, but that wasn't the case. People were really willing to work with me, to get to know me, and help me in any way that they possibly could.

An important part of the internship program was the interactions interns had with their coworkers. The interns described their coworkers as extremely helpful and friendly. However, it was the treatment of the interns as just another employee that held the most impact. Brandon stated, "They treated me like Brandon the person, not Brandon the person that's in a wheelchair." This made Brandon feel more accepted at his internship, and allowed him to focus more on the work he was doing instead of worrying about the perceptions of others.

Professional Skills and Competencies Learned

The application process the students went through may have been just as valuable as the internship itself. By asking students to develop and provide a resume, and to go through an interview process, students were able to experience what a true job search may look like one day. Theresa felt the program was helpful in allowing her to practice interview skills, as well as to develop other skills necessary to prepare for finding a job post-graduation. Logan expressed that he would feel less comfortable job searching without this experience. The resume building, application and interview process, and the internship itself made him feel more prepared for the job search post-graduation.

Transferrable skills. Simply being able to say one had an internship is not enough to secure employment. Interns need to be able to demonstrate skills and competencies they learned throughout their internship experience. Logan started his internship

having no experience in grant writing. By the end of his internship, he wrote two grant applications, one of which was funded. Through his internship in the grants department, Logan reported he learned better communication skills and the role those skills play in a professional environment. He also had the opportunity to learn how to collaborate with different personalities in the workplace, especially when under stress. Most notably, Logan learned the importance of “staying within your strengths, avoiding your weaknesses, and capitalizing on your opportunities.” During his internship, Logan was able to identify his strengths and weaknesses and determine how they played into his position in the grants department.

For Laura, the most beneficial aspect of her internship was getting out of the classroom and gaining hands-on experience. “It’s one thing to believe you can when you read about it in theory, but it’s another to actually to attempt to do something hands-on.” Her internship at the clinic allowed her to work with patients with varying mental health issues, and see firsthand the characteristics of those mental health issues, instead of solely learning about them through reading. In the clinical setting, there was never a typical work day and Laura learned to expect the unexpected. She reported she became more flexible and learned how to adapt to stressful situations. Brandon also valued the hands-on experience of working with VM Ware and setting up servers in the IT department. Theresa learned how to deal with difficult people. She recognized the importance of this skill as an educator, knowing she might someday have to deal with angry or upset parents. Paul left his internship feeling he had further developed his sense of professionalism, especially when working with those who are not his age.

Networking. The value of networking is not easily lost on those participating in an internship. The interns reported the networking aspect of the internship program as being extremely valuable. During the program, Logan had the opportunity to work with the department director on a presentation given to the Board of Health and Hospital Corporation. Laura also recognized the role networking plays in securing employment. “I had some good networking opportunities. Whether or not I choose to go into mental health, I can put these people down as my references,” Laura said. Brandon hoped his internship in the IT department would lead to a job offer. Through their internships, students were given numerous opportunities for professional development. These opportunities also allowed them to work and connect with other professionals in their respective fields.

Professional skills and competencies are only useful when accompanied by personable, competent

individuals. Additionally, students with physical disabilities will face more barriers to being successful as they must work harder than their able-bodied peers. Stigmas surrounding the abilities of those with physical disabilities often prevent them from being hired. Students with physical disabilities often fear they will face discrimination throughout the job search. However, interns reported being more confident about their job prospects post-graduation after completing their internships.

Developing Self-worth and Gaining Independence

Interns were given work that was meaningful to both themselves and their respective employers. Logan felt “the work [he] did and the work in the program that the interns get to do really makes an impact.” Feeling valued by their employers increased the interns’ self-worth in the workplace. Theresa expressed having anxiety about finding a job post-graduation, but her internship helped her to feel more optimistic about her job prospects after graduating. “I felt more confident in my ability that when I get a job someday, that people are not all close-minded and they’re going to be willing to accommodate me,” Theresa said. However, she added that while she is confident in herself, she is not completely confident that others will not be discriminatory in hiring practices.

A common theme reported by the interns was that of gaining a sense of independence through the internship program. Theresa, who lived in the campus housing, felt she gained confidence in her abilities to get places on her own and to live independently. Paul, who has had experience in large and bustling cities, saw how his roommate, another intern in the program, benefitted from being in the program. “I think having to live in [the city] forced him to be more independent. He worked far away from the apartment and had to use public transportation a lot,” said Paul. Paul also felt some students with physical disabilities are “overly coddled” when they are younger by parents who do not want to see them struggle. In an attempt to protect their children, Paul said he believed parents actually do a disservice to their children by preventing them from experiencing the real world. Through participating in the internship program and living in the provided housing, interns were forced to be more independent and self-reliant.

Post-Internship Considerations

After completing the internship program, interns reflected on their experiences in the program and discussed what impact their internships had on their career aspirations. For Theresa, Brandon, and Paul, their internships solidified their interests in their in-

tended career paths. During his interview, Logan shared he had applied to graduate school. Because of his experience in the internship program, Logan was considering developing a non-profit, similar to the collaboration between the university and the hospital, for his graduate school project. Laura, however, realized that mental health counseling was not the path for her, and was considering pursuing a career in student affairs, specifically in disability services. However, Laura said she still felt the internship was beneficial because it gave her an opportunity to explore a career path before conducting a job search for a position she would ultimately realize wasn't right for her.

Discussion

Because students with physical disabilities face alarmingly low employment rates post-graduation (Dutta et al., 2008), internship programs specifically designed for students with physical disabilities may help combat these low employment rates. Students participating in an internship program develop transferrable skills that may help them in successfully securing employment post-graduation. From resume building and practicing interview skills, to disclosing their disabilities during the interview process, students developed skills that will significantly help their job searches upon graduation. Going through the application and interview process for the internship made students feel more at ease about applying and interviewing for jobs in the future. They are less likely to avoid applying for a job because they are now confident in their ability to craft a resume, to interview, and to disclose a disability.

Students gained experience in identifying and addressing barriers which stand between them and a successful transition to post-graduation employment. Not only did the students develop these professional competencies, but they developed many vital personal competencies. Students learned how to advocate for themselves, and to ask for what they needed in order to be successful. Some also had the opportunity to experience living on their own in busy cities. Additionally, some students experienced how external circumstances can affect their experience in the workplace. For example, one student who had a negative experience with an attendant care company realized he would have to do extensive research in the future in order to find a reputable company.

Students who participated in the internship program developed a more positive outlook on their career prospects post-graduation. The hands-on experience of the internships helped students to feel confident in their abilities to do the work for which they were hired. They were able to assess how their

disabilities would affect them in the workplace, and will apply that knowledge to their future job searches. Moreover, students felt more comfortable about how they would be perceived in the workplace. While many stigmas regarding a person with a disability's ability to work exist, students felt their internships helped to permeate those stigmas. The internships helped to alleviate their own fears of not being accepted by able-bodied coworkers, but also helped to show those able-bodied coworkers just how capable they were of succeeding in the workplace.

Students who reported the importance of knowing how to address barriers to employment reflect the importance for career services professionals to also understand these barriers (Roessler et al., 2009). Professionals working with students in the internship program supported students by taking the time to help them navigate the process of disclosing a disability and asking for reasonable accommodations. Experiencing the process of disclosing a disability and asking for accommodations during their internships is only going to benefit students as they graduate and begin the search for employment. Just participating in the internship program itself will help increase the chances of students finding meaningful employment after graduation (Fei-Chuan et al., 2009; Blau et al., 2015; Oswald et al., 2015). The hands-on internships not only help the interns to understand how their disability will affect them in the workplace, but help show potential employers just how capable they are at doing the work. The skills the students developed throughout their internships will be vital to a successful transition to the working world after graduation.

Implications

Since students with disabilities are entering higher education more than ever before (Eckes & Ochoa, 2005), it is important that these students have the tools and resources to continue their success even after they graduate. Students with disabilities, particularly physical disabilities, will face additional barriers when it comes to seeking and obtaining employment post-graduation. Therefore, it is vital that students, educators, and employers actively address and prepare students for a successful transition to the working world.

Colleges and universities looking to implement similar programs on their campuses should start by facilitating a collaborative effort between disability and career services offices. Each office has tools and resources that the other does not, and only collaboration between the two offices will provide students with physical disabilities the most options for success. Career services should consider enabling a disability specialist dedicated to serving those with

disabilities. This person should be familiar with ADA and how it applies to the workplace, as well as have a focus on addressing the additional barriers to employment students with disabilities face.

Employers interested in partnering with local colleges and universities to implement similar internship programs should consider several things. The work given to interns should be meaningful to both the intern and the employer. Students will not develop critical professional and personal competencies if they are asked to do menial tasks that do not fully immerse them in the workplace. Employers should not assume an intern will need certain accommodations, but should be open and receptive to providing accommodations if requested. Further, because the program is intended for those with disabilities, program coordinators should consider the needs of chair-users in the program. As evidenced by one student in the study, the importance of reputable and reliable attendant care workers was vital to the student's overall internship experience. Internships in high traffic areas in busy cities can prove difficult to be navigated by attendant care workers hired by students in the internship program. Program directors could work with the student in finding suitable attendant care services that are familiar with the area. Additionally, the program could consider collaborating with local colleges and universities with nursing or other health-related programs in finding students who are looking to gain experience with attendant care. Local students might be more familiar with the area, and might be more dedicated to the work if they are receiving some sort of credit or practical experience.

Students with physical disabilities should be strongly encouraged to apply for internships during college. Having the hands-on experience provided by the internship, as well as the support from educators and other professionals along the way, will only help to make students more confident in their ability to get hired. By having students produce resumes and practice interviewing, they can apply these skills to future job searches. Students should utilize resources from both disability and career services centers in preparing for internships and other career-related endeavors. Incorporating opportunities for mentorship in the program may also prove beneficial in attracting potential interns. Students with physical disabilities who may have concerns about their ability in the workplace might benefit from being connected with past interns. Reassurance from past interns as to the benefit of and positive experience in the program might help to encourage students who would otherwise shy away from the program to apply.

Summary

Internship programs may help to expand job prospects for those with physical disabilities. While it is providing students with valuable hands-on experience and professional development, it is also helping businesses and organizations understand what employment looks like for those with physical disabilities. By participating in an internship program, students with physical disabilities are developing personal and professional competencies which are critical to a successful transition from college to employment. Institutions who implement similar internship programs are demonstrating their commitment to producing well-rounded, educated, and productive members of society. They are making intentional efforts to address the barriers to employment which those with physical disabilities face and are ensuring students have equal opportunities to put their hard-earned degrees to use after graduation.

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