

# Information Needed by Postsecondary Education: Can We Provide It As Part of the Transition Assessment Process?

Patricia L. Sitlington<sup>1</sup>

Erin M. Payne

University of Northern Iowa

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*One of the challenges to the transition to postsecondary education for students with learning disabilities is the ever-increasing gap between the assessment information that is collected at the secondary level and the demands for documentation prevalent at the postsecondary level. This article discusses the: (a) differences between secondary and postsecondary educational settings in terms of legal protections and demands placed on students, (b) information required by postsecondary institutions, (c) assessment information that is collected in secondary special education programs, (d) assessment techniques that are available for gathering information, and (e) recommendations for using existing assessment techniques to provide the information needed by postsecondary institutions.*

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**Key Words:** secondary education, transition, assessment

In 1994 (and again in 1999) the National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities (NJCLD) expressed concern that many students with disabilities do not consider postsecondary options. This has been supported by a number of adult adjustment studies (Blackorby & Wagner, 1996; Fairweather & Shaver, 1991; Levine & Nourse, 1998; National Center for Education Statistics, 1994; Sitlington, Frank, & Carson, 1992; Wagner, D'Amico, Marder, Newman, & Blackorby, 1992).

In recent years there has been an increasing interest in programs and services for students with learning disabilities who are attending postsecondary institutions (Ganschow, Coyne, Parks, & Antonoff, 1999; National Center for Education Statistics, 1999; Vogel & Adelman, 1993). Postsecondary education is no longer a fantasy for individuals with disabilities; it is a reality occurring with greater frequency (Black, Smith, Chang, Harding, & Stodden, 2002).

As evidence of this increase in enrollment, in 1996 six to nine percent of all undergraduate students reported having a disability (Henderson, 1998; National Center for Education Statistics, 1996), with learning disability the most prevalent disability reported (29% to 35% of those reporting a disability). In 2000, the National Council on Disability reported that 17% of all students attending higher education programs in the United States had a disability. In that same year, 40% of freshmen with disabilities reported having a learning disability, making it still the most common disability reported (Henderson, 2001).

Although the number of students with learning disabilities attending college has risen, they are still less likely than their nondisabled peers to do so (Blackorby & Wagner, 1996; Greenbaum, Graham, & Scales, 1995; Murray, Goldstein, Nourse, &

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1. Address correspondence to Patricia L. Sitlington, Department of Special Education, University of Northern Iowa, Cedar Falls, IA 50614-0601. E-mail: patricia.sitlington@uni.edu

Edgar, 2000; Vogel & Adelman, 1993). Statistics show that three to five years after high school, 27% of students with disabilities, as opposed to 68% of students without disabilities, attend some form of postsecondary education (Blackorby & Wagner, 1996; Stodden, 2001). A positive relationship between disability, level of education, and adult employment has been clearly established (Benz, Doren, & Yovanoff, 1998; Blackorby & Wagner, 1996; Reis, Neu, & McGuire, 1997). Thus, this gap significantly affects long-term career and employment prospects for students with disabilities (Stodden, 2001).

There is also evidence suggesting that many students with learning disabilities who enroll in postsecondary institutions have difficulty completing their postsecondary programs. Murray et al. (2000) found that of the students with learning disabilities who had attended postsecondary education institutions, 80% had not graduated five years after high school, compared to 56% of youth without disabilities. Ten years after graduating from high school, 56% of youth with learning disabilities had not graduated from postsecondary education, compared to 32% of individuals without disabilities.

To continue to increase the number of students with learning disabilities entering postsecondary education institutions and to increase the percent who graduate, it is important to plan for effective transition to postsecondary education, including the provision of appropriate accommodations in the postsecondary setting. One of the challenges to this transition is the ever-increasing gap between the assessment information that is collected on students with learning disabilities at the secondary level and the demands for documentation prevalent at the postsecondary level.

This article discusses the: (a) differences between secondary and postsecondary educational settings in terms of legal protections and demands placed on students, (b) information required by postsecondary institutions, (c) assessment information that is collected by secondary special education programs, (d) assessment techniques that are available for gathering information, and (e) recommendations for using existing assessment techniques to provide the information needed by postsecondary institutions.

The article is targeted toward two audiences: (a) secondary special and general educators, who need to be aware of the documentation requirements of postsecondary institutions; and (b) postsecondary educators who need to be aware that there are sources of assessment information available other than formal test scores. Postsecondary education and training can be provided in a number of settings. The term *postsecondary education* is used here to include programs whose emphasis is further education (two and four year colleges or universities) or institution-based career and technical training.

## DIFFERENCES BETWEEN SECONDARY AND POSTSECONDARY SETTINGS

All students making the transition from secondary to postsecondary settings face many new challenges, including less supervision from instructors and the potential for increased freedom and student choice. Students with learning disabilities must also be prepared to deal with differences in legal protections and in the demands placed upon them as students with a learning disability.

### ***Legal Protections***

At the secondary level, students with disabilities receive a number of protections from the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and its Amendments (IDEA; 1990; 1997). However, once they leave the secondary setting, they are considered under a different set of protections contained in Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act (1973) and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA; 1990). As Hatzes, Reiff, and Bramel (2002) indicated, IDEA was designed to provide *meaningful benefit* from education for students with disabilities; on the other hand, Section 504 and ADA were designed to provide *equal access* to education for students with disabilities.

*Section 504.* Section 504 states that individuals with disabilities must be afforded “equal opportunity to gain the same result, to gain the same benefit, or to reach the same level of achievement” {104.4(b)(2)} and further clarified that “no otherwise qualified handicapped individual” shall “solely by reason of his handicap, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance. . .” (Rehabilitation Act of 1973 § 504, 29 U.S.C. § 794). A “handicapped person,” as defined by Section 504, is “any person who (i) has a physical or mental impairment which substantially limits one or more of such person’s major life activities, (ii) has a record of such an impairment, or (iii) is regarded as having such impairment.” {29 U.S.C. Sec 706(7)(B)}. Learning is considered a major life activity; therefore, individuals with learning disabilities are covered under Section 504.

Section 504 also specifically addresses postsecondary settings in Subpart E of its federal regulations. This section establishes that postsecondary institutions must modify discriminatory requirements or methods of evaluation, but are not required to compromise the essential requirements of their programs {Section 104.44(c)}.

*ADA.* The passing of the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990 solidified and added to the provisions of Section 504. It extended protection to individuals with disabilities regardless of whether the program receives federal funding, and continued to protect those who are “otherwise qualified.” As defined by Section 504 and clarified by the ADA, individuals with disabilities are considered “otherwise qualified” when they are able to meet essential requirements of the program when provided reasonable accommodations (Frank & Wade, 1993; Gregg & Scott, 2000; Scott, 1994; Thomas, 2000).

### ***Demands on Students***

Protections offered to postsecondary students under Section 504 and the ADA differ greatly from those provided to secondary students by IDEA. Students wishing to gain entry to and services in a postsecondary setting will need to be prepared to document their disability and to work with officials of the postsecondary setting to identify the accommodations they need.

The primary decision makers regarding accommodations are the student and responsible institutional officials. Students are required to initiate the process by identifying and documenting their disability and by requesting specific accommodations in a timely manner. Responsible institution officials must then decide on a case-by-case basis whether and how to provide effective accommodations within the context of: (a) academic and nonacademic standards, (b) the essential nature of the course of study in question, and (c) the unique abilities of the student (Frank & Wade, 1993).

## INFORMATION REQUIRED BY POSTSECONDARY INSTITUTIONS

The information required by postsecondary institutions is usually used in two ways. First, it may be used to determine if the individual has a disability, as defined by Section 504 and the ADA. Second, the documentation will help determine appropriate and reasonable accommodations based on the individual's specific, disability-related needs (Hatzes, Reiff, & Bramel, 2002). Considerations associated with each of these uses will be discussed in the following paragraphs. Different postsecondary institutions may have different requirements for the amount and type of documentation required.

### *Documenting a Disability*

Two points need to be addressed in documenting a disability. First, students need to provide evidence that their learning disability “substantially limits” a major life activity (e.g., their learning). Second, students need to demonstrate that they are “otherwise qualified”—that they are able to meet the essential requirements of the program when provided reasonable accommodations.

According to recent case law, at least four options exist in interpreting whether the student's disability “substantially limits” his/her learning: (a) in comparison to most people in the general population; (b) in comparison to the average person having comparable training, skills, and abilities; (c) in comparison to the average unimpaired student, and (d) in terms of the disparity between inherent capacity and performance (Thomas, 2000).

In terms of determining if a student is “otherwise qualified” Scott (1991) proposed three questions: 1) what are the program or course requirements? 2) what nonessential criteria can be accommodated without changing the essence of the course or program? and 3) what are the specific abilities and disabilities of the student within this context?

*Association on Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD) guidelines.* In 1997 AHEAD recommended specific guidelines for documenting a learning disability. These guidelines, while not legal requirements, have come to be generally accepted and have been adopted and/or adapted by many postsecondary settings.

Hatzes et al. (2002) found that 14% of the postsecondary institutions that responded to their survey indicated that they adopted, without modification, the AHEAD guidelines. In addition, the authors found that the responses of the remaining institutions regarding ability and achievement tests they accepted indicated specifications consistent with the AHEAD guidelines. The majority (67%) of the institutions responding also followed AHEAD's guidelines regarding documentation being current.

The AHEAD guidelines addressed four areas: a) qualifications of the evaluator, b) recency of documentation, c) necessary detail to substantiate a learning disability, and d) necessary detail to determine accommodations. Specifically, the AHEAD guidelines recommended that, generally, those professionals evaluating an individual for a learning disability should have comprehensive, specific training for doing so. In particular, they suggested clinical or educational psychologists, school psychologists, neuropsychologists, learning disabilities specialists, and medical doctors as sound evaluators.

AHEAD also recommended “recent and appropriate” documentation, although specifics as to number of years are not provided. In the *Guckenberger v. Boston University* (1997), a precedent was established that postsecondary settings can require students to provide documentation of a disability that is current and has been conducted by a qualified professional. However, postsecondary settings must also demonstrate that requirements for the acceptable documentation of a disability are necessary. For example, in the Boston University case, the judge ruled that the specific requirement that documentation be no more than three years old was not necessary. While the AHEAD guidelines indicated only that it is best to provide recent and appropriate documentation, the requirement of major testing agencies regarding the date of testing is more specific. For example, the Educational Testing Service (1999) defined recency to be within the past three years for high school students and within the past five years for adults.

AHEAD was very specific in regards to the detail needed to substantiate a learning disability. They suggested five components:

- a diagnostic interview;
- a comprehensive formal assessment, which should include data in the areas of aptitude, academic achievement, and information processing (an appendix to the guidelines provides a list of commonly used tests);
- the specific diagnosis;
- test scores, in the form of standard scores and/or percentiles; and
- a clinical summary.

According to the guidelines, this summary should indicate that any alternative explanation for academic difficulties has been ruled out and how the individual’s cognitive ability, academic achievement, and information processing demonstrates a learning disability. This summary should also state how learning (or another major life activity) may be affected, which specific accommodations have been used in the past, and why specific accommodations are needed. According to the AHEAD guidelines, an IEP or a 504 plan can be included as part of a more comprehensive battery, but they are not sufficient documentation by themselves.

### ***Determining Accommodations***

The second type of information needed by postsecondary institutions relates to determining appropriate accommodations and supports for the student. Accommodations may take place at the program level and commonly include: part-time schedules, longer time to complete the program, and priority registration. Accommodations may also be directly related to instruction and commonly include: changes to the testing or evaluation procedures, the use of assistive technology, recorded books or a reader, tape recorded lectures, and notetaking modifications (Mull, Sitlington, & Alper, 2001; Mull & Sitlington, 2003). Lewis and Farris (1999) found that 98% of the postsecondary institutions that enrolled students with disabilities in 1996–97 or 1997–98 had provided at least one support service or accommodation to a student with disabilities.

In the area of determining accommodations the AHEAD guidelines stated that it is important to recognize that accommodation needs can change over time and are not always identified through the initial diagnostic process. Also, a prior history of accommodation does not, in and of itself, warrant the provision of a similar accom-

modation. In fact, 86% of the respondents to the Hatzes et al. (2002) survey indicated that a previous diagnosis of learning disability does not automatically qualify a student for an accommodation.

Once a student has sufficiently documented that he or she has a qualifying disability, a postsecondary institution is responsible for providing reasonable accommodations that "... do not result in unfair advantage, require significant alteration to the program or activity, result in the lowering of academic or technical standards, or cause the college to incur undue financial hardship" (Thomas, 2000, p. 254).

Federal law has required that an "otherwise qualified" student with a disability shall not be discriminated against, but offers little guidance in determining how to weigh accommodation requests for students with disabilities (Scott, 1994). The AHEAD guidelines provided some direction in this area, suggesting that a qualified person, serving as the evaluator, list specific accommodations and a rationale for those specific accommodations.

Case law is also establishing precedents in this area. Scott (1994) analyzed related court cases and provided recommendations for postsecondary settings. She suggested that postsecondary settings should consider the essential requirements of their programs proactively, so that standards are set prior to requests for accommodations. Scott recommended establishing essential requirements both at the institutional level and at the program and course level. Once these essential requirements have been established, postsecondary officials can look at individual students' requests based on these pre-established standards. Scott also recommended asking four specific questions as postsecondary officials attempt to weigh requests for accommodations. These questions include: (a) does the student have a learning disability? (b) has the student provided adequate documentation? (c) is the student qualified? and (d) is the accommodation reasonable?

This last question gets to the heart of the matter. What makes an accommodation reasonable? Reasonable accommodations, as established in the case law, are determined on an individual basis, do not compromise essential requirements of the program, and will not put the public or the student at risk (Scott, 1994). Additionally, as Scott pointed out, reasonable accommodations do not place undue financial burden on the postsecondary setting, although this alone may not be used to refuse an accommodation request.

In working to determine reasonable accommodations, case law has fallen on both sides of the issue regarding whether postsecondary settings have a "duty to investigate" (Thomas, 2000). A "duty to investigate" implies that postsecondary settings have the responsibility to explore alternative accommodations that would allow the student to participate in the institution's program once a student has been determined to have a disability and be otherwise qualified. Certainly, determining appropriate, reasonable accommodations on a case-by-case basis will continue to be an issue of contention. Scott (1991) referred to the attainment of accommodations as a "two-way street" (p. 462). She placed the burden on the school to provide reasonable accommodations and on the student to request and use accommodations appropriately.

## ASSESSMENT INFORMATION COLLECTED BY SECONDARY SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS

As indicated in the previous section, there is specific information required by postsecondary institutions related to documenting a disability and determining the accommodations that are needed. As more and more students with learning disabilities are attempting to access postsecondary education, changes that are occurring in special education pose challenges and hold promise for providing the information that is required by postsecondary education.

*Changes posing challenges.* Three specific innovations in special education have created some challenges in the transition of students with disabilities to postsecondary education (Kincaid, 1997; Sitlington, 2003; Sitlington, Clark, & Kolstoe, 2000). First, under the IDEA Amendments of 1997, a district is no longer obligated to conduct a three-year reevaluation, if the IEP team determines that it is unnecessary to do so for eligibility purposes. This may mean that for many adolescents in their last years of high school, the last formal evaluation data collected on the student may be a number of years old when the student graduates from high school. It does not mean, however, that ongoing data have not been collected, although possibly of a more informal nature.

Second, special educators in many states are moving away from an emphasis on standardized assessments and toward the use of curriculum-based assessments. These assessments may provide a great deal of information to postsecondary institutions in terms of the student's performance in specific content areas and comparing the student's performance to students with and without disabilities in the district. However, the student's performance is usually not compared to a statewide or national sample.

Finally, many states are moving away from specific disability labels and toward the concept of "student in need of special education" or a "noncategorical" label. Although the specific label of "learning disability" may not be applied to the student, documentation should have been provided that the student's disability does "substantially limit" his/her learning. Thus, although these innovations pose challenges to the smooth transition of adolescents with learning disabilities into postsecondary education, they also promise data that may be more recent and more relevant. The challenge is to identify how to convert the data that are currently being gathered at the secondary level into information that is needed by postsecondary institutions.

*Changes holding promise.* Other changes within secondary education have the potential for providing information that may be helpful to postsecondary institutions. Specifically, the IDEA Amendments of 1997 and the final regulations issued on March 12, 1999 require that all students with disabilities be included in testing required of other students. In addition, the IEP must include a statement that addresses the issue of participation in state or districtwide assessments (Bryant, Patton, & Vaughn, 2000). The Amendments require that the IEP must include:

- (i) A statement of any individual modifications in the administration of State or districtwide assessments of student achievement that are needed in order for the child to participate in the assessment; and

- (ii) If the IEP team determines that the child will not participate in a particular State or districtwide assessment of student achievement (or part of an assessment), a statement of—
  - (A) Why that assessment is not appropriate for the child, and
  - (B) How the child will be assessed. (S300.347(a)(5))

The IDEA Amendments (1997) also require that the student's IEP reflect a statement of present level of educational performance, including how the student's disability affects his/her involvement and progress in the general curriculum. The IEP must also include a statement of measurable annual goals, including benchmarks or short-term objectives focused on meeting the student's needs related to involvement and progress in the general curriculum.

State and local districts are also increasing their graduation requirements to include more rigorous coursework and tests to demonstrate knowledge and skills needed after high school (Kochhar-Bryant & Bassett, 2002). Many states and districts now set benchmarks to ensure that students are at appropriate points along the pathway to receiving a standard high school diploma (National Center on Educational Outcomes, 2002). The No Child Left Behind Act (2002) requires that by 2005-06, all states have in place tests in reading and mathematics in grades 3 to 8, and at least once between grades 10 and 12. By 2007-08, states must assess students in science at least once in elementary, middle, and high school.

Since the IDEA Amendments (1997) require that students with disabilities be included in these tests, this should provide information on how students with disabilities compare to those without disabilities in their district and their state. Thurlow, Thompson, and Johnson (2002) attempted to tie together the transition and standards-based education process in the following statement, "Since state assessments primarily assess progress toward standards, and since progress toward standards is addressed on IEPs, and since IEPs for older students become transition plans, it all fits together" (pp. 96-97).

### AVAILABLE ASSESSMENT TECHNIQUES

In addition to the students' involvement in state and districtwide assessments, there are a number of existing techniques that are used as part of the assessment process in assisting the student to make a successful transition to all aspects of adult life, including postsecondary education. These techniques also hold promise for providing information that will assist with the documentation of the student's learning disability and/or with the identification of appropriate accommodations. Sitlington, Clark, and Kolstoe (2000) organized these techniques into the following categories: (a) analysis of background information, (b) interviews/questionnaires, (c) psychometric instruments, (d) work samples, (e) curriculum-based assessment techniques, and (f) situational assessment. All of these approaches would be conducted with active involvement of the student in the assessment process, and with his/her permission to conduct the assessment and release the information to the postsecondary institution. We will briefly summarize each of these below. Sitlington et al. (2000) provide in-depth information on each technique.

Analysis of background information consists of conducting a systematic review of existing records from all agencies that have worked with the student. This involves

going outside the traditional “cum” folder, to information contained in the records of school personnel who have worked with the student in the transition process, as well as to the records of any adult providers who have been involved with the student, such as in vocational rehabilitation. It is important, however, to realize that the student may perform totally differently in the new postsecondary environment, so this information should be used in conjunction with current information on the student.

Interviews or questionnaires, the second technique, can be conducted with the student, family members, former teachers, friends, counselors, support staff who have worked with the student, and former employers. This approach has great potential for providing information on accommodations that have been used effectively in the past. The third approach, psychometric instruments, can be either norm or criterion-referenced. In addition to providing information on the student’s interests and preferences, these instruments can provide information on the student’s functioning level and learning style.

The fourth transition assessment technique is called work samples. In the field of transition these are formal activities involving tasks, materials, and tools which are identical or similar to those in an actual job or cluster of jobs. They can be commercially or locally developed. These samples have a standard set of directions, tasks, materials, and key behaviors to observe, and allow the individual to perform within a controlled environment, often learning the tasks as they are being performed. This approach could be used to provide information on whether the student can meet the essential course requirements in postsecondary career and technical programs with accommodations, and which accommodations may be most effective for him/her.

Curriculum-based assessment techniques measure the student’s functioning level in comparison to the curriculum of the state, school district, or specific classroom. They include the following approaches: (a) curriculum-based measurement, (b) portfolio assessment, and (c) curriculum-based vocational assessment. Curriculum-based measurement is an ongoing assessment approach that was developed by individuals at the University of Minnesota (Marston, 1989). It consists of a specific set of assessment techniques for the areas of reading, written expression, spelling, and math, using timed samples of the student’s work. Norms are often developed using scores from the local school or district. The focus of portfolio assessment is on gathering representative samples of the student’s work using specific selection criteria, and then systematically evaluating these samples. The third curriculum-based approach, curriculum-based vocational assessment, consists of systematically observing the student’s performance in career and technical education or other work-based learning programs. Each of these techniques could be useful when the information is gathered in courses similar to those at the postsecondary institution.

Situational assessment, the last transition assessment approach, is the systematic observation of behaviors in environments as close as possible to the individual’s future living, working, or educational environment. This process involves using a systematic method of recording behaviors, such as rating scales or behavioral observation techniques. Using this approach the student could be systematically observed within the postsecondary classroom or on a potential employment site to determine if he/she could perform the essential requirements following appropriate instruction

and with reasonable accommodations. This approach could also be useful in determining which accommodations are most effective in the respective settings.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR USING EXISTING ASSESSMENT TECHNIQUES TO PROVIDE THE INFORMATION REQUIRED BY POSTSECONDARY INSTITUTIONS**

Elliott, Braden, and White (2001) defined “assessment” as: “the process of gathering information about a student’s abilities or behavior for the purpose of making decisions about the student” (p. 3). They then defined “testing” as “one simple procedure through which we obtain evidence about a student’s learning or behavior” (p. 3). We would propose that the focus should be on *assessing* students with learning disabilities, rather than *testing* them, as they make the transition to postsecondary education. We would also propose that the student and his/her family be active participants in the assessment process, as well as in the entire transition process. This will require providing specific training in the area of self-determination, and providing opportunities for the student to apply the skills he/she has learned (Field, Martin, Miller, Ward, & Wehmeyer, 1998).

The following sections will provide recommendations for using existing assessment techniques to provide the information required by postsecondary institutions. They are based upon over 30 years of experience in the area of transition on the part of the senior author. This includes experiences as a classroom teacher, state department staff member, chairperson of the postsecondary education subcommittee of a local interagency transition task force, and researcher, all in the area of transition to adult life.

It is our view that these techniques can provide the information needed by these programs to document a learning disability and to determine the accommodations needed. We propose the following as possible modifications to the current AHEAD guidelines.

#### ***Methods for Documenting A Learning Disability***

As mentioned previously, the focus of assessment in this area is on determining if the disability “substantially limits” the student’s learning and if the student is “otherwise qualified” to enroll in the postsecondary program. The results of the assessment in this area need to be formal enough to allow postsecondary staff to defend their decision.

We would recommend a combination of six possible approaches to determining this, as alternatives to the formal test results recommended by AHEAD.

1. Summarize information from the IEP that documented why the student was “in need of special education services,” including why the student’s disability “substantially limits” his/her learning.
2. Report the results of any curriculum-based measurements, in which the student is compared to a district or school norm group.
3. Include the results of the statewide and districtwide assessments, which compare how the student performed in comparison to all students in the state or district.
4. Summarize information from the student’s IEP that compares the student’s performance to the standards and benchmarks of the district.

5. Include the results of any applicable formal psychometric tests, which may have been given as part of the transition assessment process.
6. Arrange to have a certified or licensed professional from a local educational agency provide a review and evaluation of previous disability documentation and current data on the impact of the disability on the academic achievement and functional performance. This review would include recommendations on how to assist the student in meeting his or her postsecondary goals (S. Shaw, personal communication, February 17, 2004).

### ***Methods for Determining Accommodations Needed***

The focus of assessment in this area is to determine whether accommodations are needed and, if so, what accommodations are the most effective. There are a number of challenges to gathering valid information in this area. First, the accommodations that have been provided in high school are seldom evaluated in terms of their effectiveness. Most of the data that we do have on the use of accommodations is from assessments, usually state-level tests (Tindal & Fuchs, 2000). In addition, the grades in which students with disabilities are involved in transition planning are the same grades in which we see declining numbers of students using accommodations. If accommodations are not built in during transition planning, it is difficult for students to know which accommodations are needed (Thurlow, 2002). Finally, the need for specific accommodations may vary from the high school to the postsecondary education environment.

Acknowledging these challenges, we would still recommend the following approaches to gathering the information needed to determine accommodations for each student. This information could be summarized in a transition portfolio (Neubert & Moon, 2000) which would go with the student to the postsecondary program. We recommend that this information be collected as part of the transition assessment process, with the student, family, and secondary and postsecondary personnel collaborating in the information gathering. We would also recommend that the assessment process and resulting findings focus on the use of accommodations to support the student's strengths.

1. Include components of the background information related to accommodations that have been found effective.
2. Conduct an interview with the student, since he/she should be in the best position to identify the accommodations needed, and which have been effective in the past.
3. Interview family members, secondary instructional and support staff, and any adult service providers who have worked with the student.
4. Summarize information from the student's IEP and other records regarding how the accommodations were used and their effectiveness.
5. Work with the student to assist him/her in conducting a systematic analysis of the specific postsecondary program and possible related employment situations, to determine the essential requirements of these environments and accommodations that will be needed. Summarize this information in a format useful to postsecondary institutions.
6. Conduct a situational assessment of the student within the postsecondary course and/or future employment situation, to determine if the student can

meet the demands of these environments following appropriate instruction and effective accommodations.

### ***Integrating the Information Gathered into the Transition Assessment Process***

It is important that this process of gathering information be integrated into the ongoing assessment and planning process used to facilitate the transition of the student to postsecondary education and other aspects of adult life. It should not be a process of gathering isolated information for the use of the postsecondary institution. In order to accomplish this, we recommend the following.

1. With the student, develop a process for determining what accommodations are most effective for the individual student at the secondary level, and include only those accommodations in the student's IEP. In examining accommodations for testing, Tindal and Fuchs (2000) referred to the concept of "differential effectiveness" when students with disabilities perform better with the accommodation and the accommodation does not benefit students without disabilities. Although this concept is often not currently applied when selecting accommodations, it may yield accommodations that are truly effective when used by the student.
2. Work with the postsecondary institutions in the surrounding area (those most often attended) to identify the format for providing the information they need. Hopefully this can be done as part of the activities of the local or regional transition advisory board, which includes representatives of key adult providers (Blalock & Benz, 1999).
3. If possible, involve a representative of the postsecondary institution in the IEP meetings in which transition to postsecondary education is being discussed.

On a national level we also recommend that the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) and its relevant divisions establish ongoing communication with AHEAD to identify strategies for enhancing the transition of students with learning and other disabilities to postsecondary education. In the newsletter from Disability Access Information and Support, Jarrow (2003) recently issued a call to postsecondary disability service providers to focus on the accommodations that have been requested by the student *before* they review the documentation the student has provided related to his/her disability. Changes are also being proposed to the language of the IDEA Amendments (S. Shaw, personal communication, February 17, 2004) to assist in the provision of information that will assist students with disabilities in their transition to postsecondary education. We view these as positive indications that the issues that have been presented in this article may be open for discussion.

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**Patricia L. Sitlington** is a professor and coordinator of the graduate emphasis in career/vocational programming and transition in the Department of Special Education, University of Northern Iowa, Cedar Falls, IA. Her research interests include adult outcomes for students with and without disabilities, assessment, and transition to all aspects of adult life. **Erin M. Payne**, is a special education teacher in the Cedar Rapids School District, Cedar Rapids, IA. Her current research interests include advocacy issues for students with disabilities and national trends in the assessment of special education students.

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