Impediments to Serving Students with Learning Disabilities in a Rural Community College Setting: The Administrative Perspective

Seth Gent
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IMPEDIMENTS TO SERVING STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES IN A RURAL
COMMUNITY COLLEGE SETTING: THE ADMINISTRATIVE PERSPECTIVE

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Old Dominion University in Partial Fulfillment of the
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ABSTRACT

IMPEDIMENTS TO SERVING STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES IN A RURAL COMMUNITY COLLEGE SETTING: THE ADMINISTRATIVE PERSPECTIVE

Seth Gent
Old Dominion University, 2014
Director: Dr. Dana Burnett

This qualitative study examined the challenges rural southern Appalachian community colleges officials face when serving students with learning disabilities. Upon entering community college, learning disabled students are often unfamiliar with many of the expectations that may be necessary to ensure their academic success such as self-disclosing to ensure they are provided adequate services, becoming self-advocates, and navigating requirements of post-secondary education. This study consisted of 15 interviews from five different community colleges across the rural southern Appalachian region in which senior level, mid-level, and front line community college officials dealing with students with learning disabilities were interviewed. A document review was also incorporated into this study.

Community colleges in rural southern Appalachia are presented with their own unique set of challenges in serving the learning disabled population. Geographical isolation results in a lack of funding and available services to appropriately serve the learning disabled population. Community colleges contain many traits that assist and facilitate the empowerment of students with learning disabilities. The traits should be shared with surrounding community colleges so that methods toward serving students with learning disabilities may be improved.

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Chapter 1

Impediments to Serving Learning Disabled Students in a Rural Community College

Setting:

The Administrative Perspective

Adult students with learning disabilities represent one of the fastest growing populations of students attending post-secondary institutions (Mull, Sitlington, & Alper, 2001). Community colleges face numerous challenges when serving learning disabled (LD) students. This study examined these dilemmas. Although there is little empirical research related to the challenges faced by community colleges officials in this area, educators and counselors closely associated with students with learning disabilities are often required to make complex choices concerning the education of these students (Keim, Ryan, & Nolan, 1998). As LD populations continue to become more prevalent among community colleges, it is critical that these institutions examine the difficulties that arise when serving these students so that they may make better informed decisions concerning the education of these students (McCleary-Jones, 2008).

This study provides information that may assist community college officials in their decisions-making, thus ensuring the best educational experience for students with learning disabilities. A vast array of services have been identified as being beneficial for meeting the academic needs of students with learning disabilities in post-secondary educational settings (Keim, Ryan, & Nolan, 1998). These services may include, but are not limited to: tutoring, readers, reduced course loads, computer laboratories, study skills, academic advisement, counseling, and testing accommodations (Keim, Ryan, & Nolan, 1998).

Individuals who pursue higher education often choose the community college for a variety of reasons. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (2003), close to
50% of all college students attend two-year colleges. In 1999, approximately 6 million undergraduates enrolled in public four-year colleges while 5.3 million enrolled in public two-year colleges (Somers, Haines, Keen, Bauer, Pfeiffer, McCluskey, Settle, & Sparks, 2006). The common assumption is that academically deficient or price-conscious students are typically the ones who choose two-year colleges. However, Somers, Haines, Keen, Bauer, Pfeiffer, McCluskey, Settle, and Sparks (2006) pointed out a number of other reasons students may opt for community colleges such as feeling inadequate for larger institutions, life circumstances, educational aspirations, influence of peers and family, price and location, and institutional characteristic.

The community college offers numerous educational opportunities to a diverse population of students. Many students who attend community colleges are considered non-traditional and face various challenges which may impede their ability to have adequate study time needed for success (McCleary-Jones, 2007). Non-traditional student populations are typically larger in the community college setting. This reality has coexistent factors that can negatively impact the educational goals of these students.

It is crucial to consider those students who also have learning disabilities, which McCleary-Jones (2007) considered to be the most common form of disability found in the college-age population. Data from the 1991 National Longitudinal Study of Special Education Students reported that persons with LDs attend two-year vocational or community colleges more frequently than four-year colleges or universities (Bigaj, Shaw, Cullen, McGuire, & Yost, 1995). Henderson (1999) also noted that in general, freshman with disabilities in 1998 were more likely to reenroll in two-year colleges (46%) than were their peers who did not report disabilities (34%). The study conducted by McCleary-Jones (2007) indicates that learning disabilities now
Learning Disabilities 3

constitute by far the largest single category of disability served by disability service offices in the community colleges.

Hand and Payne (2008) pointed out that increasing participation in higher education has become a priority in the Appalachian region in hopes of building a workforce that is more educationally equipped for economic needs. Statistics indicate a direct link between economic development and educational achievement, naturally when individuals achieve more education the economy prospers (Hand & Payne, 2008). In 2000, 17.6% of the Appalachian adult population had completed college compared to 24.4% of the U.S. adult population (Appalachian Regional Commission, 2004).

Aside from learning disabilities, individuals in rural communities such as the Appalachian region, encounter other problems such as having to compete for limited number of jobs and lower occupational attainment (Richards, 2004). As a result of this, these individuals often feel it necessary to relocate in order to expand their career opportunities and further improve themselves (Richards, 2004). According to Parker (2001), although individuals with learning disabilities may make contributions elsewhere, they represent another extraction of resources from the rural communities in moving away to do so. It is important that rural community colleges use their assets to assist students with learning disabilities in making transition plans that include post-secondary goals as well as work components (Richards 2004).

Background of the Study

According to Hart, Mele-McCarthy, Pasternack, Zimbrich, and Parker (2004), most students with learning disabilities either drop out of high school or remain in special education programs beyond their eighteenth birthday, while their non-disabled peers graduate and go on to college, technical school, or full-time employment. It is critical, however, to realize the
importance of post-secondary education in today’s economy, particularly when considering the limited participation of students with learning disabilities in higher education and the lack of opportunities for these individuals to gain requisite technical skills necessary for success in the working environment. The need to improve access to post-secondary education and to enhance the level of interaction between young adults with learning disabilities and their peers without disabilities is evident (Hart, et al. 2004). This need has sparked a growing level of interest in the development of relevant services and programs in higher education for the learning disabled population. Hart et al. (2004) stated that practitioners who have developed programs and services typically have done so in isolation, on a case-by-case basis, and without the benefit of lessons learned from evidence-based practices that support students. Of all high school graduates, 78% enter into some form of post-secondary education while only 37% of all graduated students with a disability make this transition (Hart, Mele-McCarthy, Pasternack, Zimbrich, & Parker, 2004).

**Challenges for Those Serving College Students with Learning Disabilities**

Upon entering American colleges and universities, it is the job of both the student and the institution to identify the specific needs of the learning disabled (LD) individual to ensure that the necessary steps are taken so a student may achieve academic success. When serving students who are LD, post-secondary institutions must require documentation of the disability to ensure the appropriate services are provided. Once the individual with a learning disability has indicated the need for assistance, a variety of curricular, pedagogical, and technological services can be offered in an assortment of configurations (Prentice, 2002). Prentice (2002) provided examples of these services as follows:

- **Pedagogical**: providing oral testing, tutors, sign language, interpreters, readers, note takers, and extended time for testing.
- Curricular: special course groupings and professional development on strategies that faculty can use to integrate students with disabilities into their classrooms.

- Technological: books on tape, assistive technology, tape recorders, and magnifying glasses.

Janiga and Costenbader (2002) affirmed that a variety of challenges are faced by students with learning disabilities, despite their ability to succeed in post-secondary education, many of these students may not consider college an option due to the encouragement from school counselors and teachers for them to pursue vocational education. Parents may often be uninformed and unfamiliar with the options available for their children, following the advice of school personnel unaware of the services available, and failing to encourage the pursuit of post-secondary education. Students with learning disabilities may not consider themselves smart enough for college due to their struggles in high school (Janiga & Costenbader, 2002). It is important these attitudes are addressed if students with learning disabilities are to reach their full educational potential. Students with learning disabilities may be pressured to enroll in college by parents seeking the prestige associated with a college degree. The decision to attend college does not always consider the student’s career goals and so these students may find themselves in programs that do not meet their occupational aspirations. A comprehensive transition plan is crucial to ensure that the student’s goals are considered. Competitive standardized testing requirements may cause difficulty for LD students who choose to enter university programs (Janiga & Costenbader, 2002).

According to Janiga and Costenbader (2002), LD students who enroll in post-secondary education face additional obstacles. Learning disabilities are hidden disabilities in that they are not physically evident or noticeable when in general contact with the student. Therefore, the
needs of this population are not as readily understood or as accepted as the needs of students with more obvious disabilities, such as vision or hearing impairments (Janiga & Costenbader, 2002). Students with learning disabilities often deny their learning problems and refrain from self-identifying upon entering higher education, wanting to distance themselves from the special education label they carried in elementary and secondary school. Unfortunately, these students may not seek the accommodations they need to succeed in college (Field, 1996; Janiga & Costenbader, 2002).

**Key Terms**

- **Learning Disability (LD)** – is a mental disorder characterized by difficulty in understanding spoken or written language and believed to be related to slowed development of perceptual motor skills. Learning Disabilities consist of a significant discrepancy between mental aptitude and academic performance (Lerner, 2004).

- **Rural Community College** – a community college located in a rural area characterized by low student populations, being geographically isolated, having high percentages of economically disadvantaged students, and serving a population with simple country life styles (Richards, 2004). Rural community colleges are viewed by residents, state legislators, and policy makers, as a catalyst for sustaining a higher quality of life and presenting opportunities for rural America (Miller & Tuttle, 2007).

- **Southern Appalachian** – the southern geographic regions of the Appalachian Mountains running through Southwest Virginia, Northeast Tennessee, Northwest North Carolina, and Southeast Kentucky.
• Student Awareness – the amount and accessibility of information students with learning disabilities have pertaining to the services, opportunities, rights, and programs available to them as a student at the community college level.

• Individual Goals – the personal objective individuals with learning disabilities upon entering the community college setting, whether these objectives are graduation, transferring to a 4-year institution, obtaining a certificate, etc. (Wagner & Blackorby, 1996).

• Teaching Methods – the various instructional practices used by community college faculty members to ensure that students with learning disabilities are educated efficiently and appropriately (Keim, Ryan, & Nolan, 1998).

• Institutional Policies and Practices – a specific set of guidelines implemented by the participating community college to ensure that the institution is making the appropriate reasonable accommodations to ensure that students with learning disabilities are able to receive equivalent knowledge. These may not violate state or federal laws or regulations for provisions of an appropriate education to the learning disabled population. These policies and practices include but are not limited to provision of information regarding accommodations and potential curricular adjustments, as well as procedures to identify, establish, and provide for these accommodations and modifications (Forsbach-Rothman, Padro, & Rice-Mason, 2005).

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the challenges community college officials at rural southern Appalachia campuses face when promoting awareness and providing
assistance to students with learning disabilities. The study also explored institutional policies and practices, as well as, teaching methods community college personnel use to support the community college experience for learning disabled students.

**Research Questions**

This study was guided by the following research questions:

- What challenges do rural community college officials in southern Appalachia face in promoting awareness of available services for the learning disabled population?
- What challenges do rural community college officials in southern Appalachia face with assisting learning disabled students in reaching their individual goals (whether the goal is a degree, a credential, or a single course)?
- What are the perceptions of rural community college officials in Southern Appalachia regarding institutional policies and practices which improve the community college experience for students with learning disabilities?

**Significance of Study**

This study was designed to assist rural community college leaders in southern Appalachia in determining what problems are most substantial when attempting to appropriately serve their respective learning disabled populations and what surrounding colleges are doing to diminish these issues. It provides insight related to the difficulties rural community colleges in southern Appalachia face when promoting student awareness to the learning disabled population and what barriers these institutions face when assisting students with learning disabilities in reaching their individual goals. Rural community college leaders in southern Appalachia could learn from the practices, methods, and approaches of surrounding institutions and increase their understanding on how to approach these challenges efficiently, effectively, and successfully. Although this
study was geared specifically toward enhancing the post-secondary education experience for learning disabled students in rural community colleges, it is conceivable that this study may also serve as a stepping stone for further research to assist numerous institutions in assisting learning disabled students.

Community colleges have a reputation for serving historically underserved populations. It is important for institutions of higher education to realize the magnitude of the perceptions of a student with learning disabilities regarding obtaining higher education. The process is viewed as a major accomplishment by these individuals. Many students have stated that they were attending higher education institutions when others they knew had become frustrated and quit (McCleary-Jones, 2008). The majority of high school students with disabilities enter the workforce upon leaving high school (Wagner & Blackorby, 1996). They see high school as an environment that is difficult and they are afraid to attempt a community college setting. They feel the work world will offer them a wider variety of activities in which they are capable of achieving success (Wagner & Blackorby, 1996). This realization strengthens the idea that community colleges need to take every measure possible to ensure that students are aware of the services available to them.

The study would be beneficial to practitioners as a starting point for understanding the issues community colleges face in effectively serving the learning disabled population. The area is highly under researched despite its importance. The study illustrates what the participating rural community colleges in southern Appalachia are doing to assist students with learning disabilities in overcoming the challenges they face in a higher education setting and discusses some unique practices, methods, and approaches being used by the participating community colleges to improve the experience for students with learning disabilities. As this study merely
scratches the surface of this extremely broad topic, the research encourages follow-up researcher in this area.

According to Wagner and Blackorby (1996), schooling may be even more critical for people with disabilities than for others. In the employment arena, educational credentials predicate skills, knowledge, and work ethic that can help direct an employer’s focus toward a person’s ability rather than disabilities (Wagner & Blackorby, 1996). One of the primary issues when serving students with learning disabilities is an understanding and acceptance of the support needs of these individuals. Generally, staff members of the programs for disabled students have been educated about disability issues and how they might be addressed in a community college setting. Prentice (2002) noted that, unfortunately, most other post-secondary educators had not had the opportunity to benefit from such training. Few instructors in colleges and universities have any significant exposure to learning disabilities. As a result, LD students may feel misunderstood in the higher education setting and negatively affected by teacher perceptions of their disability (Prentice, 2002). In order to serve these students more appropriately, faculty and staff should be trained in four major areas: creating receptive environments, becoming aware of language, applying the American Disabilities Act (ADA) to community college settings, and promoting the success of students with disabilities (Prentice, 2002).

If the disabled students are allowed the modifications that are necessary for them to excel academically, they are more likely to further their educational careers. Many times students with learning disabilities choose not to improve themselves educationally after completing the rigors of high school causing them to often become stagnate and complacent. This can result in intellectually disabled individuals relying solely on other sources as means of financial support.
such as government assistance and Medicaid. These students often receive some form of governmental financial aid; however, both the individual and society would benefit if these students obtain some form of higher education and are intellectually equipped to function as part of the American work force. For these reasons, it is crucial that institutions strive to enhance the higher education experience for the learning disabled student population. The purpose of this case study was to underscore the difficulties community colleges face when delivering higher education and related services to students with learning disabilities and provide recommendations, based on the findings of the study, which are designed to assist rural community college leaders in making more informed decisions regarding the education of the learning disabled student population.

Methodology Overview

The study examined the services for LD students at five rural community colleges located in the Appalachian region of Southwest Virginia, Northeast Tennessee, Northwest North Carolina, and Southeast Kentucky. The methods the chosen community colleges employ to support LD students was the focus of the study. Three interviews were conducted at each community college participating in this study. The first was with a senior level administrator (i.e. the Vice President of Student Development Services). The second was with a mid-level administrator (i.e. the Director of Student Affairs). The Director of any program at the community college dealing directly with students with learning disabilities was the third interviewee. Semi-structured interviews were conducted. Initial interview questions were consistent for all interviews, but some variations did occur in follow-up questions. The variations were due to the different positions and job responsibilities of the interviewees and the differing programs offered at each of the community colleges. Documents concerning the administration
and operation of the programs which serve the LD population, including material related to
groups, programs, policies, and procedures were collected so they could be analyzed and
compared.

**Interviews**

This qualitative examination required a wide array of data collection. Interviews allow a
great deal of data to be obtained from multiple sources, while also presenting various insights,
perspectives, and visions based on the position and involvement of the interview participants.
Comparison of interviews enabled the researcher to note patterns and themes, as well as,
similarities and differences that may occur within the institution when serving students with
learning differences (Creswell, 2007).

Interviews provide a broad spectrum of perceptions about critical issues pertinent to
serving individuals with learning disabilities. It was crucial to gain information based on the
community colleges’ perceptions and so it was necessary to discuss these issues with individuals
who could provide an appropriate illustration of the challenges the community college faces
when trying to serve the LD population from a leadership perspective.

**Document Reviews**

Documents contain a rich source of information. They are used as a means of record
keeping by many organizations, creating a trail of paper, often dating back to the initial
procedures, policies, and records of the institution (Patton, 2002). The information is vital when
conducting research as it allows a view of the progression an entity has made over time. The
documents may provide information about things that are unable to be observed, such as
decisions, goals, or interchanges that may otherwise be unknown to the researcher (Patton,
2002). Document reviews provide information pertaining to the policies and procedures allowing a better understanding of how the community college strives to serve these individuals.

**Delimitations**

The parameters of this study were extremely focused in that only a finite sampling of southern Appalachian rural community colleges participated. Although there were numerous obvious similarities, the environments were unlike any other society in many ways. Learning disabled populations located in rural communities struggle with a shortage of expert personnel, poor families have weak influence on behalf of their disable child, and there is a lack of positive examples of service delivery (Capper, 1990). Follow-up research on the challenges community colleges face when serving learning disabled populations would be beneficial in other geographical areas as well. Learning disabilities are a global phenomenon. It is crucial that research is conducted globally so that this population is served effectively and efficiently.

**Summary**

The purpose of this study was to examine the difficulties community colleges face when serving students with learning disabilities. Research on the issues students face when entering post-secondary education is abundant; however, information based on the difficulties the institutional staff face when serving this population is limited. As LD populations continue to become more prevalent among community colleges, it is critical that institutions examine the difficulties that arise when serving these students so that they may compare methods and operations in order to gain a better understanding of how to successfully approach these difficulties. This study focused on a particular type of disability; those associated with learning. Although the term “learning disability” is close to five decades old, the general phenomenon has been observed for centuries (Lerner, 2004). As this disability continues to be understood, the
basic definition of "learning disability" has allowed swelling numbers to seek a diagnosis that is construed as entitling these individuals to be the legal recipients of special services (Lerner, 2004). Comparing and contrasting the difficulties community colleges face in serving individuals with learning disabilities allows more efficient and effective policies and procedures to be developed. It is important for community colleges to provide services to individuals who are in need without allowing students of the general population to take advantage of the system.
Chapter 2

Method of Literature Review

Research was collected from educational databases such as Google Scholar, ERIC, Education Research Complete, and Education Full Text. Search terms included Learning Disabilities, Rural, Community Colleges, Southern Appalachia, Funding, Transition, IDEA, ADA, and Human Capitol Theory. Numerous articles were examined. Literature was organized in large binders based on topic for easier referencing. Literature pertinent to this study was organized and synthesized based on relation to important points of interest pertaining to this study. Appropriate literature was integrated into the study in small increments to ensure all necessary points of interest were discussed during this review.

Theoretical Framework

The study was guided by the Human Capital Theory. Research conducted by Olaniyan and Okemakinde (2008) indicated that this theory views education as a highly instrumental and crucial aspect to the production capacity improvement of a population and further suggests that educated populations are superiorly effective and efficient. In the Human Capital Theory, education is viewed as an investment that increases the productivity and abilities of humans and plays a vital role in the economic growth and development of a nation (Olaniyan & Okemakinde, 2008). Most economists agree that the human resources of a nation will ultimately determine the character and pace of its economic and social development as opposed to capital or material resources. According to the research of Olaniyan and Okemakinde (2008), the Human Capital Theory is concerned with the acquisition of education and training that increase individuals’ productivity. The Human Capital Theory helped to drive the educational purpose of this study and to clarify the overall significance of the study. Within the Human Capital Theory, earning a
community college degree or certificate, or completing a course or series of courses can have wage benefits or life-rewards that can dramatically improve the economic prospects of all citizens beyond what these individuals could expect without the educational opportunities of community colleges.

Overview

Garner (2008) stated that effective special education enables students with disabilities to dare to dream, to realize they are people of worth, and have much to offer the world. Another role of special education is to empower students with skills that will allow them to achieve future goals. Garner conducted a study which illustrated the challenges encountered by three young learning disabled (LD) men, (1) their successful navigation through high school and (2) their perspectives of the skills they possessed that contributed to their successful completion of post-secondary education. Differences, as well as common themes and recommendations that are foundational in preparing students with learning disabilities for post-secondary education were also evident.

Garner (2008) emphasized the importance in these students, their parents, and special educators to gaining a better understanding of how to prepare for college, the available services at the post-secondary level, and academic expectations. Self-advocacy skills are crucial to early academic development. Students with LD need to know and understand their particular learning preferences and their needs for accommodations and modifications. Current trends toward student-led individual education plans can foster positive transition toward more obtainable career goals and self-advocacy skills. It can only happen when teachers, parents, and students work together collaboratively in developing transition goals and in understanding individual
According to research conducted by Garner (2008), students with disabilities need a set of skills to successfully make the transition, adjust, and remain in higher education. Garner (2008) noted a list which outlined a set of personal or interpersonal skills encouraging students who are motivated to pursue post-secondary education. The list includes the following:

- Accepting one’s disability and its academic impact;
- Understanding and identifying needed support services;
- Ability to describe the disability and the needed service supports to service providers, instructional faculty, and staff;
- Self-advocacy skills; and,
- Determination to overcome obstacles such as time management, study skills, decision-making, and independent-living skills.

Focusing on acquiring specific self-determination skills will play a huge role in the post-secondary success for students with learning disabilities (Garner, 2008). Research suggests that self-determination skills coupled with learning to set realistic goals for the future better ensures post-secondary success. These skills might be introduced in a variety of settings and may even be learned in high school or taught at home prior to the transition. By the time students with disabilities reach high school, they should demonstrate an understanding of their disabilities and be aware of the accommodations and modifications they need for academic success (Garner, 2008). Students with learning disabilities who are able to demonstrate an awareness and understanding of themselves and their disabilities will gain the confidence to act in their own best interest and will acquire the appropriate skills to make choices and comprehend those
choices. Gerber, Ginsberg, and Reiff (1992) wrote of a model for successful employment for individuals with learning disabilities that has proven to be very successful in bridging the gap between school and beyond. The model can also be applied to successful completion of post-secondary education (Garner, 2008). The model for success first addresses internal decisions including desire, realistic goal setting, self-assessment and planning related to the individual's desire, and reframing, or working through stages of setting goals and understanding individual drive (Garner, 2008; Gerber, Ginsberg, & Reiff, 1992). Garner (2008) pointed out these stages are basic to productive outcomes in self-awareness, self-determination, self-advocacy, and success in employment as well as other areas of adult life. Second, the model included the following external manifestations: persistence, proper fit, matching strengths with probable positive outcomes, creativity for effective problem-solving, and possessing social skills necessary to know where help is needed and being able to elicit help (Garner, 2008; Gerber, Ginsberg, & Reiff, 1992). Educators, parents, and service providers should encourage the development of these skills in all students, but especially in students with learning disabilities. It is critical for teachers, students, and their families to be aware of programs that support educational options beyond high school. Sometimes, this knowledge comes best when experiences are shared by students with learning disabilities who have successfully completed post-secondary degree programs.

**Empirical Research**

Serving students with learning disabilities has become a major issue in community colleges across the nation. The number of students with disabilities who turn to higher education to obtain their academic and professional goals has seen a steady increase over the past decade (Prentice, 2002). The concern comes when students who have been provided accommodations
and modifications throughout their academic careers suddenly do not have the option to receive the exact same benefits should they decide to attend college. In order to obtain services, LD students are required to disclose their disability when entering higher education institutions. Failure to identify students with learning differences may cause funds allocated to serve these individuals to decline. If the disabled students are allowed the modifications that are necessary for them to excel academically, they are more likely to further their educational careers. Many times students with learning disabilities choose not to improve themselves educationally after completing school. Because of this choice, they may become stagnant and complacent. This often results with intellectually disabled individuals relying solely on other sources as means of income. These students often receive some form of financial aid; however, both the individual and society will benefit if these students have some form of higher education and are intellectually equipped to function as part of the American work force. For these reasons, it is crucial that institutions continually strive to enhance the higher education experience for the learning disabled population. The purpose of this case study was to help understand the difficulties community colleges face when providing assistance to the learning disabled population.

Beale (2005) pointed out that it was not too many years ago that opportunities for students with learning disabilities to attend technical schools and two- and four-year colleges were virtually nonexistent. Fortunately, this is no longer the case. One example of this lies in the fact that there are now three times as many full-time college freshmen with learning disabilities as there were in the 1970's and this number is expected to increase as larger numbers of students currently being served by secondary school special education programs graduate (Beale, 2005). Most post-secondary institutions offer programs and/or support services for students with
Learning disabilities. Beale (2005) suggested there are four primary factors responsible for the dramatic increase in the number of students with learning disabilities who are accessing post-secondary educational opportunities. These factors include:

- Federal and state legislation, such as the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Section 504) and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990.
- The large number of students identified as LD since the enactment of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).
- The increased emphasis on transition planning for students with learning disabilities at the secondary level.
- The efforts of post-secondary schools to provide adequate support and services for these students (Beale, 2005).

Students with learning disabilities are generally young people who have overcome significant obstacles in achieving academic status. Most post-secondary admission officials are becoming more willing to admit students with learning disabilities. Admission, however, to a post-secondary school is only the initial step in the process of completing their course of study or certificate program. Students with learning disabilities must not only contend with their own unique set of learning challenges, they must also deal with institutional barriers to academic success (Beale, 2005). This means that once admitted it is important for students with learning disabilities to be knowledgeable about their rights and responsibilities, as well as, the responsibilities post-secondary institutions have in serving LD students. The responsibilities of post-secondary schools serving students with learning disabilities are significantly different from those of secondary schools. Because of this, it is important that students, teachers, counselors, and parents understand these differences. Being aware of their rights and responsibilities will
allow students with learning disabilities to prosper from higher education without unnecessary confusion or delay (Beale, 2005). When students voluntarily disclose their learning disability, have provided documentation of that disability, and have requested reasonable accommodations, they are eligible to receive program modifications and other appropriate academic accommodations that will enable them to participate in and benefit from all the educational programs and activities their respective post-secondary institutions have to offer.

**Content**

Empirical research of this literature review highlighted several important areas of concern related to the issues rural community colleges face when serving their learning disabled populations. Topics of interest included the learning disabled population along with historical perspectives, legislative initiatives, and legislation including a comparison of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Section 504, Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE), Section 504, and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). This portion of the literature review also included information pertaining to the rural community college, the historical development of these colleges, and the mission of the community college including open access, comprehensive curriculums, student-centered learning environments, and community orientation programming, along with the commitment to economic development of the service region. Empirical research also contains information specifically pertinent to how rural Appalachian community colleges serve learning disabled students including laws of post-secondary institutions, dealing with the transition process, accommodations, funding, admissions, dealing with discrimination in the workforce and other issues, concerns and challenges. The research also pointed out the potential barriers presented by these areas.
The Learning Disabled Population

As community colleges seek to provide the appropriate accommodations and modifications that will enable students with learning disabilities to experience academic success, the number of students with disabilities who turn to higher education to obtain their academic and professional goals continues to rise (Prentice, 2002). The traditional profile of these students continues to change and as these changes occur more barriers are created in serving this population. These individuals are no longer necessarily viewed as people who are older, poorer, less educated, and less likely to be employed (Prentice, 2002). It is the responsibility of both the student and the institution to identify the specific needs of the LD individual to ensure the necessary steps are taken so the student may achieve academic success. Higher education institutions often struggle with barriers such as consent, boundaries of competency, accommodations, and release of information (Denhart, 2008). When serving students who are LD, colleges must require documentation of the disability to ensure the appropriate services are provided. If the disabled individual indicates the need for assistance, a variety of curricular, pedagogical, and technological services can be offered in an assortment of configurations (Prentice, 2002).

As these students attend institutions of higher education, the expectation of what they are capable of achieving increases. It is the responsibility of the school to constantly support these individuals with various and appropriate teaching methods, curricular accommodations, and technological approaches (Prentice, 2002). Students with learning disabilities will often deny their learning problems as they want to distance themselves from the special education label they carried in elementary and secondary school (Janiga & Costenbader, 2002). It is difficult for the institution to identify LD students. Learning disabilities are hidden disabilities because they are
not physically evident or noticeable when in general contact with the student. The needs of
students with LD, therefore, are not as readily understood or accepted as the needs of students
with more obvious disabilities, such as vision or hearing impairments (Janiga & Costenbader,
2002).

Gregg (2007) cautioned that recognition of the barrier socioeconomic status presents to
successful post-secondary transition for the adult population with learning disabilities is a critical
factor requiring far greater attention from professionals involved the education of these
individuals. When outcomes are negative, the adult with learning disabilities is generally seen as
the primary source of failure and little examination is made of the negative socio-cultural factors
influencing these outcomes (Gregg, 2007). Research suggests that socioeconomic status remains
the most significant predictor of occupational aspirations and post-secondary transitional status
(Gregg, 2007; Rojewski & Kim, 2003). The influence socioeconomic status has on post-
secondary career attainment is considered to be highly correlated with systematic patterns of
educational placement and social expectations (Gregg, 2007; Rojewski & Kim, 2003).

Competencies for success in this global economy require basic academic and critical thinking
skills along with personal qualities such as self-esteem, individual responsibility, self-
management, and integrity (Gregg, 2007). An individual’s expedient access to knowledge is
critical to success in our current global economy. Unfortunately, as Gregg (2007) pointed out,
the acquisition of knowledge is significantly correlated to income level, socioeconomic status
becomes a barrier to career success.

**Historical perspective.** The study focused on a particular subset of disabilities, those
associated with learning. In doing this, it was critical to gain an understanding on precisely what
the research was indicating. It was difficult understand what the research was indicating due to
the fact that the basic definition of learning disability refers to a substantial discrepancy between mental aptitude and academic performance (Lerner, 2004). The malleability of this definition has allowed swelling numbers to seek diagnosis that is construed as entitling one to legal accommodations (Lerner, 2004).

Samuel Kirk, a psychologist in the field of special education, invented the term "learning disability" at an academic conference in 1963 (Lerner, 2004). By inventing the term, he expanded the medical diagnosis of what a disability was. The intent of this was to widen the circle of students entitled to special federal protection and funding (Lerner, 2004). It was successful and the term "learning disability" entered the United States Law a little more than a decade later in 1975, with the enactment of the Education for All Handicapped Act (EAHA) (Lerner, 2004). The successor of the EAHA, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) contains the current standard legislative definition of a learning disability (Lerner, 2004).

Garner (2008) pointed out that after the 1980s, colleges and universities, both public and private, slowly began offering support services such as reading, writing, and math centers, tutoring, remediation, and reduced course loads to all students, including those with disabilities. Although the colleges and universities offered services for students with LD, the services were often not specifically designed for students with L.D. Since the level of awareness regarding transition has been on the rise due to IDEA 1990, amendments of 1997, and the reauthorization of 2004, students today are better equipped for post-secondary education options (Garner, 2008). Their goals for the future are higher because of supportive parents and teachers. Colleges and universities have come to understand the strengths and potential of students with learning disabilities; and, so the number of programs available for students with learning disabilities has
grown significantly. Students with LD that are attending college are the fastest-growing disability group (Garner, 2008).

**Legislative initiatives.** Salend, Salend, and Yanok (1985) suggested that as a result of the EAHA of 1975 IDEA and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the rights of handicapped students in an educational setting have expanded greatly. Implementation of IDEA has facilitated the enrollment of students with learning disabilities in secondary school college preparatory programs, while Section 504 has mandated that publicly funded colleges and universities make reasonable modifications in entrance and academic requirements to ensure that they are afforded an equal educational opportunity (Salend, Salend, & Yanok, 1985). Members of the collegiate special education faculties may serve on committees responsible for protecting the rights of students with learning disabilities. Specifically, special educators could assume a leadership role in implementing as well as monitoring, admissions and programmatic modifications for the learning disabled (Salend, Salend, & Yanok, 1985).

According to Salend, Salend, and Yanok (1985), Section 504 mandates that no admission examination or other entrance criteria that adversely affect the disabled may be used unless such standards can be validated as predictors of success within the specific post-secondary educational program in question. In essence, the existence of equitable admissions policies requires that the handicapped be evaluated on the basis of their abilities as opposed to their disabilities (Salend et al., 1985). Accordingly, special education faculty may ensure that no qualified learning disabled student is denied entrance to the college under prevailing admissions policies. To that end, testing procedures and admission requirements can be carefully monitored to ensure that they do not result in disproportionate rejection of handicapped applicants (Salend, Salend, & Yanok, 1985). Special educators can work closely with their teaching colleagues and college
administrators to establish uniform policies concerning the requirements for the learning disabled populations (Salend, Salend, & Yanok, 1985).

**Legislation.** Kavale, Spaulding, and Beam (2009) noted that unlike other special education categories defined by U.S. Law such as IDEA, the definition of specific learning disability (SLD) has not changed since it was first proposed in 1968. Although the operational definition of SLD has responded to new knowledge and understanding about the construct, the formal definition has remained intact for 40 years, creating a division between theory and practice (Kavale, Spaulding, & Beam, 2009).

According to Gajar (1992), legislative direction for adults with LD was limited prior to 1980, due to lack of adequate funding and social commitment to the area. The Rehabilitation Act of 1973, which emphasized services for individuals with severe disabilities, provided landmark regulations for adults with learning disabilities (Gajar, 1992). Section 504 provided significant changes in hiring and training practices. Specifically, it mandated that it is illegal to discriminate against qualified individuals on the basis of their handicap (Gajar, 1992).

**Section 504.** Forsbach-Rothman, Padro, and Rice-Mason (2005) pointed out that Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 states that “no otherwise qualified handicapped individual in the United States... shall, solely by reason of his handicap, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance.” Under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act-Revised, institutions of higher education are mandated to provide the following: access to facilities and activities; admission policies and practices that do not discriminate on the basis of disability; testing procedures with appropriate accommodations; and, provisions for auxiliary aids and services (Lynch & Gussel, 1996).
Section 504, originally known as Section 503, initially began as an employee protection act to support disabled workers from undue discrimination by their federal employer (Schraven & Jolly, 2010). Section 504 assisted employees as well as students in gaining access to organizations that previously limited access for disabled individuals and reflected other federal civil rights laws that prohibited discrimination on the basis of race or gender (Schraven & Jolly, 2010; Yell, Rogers, & Rogers, 1998). Organizations that receive federal funding cannot discriminate against any group of individuals. If such entities are found to be in violation, they place their federal funding in jeopardy (Schraven & Jolly, 2010). Finally, Section 504 extends the rights of individuals with handicaps to children with disabilities participating in federally funded educational settings and protects students with disabilities in schools with a protection similar to that afforded to employees with disabilities in the workforce (Schraven & Jolly, 2010; Yell & Katsiyannis 2004).

**IDEA vs. Section 504.** Described by deBettencourt (2002), IDEA is a federal law that governs all special education services in the United States. In contrast, Section 504 is a civil rights statute, rather than a federal, programmatic statute (deBettencourt 2002; Schraven & Jolly, 2010). Schraven and Jolly (2010) pointed out that Section 504 defines an appropriate education as an education comparable to that provided to students without disabilities. On the other hand, IDEA states that a program designed to provide "educational benefit" must be provided for students who receive "special education services" (deBettencourt 2002; Schraven & Jolly, 2010; Yell & Katsiyannis 2004). While Section 504 is the older piece of legislation, it is often left to the wayside by teachers and administrators due to a lack of understanding and professional training (Schraven & Jolly, 2010). Ironically, 504 is a broader protection policy, even though IDEA is the one that is more often regulated by school administrators and staff (Schraven &
The misunderstandings between Section 504 and IDEA fall under the leniency of procedures which lend themselves to the advantages and disadvantages of both pieces of legislation (Schraven & Jolly, 2010).

**FAPE.** Section 504 regulation requires a school district to provide “free appropriate public education” (FAPE) to each qualified person with a disability who is in the school district’s jurisdiction, regardless of the severity of the person’s disability (Office for Civil Rights, 2007). The U.S. Department of Education (ED) Section 504 regulation defines a person with a disability as any person who has a physical or mental impairment which substantially limits one or more major life activities, has a record of such impairment, or is regarded as having such and impairment (Office for Civil Rights, 2007). FAPE does not apply in higher education.

**Americans with Disabilities Act.** The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), designed after the modifications provided in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), expands the antidiscrimination coverage under Section 504. The purpose of ADA is:

- To provide a clear and comprehensive national mandate for the elimination of discrimination against individuals with disabilities;
- To provide clear, strong, consistent, enforceable standards addressing discrimination against individuals with disabilities;
- To ensure that the Federal Government plays a central role in enforcing the standards established in this Act on behalf of individuals with disabilities; and,
- To invoke the sweep of congressional authority, including the power to enforce the fourteenth amendment and to regulate commerce, in order to address the major areas of discrimination faced day-to-day by people with disabilities (Americans with Disabilities Act, 1990).
Lerner (2004) pointed out that the ADA of 1991 dramatically expanded American anti-discrimination law. It is unclear how anti-discrimination principles developed in the context of race can be translated to the context of disabilities. A preference for ability is generally perceived as a rational concern and cannot necessarily be said to arise from animus or stereotype (Lemer, 2004). The lack of specifications of the definition of “disability” increases the risk of individuals taking advantage. As ADA subsidizes certain kinds of disabilities and implicitly penalizes complementary kinds of ability, one should expect growing numbers seeking to define themselves as disabled (Lerner, 2004).

**Rural Community Colleges**

When identifying challenges facing higher education in rural settings, Katsinas and Miller (1998) concluded that it is useful to consider whether roles are different for rural community colleges in comparison to other community colleges. These differences are of particular importance in understanding how these rural institutions work toward delivering labor-intensive occupational education programs and serving as conduits for economic development. Katsinas and Miller (1998) point out that a basic challenge in planning and delivering vocational education programs in rural areas has to do with economy of scale. Preliminary analysis of data provided by the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics Integrated Post-secondary Education Data Surveys (IPEDS) have indicated in the past that the average total budget for small rural community colleges has been around about $4.5 million (Katsinas & Miller, 1998). As a result of this, it is not uncommon to find rural community colleges with a low total full-time faculty base (Katsinas & Miller, 1998). Considering staffing and budgetary limitations, these institutions are challenged to deliver both a broad-based curriculum in general education, transfer programs, and vocational and occupational areas. These
same challenges also describe the situation for many community colleges in which transfer and vocational education programs compete for limited resources (Katsinas & Miller, 1998).

According to Katsinas and Miller (1998), rural community colleges, defined by their geographic location, are estimated to be around one-third of all community colleges within the United States. Katsinas noted a more recent attempt to catalog this group of colleges which led to the identification of 922 individual rural community college campuses located in 533 community college districts (Miller & Tuttle, 2007). Murray (2005) cautioned that rural community colleges face a host of unique and often difficult challenges. These challenges may be as simple and essential as securing resources necessary to maintain operation of the college (Miller & Tuttle, 2007). For states that rely on local taxation revenue for the operation of their community colleges, real estate taxation may produce only minimal amounts of revenue and, by requesting increases, college administrators often find themselves in financial constraints (Katsinas & Palmer, 2005; Miller & Tuttle, 2007). Research lists other challenges unique to rural colleges such as recruitment, retention, and development of a high quality faculty and administrative team; resources to support advanced technological applications, including the telecommunications infrastructure necessary to support high-speed computing traffic; the availability of trained staff; and, the challenges associated with economic development in areas that have historically underperformed or have suffered from prolonged economic depression (Killacky & Valadez, 1995; Miller & Tuttle, 2007).

**Historical development of the rural community college.** Over the decades, theorists have attempted to find reasonable explanations to determine why the Appalachian region has lagged behind economically, culturally, and academically. Research from Hand and Payne (2008) demonstrate two theories. Hand and Payne (2008) refer to the first theory as Internalism,
which claims that the problems are internal to the region due to cultural and geographic considerations. The second theory, referred to as Relationalism, blames the problems on relations between regions and between classes. According to Hand and Payne (2008), Relationalism is believed to be the more logical theory, claiming that poverty and underdevelopment are the result of backward work and social relations in the coal industry, unequal class structures, and poor management. Local inhabitants may not feel adequately equipped to initiate the necessary changes (Hand & Payne, 2008). Although research emphasized the economic aspects of Appalachian culture, Chenoweth and Galliher (2004) explained the culture in terms of a sense of belonging, focusing on what they refer to as localism, historicism, and familism. Localism describes the sense of attachment that Appalachians have to their birthplace and childhood environment (Chenoweth & Galliher, 2004; Hand & Payne, 2008). Familism focused on the influences of family members in relation to the college aspirations of Appalachian students. Historicism reported the roots of students indicating where students were originally from and where they planned to attend college. The role of historicism was difficult to access. Chenoweth and Galliher (2004) found that these factors exerted an influence on whether students decided to attend college or not and where they attended college.

Miller and Tuttle (2007) suggested that rural community colleges have three distinct economic development service activities which consist of providing contract training, developing small businesses, and local economic-development planning. Contract training varies from traditional vocational or occupational education in that the “client” for the training is a private business. The training was also being incorporated for the express benefit of the business, which means the purpose of the training is to improve worker performance or ability for a specific business (Miller & Tuttle, 2007). Businesses will often contract developmental education which
may increase the profitability of the company. State departments of labor, economic
development, education, and social services continue to work toward consolidation of the
programs that serve rural communities. Miller and Tuttle (2007) indicated that it was possible to
leverage investments by offering cost shares with businesses and investing in training through
local community colleges. Over 90% of all community colleges offer some contract training
(Miller & Tuttle, 2007).

The second economic development function of community colleges dealt with the
development of small businesses. Development function activities often include incubators that
provide free or reduced office space along with consultative services and advice such as
personnel policy development, hiring assistance, help completing and filing appropriate state and
federal paperwork, marketing expertise, data sets that can feed into business plan development,
and, in some instances, executive on-loan programs to provide seasoned business leadership
(Miller & Tuttle, 2007). Some states have discovered that they are more effective at offering
these types of services by developing networks of community college where experts on a specific
learning disability are located at specific sites or campuses. The networking approach allows for
systems to expand their ability in assisting rural colleges (Miller & Tuttle, 2007). The third area
in which community colleges demonstrate economic development support is in local economic
planning. The activities may consist of scanning for economic trends and watching legislation or
changes to rules and regulations that impact local business or industry.

Miller and Tuttle (2007) stated that several community colleges have even moved into
the policy making arena by calling meetings of policy makers to debate issues that can impact
local industry. They also actively bring citizens together to learn about issues that have the
potential to affect local business. Community colleges can provide educational opportunities for
local policy makers, such as city council members, concerning potential economic growth activities (Dougherty & Bakia, 2000; Miller & Tuttle, 2007). Colleges are critical in assisting in the development of a self-identity for students living in or near the town where the college operates (Miller & Tuttle, 2007). The guiding assumption of research conducted by Miller and Tuttle (2007) is that people who grow up and live near a college, in this case a rural community college, hold a fundamentally different outlook or vision of life, pride, and self-identity. The outlook can arise from early or frequent contact with the college or its faculty, staff, or administrators or it can stem from a community’s sense of pride in serving as the home for the college. The prosperity driven by the college, among other benefits, may also influence the outlook of those who live nearby (Miller & Tuttle, 2007).

Rural community colleges provide multiple services to their local communities including adult literacy programs, academic transfer opportunities, social and health welfare programs, workforce skill enhancement, and even cultural opportunities and leisure education programs. Within the realm of vocational education, two distinct areas of concern are at risk in the rural setting. One is workforce development, where vocational programs provide an educated and qualified pool of potential employees. The other is in the area of economic development, where the institution serves as a conduit for expanding the economic base of local communities (Katsinas & Miller, 1998).

The Mission of the Community College. The mission of the community college is best illustrated through the discussion of five critical points which have been responsible for the success of these institutions. The five points are open access, a comprehensive curriculum, a student-centered learning environment, a community orientation to programming, and a commitment to the economic development of the region which the community college serves.
Open access. Of all the developments in American higher education, few have had a greater impact than the creation of the egalitarian mission of community, technical, and junior colleges (Shannon & Smith, 2006). The shared commitment to access of these institutions is a testament to American beliefs in equality. Research conducted by Shannon and Smith (2006) indicated that the role and scope of the community college is defined as a network of community, technical, and junior colleges in America which are uniquely and extraordinarily successful. It is, perhaps, the only sector of higher education that truly can be called a “movement,” one in which the members are bound together and inspired by common goals (Shannon & Smith, 2006). According to Shannon and Smith (2006), community colleges are often referred to as the “people’s colleges” and have stirred an egalitarian zeal among their members since their arrival. Shannon and Smith (2006) stated the open door policy has been pursued with an intensity and dedication comparable to the populist, civil rights, and feminist crusades. While more elite institutions may define excellence as exclusion only serving a certain population, community colleges have sought excellence in providing service to many (Shannon & Smith, 2006).

Community college educators are aware in how their institutions expand opportunities and improve the lives of their students (Shannon & Smith, 2006). Community college faculties are not judged by their research or publishing but on the strength of their ability to assist students in their educational endeavors and to engage students with different backgrounds, ethnicities, and aspirations. The community colleges’ proverbial open door policy, which ensures access for all who can benefit, is the foundation on which all community college operations rest (Shannon & Smith, 2006). The open door concept influences admissions and enrollment processes, curricular structures, faculty hiring, the relationships between community colleges and four-year
institutions, advising and counseling activities, and colleges’ responses to the needs of the K–12 sector, as well as those of the local economy. Shannon and Smith (2006) concluded that the open door concept is critical to our understanding of the community college itself.

*Comprehensive curriculum.* Wilson (2010) pointed out that academic freedom is currently under threat at many public two-year institutions and community colleges, which serve almost one-half of the nation's first-year college students. The growing reliance on part-time faculty exacerbates the problem, with many adjuncts feeling muzzled for fear of losing their jobs (Wilson, 2010). In 1987, 54% of community college faculties were considered part-time. According to Wilson (2010), twenty years later a report conducted by the U.S. Department of Education in 2007 indicated 69% worked part-time, compared to 32% at four-year colleges. Only 17% of community college faculties are in tenure-track positions, with 14% in full-time, non-tenure-track positions (Wilson, 2010).

The problems facing academic freedom at community colleges in the twenty-first century are more than just structural limitations placed on the adjunct faculty. At some of the nation's community colleges, faculty control over curriculum design is threatened by corporations that dictate course material for degree-granting training programs (Wilson, 2010). Programs such as this have become increasingly common tools for local workforce development initiatives. Elsewhere, faculty face growing demands by accrediting agencies to design protocols that will test student outcomes, which some fear will lead to a more standardized curriculum. In other institutions, faculty members are asked to adopt a "customer service" approach to teaching, with instructors pressured to make students satisfied purchasers of their educational product (Wilson, 2010). Some institutions may face more than one of the aforementioned issues.
Community colleges have become such a central part of the nation's education network, with 1,269 colleges serving close to seven million students, or 43% of the nation's undergraduates (Wilson, 2010). Community colleges are now seen and discussed in mainstream media as well. NBC created a prime-time situation comedy called *Community* that is set on a fictional campus, Greendale Community College. According to Wilson (2010), President Barack Obama traveled to Macomb Community College, thirty-five miles north of Detroit, to announce his administration's proposal to invest $12 billion in community colleges over the next decade through the American Graduation Initiative. The requested money would have been used to upgrade college facilities, develop plans to boost graduation rates, and support the creation of interactive computer software for online learning. The bill for community colleges only contained a $2 billion allocation out of the original $12 billion requested after passage by both houses of Congress (Wilson, 2010).

Community college enrollments have been soaring, with many reporting double-digit gains in 2009. Wilson (2010) pointed out that affordability was a major factor. According to the College Board the annual average for tuition and fees at a community college is $2,544, compared to $7,020 for four-year public colleges (Wilson, 2010). The affordability is largely based on the work of hundreds of thousands of adjunct faculty members, who live semester by semester teaching for as little as $1,500 a course. The educators serve at the pleasure of the administration with little recourse. They can lose a teaching assignment without a stated cause and are the least visible victims in battles over academic freedom. Community college adjunct faculty members are not fired but rather their contracts are not renewed (Wilson, 2010).

Wilson (2010) stated that academic freedom supports the right of faculty to conduct research and publish their findings, even if the subject matter is controversial. It allows them to
speak out on controversial issues, free from institutional censorship or discipline. Recent court rulings have found that public employees, including faculty members, can be disciplined for communications made while carrying out their professional duties. The rights of faculty to determine curriculum and decide what is taught in the classroom are also protected by academic freedom (Wilson, 2010).

Student-centered learning environment. Spangler and Seymour (2002) suggested that excellence within the community college comes from meeting the needs of students without them having to ask. It is equally critical to not only acknowledge but respond to even more challenging dynamics concerning students. The problems occurring with under preparation cannot be ignored. It is the responsibility of community college educators to promote the education of students coming from numerous environments and different walks of life. Their strengths should be recognized and they should be provided strategies to deal with their weaknesses (Spangler & Seymour, 2002).

Community colleges represent hope and for many individuals a second chance. The community college's open door policy allows access to all; without this opportunity, many individuals would never receive the chance to obtain the necessary skills to adequately function as part of the economic work force. Barriers, however, must be removed allowing students to gain access and complete their courses successfully. Students are increasingly likely to have positive experiences when they are provided the appropriate tools and motivation to succeed. Staff and administration should work together in identifying opportunities to continuously improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the student services provided. Community colleges serve a lot of students who need a lot of assistance. The responsibility to support and serve these students is extremely valuable to the capital gain of our nation (Spangler & Seymour, 2002).
Community orientation to programming. Frost (2011) pointed out that the community college movement can be traced to a combination of community needs and higher education pressures. Community or local needs ranged from increasing pressures to make higher education available to more citizens to providing the broad general education and career training that would result in safer drivers, lesser incidence of alcoholism, drug abuse and teenage pregnancies, and a host of other societal hazards. Community colleges were founded for training workers at public expense, for community prestige, and to attract and support a stronger business community (Cohen & Brawer, 1996; Frost, 2011). As they developed, community colleges addressed a variety of needs in U.S. society and particularly in higher education. On one side, junior colleges increasingly became involved in following on the high school experience with either terminal career education, developmental education to assist students in qualifying for university entry, or in retraining workers unqualified for newer industries or evolving technologies (Frost, 2011).

As junior colleges continually integrated themselves within higher education, they were called upon to address still more societal needs. According to research conducted by Frost (2011), the 1947 Truman Commission Report declared the need for modern community colleges to assist the large number of World War II veterans who desired a college education. In the 1960s, community colleges flourished and were constructed almost at the rate of one per week for several years. It was done in order to address increasing enrollment pressures on higher education due to the baby boom and increasing emphasis on scientific and technological education following the Sputnik launch in 1959 (Frost, 2011). Overall, comprehensive community colleges have emerged to emphasize academic transfer preparation, vocational technical education, remedial education, and community service (Cohen & Brawer, 1996; Frost, 2011).
While colleges are charged with such diverse activities, small town colleges are specifically challenged to maintain a balanced mission that addresses community needs. According to Cohen and Brawer (1996), every book written about the institution of higher education since 1936 has articulated these basic elements of providing education and service for community benefit, including providing adult education and educational, recreational, and vocational activities and placing its cultural facilities at the disposal of the community. It was for these reasons that the community college has been chosen for studies gauging the impact globalization might have on smaller colleges and communities. Globalization is still a widely contested concept, particularly in how its existence as a process or force impacts states, communities, and individuals. Institutions such as the community college may be ideal barometers for ongoing measurements of these global forces (Frost, 2011).

Commitment to economic development of service region. Community colleges are a key in providing workforce preparation to a diverse array of economic environments. The United States educational attainment rates have stagnated during the last decade. Because of this, a number of countries have surpassed our nation’s performance on this critical benchmark. In response to this fact, President Obama called for efforts to bolster educational attainment rates, stating that “by 2020, America will once again lead the world in producing college graduates” (Business-Higher Education Forum, 2010).

Bolstering community college pathways is perceived to be an important component toward increasing U.S. educational output and meeting the projected shortfall of workers needed who possess at least some post-secondary education (Carnevale, Smith, Strohl, & Georgetown University, 2010). According to the Business-Higher Education Forum (2010), President Obama believes community colleges will play a huge part in meeting this goal by producing an
additional five million degrees and certificates within the next 10 years. Community colleges play a central role in producing an educated citizenry and skilled workforce. The Business-Higher Education Forum (2010) indicated that community colleges conferred approximately 1.5 million degrees, about evenly split between associate's degrees and certificates in 2007. As the American Association of Community Colleges (2012) pointed out, community colleges serve a vast and diverse set of learners from approximately 1,132 different institutions.

Students attend community colleges for a number of different reasons related to academic, vocational or personal goals and interests (Business-Higher Education Forum, 2010). Among this large group of students, there are those who attend to earn a certificate or terminal associate's degree. These degrees and certificates equip students with the necessary skills needed for the workforce. Finally, students attend community colleges intending to complete introductory level courses that will allow them to transfer into a bachelor's degree program at a four-year institution. While community colleges hold the potential to contribute to rising educational attainment and increased workforce preparedness, a variety of systemic problems and barriers have contributed to disappointing outcomes (Business-Higher Education Forum, 2010).

Rural Community Colleges. Pennington, Williams, and Karvonen (2006) pointed out that a prosperous and successful life in the rural areas of contemporary America requires resourcefulness, creativity, and intelligence. Simple survival within rural areas often necessitates residents to interact with their natural and social environments in ways never experienced by more urban, commercial, or highly populated areas. Pennington, Williams, and Karvonen (2006) added that it may be necessary for educators in rural areas to address challenges their colleagues in more metropolitan areas may be immune to or at the least encounter on a smaller scale.
Community colleges that serve rural America, that must meet the task of being an educational institution, might not always necessarily be understood by other facets of higher education, while simultaneously serving the unique needs of the rural population (Cohen & Brawer, 1996; Pennington, Williams, & Karvonen, 2006). The combined burden has resulted in a number of unique challenges and situations faced by leaders of rural community colleges. According to research conducted by Pennington, Williams, and Karvonen (2006), unique challenges faced by small, rural, 2-year colleges were initially identified in the 1970’s. A series of national conferences and workshops have been conducted on this topic, which have raised awareness addressing the unique concerns pertinent to issues related to these types of institutions. The conferences and workshops have led to the creation of the Task Force on Rural Community Colleges. The task force provided an operational definition of the rural community college as: being publicly supported, being located in a population center of under 100,000 people, serving a vast geographic area, and having programmatic thrust towards comprehensiveness (Pennington, Williams, & Karvonen, 2006). Sources of the unique challenges for the rural community college include the systemic and programmatic features of the community college system and structure, as well as, the geographical and economic context of the rural setting (Pennington, Williams, & Karvonen, 2006).

Pennington, Williams, and Karvonen (2006) stated that rural community colleges are tasked with serving a small population located in a large geographic area. Distances between these colleges and their perspective students along with related communication problems have become fundamental concerns (Pennington, Williams, & Karvonen, 2006). Rural community colleges may often serve as the only source of cultural avocation and personal enrichment in the rural areas due to the limited cultural, social, and recreational services. Geographic limitations
also potentially hinder the recruiting and retaining of faculty who may find life in small towns unattractive in that housing is in short supply and their political and cultural values often differ from the local citizens (Vineyard & American Association of Community and Junior Colleges, W. C., 1978). Geographic barriers and economic concerns present a range of challenges to rural community colleges. According to the research of Pennington, Williams, and Karvonen (2006), rural community colleges suffer from small tax bases that are often not diversified. Lower educational levels are common and economic conditions in the community may mean a lack of part-time jobs for students and full-time positions for graduates. The rural community college’s mission is shifting from once being seen as labor force development to broader economic development in the community (Pennington, Williams, & Karvonen, 2006).

Appalachian region. According to Burnell (2003), rural students are taught to view acceptance by the community as an important aspect of life. When students enter college, they are faced with the loss of their comfort zone and protective environment and are forced to deal with different personal support network. For these reasons, rural students with LD need to be directly taught how to develop systems of support upon being enrolled in post-secondary institutions (Richards, 2004). The social interaction skills necessary for building support networks noted by Richards (2004) such as maintaining eye contact, using the appropriate pitch and tone, practicing good body posture, and developing good listening skills can be facilitated by having students participate in support groups during high school.

Research conducted by Richards (2004) indicated that rural students are severely limited by narrow school curriculums, as well, as poverty issues in their ability to gain the academic background needed to be successful in post-secondary institutions. As students move through secondary education and begin to research post-secondary programs, their Individualized
Transition Education Plan (ITEP) will need to be aligned precisely to meet their goals and objectives (Richards, 2004). The primary goal of the ITEP is to prepare students to lead productive independent lives after their secondary education experience (Richards, 2004). Students, parents, and teachers must continually evaluate goals and assess if course work applied will provide the student the skills necessary to achieve these goals (Richards, 2004). Once a student has determined that they are capable of and interested in pursuing post-secondary education, the transition plan must contain components that ensure that the current course of study is preparing the student for their future goals (Janiga & Costenbader, 2002).

Hand and Payne (2008) state the education level of parents is a primary factor in the high school student's decision of whether to go to college or not. According to Chenoweth and Galliher (2004), students have a much higher probability of attending college if their parents did. Students, whose parents did not attend college, perceive the college-going process as a particularly challenging obstacle (Hand & Payne, 2008). Getting students to enroll in college is difficult but keeping students from dropping out is an even greater challenge. Stable enrollments are crucial to the success of an institution and depend highly on retention of current students, as well as, a steady flow of new students. It is logical for an institution to invest in retaining its students, particularly those who are considered at risk (Hand & Payne, 2008). The Appalachian region consistently faces challenges with economic development and college-going rates.

According to the Appalachian Region Commission (ARC), "Appalachia" stretches along the Appalachian Mountain Range, encompassing all of West Virginia and portions of 12 other states, from New York south to Mississippi (Appalachian Regional Commission, n.d.). It is considered to be an extremely rural area which has traditionally faced challenges of poverty, low rates of white collar employment, and low rates of college attendance (Chenoweth & Galliher,
In 2000, 17.7% of the Appalachian adult population had a college degree, compared to 24.4% of the U.S. adult population (Appalachian Region Commission, 2004; Hand & Payne, 2008). According to 2009 figures, the average per capita personal income in Appalachia was $29,702 compared to the U.S. average of $36,306 (Appalachian Regional Commission, 2011). The U.S. Census Bureau statistics measure poverty only in terms of financial criteria.

**Serving the LD Population in Rural Community Colleges.** Research conducted by Kosine (2007) reported that among college freshmen, students with learning disabilities are the fastest growing disability category. Kosine (2007) suggested two primary reasons for the increase in college attendance of students with learning disabilities. The first being pressure from parent and advocacy organizations on colleges and universities to enroll students with learning disabilities (Kosine, 2007). The second reason relates to the significant role that anti-discrimination legislation has played in colleges accepting students with disabilities. Feeling pressure from many directions and fearing the loss of funding, colleges and universities have adopted more open admission standards for these students (Kosine, 2007).

Wagner and Blackorby (1996) point out that although more students with disabilities are enrolling in post-secondary institutions, retention rates among this population are low. Results of the National Longitudinal Transition Study indicate a higher percentage of students with learning disabilities drop out of school when compared with their nondisabled peers (Kosine, 2007). These students displayed performance and adjustment problems, including lower grades, lower
attendance rates, higher course failure rates, and lower rates of self-esteem. Kosine (2007) referred to study conducted by the U.S. Department of Education during the 1989-1990 academic year, which followed a sample of disabled and nondisabled students enrolled in post-secondary education programs. When this same group was surveyed six years later, the overall rate of persistence indicated that 53% of students with disabilities had either obtained their degrees or were still enrolled compared to 64% of students without disabilities (Kosine, 2007).

Research suggests several contributing factors leading to poor graduation rates of students with learning disabilities. Literature proposes that these students are not prepared for the rigorous academics encountered in a college setting and have not developed independent learning skills (Kosine, 2007). Other issues cited for academic failure consisted of inadequate support offered by post-secondary institutions, poor transition planning from secondary to post-secondary settings, a lack of self-awareness in one’s disability and learning strengths and weaknesses, and deficient skills and/or desire to self-advocate for academic rights and needs (Eckes & Ochoa, 2005; Kosine, 2007).

The lack of educational support in the post-secondary setting is in part due to the fact that post-secondary institutions are not required to comply with IDEA (Madaus & Shaw, 2006). Educational support is required by law during a student’s primary and secondary years, where the IEP is developed, implemented, and monitored by a team of educators, parents, and often the student. The process provides students with educational services, protection, and advocacy; however, once these students enter a post-secondary setting and are no longer protected by IDEA, they are placed in a position of self-advocacy for support services. During this time while students feel as though they are losing institutional support and protection, parents find themselves excluded from this process due to the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act
(FERPA) (Kosine, 2007). FERPA states that parents no longer possess the legal right to be involved in the educational decision-making process once a student reaches the age of 18. In protecting the privacy rights of students over the age of 18 by not allowing parents to access their children's educational information, the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act in essence eliminates parental advocacy, leaving the student in an even more vulnerable position (Kosine, 2007).

According to Killacky and Valadez (1995), rural community colleges are perceived by residents, state legislators, and policy makers as catalysts for sustaining high-quality of life opportunities for rural America. Research conducted by Miller and Tuttle (2007) pointed out that community colleges indeed provide key educational opportunities for their local population; however, they also provide job training, small business support, and, in many cases, are the focus of small town life. Businesses are more likely to be operated in communities with a college that can provide training (Miller & Tuttle, 2007). It is especially true when training packages include a state investment in workforce development (Miller & Tuttle, 2007).

**Laws of post-secondary institutions.** The Guckenberger v. Boston University case (1997) brought forth the legal requirements of responding to requests for reasonable accommodations (Elswit, Geetter, & Goldberg, 1999; Mull, Sitlington, & Alper, 2001; Wolinsky & Whelan, 1999). In 1977, the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, what is now known as the Department of Education, established guidelines for implementing Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. Mull, Sitlington, and Alper (2001) cautioned that individuals with disabilities must be afforded an equal opportunity to gain the same result, to gain the same benefit, or to reach the same level of achievement in the most integrated setting appropriate to the person's needs. Mull, Sitlington, and Alper (2001) further pointed out that Section 504 states that no
otherwise qualified handicapped individual shall be denied the benefits of or be subjected to discrimination, under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance based solely on his/her handicap. Subpart E of the federal regulations for the Rehabilitation Act relates specifically to post-secondary education. The regulations decree that institutions of higher education must modify academic requirements and methods of evaluation that may be discriminatory. Post-secondary institutions, however, are not required to compromise on requirements that are essential to the program or course of instruction that are directly related to licensing requirements, or that alter content or process that is essential to the evaluation (Mull, Sitlington, & Alper, 2001).

Institutions of higher education are also not permitted to impose rules that may limit the participation of students with disabilities, such as prohibiting tape recording in the classroom. The ADA reinforced the mandates of Section 504 and expanded its coverage to all programs and services despite their federal financial assistance (Mull, Sitlington, & Alper, 2001).

Antidiscrimination statutes were extended to all colleges and universities, regardless of federal funding. Understanding that nonessential methods or criteria may be accommodated without changing the essence of the course is critical to comprehending the right to a higher education for the student with disabilities. As defined by Section 504 and clarified in the Americans with Disabilities Act, an otherwise qualified individual must be able to meet essential program or course requirements with or without reasonable accommodation (Mull, Sitlington, & Alper, 2001; Thomas, 2000).

**Transition process.** Kosine (2007) suggested the continual rise of students with disabilities on college and university campuses over the past several years can be attributed to the 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), which extended anti-discrimination legislation,
under Section 504, to higher education institutions. With the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 1997, secondary schools were required to begin planning for post-school transitions once students reached 14 years of age and were required to include a statement of transition services on the student's IEP (Kosine, 2007). The transition requirements encouraged students with disabilities to consider all possibilities after high school including post-secondary education, in light of the financial benefits afforded by college degrees and certificates (Kosine, 2007; Madaus & Shaw, 2006).

Recent reauthorizations of IDEA in 2004 continue to require IEP teams to provide transition planning; however, it no longer mandates that this process begin when students reach 14 years of age. IDEA 2004 instead states that transition planning must begin no later than age 16 and that the plan be updated annually (Kosine, 2007). The planning process may begin before students turn 16, if deemed appropriate by the IEP team. Kosine (2007) listed further IDEA 2004 stipulations to be included in transition planning such as:

- Appropriate, measurable post-secondary goals based upon age-appropriate transition assessments that relate to training, education, employment, and where appropriate, independent living skills;
- Transition services (including courses of study) that are necessary to assist the child in reaching those goals; and,
- A statement, written no later than 1 year before the child reaches the age of majority under state law, that the child has been informed of his or her rights, and that these rights will transfer to the child on reaching the age of majority.

It is important to note that many educators display concerns about this change in the required age for transition planning. They believe age 16 is too late to begin the planning process
and that waiting until this point to discuss transition issues will leave many students unprepared to pursue post-secondary options (Cummings, Maddox, & Casey, 2000; Kosine, 2007; Madaus & Shaw, 2006).

**Accommodating learning disabilities.** It is important for students with disabilities to realize that post-secondary schools typically ask for current documentation verifying the disability of students who request accommodations. Colleges, universities, and technical schools are likely to ask for assessment documents that illustrate the student’s disability along with the functional limitations the disability presents confirming the need for accommodations (Planning for Postsecondary Education Takes Time and Information, 2007). The documentation should be no more than three years old. Students with learning disabilities who plan on furthering their education in a post-secondary educational setting should begin obtaining and preparing the appropriate documents prior to high school graduation. Post-secondary schools will generally not accept high school IEP’s as documentation of a disability. One exception to this rule is when the IEP is specific to the disability and current. When both of these conditions are met, the students may present test results used to create the document. For example, a student with learning disabilities might submit the evaluation done in his or her junior year as documentation of disability (Planning for Postsecondary Education Takes Time and Information, 2007). If the post-secondary schools require alternate documentation, it is the responsibility of the student to obtain and provide this information. Students with learning disabilities should collect and maintain school files and medical records upon completion of high school.

According to *Planning for Postsecondary Education Takes Time and Information* (2007), IDEA 2004 states that school districts are to provide the child with a summary of his or her academic achievement and functional performance, including recommendations on how to assist
the child in meeting post-secondary goals. The information should assist students in gaining access to further education and employment significantly (Planning for Postsecondary Education Takes Time and Information, 2007). Cawthon and Cole (2010) suggest that after transitioning to college, students with learning disabilities usually have a range of accommodations available to them. ADA and Section 504 mandate that services provided by post-secondary institutions must only provide students with an equal opportunity to learn. It does not require that schools provide accommodations that would provide equal results with non-disabled peers (Brinckerhoff, Shaw, & McGuire, 1992). Accommodations from higher education institutions must be appropriately provided to students with learning disabilities, but cannot fundamentally alter the program of study or produce excessive financial or logistical hardship. If an accommodation is found to be unreasonable, the institution must only provide the most basic accommodation (Brinckerhoff, Shaw, & McGuire, 1992; Cawthon & Cole, 2010).

A national survey of 98% of all institutions with at least one student with a disability provided at least one support service. Reported accommodation rates varied: 88% of all institutions offered extended time, 77% provided tutors, 69% supplied note takers, 62% made class registration assistance available, 55% offered text on tape, 58% provided adaptive technology, and 45% made sign language interpreters available (Cawthon & Cole, 2010; Janiga & Costenbader, 2002). Kurth and Mellard (2006) found that many students with learning disabilities rate these accommodations as ineffective as often as 25% of the time. Kurth and Mellard (2006) hypothesized that many accommodations offered by universities are ineffective and inappropriate because they assign accommodations based on the student’s disability rather than understanding what a student with learning disabilities will practically need in their classroom environment.
From the perspectives of students with learning disabilities, accommodations are often selected based on multiple factors, including the effectiveness and availability of the accommodation, as well as, the amount of increased independence associated with the accommodation and the ease of use. Of these factors, effectiveness of the accommodation being provided was reported as being most important by students receiving them (Cawthon & Cole, 2010; Kurth & Mellard, 2006). Students with learning disabilities rated note takers, extended time on tests, adaptive technology, preferential classroom seating, and public transportation as being effective 80-88% of the time. Tutoring services, tape recorders, alternate test locations, taped text/notes, and mental health services were considered effective 64-78% of the time (Cawthon & Cole, 2010).

**Funding learning disabilities.** According to Katsinas and Palmer (2005), many state legislatures only consider funding public institutions of higher education after they have funded other major programs in the state budget. It is a result of the recent recession and the decline of state revenues. Public colleges are generally considered a discretionary item and typically funded with left over monies from more pressing state priorities, such as programs like Medicaid which attract large amounts of federal funds. Community colleges may also have to wait until the state provides for such functions as corrections and K-12. This has not always been the case (Katsinas & Palmer, 2005). When the baby-boom generation went to college in the 1960s and 1970s, higher education enjoyed a more favored position in most states and community college leaders looked optimistically to state legislatures for much needed support (Campbell, 1985; Katsinas & Palmer, 2005). The capacity or willingness of states to provide that support has since diminished. Community colleges have been forced to adapt in ways that can run counter to their ideas of increasing access and equity (Katsinas & Palmer, 2005).
Hovey (1999) argued that unless states raise taxes to address structural budget deficits, funding will become even more volatile because allocations earmarked for public higher education will be raided to accommodate other needs of the state during bad economic times. Hovey (1999) further pointed out that higher education budgets that increase state cost per student during times of financial stability usually add to the cost of maintaining services during difficult financial periods. Hovey’s (1999) argument has held true through the current recession.

Tidal Wave II is a project of the state of California that focuses on the multitudes of graduating high school students awaiting access to higher education. In order to accommodate the increase in projected college enrollments associated with Tidal Wave II, expenditures on K-12 education, health care, and corrections would have to be held nearly constant; however, it has yet to occur (Katsinas & Palmer, 2005). Instead, many governors and state legislatures have opted to cutting appropriations to all public higher education institutions on an across-the-board basis.

Community colleges rely heavily on state funds, much more than other sectors of higher education. As a result, reductions have a significantly greater impact on community colleges than they do at four-year colleges and universities (Hebel, 2003; Katsinas & Palmer, 2005). State funding reductions at the institutional level challenge governing boards to make up the difference by raising local revenues, cutting programs, or both (Katsinas & Palmer, 2005).

Increasing local revenues through tuition, fees, and local taxes shifts the costs to the students and their families rather than the state. According to Katsinas and Palmer (2005), personnel cost are four-fifths of institutional operating budgets and so cutting costs is usually associated with a reduction in faculty and staff. In 2003, Katsinas and Palmer indicated that 45 state directors of community colleges surveyed reported tuition increases and 44 of 47 reported
increases in 2004 (Katsinas & Palmer, 2005). Both years demonstrated a tuition rise greater than the 2% inflation projected for the consumer price index (Katsinas & Palmer, 2005).

Because of the growing enrollments and state budget cuts, Katsinas and Palmer (2005) stated that community colleges are being forced to make tough choices and do more with less. In addition, the rise of term limits in some states has stifled the legislature’s collective memory of what may be an appropriate formula when funding community colleges. Even states with historically low-levels of investments toward community colleges have dealt with sharp declines in state funding. Katsinas and Palmer (2003) found that states with high-levels of local taxation sustained even deeper cuts than states without local taxation. The reason for this occurrence is that state budgeters know community college districts have access to local revenues. As community colleges use their access to local revenue sources, state officials have decreased state allocations so that deeper cuts can be made in the statewide budget (Katsinas & Palmer, 2005).

In the difficult current economic climate, community college leaders and boards of trustees have been forced to either dramatically increase tuition rate or cut programs and in some cases do both. It is important to consider the struggles that may arise when a community college district lacks one of the two key prerequisites of financial sustainability; access to a viable local revenue stream and citizens willing to tax themselves (Katsinas & Palmer, 2005). It may be necessary for colleges, without access to local revenue streams, to cut high-cost, high-tech programs such as allied health, nursing, or statistical numerical control machining, despite the critical importance these programs have in their regional economies. Community college administrators must often raise tuition, which may depress student enrollment. By raising tuition, students, especially disadvantaged students, may be deprived of the opportunity to gain the lifelong skills critical to employment in an information economy (Katsinas & Palmer, 2005).
Katsinas and Palmer (2005) stated that effects of rapid increases in tuition are evident across the United States. The dollar amounts of the federal Pell grants have not been increased since 2000. Unless state higher education policies are actually in favor of fewer young people going on to college, it seems that the conflict between practice and policy may increase in future (Katsinas & Palmer). Today, impoverished students, much like the ones living in rural southern Appalachian, must take out increasingly large student loans to graduate, requiring community colleges and access-oriented four-year institutions to instruct them in financial debt management (Katsinas & Palmer, 2005).

Community colleges have consistently been mentioned by name in recent presidential State of the Union addresses. President George W. Bush's reference to community colleges in his 2005 State of the Union speech was followed by a sustained standing ovation (Katsinas & Palmer, 2005). Unfortunately, presidential attention does not translate into hard dollars to finance preservation of the open door college, much less its expansion. The current economic climate is extremely troubling for those concerned with access to an education that can prepare and retain workers for jobs in a knowledgeable economy and who see community colleges as critical portals to the baccalaureate. Katsinas and Palmer (2005) state that structural state budget deficits caused by skyrocketing increases in health care, corrections, and K–12 expenditures threaten community college operating budgets. Anti-tax and private benefits movements, along with the diminished capacity community colleges have in lobbying effectively for increased funding are also a concern. The financing methods used to fund operating budgets of community colleges continuously conflict with the goal of universal access to post-secondary education. Addressing these issues will remain a challenge for community college leaders for years to come (Katsinas & Palmer, 2005).
Admissions. Brinckerhoff, Shaw, and McGuire (1992) state that open admission policies or special admission procedures that allow more flexibility in determining whether an applicant with a learning disability is qualified may have the potential for inadvertent negative results. Brinckerhoff, Shaw, and McGuire (1992) further point out that access, defined in Section 504 as including reasonable academic adjustments and use of auxiliary aids, may not be sufficient to overcome unpreparedness, skills deficits, and curricular deficiencies for students with learning disabilities who may have been in non-college preparatory secondary programs. Section 504 clearly states that equal opportunity is the objective as opposed to guaranteed outcomes. It is important for institutions to bear in mind the financial, emotional, and psychological cost to students with learning disabilities if they are eligible for admission but are at risk for failure (Brinckerhoff, Shaw, & McGuire, 1992). Access should be addressed with careful consideration of the student’s potential to be successful in a higher education setting when provided reasonable academic adjustments, modifications, and accommodations.

LD in workforce/discrimination. It is highly probable that employers, as well as others, overestimate the cost of employing the disabled, whether it be physically disabled or mentally disabled (Lemer, 2004). In 2004, Lemer stated that there were grounds for suspicion that large segments of society harbor irrational animus towards disabled persons. Lemer (2004) suggests that people often prefer not to surround themselves with the disabled, perceived somehow as “sick,” and will, as a result, refuse to hire a disabled person who would be more productive than a non-disabled person, even factoring in the additional costs of accommodating the disability.

A broad view of the ADA would prohibit employers from taking into account the cost of accommodating the disability at all when making a hiring decision. In this view, the ADA prohibits both irrational and rational discrimination (Lerner, 2004). Consider two individuals
applying for a job where one has a disability and one does not have a disability. The employer could not prefer the equally qualified applicant over the disabled applicant simply due to his/her disability and the cost of accommodating it, which in turn would make them a less profitable employee. Alternatively put, rational cost-benefit calculations would be foreclosed as a defense to an accusation of illegal discrimination, at least to the extent that such calculations included the cost of accommodating a disability (Lerner, 2004). The Congress that enacted ADA discovered that disabled persons are discriminated against because of stereotypical assumptions, which may not be truly indicative of the individual’s capability (Lerner, 2004).

Issues, Concerns, and Challenges. As noted by Pennington, Williams, and Karvonen (2006), rural community colleges are charged with providing comprehensive programs to a relatively small student population. The deficiencies that accompany this demand prevent rural community colleges from enjoying some of the advantages that benefit colleges with larger enrollments (Vineyard & American Association of Community and Junior Colleges, W. C., 1978; Pennington, Williams & Karvonen, 2006). These inefficiencies are especially evident in program planning, research, and development. Other challenges facing rural community colleges come with obtaining necessary funds. According to research conducted by Pennington, Williams and Karvonen (2006), these institutions are often at a significant disadvantage when in competition with other colleges due to limited resources for grant writing and grant administration.

The research of Pennington, Williams, and Karvonen (2006) pointed out that rural community colleges lack the time and expertise required to conduct sufficient research of local problems and also emphasized the need to identify effective retention strategies for an ever changing student population are also critical. Pennington, Williams, and Karvonen (2006) further
stated that literature has identified challenges related to students and educational programs. In the area of vocational education, challenges may occur due to the perception of limited job opportunities, inadequate positions for cooperative educational experiences, difficulty in instructor recruitment and retention, and problems related program financing (Pennington, Williams, & Karvonen, 2006).

Pennington, Williams, and Karvonen (2006) suggested that rural community colleges often face problems of status and competition within the higher educational system. They often do not have the political support of larger, more prosperous peer institutions and they battle regulatory agencies that do not sympathize with the issues of the small rural community college. Pennington, Williams, and Karvonen, (2006) indicated that these institutions are often ignored by the organizations to which they belong and that the rules and formula for division of funds do not consider unique problems associated with small, rural community colleges.

Pennington, Williams, and Karvonen (2006) stated that federal and state requirements for data and surveys do not acknowledge small, over-worked staffs of rural community colleges. As a result of strategic planning requirements and a general inability of funding formulas to respond to student needs, rural colleges also experience less flexibility. It is difficult for rural community colleges to gain exposure and visibility in the media at the various state capitals, within higher education, and the community college movement (Pennington, Williams, & Karvonen, 2006). The lack of political support at both the state and federal levels creates a barrier against the small rural community college in fulfilling its role as a cultural center for the community (Pennington, Williams, & Karvonen, 2006). Research suggests that it is critical for rural leaders to recognize and promote the institution’s potential as a community and regional catalyst for positive change (Pennington, Williams, & Karvonen, 2006).
Potential barriers to access. Even if students receive effective accommodations, they may still encounter many obstacles in the course of their education. According to West, Kregel, Getzel, Zhu, Ipsen, and Martin (1993), up to 86% of students with learning disabilities may encounter some type of barrier in their post-secondary education. One of the primary areas for potential development of obstacles is in interactions among faculty and students with learning disabilities. Research indicated that faculty members consider themselves to have positive attitudes toward students with learning disabilities and are willing to accommodate and advocate for them in their classes (Cawthon & Cole, 2010; Debrand & Salzberg, 2005; Murray, Flannery, & Wren, 2008).

Research conducted by Salzberg, Peterson, Debrand, Blair, Carsey, and Johnson (2002) indicated that a high percentage (80%) of faculty wanted to know what their responsibilities were in relation to students with disabilities and many want to offer additional time and assistance to these students. While faculty members do promote positive interactions with students with learning disabilities, the students often do not feel the same way. Interviews conducted with students with learning disabilities suggest that they often lack a sense of belonging (Cawthon & Cole, 2010; Kurth & Mellard, 2006). Students with learning disabilities sometimes feel that faculty members either believe that they are incompetent, requiring help in order for them succeeded, or that students with learning disabilities should not be enrolled in their class altogether. Additionally, some students feel that they have difficulty accessing academic information because their professors do not know how to properly accommodate them, that faculty are unwilling to provide specific accommodations, or that the accommodation provided by the university was unsubstantial (i.e. a note writer whose handwriting was illegible to the student). Finally, some students feel discriminated against whether in only perception or in
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reality (Cawthon & Cole, 2010; Kurth & Mellard, 2006). The recognition of potential barriers faced by students with learning disabilities is important. They demonstrate the need for high quality transition services at the high school level that create high levels of self-awareness and self-advocacy skills. At the collegiate level, it illustrates the need for effective and adequate accommodations, as well as, faculty education and support for working with students with learning disabilities (Cawthon & Cole, 2010).

Transitions. In rural communities, the aspirations of students to further their educations are often limited due to the geographical and economic boundaries (Burnell, 2003; Richards 2004). Educators, in rural communities, recognize that when students from these areas choose to continue their education after high school they are more likely than urban or suburban youth to drop out (Burnell, 2003). Despite this fact, research conducted by Parker (2001) indicated there is great hope for rural school survival. The survival depends in part on the students leaving their rural home place for a period of time, usually for college, and then returning to assist the development of their home economies (Parker, 2001).

Research conducted by Richards (2004) suggested that students in rural communities with learning disabilities are faced with a limited number of local jobs and lower occupational attainment. With this realization, students with learning disabilities often decide that they must leave their rural communities so that they can expand their career opportunities and further their education (Richards, 2004). While individuals with learning disabilities make contributions elsewhere, they represent yet another extraction of resources from rural areas very much like other resources found in these areas such as grain, cattle, lumber, fish, minerals, and oil (Parker, 2001; Richards, 2004). In order to deal with this loss of resource appropriately, rural institutions
need to use their assets to assist students with LD in making transitions plans that include both post-secondary and work components (Richards, 2004).

A transition plan is designed to guide the lives of people with special needs. Kinnison, Fuson, and Cates (2005) stated the primary component for these plans considers how the individual is prepared to integrate into the community setting. Subsequently, transition for secondary students is defined as the movement of a person with special needs from the public school to their adult life in the community (Kinnison, Fuson, & Cates, 2005). Barriers to effective transition for students in rural special education programs have focused mainly on issues related to students with high incident disabilities, such as geographic barriers to special education delivery (Fischer, 1995; Kinnison, Fuson, & Cates, 2005), lack of jobs in rural areas (Theobald, 1996; Kinnison, Fuson, & Cates, 2005), and national shortages of qualified special education personnel, particularly in rural areas (Kinnison, Fuson, & Cates, 2005).

Examples of what Kinnison, Fuson, and Cates (2005) considered to be mild disabilities would be LD, Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD), Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), among others. Students with low-incidence disabilities, meaning more severe or hindering disabilities, face even greater challenges than students with high or mild-incident disabilities due to the limited social and rehabilitative services for adults with disabilities in rural areas (Kinnison, Fuson, & Cates, 2005). Students in these communities face long bus commutes to job training programs in other communities (Kinnison, Fuson, & Cates, 2005). Some research suggests that students should realize if they want to work, they should leave the small rural communities in favor of a larger one (Kinnison, Fuson, & Cates, 2005; Theobald, 1996).

More recent research indicated that, within these rural environments, students with LD are carefully guided throughout their academic careers (Richards, 2004). Burnell (2003) pointed
out that in rural communities, personal relationships, cooperative problem-solving, and being accepted by the community are important aspects of life. When enrolling in a post-secondary institution, rural students with LD move to an environment in which they are expected to achieve on their own and serve as self-advocates (Brinckerhoff, Shaw, & McGuire, 1992).

Professionals working with transition services in rural areas are often limited in their experiences at facilitating the transition process (Richards, 2004). For rural students, the lower number of students aspiring to attend post-secondary education institutions further limits professionals working transition in rural areas (Burnell, 2003). Due to this, students with LD are usually provided with transition services; however, most are unprepared for the transition to a post-secondary institution. LD students also need assistance in navigating through the continuum of programs and services provided by institutions of higher education, much less what laws they are impacted by at the post-secondary level (Brinckerhoff, Shaw, & McGuire, 1992; Richards, 2004).

Reasonable accommodations. Forshback-Rothman, Padro, and Rice-Mason (2005) stated, that when considering the academic demands of students with disabilities, instructional leadership must define reasonable accommodations and determine how the integrity of published curricular requirements is affected by such accommodations. According to Forsbach-Rothman, Padro, and Rice-Mason (2005), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (PL 93-112), the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1977 (IDEA) (PL 105-17), and the ADA (PL 101-336) must all be considered. Providing course substitutions, appropriate accommodations, and curriculum adjustments necessary to properly educate students with learning differences presents a constant battle in higher education (Forsbach-Rothman, Padro, & Rice-Mason, 2005). Current legislation does not require that colleges and universities provide course substitutions for
students with disabilities; however, according to the National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities (NJCLD), regardless of the decision as to whether or not to offer course substitutions, post-secondary institutions must establish written policies for the decision-making process (Forsbach-Rothman, Padro, & Rice-Mason, 2005; Wolinsky & Whelan, 1999).

Community colleges often struggle with bridging the gap between high-school and higher education, determining eligibility access for LD students, determining reasonable accommodations to support these individuals, and fostering the level of interdependence these students require (Brinckerhoff, Shaw, & McGuire, 1992). Rights of individuals with learning disabilities are extremely complex. Many institutions are unaware of or do not have a full understanding of these legalities. Without written policies developed to comply with legal mandates and to provide for an individual's acquisition of skills needed to complete educational goals, institutions face two potentially negative outcomes (Forsbach-Rothman, Padro, & Rice-Mason, 2005). Institutions denying course substitutions without justification may face legal ramifications; however, institutions that provide alterations to the extent that necessary skills are not mastered may be placing unprepared professionals in the field, thus discrediting the institution (Forsbach-Rothman, Padro, & Rice-Mason, 2005). Reasonable accommodations are legally required to serve the LD population but it is often difficult to determine what constitutes a reasonable accommodation. The determination of what a "reasonable accommodation" is often at the discretion of the institution. It is crucial that leaders of higher education have a complete understanding of current legislation, so that appropriate provisions ensure the legal rights of students with learning disabilities are met. (Forsbach-Rothman, Padro, & Rice-Mason, 2005).

**Understanding LD needs.** One of the primary issues in serving LD students is an understanding and acceptance of the support needs of these individuals. Learning disabilities are
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the most common form of disabilities found among the college population. Learning disabilities have the highest growth rate of all disability categories associated with higher education; however, many times these limitations go unrecognized (McCleary-Jones, 2008). According to research conducted by McCleary-Jones, about 5% to 10% of Americans have learning disabilities, and while, no two individuals are exactly the same, many share certain similar characteristics.

Salend, Salend, and Yanok (1985) pointed out that while many of the nation's 3,000 colleges and universities are enrolling learning disabled students, only a few institutions have developed specific programs for these individuals. One way of addressing both the academic and social needs of this specific population is to expand the service role of special education faculty members to assist the college community in its delivery of special services to learning disabled population (Salend, Salend, & Yanok, 1985). The expanded role of special education faculty may have mutual benefits for learning disabled students, special education faculty, and institutions of higher education (Salend, Salend, & Yanok, 1985).

Community college staff members of the programs for disabled students generally have been educated in disability issues and how they might be addressed in a community college setting. Unfortunately, most instructors have not had the opportunity to benefit from such training (Prentice, 2002). Few instructors in community college education have any significant exposure to learning disabilities. As a result, LD students attending these institutions may feel misunderstood and negatively affected by teacher perceptions of their disability (Prentice, 2002). In order to serve these students more appropriately, faculty and staff should be trained in four major areas: creating receptive environments, becoming aware of language, applying the American Disabilities Act (ADA) to community college settings, and promoting the success of
students with disabilities (Prentice, 2002). Gregg (2007) suggested that the attainment of positive post-secondary outcomes for adolescents and adults with learning disabilities is dependent upon professionals becoming more knowledgeable about the changing demands of education.

Creative solutions are essential in assisting this population in gaining access to tools and information so that they may add to the world knowledge and economy, thereby increasing their own potential worth (Gregg, 2007). In order to be responsive to the needs of this growing population, it is also vital for community colleges to offer assistance in preparing students to be self-advocates and promote a successful transition between school and work (Norton & Field, 1998). The problem is these types of programs and trainings are expensive and funds have become increasingly stressed in the global economy. Despite the community college serving these diverse disadvantaged populations and devoting substantial resources to ensure appropriate services are available for the LD population, little evidence, if any, exists indicating their efforts are any more effective than those of four-year colleges and universities (Finn, 1999). If the inclusion and acceptance that have renewed the possibilities for LD students in the community college setting are continued, individuals with learning disabilities will continue to choose community college as the path for fulfilling their academic aspirations. Indeed, it is this acceptance of all that should be at the heart of the disability programs on community college campuses (Prentice, 2002).

**Workforce Development.** Community colleges have generally been relied on to provide local businesses and industries with a pool of qualified and skillfully trained employees ready for work (Katsinas & Miller, 1998). A major difficulty, however, is the rise of competition in research, the desire of institutions seeking to expand their continuing education revenues, and a need to train future vocational teachers for the secondary school arena and proprietary
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institutions. Additional challenges have developed from state funding formulas that encourage high student enrollments, often at the cost of vocational programs that tend to be labor-intensive and expensive when compared to transfer-directed humanities courses (Katsinas & Miller, 1998).

Katsinas and Miller (1998) indicated there has been a great deal of research and literature since the passage of the Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Applied Technology Education Act of 1990 concerning post-secondary education's role in articulation programs and teacher training. Often referred to as 2+2+2 programs, students gain experience with two years of vocational education in high school, then two years of training at a community college in a vocational area, and finally, two years of baccalaureate work at a four-year institution, which is supposed to result in a teaching certification. Although these programs have been effective in providing a pipeline of future secondary school teachers, they also encourage out-migration from rural areas and change the role of vocational programs from immediate workforce employment to a transfer orientation. The balance of vocational and academic education is a key issue for vocational education in general and community colleges in specific (Katsinas & Miller, 1998).

Katsinas and Miller (1998) pointed out that many of the most effective articulation programs have been promoted through state legislative activity and, in some instances, have even become mandated. There continues to be a need for vocational teachers, yet it is difficult for many rural areas to offer competitive compensation packages. The resulting difficulty is that rural community colleges are then forced into a situation where they are encouraging their best students to leave the area instead of working in local labor markets, while hoping for a subsequent return. The other pressure is recognized by local labor markets that demand a well-trained pool of employees capable of immediately assuming positions of responsibility (Katsinas & Miller, 1998). Colleges using advisory councils may offer beneficial input to curricular
outcomes for the promotion of program currency; however, weak and limited labor market
demands force graduates to leave the rural setting (Katsinas & Miller, 1998). The challenge lies
in adequately preparing workers while simultaneously projecting employment opportunities and
regulating enrollment based on placement potential. It is important to realize that what has
worked in the past may not necessarily work in the future (Katsinas & Miller, 1998).

Katsinas and Miller (1998) list another dimension to the offering of vocational and
occupational programs as skill-enhancement and continuing education opportunities for rural
industries. With less money available for incentives from state and federal departments of labor,
rural colleges are forced to competitively bid on training contracts. According to Katsinas and
Miller (1998), the competition provides local industry the opportunity to invest in its own
communities, but the advantage has been placed in the arena of the research institution due to the
dramatic rise and increased sophistication of continuing education divisions of federally-
subsidized land-grant universities. The rural community college does have an advantage in being
able to respond quicker when developing curriculums and generally has a structure, lower costs,
and a closer personal local relationship to employees on which to rely (Katsinas & Miller, 1998).
These advantages have been efficient in the past but are fading in light of service missions and
external revenue search put forth from major research and doctoral institutions (Katsinas &
Miller, 1998).

Economic development. The boards of trustees at rural community colleges generally
expect their chief executive officers and institutions to be involved in economic development
activities. Involvement is perceived as simply part of the job, with often great pressure to be
involved with specific training for small-manufacturing firms, and in the delivery of
nontraditional training programs for currently employed, temporarily dislocated, and long-term
unemployed workers (Katsinas & Miller, 1998). In rural settings, the public community college is many times the only entity that can realistically provide training to a wide range of firms and individuals. As the resource base is limited, the issue becomes whether the scarce institutional resources will be invested as part of a long term rural development strategy or to achieve a short-term political agenda (Katsinas & Miller, 1998).

Rural areas are typically more dependent on extractive industries and natural resources to assist with generating their income than their urban or suburban counterparts. These extractive, natural resource-based industries include agriculture, forestry, and mining. Rural America, particularly the rural south, has also been dependent upon textiles and heavy manufacturing industries that have not always performed well. Industries found in these areas have accrued significant deficits, which have made it difficult for many of these industries to be competitive in the global economy (Katsinas & Miller, 1998).

Katsinas and Miller (1998) pointed to the responsibility of rural community college leaders in addressing their own abilities and need for institutional effectiveness within the limited resources available to rural settings. The challenge in developing vocational programs in rural community colleges includes working in a smaller-scale environment which itself does not possess broad-based skills and expertise in economic development planning and program execution (Katsinas & Miller, 1998). The reality provided the rationale for two distinct challenges to community college administrators, faculty, and trustees. The first challenge is the need for a base of technical knowledge related to economic development theory and practice in the rural setting. The second challenge is a need for process training related to the proper use of the institution as an entity to augment and build institutional capacity to server rural development through environmental scanning and purposeful actions (Katsinas & Miller, 1998).
Summary

It is evident that additional research is necessary related to the challenges rural community colleges face when serving the rural learning disabled population. The cultural makeup of community college students in rural environments is unique in comparison to any other society, yet these students, particularly the learning disabled are neglected in the literature.

An understanding of barriers to success that learning disabled students face such as workplace prejudice, lack of career planning, unsupportive work environments, lack of communication skills, and unawareness of resources and accommodations available to them, are critical to improving the educational experience for these individuals and can help open the doors of opportunity. These students have the potential to serve as valuable members of their communities provided they are given the chance along with the assistance to acquire the appropriate skills necessary for success. For this reason, this study and more studies similar to this are necessary.
Chapter 3

Methodology

Economists view education as both a consumer and capital good because it offers utility to a consumer while serving as a resource to the production of other goods and services (Olaniyan & Okemakinde, 2008). As the federal government continues to increase commitment to providing adult services for the learning disabled population, several pragmatic and crucial philosophical issues arise concerning the future of this trend. For the past three decades, a great deal of attention focused on the transition from school to work and school to post-secondary education (Gerber, 1986). Vocational adjustments, community adjustments, and post-secondary training have become high priorities of educating the learning disabled population due to the persistent effects of the disability. The individual and society will both benefit if the students with learning disabilities achieve their goals within higher education and are academically equipped to function as part of the American workforce. For these reasons, it is crucial that institutions strive to enhance the higher education experience for the learning disabled population.

The goal of this study was to examine the various ways rural community colleges in the Appalachia region of Southwest Virginia, Northeast Tennessee, Northwest North Carolina, and Southeast Kentucky serve LD populations and the difficulties these institutions encounter as they address the needs of their LD students. The study examined methods and practices which were successful when serving LD students from rural environments. Three interviews were conducted at a five different community colleges for a maximum total of 15 separate interviews. The interview participants consisted of one senior level administrator, one mid-level administrator, and one individual serving as the Director of any program located on the community college
dealing directly with students with learning disabilities. Interview questions were generally identical; however, some variations occurred due to the position, job responsibilities, and programs offered at the specific community college of the interviewee. Documents concerning operations of the LD populations including any material related to programs, policies, and procedures were collected so they could be compared to those of other community colleges participating in this study.

It is evident that community colleges face numerous challenges when serving the LD population. It has become increasingly difficult to distinguish the truly disabled from those simply claiming a disability to gain an advantage (Lerner, 2004). As LD populations continue to become more prevalent among community colleges, it is critical that institutions examine the difficulties that arise when serving these students. In doing so community colleges could compare methods and operations in order to gain a better understanding of how to successfully approach these difficulties. This study provided an in-depth look at the challenges rural southern Appalachian community colleges encounter when serving students with learning disabilities.

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the challenges community college officials at rural southern Appalachia campuses face when promoting awareness and providing assistance to students with learning disabilities. The study also explored institutional policies and practices, as well as, teaching methods community college personnel use to support the community college experience for learning disabled students.

**Research Questions**

This study was guided by the following research questions:
• What challenges do rural community college officials in southern Appalachia face in promoting awareness of available services for the learning disabled population?

• What challenges do rural community college officials in southern Appalachia face with assisting learning disabled students in reaching their individual goals (whether the goal is a degree, a credential, or a single course)?

• What are the perceptions of rural community college officials in Southern Appalachia regarding institutional policies and practices which improve the community college experience for students with learning disabilities?

**Qualitative Approach**

Community colleges try to promote the educational achievement of LD students. Faculty members, however, are limited in their ability to provide appropriate accommodations because many LD students are reluctant to self-identify upon entering higher education. Perhaps this is due to issues they may have encountered in secondary education such as being misunderstood by faculty, stigma, and having to work considerably harder than non-labeled peers (Janiga & Costenbader, 2002). The proposed qualitative study examined the challenges southern Appalachian rural community colleges face when serving students with learning disabilities.

Interviews and documents reviews served as the sources of information. These types of data collection methods are typical for qualitative studies, in that this approach is generally extensive and seeks to draw on multiple sources of information (Creswell, 2007). In collecting data from both interviews and document reviews, the validity of the research was strengthened through triangulation, a powerful technique in which information from the two sources are cross examined (Patton, 2002). An understanding of how the community colleges involved in this study have adapted over time to better serve individuals with learning disabilities was beneficial.
to this study. The document review allowed for better comprehension of how the community college serves individuals with learning disabilities. Document reviews proved valuable not only for what can be learned directly from them but also as a stimulus for paths of inquiry (Patton, 2002).

This qualitative examination required a wide array of data collection. Interviews allowed a great deal of data to be obtained from multiple sources, while also presenting various insights, perspectives, and visions based on the position and involvement of the interview participants. Comparisons of interviews enabled the researcher to note patterns and themes, as well as, similarities and differences that may occur both within the institution, as well as with other participating institutions, when serving students with learning differences. Although there were challenges that arose when conducting interviews, the benefits of this research were much too valuable to forgo this method of data collection (Creswell, 2007). Patton (2002) stated that interviews provide information that cannot be directly observed. It was important to realize that everything such as feelings, thoughts, and intentions toward students with learning disabilities cannot be observed. It was impossible to observe behaviors correlating to this population that have occurred at a previous point in time. The purpose of interviewing was to allow for an entrance into the perspective of others. Qualitative interviewing begins with an assumption that the perspective of others is meaningful, knowledgeable, and able to be made explicit (Patton, 2002). The study used an interview protocol developed specifically for the purposes of this study. The interview protocol was reviewed by a panel of experts in research (see Appendix D). While all participants were asked the same questions during the interview, it was important to realize that some of the follow up questions could vary based on responses provided as well as the positions and responsibilities of the interview participants. Follow up questions clarified
previous points made by the participants or provided additional detail about programs and services.

**Context**

The Appalachian Region has historically depended highly on mining, forestry, agriculture, chemical industries, and heavy industry for economic development. Within recent years, the region has begun to become more diversified to now include manufacturing and professional service industries. Despite the progress of the Appalachian region, this area is still inferior to the rest of the nation in terms of economic vitality and battles economic distress concentrated in the areas of high poverty, unemployment, poor health, and educational disparities (Appalachian Regional Commission, n.d.). The research conducted during this study was done over a three month period, from October to December in 2012.

**Community College A**

Community College A serves two counties and one major city in its region. It is one of 23 community colleges within its system. The institution strives to provide quality and affordable education, training, and cultural activities through an array of flexible, diverse programs that enable community members to succeed today and in the future. Over 4,000 students are enrolled each semester.

**Community College B**

Community College B is a two-year college, serving residents of four counties, as well as one city. The College is one of 23 in its system and operates under policies established by the State Board for Community Colleges and the Local Advisory Board. The College is financed primarily with state funds supplemented by contributions from the participating localities.
Community College C

Community College C is a comprehensive two-year community college under the governance of the State Board of Regents of the State University and Community College System. As a comprehensive community college, it provides university parallel programs designed for students desiring to transfer to another college or university, career programs for students planning to enter the workforce immediately upon graduation, and continuing education and community service programs for professional growth and personal enrichment to the citizens of five different counties.

Community College D

The institution is a comprehensive community and technical college committed to learning success. It partners with students of all ages and backgrounds, helping each design a satisfying future filled with accomplishment. Community College D is a great investment. It provides affordable access to college and workforce readiness programs through their career, college, and life planning support structure. The institution also offers college/university transfer, technical programs, and healthcare opportunities via their academic programs. Finally the college offers customized business/industry training and lifelong learning through workforce solutions. Community College D is a collaborative catalyst in its region, helping blend honored Appalachian traditions with diverse global innovations.

Community College E

Community College E is located in the Blue Ridge section of the Appalachian Mountains. Community College E has been serving 3 surrounding counties for 40 years. It serves as the educational gateway to opportunity in these counties. Community College E exemplifies strong community values and strives to establish respectful learning environments,
maximize natural resources unique to the area, bridge the gap between goals and achievement, respond to the needs of the community, advance opportunities for entrepreneurship and innovation, and cultivate relationships with community partners while encouraging lifelong learning.

**Interviews**

Interviews provide a broad spectrum of perceptions on critical issues pertinent to serving individuals with learning disabilities. For a better understanding, it was crucial to gain information based on the perceptions of the leaders of community colleges. It was necessary to discuss these issues with individuals who provided an appropriate illustration of the challenges the community college faces when trying to serve the LD population. Interviews for this study were semi-structured unless otherwise requested and would be conducted on campus at the participant’s convenience. An email or phone call was placed ahead of time to set a time and date. The purpose of the study was explained and the interview participant was given the opportunity to express any concern or raise questions that were of interest. All participants signed a Research Consent form stating that they understood the purpose of this qualitative study, that their identities would not be revealed, and that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any point. All data were recorded in aggregate form and without using names of the participants or the institutions involved. The interviews were conducted in the office of the participant unless otherwise requested. Upon the approval of the participant, interviews were recorded using a digital audio recording device so that interviews could be later transcribed. Interview questions were generally the same for all participants; however, slight variations occurred in follow up questions based on individual responses, position, or responsibilities. If potential interviewees were unreachable through emails, a phone call was placed to initiate the
process. With the permission of the interview participants, the interviews were recorded and stored on a digital audio recording device so they could be transcribed for analysis. Upon transcription of interviews, a copy of the transcribed interview was emailed to the participating interviewee for verification and accuracy. The recordings kept and secured by the researcher. No other individuals had access to these recordings. Once the research was complete the recordings were permanently deleted.

Description of Interview Participants

Critical case sampling was demonstrated in this study, which permitted logical generalization and maximum application of information to other cases (Creswell, 2007). The sampling method was used to illustrate the challenges surrounding issues, which in this study, were challenges faced by community college officials of rural southern Appalachia when serving students with learning disabilities (Creswell, 2007). Findings of this study could, however, be beneficial to all rural community colleges.

Interviewees were contacted via email, which explained the study including the methodology as well as goals and objectives. Any questions were answered. Ideally a time and place was arranged to meet in order to conduct interviews. The researcher worked at the convenience of the interview participants, agreeing to meet in their campus office and at a time which was most convenient for them. Interview participants were requested to grant permission to have interviews recorded with a digital recording device to ensure that data could be transcribed and analyzed accurately. If a participant declined to be recorded by the digital audio recording device used in this study, a new participant was chosen to replace them.

The participants selected for these interviews were experienced leaders at their community colleges. The goal in the selection process of choosing interview participants was to
have representatives from three levels of administration. The first was a senior level administrator (i.e. the Vice President of Student Development Services). The second was a mid-level administrator (i.e. the Director of Student Affairs). The third was the Director of any program at the community college dealing directly with students with learning disabilities. Titles of interview participants varied accordingly with different positions. All identities of participating institutions and interviewees were kept confidential.

Document Reviews

Documents contain a rich source of information. They are used as a means of record keeping by many companies and organizations, creating a trail of paper, often dating back to the initial procedures, policies, and records of the institution. These documents can provide information about the community colleges participating in this study that may not be observed through interviews and evaluations. Document reviews may provide insight to things that have taken place prior to the research (Patton, 2002).

Documents can provide detail about existing program processes and how these programs came to be. This information is vital when conducting research as it allows a view of the progression an entity has made over time. These documents may provide information relating to decisions, goals or interchanges that may otherwise be unknown to the researcher (Patton, 2002). Documents will ideally provide a more in-depth and personal look at the program processes and managerial operations community colleges employ when accommodating students with learning disabilities.

The document review offered unobservable information about events that occurred prior to this study. With an issue as complex as learning disabilities, it is important to have a well-developed understanding of the historical background that has brought learning disabilities to
where they are today. The researcher concluded that information gained from a focus group would be similar to the information received through interviews. In an attempt to avoid these redundancies, the document review is intended to provide a more diverse array of information beneficial to the research (Creswell, 2007).

Patton (2002) provided some challenges in analyzing documents such as getting access to appropriate documents, understanding how and why the documents were produced, determining the accuracy of the documents, linking the documents with other sources including interviews and observations, and deconstructing and demystifying institutional texts. In this study, interview participants were requested beforehand, via email, to provide appropriate documentation at the time of the interview. The request of documents was made formally. Appropriate documentation included pertinent descriptions of services, policies, procedures, or activities involving students with learning disabilities. Forms were not required to be filled out, blank copies were sufficient. Participants were made fully aware of what the intended use of documents and of the purpose in obtaining such documents. The study sought to prepare and organize data obtained for analysis, then reduce the data into themes through a process of coding and condensing codes and representing the data through discussion (Creswell, 2007).

Description of Documents

No two community colleges participating in this study used identical forms or documents for serving their learning disabled population. These varied due to programs offered and the offices which provided support to students with learning disabilities. However, each community college participating in this study did have the same basic methods and practices in accommodating students with learning disabilities. This section provides a general description of
the most common types of forms or documents obtained and describes how they are used and why they are important.

**Academic referral form.** The academic referral forms are generally used when a student is being referred to a specific program or service. These issues are usually discussed with a student advisor or program counselor. The referral forms consist of the student's full name, address, home and business phone numbers, student ID numbers, and the program in which the student is interested. There is also a section describing the reason for referral, which may explain the reason this particular program or service has been determined as being most beneficial for this individual. Additional comments from the student or referring source may also be listed. The academic referral forms provide excellent documentation on why a student initially chose a particular program or service.

**Client assistance form.** The Client Assistance form is a document that the community college uses to protect the institution by ensuring that any student who receives special services has been made aware and understands their legal rights. The form explains that the Client Assistance Program was established as part of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 to explain and protect the rights of the benefits to persons who are clients of or applicants for services provided by the Department of Rehabilitation Services, Department for the Blind or Vision Impaired, Centers for Independent Living, or programs funded under the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended. Offices for Protection and Advocacy can assist eligible individuals to help resolve problems with a client's counselor or case manager, mediate disagreements about services, provide information on additional resources, and represent clients who are denied services or provided inappropriate services. States involved in this study may have slightly different forms which will be obtained upon visits and compared in this study.
**Request for student accommodation forms.** The Request for Student Accommodation form allows the student and programs for LD students to make a formal documented request to receive a specific service or accommodation. The form consists of the student’s full name, ID number, and the class and instructor for which the service or accommodation will be provided. Numerous and even multiple accommodations can be selected such as adaptive technology, read aloud accommodations on test, special seating during lectures, extra time on assignments or test, a private room for testing, audio recordings of lectures, supervised breaks when tested, assistance with taking notes, service animals, interpreters, or any other need that is deemed reasonably necessary. The form indicates that both the student and programs for LD students are in agreement with the request.

**Academic and/or training program agreement.** The Academic and/or Training Program Agreement form indicates that the student understands and agrees to follow the necessary requirements enabling programs for LD students to assist them with any academic and/or training program needs. In this agreement, the student must agree to meet with the academic coach of the programs for LD students at the beginning of each semester providing them with a copy of their current class schedule and a copy of the previous semester final grades. The form indicates that the student understands that if a tutor is requested, appointments will be set for tutoring services. It is the responsibility of the student to keep these appointments; however, if the student does have to miss, they are to notify the tutor prior to the designated meeting time. If the tutoring appointments are missed twice without notification, the participants tutoring services will be terminated. It also indicates that the student understands that if they are in possession of proper documentation for an accommodation, they are to meet with the academic coach of the program each semester to ensure that accommodation forms for each class requiring an
accommodation are appropriately submitted. The form states that, if a student is struggling with classes that are required as part of a specific program or if a decision to change program of study is made, the student must contact the academic coach to inform them of such changes or find an appropriate solution for academic needs. Academic Coaches must be informed of any work-study jobs or any other jobs that a participant begins are leaves.

Program intake form. The program intake form is a document concerning programs for students with learning disabilities. It is used to record and reference pertinent information about program participants. The document contains numerous sections. The first section provides standard information such as the participant’s full legal name, social security number or identification number, address, date of birth, age, cell phone or email contacts, emergency contact information, gender, race, educational background, and whether or not the participant has an individual education plan (IEP) or a 504 plan in place. The document then provides information about the individual’s disability such as the type of disability, limitations or restrictions as a result of the disability, allergies of the individual, medications prescribed to the participant, contact information for the individual’s current health care provider, and information for contacting the legal guardian. There are sections of the document which contain financial information, such as the type of income received by the participant and information concerning legal status, such as whether or not the individual has ever been convicted, charged, or on probation.

Work status is also provided in this document along with information relative to the work experiences of the individual such as hours, wages, and contact information. Participants are also asked to provide details about unpaid or volunteer work experience. The intake form of programs for students with learning disabilities contains an Employment Placement Plan. The Employment
Placement Plan states the employment goal of the participant, and list potential barriers along with interventions to achieve the employment goal. Signatures of participants indicate they understand and agree with the advisement provided and have enrolled in the selected options by choice. The form indicates that participants may change their goals at any time.

Aside from the Employment Placement Plan, the intake form contains an Employment Placement Record. These programs use this to follow up on the participant's employment status. Once again, the form contains all appropriate contact information for both the participant and their supervisor along with the individual's hours and wages. The programs also use this form to record information obtained from checking the participant's employment status and progress. The follow-ups are conducted at 30 day intervals up to 180 days. The intake form contains an Authorization to Exchange Information form. The form gives the programs for students with learning disabilities permission to release and/or obtain information from selected entities. Description of information to be exchanged may be specified on this form as well as the dates for which the exchange must occur. The purpose of use for the information exchanged may also be specified. The participant signature indicates an understanding of this authorization and the right to revoke authorization at any point. Revocation will not apply to information already furnished in reliance upon this authorization or those to be released by law.

The intake form contains a section dedicated to the Participant Rights and the Participant Agreements. The sections go into detail about the rights of participants in programs for students with learning disabilities, and the agreements necessary for them to comply with as a participant in such programs. The forms are signed by both participant and counselor. The final piece of the intake form is the consent for services form. It indicates that the services an individual receives will be based on an assessment of needs and that any information generated while participating
in this program will be kept confidential. The form states that the participant agrees to provide
the appropriate information to assist him/her with job placement and employment counseling.
Any information obtained during this process is voluntary and will be used solely for the purpose
of employment assistance. Authorization may be revoked at any point. The form gives
permission to contact employers on the participant’s behalf in order to confirm employment and
monitor progress.

**Community College policy for services for students with disabilities.** The document is to
inform students of campus practices and policies. It is the responsibility of the student to contact
the Dean of Student Development Services, or their counterpart, for the request of services.
Request for accommodations should be made three to six weeks prior to the date service is to
begin. Students must provide documentation of disability for which they seek accommodation.
The documentation should be current and from a qualified professional in the field. It is the
responsibility of the student to notify the faculty members of approved accommodations needed
for each class. When course substitutions and curriculum changes are necessary, the appropriate
divisional dean is to be consulted. A student with a complaint should file it in writing to the Dean
of Student Development Services. Students with disabilities are expected to abide by the same
rules, policies, and due process procedures that apply to all other students. Community Colleges
must maintain compliance with both ADA and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

**Student information sheet.** The form provides information about students who receive or
are attempting to receive modifications or accommodations from Student Development Services.
It lists general information such as the student’s full legal name, address, date of birth, social
security number or identification number, high school attended, programs of study, contact
information, their academic advisor, and career goals. The students are asked to provide a
description of their physical or learning challenges and when they became aware of these challenges. Students are asked to provide information as to what has been done to assist them prior to entering this institution, when and by whom they were last tested, whether or not they have an IEP, what their best mode of learning is considered to be, and items they struggle with such as concentrating, remembering, sleeping, eating, waking, being on time, or any other item of concern. Students are asked to list what they consider to be their best quality. Students are asked what support services they anticipate needing. The student information sheet is a general information form used by Student Development Services as a quick reference for students they serve.

*Student Development Services disability accommodation request form.* The form indicates that the student requesting services has a disabling condition which has been documented by the institution. In order to meet the needs of this, student information will be shared to discuss methods to appropriately work with him/her. It states the student has requested a reasonable accommodation as described in Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as well as, the American’s with Disabilities Act of 1990. The necessary modifications will be listed. The reasonable request will ensure that the laws protecting the rights of the disabled are implemented and will prevent the condition from interfering with the student’s potential ability to be successful.

*Student contract.* The form certifies that the student requesting services gives the community college permission to release a description of the student’s accommodations to faculty as per request, and that the student realizes it is their responsibility to seek assistance from the college each semester. It will enable the faculty and staff to assist with courses based on the individual needs of the student. The form is to be signed by the student’s instructors each
semester. Student contracts give the institution the legal right to appropriately discuss the student's needs so that the necessary accommodations and modifications are implemented.

**Justification of Documents Review**

Information found through document reviews is vital when conducting research. It allows a view of the progression an entity has made over time (Patton, 2002). The documents may provide information about things that are unable to be observed, such as decisions, goals or interchanges that may otherwise be unknown to the researcher (Patton, 2002). The same collection of documents were gathered at each community college visited and were obtained at the time of the interviews. Blank copies of forms were sufficient for the purpose of this study. An email was sent prior to the interview date so the participant may effectively gather all necessary documents to share. A review of the documents at the rural southern Appalachian community colleges in this study provided an opportunity to examine some of the barriers that could exist with serving students with learning differences that the employees of this institution are either unaware of or reluctant to suggest. Document reviews provide a different method of data collection than interviews or observations and provide valuable insight to institutional operations that may otherwise be overlooked (Patton, 2002).

**Data Analysis**

The qualitative analysis constitutes a specific way of collecting, organizing, and analyzing data. It represents an analysis process in which the purpose is to gather comprehensive, systematic, and in-depth information pertaining to a specific interest (Patton, 2002). A great deal of data was collected during the process of this examination. The data was analyzed based on specific methods of collection. Data collected during the interviews and document reviews of this study were analyzed using four unique methods which include: data organization and
transcription, reviewing and coding the data, theme development using the coded data, and data validation (Patton 2002). The interview portion of this study was reviewed by a panel of experts in research.

Interviews were transcribed so that responses may be categorized based on specific themes and/or areas the participating community colleges indicate success or shortcomings. Responses were coded based on recurring themes. In transcribing data, all interviews which were recorded using a digital audio device, and were listened to while the researcher transcribed the interview verbatim into a word document. The documents were saved for further analyzing. All community colleges participating in this study were analyzed both individually and collectively.

Documents were initially analyzed question by question, looking for common, unique, and diverse responses. Notes were kept detailing these findings. Data were reported on each separate college and each separate question as well as a collective look of overall general responses and variations. The research noted both differences and similarities in responses in the data analysis. By doing so, a better understanding was provided to what has been successful and what has been unsuccessful. It also allowed the researcher to explore what has been beneficial and what has been a detriment to both the rural community college and the LD population. In this study, all interviews were analyzed individually, which helped in identifying various themes. Interviews were then analyzed together, comparing and contrasting the noted themes through the entire interview process.

A similar method was used in the analysis of the documents review. Documents were individually analyzed based on the specific institution from which they were obtained. Each document was reviewed as a separate entity, noting similarities as well as variations among the policies and procedures within the participating community colleges. The findings were recorded
for further analysis and comparisons. Upon completion of individual analysis, the researcher conducted a cross analysis. Similarities and differences between the participating community colleges were examined. The document review indicated what policies, procedures, and other operations related to educating learning disabled students were most used among the participating community colleges, what programs might be unique, safeguards these institutions implement to protect themselves, as well as, the learning disabled population.

Once this method of analysis was completed, all data from the interviews and document reviews were analyzed together as a whole, noting the differences. Similarities and patterns that were evident through the various methods of data collection and examining major reoccurring themes throughout the study indicated what practices were successful and beneficial and what practices were unsuccessful and unbeneficial. The analysis provided for a more complete and comprehensive look at the problems and challenges rural southern Appalachian community colleges face as a whole when striving to serve individuals with learning disabilities.

**Researcher Bias**

Due to the nature of the proposed study, it was crucial to address the question of researcher bias. The researcher has had a substantial amount of experience working with students with learning disabilities. Due to these experiences the researcher has developed a passion for students with learning disabilities and a desire to see them become successful at a community college level. In an attempt to control researcher bias a reflective journal was kept. The reflective journal assisted with monitoring changes in attitudes beliefs and indicated the researcher's mood toward the data being collected. It provided insight as to the researcher's disappointment, frustration, impressions, etc. Participants of this study were asked to give honest, open, and
direct answers during interviews and follow-up questions and emails. Due to the personal nature of qualitative data, a strong ethical framework for this study was defined.

**Ethical Protection of Participants**

All educational leaders, community college personnel, and interviewees participating in this study were informed of the purpose of this qualitative study prior to data collection. All participants signed and were provided a copy of an Informed Consent Form (see Appendix C) pertaining to this study. The Informed Consent Form was read and explained to all participants ensuring they each understood the nature of the study. Participants were reminded that their participation was voluntary and they were permitted to withdraw their participation at any point during the research. Participants were additionally reminded that all information obtained during the course of this qualitative study would remain confidential. Upon transcription of interviews, each interviewee was provided a copy of their transcription to review for accuracy and clarification. The transcriptions contained a copy of the Informed Consent Form, thus again participants were reminded of their right to withdraw from the study at any point.
Chapter 4

Findings

This chapter focuses on the answers to the research questions formulated to guide this study. The thoughts, experiences, and visions of the interview participants of this study are illustrated; however, the identity of the participants and the institutions involved in this study will remain anonymous and no identifying information will be evident through the research. One purpose of this study was to assist community college officials in making more informed decisions regarding the services provided to the learning disabled population as well as to the education of these students.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the challenges community college officials at rural southern Appalachia campuses face when promoting awareness and providing assistance to students with learning disabilities. The study also explored institutional policies and practices, as well as, teaching methods community college personnel use to support the community college experience for learning disabled students.

Research Questions

This study was guided by the following research questions:

- What challenges do rural community college officials in southern Appalachia face in promoting awareness of available services for the learning disabled population?

- What challenges do rural community college officials in southern Appalachia face with assisting learning disabled students in reaching their individual goals (whether the goal is a degree, a credential, or a single course)?
What are the perceptions of rural community college officials in Southern Appalachia regarding institutional policies and practices which improve the community college experience for students with learning disabilities?

**Challenges in Promoting Awareness of Services**

The intent of this question was to gain an understanding of how rural southern Appalachian community colleges promote awareness for the available services offered to students with learning disabilities. There was a palpable amount of confusion during certain interviews when referring to learning disabled students. Participants would often speak about deaf or handicapped students when responding to a question. Community college officials acknowledged that student awareness was a challenge in educating the learning disabled population, as one mid-level administrator indicated:

I think getting the word out to students is probably the biggest issue. We have so many students with disabilities that don’t come and ask for assistance. We think we do a good job of getting the word out but I wish we could get people to take advantage earlier. I think that is probably the most difficult task. We have a lot of information on our website. We’re pretty well known here. We’ve had a very established program over the years. We’ve got a lot of good contacts with the high schools and all the terms that go on. I think we’ve got a very good reputation. I think we make really good ties with the high schools but it’s the other people that come here, maybe the adult students, that I’m thinking maybe are not as aware and maybe never were identified as having a learning disability.

The academic assistance program, which provides tutoring services and one-on-one tutoring, is one example of a total service program. One senior level administrator spoke of the
concentrated effort put forth in the last two years toward “ramping up” total services for students. According to the participant, this community college embedded tutors in certain courses, particularly in developmental courses. The participant further spoke of investments geared toward ensuring that equipment and technology readily available to students remained current. These areas and programs support the learning of all students, not just those with learning disabilities.

**Awareness.** One front-line community college official expressed the positive impact of recent changes in promoting awareness and excitedly declared that he/she is the “go to” individual for serving students with learning disabilities, ensuring each student is offered the necessary tutoring and accommodations. As this participant pointed out:

Before students would be surprised to find out they could get the kind of support being provided. Now they have come to expect it and so it is not such an issue for students to come and meet once a week or check in with the department to make sure everything is running smoothly. Little changes such as this have been instrumental, in everyone including students, staff, and faculty, becoming more aware of the issues involved in serving students with learning disabilities.

Another opportunity to promote awareness toward learning disabilities occurs annually in October during National Disabilities Awareness Week. One mid-level administrator discussed efforts undertaken during this time. The participant conveyed that the community college provides extra attention and is both student oriented and student friendly. The participant further insisted that the institution does an excellent job in making other students, faculty, and staff aware of some of the things students with learning disabilities deal with, which broadens the understanding and sensitivity toward these types of disabilities.
When asked about changes enhancing the community college experience for the learning disabled population, one mid-level administrator indicated students were becoming more educated about their disability as they matriculated from high school such as having a more detailed understanding of their learning disability and how it affected their academic career. This makes a big difference according to the participant who further noted that approximately five short years ago students would often be unaware of their learning disability. Clear explanations were sometimes not provided to students and as a result the students were unable to provide clear explanations of their needs, but only to articulate they received certain accommodations while in postsecondary education. The mid-level administrator further noted that stigmas about being learning disabled have declined and students are more accepting of receiving accommodations and want to have a stronger voice in their academic careers.

There are fewer stigmas about accommodations where students wouldn’t want have or wouldn’t want to participate in accommodations which could contribute to their part of their education. They just didn’t want to be singled out. They are afraid of how that looks to their peers. They would rather try to do without accommodations first and see how it goes. I think there’s less of that now and it’s okay socially.

The participant concluded that students with learning disabilities are not as afraid to come forward and ask for help. They realize it is socially acceptable to seek assistance when needed. These students recognize that education equals empowerment. They are learning to advocate for themselves and to ask for what they need.

Another mid-level administrator spoke of placing information in each syllabus indicating appropriate procedures and approaches for students needing accommodations or services. "Our
staff may have referred to our syllabus. In each of our syllabi we have a statement regarding accommodations."

The participant also spoke of discussing student development and disability services during student orientation programs and making an effort to illustrate that academic advisors are willing to work with students and that appropriate services are offered. Despite these efforts, the participant concluded that the community college remains dependent on students to self-identify. It would be against the law, unethical, and immoral for community colleges to inquire about the disabilities of any student.

Participants were typically positive about tactics used to create awareness and about staff and the efforts they make toward serving the learning disabled population. One senior level administrator stated:

I feel good about it. We have a very supportive staff, a very caring staff; we have a very proactive staff. We become involved with these students before they ever become students on this campus. Our counselors, most of whom are part-time, work with local high schools, guidance counselors, and various connections. If the counselors know that the students might be interested they will bring the students on campus beforehand, work one-on-one with them, and let them know that the services are available. These students are the ones who work through their high school guidance counselors and identify. They’re already identified. The high school guidance counselors know they’re going to pursue an education. We always have a table at the college fair and even orientations when new students come on campus. This office is always represented. So I feel good about what our people do.
One senior level administrator spoke of changes in awareness as the biggest change occurring at their community college in the past two years. According to this participant, the college works hard to establish a relationship between the faculty and the ADA coordinator. In the last few years, the relationship has become solidified. Faculty members who may not have been trained in how to deal with students with learning disabilities are learning to meet the needs of these students and are becoming more comfortable serving them. According to the senior level administrator, awareness among students has increased exponentially.

The same participant further alluded that although there is still a stigma attached to learning disabilities, community college officials spend a great deal of time with these students discussing available services, accommodations, or modifications they may be entitled to, potentially enhancing their community college experience. Many efforts have been made to improve awareness and marketing, to increase connections, and connect learning disabled students to the resources promoting their success. Unfortunately, the senior level administrator was unable to discuss how these changes had impacted the academic careers of these students. The senior level administrator pointed out that they did not talk with the learning disabled population at the end of their post-secondary education to learn how their accommodations and learning experience was improved by these measures. The participant spoke positively of the accommodations provided, in particular services offered through the tutoring center, but stated they would like to have more concrete data indicating the benefits of these efforts. “The tutoring center and the accommodations have been successful but I don’t have data to show you how our efforts have improved. It’s a hole that we’d like to fill.”

Creating awareness was a recurring theme throughout the study particularly with senior level administrators. As another participant stated:
We’ve got to make people more aware of what we have available and to encourage more people to participate and I think we need to market that a little better than what we’ve done. I’m not saying advertise for learning disabled people but I’m saying that we need to market what we offer and get that out so people know and it will do away with that stigma a little bit of it.

The participant also spoke about the idea of creating awareness more quickly. Student awareness is a big issue, the participant noted, and it might be beneficial to include more about learning disabilities in the community college’s student orientation. According to the participant, learning disabilities are briefly mentioned during this time but, with the bulk of information students are getting that day, they may fail to realize the positive impact these services could have on their academic careers. The senior level administrator suggested that although learning disabilities are discussed during this time that it would be nice to take a closer look and go into more detail pertaining to these services.

Simply stated by one mid-level administrator, “We have a lot of information on our website.” Websites are instrumental in providing awareness to students. Most community colleges utilize websites as a way to ensure that students are aware of their commitment to providing all students with equal access to academic opportunities that may enhance their educational experience and that appropriate accommodations and disability services are available upon request to qualified students. Contact information is typically made available on the same web page along with some of the requirements necessary for obtaining accommodations and services. Another mid-level participant was very candid in stating, “I’ve looked at web pages at other colleges that are really thorough and give a lot of information that we don’t have and so I’d like to make a web page that would be like that.”
Pamphlets also served as a way for community colleges to generate awareness towards learning disabilities. One community college offered a pamphlet entitled *Don’t Let Obstacles Stand in The Way*. The pamphlet outlined what a disability is, listed various types of disabilities including learning disabilities, and listed reasonable accommodations that may be provided toward enhancing a student’s learning experience. The pamphlet also illustrates the appropriate steps on how to initiate services and obtain accommodations or support from the Center for Students with Disabilities along with contact information. A second pamphlet, obtained from another participating community college, illustrated support services offered by the institution and how these services would aid students in overcoming obstacles and assist them in achieving academic success.

During the document review portion of this study, one community college provided copies of many different brightly colored flyers and hand-outs containing information about learning disabilities. The flyers were made readily available to assist in promoting awareness. The Center for Students with Disabilities provided one flyer which asks questions from a student’s perspective, such as, What types of disabilities do you work with? and, When do I need to seek services through your office? The questions were then answered and contact information for the appropriate staff was included.

One community college provided a hand-out entitled *Bill Of Rights*. The hand-out was available to students and contained information describing what could be expected including tutoring services. The hand-outs also covered topics such as the right to learn strategies for effective study skills and test preparation, the right to make final decisions regarding student work, the right to be informed when a problem arises with a tutor such as a schedule change or
that a substitute tutor will be provided, the confidentiality of tutoring sessions, and other formalities.

Another document obtained in this study, came in the form of a short hand-out providing information about anxiety disorders. The hand-out detailed information such as the different types of anxiety disorders, the commonality of these disorders, effective treatment, and the relation anxiety disorders have with other physical or mental disorders. The hand-out also provided a short quiz allowing the readers to gauge their understanding of anxiety disorders. The answers to this quiz were also provided along with informative explanations. For an example, one of these questions asked the reader to identify the most common mental health problem in the United States. The answer provided stated that Anxiety orders were the most common in the U.S. and that more than 19 million Americans suffer from anxiety disorders including panic disorders, obsessive-compulsive disorder, post traumatic stress disorder, phobias, and generalized anxiety disorder.

A similar form outlining the basics of dyslexia was also provided. This form answers questions such as:

- What is dyslexia?
- What causes dyslexia?
- How widespread is dyslexia?
- What are the effects of dyslexia?
- How is dyslexia diagnosed?
- What are the signs of dyslexia?
- How is dyslexia treated?
- What are the rights of a dyslexic person?
All of these questions were answered in an informative manner, providing information concerning dyslexia.

One community college had the unique idea of creating a form listing the titles of all books related to disabilities available at the campus library. The same community college provided a single sheet containing caseload statistics describing the number of students attending the community college with a specific disability. For example, the sheet indicated that the community college had 73 students with ADD/ADHD, 73 with Chronic Illness, nine students with a hearing impairment, along with other statistics for learning disabilities, mobility issues, orthopedic disabilities, psychological problems, traumatic brain injury, visual impairment, wheelchair use, and other disabilities. The statistics were from June to January.

In promoting awareness about counseling services, one participating community college provided a flyer entitled *Do I Need Counseling?* The flyer included three sections. The first invited students to see counselors despite feeling uncomfortable. The second section notified students that all counseling is confidential regardless of the issue, unless there are suggestions of abuse or danger. The flyer concluded with a third section containing information about what to expect from counseling services.

Another form provided was entitled *Characteristics of College Students with Learning Disabilities.* The form simply listed issues or problems students with learning disabilities may display in areas such as math, reading, writing, oral language, study skills, or social skills. Readers were reminded that students did not have to display all of the characteristics in order to have a learning disability. Though this form was simple, students having a limited understanding of learning disabilities may find it useful. Another institution offered hand-outs containing information describing learning styles such as visual-nonverbal, visual-verbal, tactile-kinesthetic,
and auditory-verbal. It is important to remember that, like other students, learning disabled students learn in many different ways. It is essential the community college determine what style is most beneficial to each individual learning disabled student so to ensure that student has a positive experience while pursuing higher education. The hand-out listed teaching strategies for each of these learning styles along with information about how each type of learner is different and what resources may be beneficial to the specific learning styles.

Many participating community colleges provided a copy of their catalog or handbook for the document review portion of this study. Although no two catalogs or handbooks received were identical, they basically contained the same information with regard to learning disabilities. The catalogs and handbooks note that in regard to learning disabilities, federal law prohibits the community college from making preadmission inquiries about disabilities. Information regarding a disability, voluntarily given or inadvertently received, will not affect an admission decision. If a student does require special services or accommodations due to a disability, they should notify the appropriate department or service provider in advance. By doing so, it allows the community college to make the necessary preparations to facilitate learning. All information is strictly confidential.

**Technology.** Community college officials expressed awareness of the development technology that can support LD students. Participants pointed out difficulties occurring in the last couple of years with providing assistive technology to the homes of students. The participant did not go into detail about outside organizations involved but spoke positively about the connection to these organizations and how their increasing involvement has become instrumental in the assistance they provide to learning disabled students with helping them gain access to technology within their homes. Although an interest in converting documents and forms to electronic
versions was expressed, the front-line community college official indicated some students may not have access to the internet at home or may not even live in an area where high speed internet is available:

We can’t get away from paper. Some people need to fill it out and bring it in. Everybody is different. We can’t do away with paper and only offer electronic because we do have some areas where they don’t have high speed internet. They can’t access that online website to print it out or send it electronically, but we would like to have all of our information online.

Another front-line community college official acknowledged the barriers technology presented but also spoke of the benefits technology provided to students with learning disabilities:

I said technology can be a barrier. At the same time there a lot of the new apps available. There is the learning ally app which is great for students that have smart phones. We can put the audio book on a virtual bookshelf they can download it and it saves so much time in terms of using the older CD equipment. Students love that. So I think those things make some of the resources more accessible if they have the technology. We just had some iPods donated to us from another department. We’re going to be able to give these to students for them to use and we’re actually working on iPads and iPad labs now. I have someone that we’ve just hired to research apps for students with disabilities and we’re going to load those on the iPads. Another thing, a few other faculty members and I just went through a class. The class was the idle class and it’s about developing online classes through blackboard and a huge component of that is making those classes accessible to students with disabilities in terms of color and font. That was something that was very
helpful to me. Rather than just putting text on blackboard, you make an audio file now, so you make sure there is a lot of different ways for students to access that information.

Contrary to statements provided by a front-line community college official, one mid-level administrator stated many learning disabled students were technologically savvy despite not having internet access. The participant spoke about how crucial it was that higher education institutions determine ways to educate every student. There is an abundance of high quality equipment that benefits the educational experience of the learning disabled population if the technology is utilized effectively and efficiently.

When asked about the biggest obstacle to serving the learning disabled population, one mid-level administrator stated that funding was secondary to finding audio books. According to the participant, it is always difficult to find funding but finding the appropriate audio books has also become difficult. The community college has gotten creative in dealing with this issue. Some of the newer textbooks take so long to record that the community college often has more success finding them on a podcast from the publisher. An assurance that the student actually purchased the book is necessary but students can open PDF versions of textbooks and use a screen reader to read the text.

Another community college provided a PDF Request form. The idea behind this form is that students with learning disabilities may request PDF versions of their text books so they may benefit from the screen reader which serves as valuable technology for some learning disabled students. The form affords community college administrators the following information:

- The student is enrolled for the semester and particular course correlating with the requested PDF.
- The student has registered with the Center for Students with Disabilities.
Learning Disabilities 102

- The student has provided appropriate documentation of their disability and explains why they are unable to use standard instructional printed material.

- The student has purchased the associated course text book and agrees not to copy or share the PDF materials.

- The student agrees to return the PDF version to the Center for Students with Disabilities on the last day of the semester.

If students fail to return the PDF version of the text, a hold is placed on their account and students may be charged replacement costs. The PDF Book Request Form will also indicate when the PDF was picked up and returned by the student so the community college can monitor the whereabouts of PDF versions. Once the student agrees to the aforementioned information they simply list the title, author, and edition of the book needed.

**Accommodations.** Sometimes participants spoke of transition teams to serve LD students. One mid-level administrator in particular discussed the importance of these teams and emphasized that they were a mandate of the state. The responsibility of the transition team is to assist students with learning disabilities in the transition from high school into their next phase of life, whether that is higher education, finding a job, or independent living. The mid-level administrator further spoke to the idea that, through these transition teams, students were encouraged to make entities aware of any accommodations they received in high school. They may or may not be eligible for the same service or accommodation in higher education but having the appropriate documentation is beneficial to the student and to the organization. As pointed out by the mid-level administrator, the transition team helps to provide a face, name, and contact to which students can refer.
One institution provided a form entitled *Individual Accommodation Plan* (IAP). The document indicates when a student has a legitimate disability and has the appropriate documentation. The IAP may be sent to the instructors in order to provide clarification of student needs and an understanding of their disability. The form also provides a checklist of the accommodations that should be provided. Some examples of accommodations listed include: note taking, test reading, alternate testing locations, tutoring, and other accommodations.

The same community college also provided a Request for Academic Accommodation form during the document review portion of this study. The form allowed the student to make a formal request for disability accommodation services. It also required students to indicate that they had either provided appropriate documentation to the community college or that they would provide this information by a certain date. A Request for Test Accommodation form was also obtained from this institution. The form allows students to request the following testing accommodations: oral testing, alternate testing locations, extended time on test, or other specific accommodations that may be pertinent to the student’s learning disability.

It is important for students to realize that in order for them to receive certain requested accommodations it may be necessary to provide information pertaining to their learning disability to other individuals including administrators, faculty, staff, and other agencies. Request for this information is used only for the fulfillment of educational needs; however, as noted on most information release forms, a student has the option to modify what information is released and to whom it is released at any point during their community college career. All of these documents and forms are designed to protect both the interest of the student and the community college.
Diversity. Another challenge facing community college lies in generating awareness of available services to the broad and diverse student population. One senior level administrator spoke of the challenges providing information to the many different types of students. According to this participant, the average age of the student served at the community college is 26, however, dual enrollment students may be as young as 16, while some students return in their 70’s. Wide ranges of students are served and many of the students, particularly the older ones, may be unfamiliar with the services offered or feel uncomfortable in requesting accommodations or assistance. The participant spoke of the constant struggle with this issue.

There’s a wide range of students and a lot of the students particularly the ones who are perhaps older students are either not as familiar with our services and don’t take advantage of them or perhaps feel uncomfortable in requesting accommodations or assistance from our office and that’s a challenge.

When asked about the most difficult task faced when serving the learning disabled population, one front-line community college official spoke of non-traditional students. According to this participant, it was much easier to obtain documentation for students coming directly out of high school. These students are used to receiving services and will seek assistance. Obtaining this same information becomes more difficult when dealing with older or nontraditional students. As the participant pointed out, it is crucial that the community college leaders have some evidence and documentation for students with learning disabilities so they are aware of how to promote their success. Unfortunately, community colleges officials often become aware of needs at a point when students are struggling deep in the semester, when problems surface. Attempts are made to increase student knowledge of available services. Student orientations usually provided displays and information in an attempt to spread the word
of services. Although the participant felt the community college did a relatively good job in this area, room for improvement was recognized.

During the document review portion of this study, one institution provided inspirational hand-outs made available to students. The hand-outs spoke to and encouraged the diverse student population. The first hand-out was a short story entitled *You Are an Eagle*. The hand-out insinuated that all students, regardless of their diverse backgrounds, were eagles and had the potential to soar and to experience life in their own different and unique ways. The second hand-out was entitled *Rules for Being Human*. The hand-out lists 10 rules for students by which to live. One example expresses one sure rule succinctly: Learning lessons does not end. There is no part of life that does not contain lessons and that, as long as there is life, there are lessons to be learned. These documents were merely used to uplift the spirits of all students while attending community college.

*Rural.* There are still negative assumptions associated with learning disabilities. One senior level administrator spoke of the lingering stigma in a rural area of being a learning disabled student:

I think in this area there is a limited awareness and willingness to talk about disabilities in general. It’s a rural area. There are some cultural barriers that I think we still fight here. So, I think that always presents a barrier and that may be why we sometimes hear them say, I don’t want anybody to know about this. So I think that’s one of the barriers.

Another senior level administrator spoke of manufacturing jobs in the area that had faded thus creating an economic hardship for all students. In referring to regional climate, the participant reminisced of talking with older returning students who refused accommodations, letters of accommodations, and did not want to disclose their learning disability. Actions such as
these indicated that students failed to realize the benefits of services and continued to view learning disabilities as a stigma, which limits the community college in terms of serving the learning disabled population.

Transportation. The issue of transportation came up in multiple interviews in this study. Although transportation may not be directly pertinent to the study or specific to students with learning disabilities, it was recurring issue discussed by participants. Many rural areas have little if any public transportation. The participants pointed out that some students simply do not have appropriate access. As one mid-level administrator pointed out, a lack of transportation may also hinder students in obtaining documentation for their learning disability. Many students are unable to visit the appropriate offices, which provide this documentation simply because they have no means of transportation.

Challenges in Providing Assistance

The study sought to allow community college officials an opportunity to openly discuss struggles faced when providing assistance to learning disabled students. Many issues arise when serving students with learning disabilities. When asked about the most difficult task in serving the learning disabled population, one front-line community college official discussed time issues. Many students with learning disabilities have multiple issues which may be complicated and require a great deal of support. In this particular case, the participant was accountable for ensuring that every student with a documented learning disability obtained the appropriate accommodations. As the participant stated, other methods of support such as self-management, assistance with getting certain things completed, and access to consistent support throughout the week are needed. The participant said it was a struggle finding time to call and follow up with students or check in to make sure their needs were being met. The front-line community college
official stated they were the “go-to” person concerning learning disabilities and that all students with learning disabilities would be offered necessary tutoring and accommodations. When speaking of recent changes, this individual stated that information about learning disabilities and how to get served is required in every class syllabus. Training has become more emphasized and students with learning disabilities are coming forward and asking for help more readily. The front-line community college official spoke of how important the possession of a fundamental understanding was for the students with learning disabilities, ensuring they are aware of what they are dealing with and have clarity on what is going to ensure their academic success.

Often front-line community college officials felt they held the majority of responsibilities in serving the learning disabled population. Many times community colleges would have more than one campus or have smaller off campus sites, creating difficulties with getting the job done at each of these sites. Email and phone systems are heavily utilized and, as one front-line community college official pointed out, the relationship with the staff of these locations is excellent. Anytime a student inquired about disability services, the staff immediately sends an email or phones the front-line community college official who advocated for the learning disabled population. Phone conferences are arranged to discuss possible accommodations and services the students may be eligible for and copiers are used to scan the paperwork and documentation over to the front-line community college official advocating for students with learning disabilities. When possible, the accommodations are placed into action on the same day.

Mid-level administrators typically deal with administrative duties and less with the students. When asked about changes occurring in the last 2 years to enhance the community college experience for the learning disabled population, one mid-level administrator was candid in replying, “I would say none, because we don’t really focus on that.”
The participant further reiterated that it was the responsibility of the student to self-disclose. Although the interaction between mid-level administrators and students does not occur often, it does generally occur on an individual basis regarding the needs of the community college. One mid-level administrator provided the example of students being “backed out” of classes because they had failed to pay. The mid-level administrator was in the process of assisting them with getting back in the classes once the financial issues were resolved. One of these students was receiving a full refund. The student happens to have a disability, although that is not the reason for the refund. Apparently the student had not met the prerequisites for the class. The participant stated, “I do a lot of administrative duties like that,” and emphasized the importance of providing services to any students who may require them regardless of the disability. As reiterated many times during the course of this study, community college officials are often unaware as to whether or not a student has a disability.

One mid-level administrator spoke of helping students with learning disabilities with self-esteem issues. As the participant pointed out, students with learning disabilities often receive many negative messages while attending public school and sometimes feel they are unable to achieve academic success.

I think helping students with disabilities work through self-esteem issues is definitely difficult. They have had so many negative messages in public school, made to feel like they can’t do things, and so I think the task of helping them to overcome that and to understand disabilities and that they can do things that they thought they couldn’t is probably very difficult.
The community college has a desire to help these students overcome these issues and demonstrate the possibility that students with learning disabilities can reach goals they initially felt they could not. It is not an easy task.

One senior level administrator stated that the issues faced by students with learning disabilities were often the same difficulties faced by all students. Although funding was mentioned by senior level administrators, it was not addressed by front-line and mid-level community college employees as much. When asked about the greatest obstacle faced on a personal level when serving the learning disabled population, one senior level administrator denied facing a personal obstacle because they had performed their job for many years. One senior level administrator stated that money issues were a constant struggle but recognized these issues will occur whether a student is learning disabled or not.

As the participant moved beyond discussion of financial limitations, they began to speak of counseling and finding adequate resources, issues faced by adult students, returning students, and students of families trying to work and go to school. The senior level administrator concluded by saying that there is often no quick fix for many problems, but certain issues are encountered by all students, not just those with learning disabilities. As another senior level administrator pointed out, it is difficult to define the single most difficult task in terms of serving students with learning disabilities. When new students come to the community colleges, a great deal of one-on-one interactions occur to determine what the specific learning disability is and how to best work with the faculty and staff to ensure students receive the most beneficial academic experience.

**Self-identification.** As mentioned numerous times in this study, it is the student’s responsibility to self-disclose any learning disabilities and request services. As one front-line
community college official simply stated, students will often fail to self-disclose. Although faculty and staff are typically good at recognizing when someone is struggling and in need of services, it becomes much easier for a student to have success once they self-identify and begin receiving assistance. As one front-line community college official pointed out, “Being in a rural community I think students often struggle with understanding their learning disability and how they can get through college.” Upon self-identification, the community college suggests services to benefit students, such as weekly appointment meetings with the community college’s designated department for students with learning disabilities. According to one front-line community official, issues with self-identification are a consistent struggle from one semester to the next. What typically happens is the student will attempt one or two semesters without assistance but essentially fail or drop the majority of their classes. The participant felt that students were ashamed to ask for help although the participant did not completely understand why in that disabilities are never publicized or announced. Students with learning disabilities often wait and ask for help when it is almost too late and their GPA’s are low. Students sometimes turn to the financial aid office for help. The community college tries to address this issue by placing information for students with learning disabilities in each syllabus of every class instructing them where to go and how to receive assistance. Instructors also go over this information, highlighting this clause to insist students are aware and understand. The participant concluded that informational brochures were made available and disability information was on the community college website.

Although self-identification was mentioned by numerous participants throughout this study, only one mid-level administrator spoke about it in specific terms:
It’s very problematic for us to serve a learning disabled student at this college. Now, what do we do? Well first is self-disclosure. We’re not going to ask. We simply aren’t going to do that and so we don’t get a lot of students identifying as learning disabled. We simply don’t pursue it. We can’t. It’s illegal and besides that, it’s not the right thing to do.

Perhaps the biggest and most obvious issue in serving the learning disabled population comes with issues faced from students being responsible for identifying themselves. Stepping into a higher education atmosphere upon coming out of high school is different and many times learning disabled students view this as a way to shed their past label of having a learning disability. When one senior level administrator was asked what their greatest obstacle was when striving to serve the learning disabled population, they responded with the following remark:

In many cases, if I’m working with a student, I may not even know the student is part of the learning disabled population. I think one of the things that happens, and we see this here, when students leave high school and they enter college, they don’t apply for the services that are available or let me say this, they don’t even request the services that are available. They have to identify themselves to us. So I think that in itself, maybe not even knowing that the students need the services or are eligible for services. I know faculty come to me when they sense a student has an issue, such as a learning disability. We always refer the student to our center for disability services. Our staff there can interact with these students or a counselor can interact with students. But one of the things is just students identifying.

Reflecting on their time as an instructor, another senior level administrator stated that it was difficult to recognize which students had learning disabilities, and as an instructor, it is often unclear which students might require services. Learning disabled students seem to be reluctant to
self-identify out of embarrassment or fear someone may view or treat them differently. It is a big obstacle. Many learning disabled students feel they are going to be unable to do certain things and so it is difficult for community college officials to bring them out of that mindset. In trying to handle this issue, the senior level administrator concluded that information was placed in each class syllabus directing students on where to go and how to proceed with obtaining the necessary assistance, accommodations, and modifications should they require them. The senior level administrator however stated they did not see these students because their job dealt primarily with faculty, and so their direct contact with the learning disabled population was limited.

Many institutions have some form of disability service student profile, which obtained upon a student’s self-identification. The profiles provided the community college with necessary general information such as the nature of their disability, how long they have been diagnosed, related medications, what impacts the student feels from their disability, past accommodations, and whether or not permission to notify instructors of the disability has been granted among other information.

Upon self-identification, students are asked to complete and sign a form authorizing use and disclosure of confidential information. The forms indicate student consent to the use of health information and clearly state that the information contained on the form is protected by federal and state confidentiality laws governing mental health, developmental disabilities, and substance abuse services. The form authorizes outside agencies and organizations to disclose pertinent information to the community college. For example:

- Screening and Assessments
- Diagnostics
- Progress Notes
- Treatment Plans
- Psychiatric Reports
- Academic Testing Results
- Disability Assessments
- Substance Abuse

The community college or department which obtains this information may not disclose the information further except as permitted by the student or required by law. Consent to disclose information may be revoked by a student at any point by providing written notice. Students are not required to self-identify in order to receive financial assistance or other benefits that may be available. By providing the aforementioned information on the form which is signed by the student, community colleges illustrate that all participants have been provided the appropriate information.

**Parental Involvement.** Parental involvement was mentioned by several participants during the course of this study although not frequently discussed. When speaking about difficulties encountered by learning disabled students and how these challenges contrast with the issues faced as an administrator, one front-line community college official did, however, elaborate on the topic:

I know for me personally parental involvement is a big deal. One issue as an administrator I guess is having parents of students who were heavily involved in high school and now they’re coming to college and they want to be heavily involved in college. It’s done differently number one and then number two, generally speaking, we have waivers or release forms the student can sign that we can communicate with the parent but other than that, we’re generally not communicating with the parents so much.
at a college level. There is this adjustment that has to take place from an administrator point of view. That’s kind of an ongoing thing. It’s pretty common that the students dealing with a learning disability have an involved parent if they’re coming out of high school. I’ve tried to develop a sheet that shows the differences and explain it to them.

As indicated in the document review portion of this study, students typically are required to complete some type of Information Release Form. The form indicates whether the college has the right to release information to the student’s parents or guardians and also to instructors, to rehabilitation service providers, to a spouse or other family members, to medical personnel, or to other agencies. Forms of this nature were received from more than one institution participating in this study but were generally structured in the same format containing the same information.

**Staffing.** Being short staffed or not having enough personnel to serve all the needs of every student seemed to be a theme that arose in more than one discussion and, despite being short staffed, participants remained optimistic. One front-line community college official noted:

Every student that walks in belongs to all of us. We all have an obligation to serve them. I think that’s the beauty of the people that work in here, even though there will never be enough of us to meet the individual needs of everyone, we certainly make every effort.

Another front-line community college official elaborated that working with the learning disabled population was only one of several responsibilities and that other duties took away from time in that area:

We’re small and we have a rather small student population, so it’s not a full-time job for me. It’s part of a couple other jobs, so that makes it hard in terms of time. I think that if I had more time throughout the semester I could do more research in terms of how to better use the technology. The fact that it’s only part of my job, I’m restricted and I do the best I
can do with what I can do. I think that makes it difficult. It’s something that you have to keep on. I went to a conference this summer because I knew I was going to be taking this job. I think it’s something you have to read the research, you have to keep up on the new technology, and you have to keep up on the new learning models out there for students with disabilities. That takes a lot of time for those kinds of things.

One front-line community college official had the opportunity to hire a learning specialist and spoke about how beneficial and instrumental the learning specialist had become to the department in providing one-on-one time with all students needing assistance, predominantly those students with learning disabilities.

A mid-level administrator pointed out that although he/she considered himself/herself an advocate for all students with learning disabilities, he/she believed the faculty often did not have that same sensitivity toward these students. The participant stated they often had to “go toe-to-toe” and explain that the community college was not asking faculty to compromise the integrity of their class. Faculty are expected, however, to do certain things such as provide required accommodation for students with learning disabilities. Other accommodations may include extended time on assignments, a copy of notes, or extra time on a test. No different expectations or changes to the syllabus are necessary, just certain accommodations. The mid-level administrator emphasized how important it was to have an advocate who would ensure the equality for all students.

As one senior level administrator noted, his/her office places significant emphasis on promoting student services or instruction. Unfortunately, senior level administrators often do not see learning disabled students until problems arise and usually these problems consist of issues in developmental education and/or with the complexity of navigating the system. Staffing
limitations result in many struggles for community colleges when working with these issues on a case-by-case basis. Another senior level administrator pointed out that the community college had just hired a learning specialist to tutor students and provide other assistance. According to this senior level administrator, creating a new position is not easy to do due to budgetary restrictions. The participant indicated satisfaction with the new personnel, and further noted that the community college wanted to give maximum time to students who required special services. According to the participant, the student center for disabilities had been moved to a different office located on the first floor near one of the doors in an attempt to make it more accessible and encourage more students to become involved.

Senior level administrators generally spoke positively of their staff. They went on to add that new methods would be employed to get more involvement in creating greater awareness concerning students with learning disabilities. As a result of this, one senior level administrator stated that the community college was having success in supporting more students with meeting their individual goals and graduating, despite initially coming in with low self-esteem.

We’re having more students be successful in meeting their goals. We’ve had students graduate whereas initially it was uncertain they ever would because of their low self-esteem. I think that’s typical of people with learning disabilities, a lot of times they have real low self-esteem. To see them be successful, even if it’s a small goal, that’s great.

Although their community comprises five campuses, one senior level administrator emphasized, these campuses are served by only one disability service person. Although this person has now been housed on the main campus, they remain responsible for all five. The particular community college serves a larger service area of seven counties, where many
community colleges may only serve two or three counties. It presents a challenge when serving
the learning disabled population.

Senior level administrators seem to deal primarily with faculty and staff and have limited
interaction with the student population. One senior level administrator spoke of staff
development programs consisting of activities designed to help staff and faculty become more
aware of how better to deal with students with learning disabilities. The senior level
administrator even discussed working with some faculty who had learning disabilities. The
employees might be handled in a different manner and may be worked with on a more intense
level to ensure their understanding.

In an attempt to provide the workforce with more information regarding learning
disabilities so that the community college staff may become more equipped to promote the
success of students with learning disabilities, one institution provided a pamphlet entitled
Enhancing the Development of a Diverse Workforce. The pamphlet provided information to
faculty and staff pertaining to students with disabilities. It also clearly pointed out that services
are designed to meet the individual needs of students and eventually lead to employment.
According to the pamphlet, one in five students has a disability. The pamphlet emphasizes
special programs; however, most of these programs were not specific to students with learning
disabilities. The pamphlet also lists employment services along with contact information.

Another institution provided a form entitled Workshop Evaluation form for Disability
Awareness. The form allows the participants to answer questions on a rating scale from zero to
four, where a four indicates participants strongly agreed and a zero meaning they strongly
disagreed with the statement. The participants are also allowed to provide feedback and
comments regarding their overall evaluation of the workshop, things they would like to see
added or omitted, and suggestions for other topics. The form gives the faculty and staff an opportunity to express their concern and offer suggestions they feel may promote a stronger and more aware institution with regard to serving learning disabled students.

*Becoming self-advocates.* One front-line community college official compared the community college to high school. The participant felt as though many students, particularly the ones coming directly out of high school, entered community college with the impression they would merely survive by the same methods in which they survived high school.

What I see is that college is much like high school, I feel like many people come to college just seeing that they survived high school and feeling like they do not have to take initiative or become self-advocates because they have already been programed in the high school. Teachers would know what they needed and provide what was on their IEP. Some of these students don’t even know what an IEP is unfortunately and they’ve had one for four years, but they are not used to accepting that responsibility to get what they need. It’s one of the biggest difficulties I see, especially with eighteen year olds.

According to this participant, students did not take initiative in high school and, in many cases, had become programmed, where they expected their teachers to advocate for them. The front-line community college official stated that many students, primarily the younger ones are not used to accepting responsibility. The participant discussed measures taken with these students to help them adjust to the community college atmosphere and accept the role of being a self-advocate. One example provided was a new approach the participating community college had learned of from one of their sister schools. According to the front-line community college official, accommodation letters, in the past, would be provided to the instructors. The accommodation letters were to be signed by the front-line community college official and the
students with learning disabilities. Copies were then made for each instructor. The students with learning disabilities are not forced to provide a copy of this letter for each class. Learning disabled students have the choice as to the courses in which they receive accommodations. The new approach on trial at this institution holds the learning disabled students responsible for these accommodation letters. Once the letters are signed, they are scanned and emailed to the learning disabled student via their campus email so the institution has record they did provide the letter. The learning disabled students are then responsible for printing these documents and distributing them to the appropriate instructors. The participant would often practice explaining a student’s disability to them so the student would then know how to communicate their needs to the faculty.

One front-line community college official discussed issues with accommodations in that certain students may have had accommodations in high school that are simply not offered on a community college level. For example, the student may have had an aide that sat with him/her all day, or their assignments may have been modified so only a percentage of the assignment was required. As the front-line community college official pointed out, although tutoring services are offered, personal aides are not provided and all students complete the same assignments regardless of whether or not they have a learning disability.

Another front-line community college official discussed how most students with learning disabilities, regardless of the disabling condition, have trouble with self-management issues and being able to complete their work effectively, efficiently, and in a timely fashion. The participant spoke about how their department had been working with learning disabled students, assisting them with becoming self-advocates. The department had also spent time talking to instructors about following through on suggestions that may benefit the academics of these students. Despite
the benefits of counseling sessions, the participant noted recurring struggles in getting students with learning disabilities to come in and discuss issues they had encountered during the week.

Self-management was mentioned by more than one front-line community college official. In promoting students to become self-advocates, one institution provided a document entitled *Disability Services Admissions Process*. The document outlined the necessary steps students with learning disabilities must take when attending the community college. The steps included were: submit college application, complete financial aid application, make disabilities service intake appointment, meet with ADA coordinator, schedule placement testing, contact division counselor to review placement scores and enroll in classes, and bring the ADA coordinator a copy of schedule. The document further listed the offices and contacts for students to achieve help in completing each of these tasks and indicated why each of these steps was important.

Another community college promoted self-advocacy by offering a *Needs Assessment Information* document to students. On this form, students indicate: whether they were a new student, a returning student, or a transfer student; other colleges attended; and, intended majors, minors, and career goals. Students are encouraged to indicate if they require, had completed, or were enrolled in certain remedial classes and to list any courses they had failed, although the form did not specify which type of course whether it be community college, high school, or other. The form also provides students with the opportunity to describe their disability and the effect it presents in relation to participating in classes or accessing campus facilities. The form encourages students to indicate when they were first diagnosed and any physical limitations they might have. The form has a section for students to list their perceived weaknesses and strengths. The final portion of this form is completed by the appropriate office or department with the
student and consists of a checklist indicating the appropriate accommodations that may benefit the student. Students are asked to sign the document with an understanding that a written request must be submitted in advance in order to obtain additional accommodations and that all accommodations are determined on an individual basis and must be supported by documentation.

Students are in complete control of who has access to their personal information. One participating community college offered a form entitled HIPPA Authorization for Release to 3rd Party. The form acknowledges that a student has authorized the use or disclosure of individually identifiable health information to be distributed to those indicated and that, if the person or organization receiving the information is not a health plan or health care provider, the released information may no longer be protected by federal privacy regulations. Students may grant access to personal information by listing the acceptable persons or organizations on the form. One example of how the community college uses such a form is to request personal health information so that the student may be registered with the Center for Students with Disabilities or Vocational Rehabilitation.

Accommodations. Institutions participating in this study are dedicated to providing the necessary and appropriate accommodations and modifications for the learning disabled population whether it be through individual tutoring, working through the instructors, or just modifications to assignments. As one front-line community college official stated, “A student comes through the door, you have to meet the student where the student is and you don’t know what kind of background, what kind of issues the student has had in terms of accessing accommodations.” Typical accommodations learning disabled students may require to be successful in a higher education setting consist of but are not limited to extended time, someone to scribe a test, a read aloud accommodation, assistance with technology, or training with a
particular type of equipment among other accommodations. When asked about providing accommodations, another front-line community college official answered with the following response:

We do have an assistive technology person on campus who is also an advisor for students who are learning disabled, so there is kind of a duel role there. They can work with faculty; they can work with the student, training them either as a small group or individually.

When asked about common difficulties encountered by the learning disabled population, a participating front-line community college official spoke of issues in working with the learning disabled population in the classroom setting, providing those accommodations, and helping the faculty or instructors to better serve the student:

The interpreter, that’s a huge issue. We don’t have many students that need sign language interpretation but finding someone is very difficult. It’s difficult for students that have Asperger’s syndrome, autism, to get along in the classroom setting. They have to multi-task and be responsible for multiple assignments. Helping the faculty members to realize and understand some of the issues they’re going through is a challenge that I think we can continue to work on. I think we can make some improvement in those areas and I think just the broad spectrum of disabilities, physical, reading comprehension, auditory/visual processing disabilities, there’s just such a wide range that manifest in different ways in the classroom. It’s hard sometimes for faculty to understand. We have the documentation they don’t have the documentation. We only send them the accommodations. For them to understand where it comes from and what they can do is sometimes an issue. There are
some faculty members who are very comfortable with calling me and asking “What else can I do, What else can I do?” In that situation it works out perfectly.

As one mid-level administrator pointed out:

In high school the accommodations they provide sometimes are a little more hand holding than we provide here. The students have to be more on the college level, and to advocate for themselves. Sometimes because they’ve always been taken such good care of in the high schools, it’s a big transition to come here and have to become a self-advocate.

The same participant had the idea of a team approach. For example an individual the student could turn to for help. The participant gave the example of reminding students they had support, but that certain assignments are required by the set due date. The participant said this approach may serve as a reinforcement that would be beneficial to students with learning disabilities.

Another mid-level administrator pointed out that there are difficulties when providing accommodations to students with learning disabilities. Sometimes there will be multiple tests on the same day or even at the same time and, of course, part of providing accommodations to these students may lie in needing a room free of distractions in which to test, having a proctor for the test, or someone to read the test aloud to the student. The issues present challenges for the community college. As the participant noted, it is difficult to be three places at once or cover all the needs of the learning disabled population due to manpower limitations. Luckily other counselors and instructors are willing to assist with these issues and sometimes students may need to take test at times that work better for those trying to provide accommodations to ensure
their needs are met. Instructors are understanding of these issues and work with the counselors and other accommodating individuals. As the mid-level administrator pointed out:

Well as the counselor, usually if I had more than one student testing and they couldn’t be in a room together I would ask another counselor to help or I would ask the instructors to let them take the test earlier, earlier in the day or the day before so I could give the accommodations to both students or multiple students and make sure they got what they needed.

In order to receive accommodations some community colleges have, students complete an interview type form, which asks general questions such as:

- What high school did you attend?
- Why did you decide to attend college?
- Who is your advisor?
- Are you currently working?
- Are you receiving financial aid?
- Are there any obstacles you feel may make it difficult for you to reach your goal of graduation?

Most institutions participating in this study have some type of accommodation form indicating that the Disability Coordinator or other responsible official will discuss the types of available appropriate accommodations with the student and that these accommodations will be provided once the student has self-identified as having a learning disability. Notification that the student must self-disclose before the institution is obligated to provide any accommodations is clearly noted on the form. The form protects the student and the community college in that it
provides evidence the student self-identified, requested assistance, and that the institution acknowledged the student’s self-disclosure and offered the appropriate accommodations.

One institution provided a document pertaining to information students must present to establish eligibility for disability support services. According to this document, students will not be allowed to receive these services until this information is submitted. Students are required to be either a first generation college student, have limited income by federal guideline standards, or have a disability that my impact their pursuit of a degree. The document clearly indicates acceptable forms of verification for each of these stipulations.

One community college provides an *Intake/Need Analysis* form. The form asks clients for general information, such as the type of degree a student is enrolled in, their basis of eligibility to receive support, family income information, an explanations of any physical, emotional, or educational disabilities, whether or not the client is a former veteran, the types of services they may be interested in, whether or not they have been served by other programs, and other information that may be beneficial to the community college and the support services department.

*Tutoring.* Community colleges in rural southern Appalachia place an emphasis on tutoring services, especially when striving to serve the learning disabled population. Based on responses during the course of this study community colleges are seeking to enhance their tutoring programs. One front-line community college official noted that the greatest obstacle personally faced when serving the learning disabled population was creating a desire for tutoring within the learning disabled population. Although this is something that is heavily recommended, as the participant further discussed, just because it is here, readily available, and the student may have a learning disability, does not ensure he or she will take advantage of these services.
Despite efforts of the community college to encourage the learning disabled population to seek help and take advantage of services, students will not come if they do not want to come and they cannot be forced. As the front-line community college participant pointed stated:

Well getting them to want tutoring and even sign up for tutoring, although I do recommend it and also that they see the learning specialist, just because she’s here and they have a learning disability doesn’t mean they are willing to see her. She had two or three cancelations today. They set up appointments and they don’t show. So my big issue is to get them to come and get the help that we want them to have. We’re here for them, to serve them, but I can’t make them do anything and we have emails and phone calls to try and contact people but if they don’t want to come, they won’t come.

For the documents review portion of this study, one participating community college offered a Justification for Tutoring Services form. The form came from the Center for Students with Disabilities and was usually completed by the disability coordinator for students receiving vocational rehabilitation services from an outside agency. It also indicated the student’s disability and the courses in which the student was in need of tutoring services. Furthermore, the form indicated an estimated cost from the community college for providing tutoring services to this student. It contained a justification checklist as to why the intended student was a candidate for tutoring services, whether it be a need for personalized instruction, difficulty with organization, a limited understanding of course vocabulary, difficulty with retention of material, or other needs. Once completed, the form is sent to the appropriate vocational rehabilitation agency, which will either agree or refuse to pay the suggested cost of tutoring for the student receiving vocational rehabilitation services.
At the same participating community college, students are required to complete a *Participant Request for Individual Tutoring* form in order to obtain services. The form lists the courses and sections for which the student may require tutoring services, along with instructors for these courses. Weekly tutoring sessions may be arranged by time and day of the week so that the sessions do not conflict with the schedule of the tutor or the student.

A document containing the job description for tutors was also obtained during the document review portion of this study. The document clearly notified tutors that they were considered an employee of the community college and a member of the staff. Tutors are expected to serve as role models for others and demonstrate work habits, attitudes, and behaviors consistent with this role. They are to sign the form indicating they understand these responsibilities and agree to comply with the job description. Time sheets are kept indicating the number of hours they work. On the time sheet document obtained, student tutors are clearly notified they are to submit signed and verified time sheets to the appropriate person on the requested date each month. All community colleges require tutors to keep a weekly schedule to ensure that class times do not conflict and so that students may see when tutors are available for sessions, as well as, what courses are being tutored. One community college requires that tutors complete a tutor session summary form, specifying content being tutored, the student receiving tutoring, the provider of tutoring services, along with date and times, and positive or negative factors that may affect student performance.

An *Accommodations Request* form was obtained from one institution. This form is generally used when a student needs assistance on a test and includes information such as the student's name, the class which the test is for, the instructor, and the date and time of the test. The office or department providing services completes a separate section on the form including
information such as the person assisting with the test, the accommodation needed, and the location of the test.

**Technology.** One front-line community college official spoke of online classes, which as they indicated were in high demand. Many students work full-time and are unable to attend college due to their work schedule. Thus, a more flexible class schedule is desired. Online classes also provide greater access to individuals with disabilities who may not feel comfortable or be reluctant to attend community college when required to attend classes in person. Certain disabilities may limit what individuals can do and they may feel more comfortable taking classes in the privacy of their own home. The participant concluded that online classes give more opportunity to all students, disabled or not. Online classes have sparked student interest and more students are enrolling as a result. The internet has opened up a new avenue of learning. According to the participant, disabled students now have the same opportunities as other students. They can be successful in obtaining their degree and, as a result have more confidence. Some students with learning disabilities, however, do not have access to internet or their service provider and internet connection are inconsistent. Because of the issues with the internet, problems can arise.

A technological issue discussed by one mid-level administrator during this study was the method in which math was taught. As the participant noted, math is a difficult subject. Math courses at this particular community college are now taught asynchronously and no longer operate under the traditional classroom instructional methods to which students have become accustomed. They now provided in short modules on the computer and are self-directed. Students ask for help as needed. The community college wants to make sure the students with learning disabilities receive the help they require and have their questions answered.
appropriately. The students need personal attention that they are obviously not going to get from a computer. As the participant concluded, it makes serving these students even more difficult. Tutoring services have been heavily encouraged for these students in an attempt to ensure they do receive at least some one-on-one personal attention outside of the asynchronous course. When asked about beneficial changes, one senior level administrator concluded that technology is emphasized often and whenever possible. The participant mentioned voice recognition software but technology was a vague issue with most senior level administrators.

**Funding.** Participants of this study were bothered by the fact that students often lost their financial aid due to academic struggles. As one mid-level administrator illustrated:

I see students unfortunately when they get to the point where they are in academic trouble or they’ve lost their financial aid. Perhaps they weren’t identified early enough. I see students that want another chance now and maybe they’ve already lost their financial aid but they’ve just got a learning disabled diagnoses or identification that they hadn’t gone and done before. I don’t like seeing students in that negative aspect. I’d rather see them more in the positive. I’m also on the academic standards and financial aid committee and we look at students now with the new financial aid regulations. With unsatisfactory academic progress many of our students are losing their financial aid. Where in the past we could let them keep trying now we’ve got very rigid academic standards they have to follow and sometimes students have already used up their financial aid by the time they realize they have a learning disability or perhaps they’ve learned how to get through the system better. Also with academic appeals, the people that are suspended and dismissed, those come through here. It’s not just students with disabilities it’s all students but I feel
like we are a failure some ways in that regard. We've always given students a second chance but sometimes that runs out.

One mid-level administrator felt that their state labeled people as a way of generating funds and dollars through free lunches and other programs:

We use extra dollars available for people through government assistance to reduce lunches through schools. I think we give the nomenclature of learning disabilities to way too many students.

The participant further suggested there was a certain degree of manipulation in labeling individuals with learning disabilities when all they really need is a little extra support through tutoring, assistance, and to be given a fair opportunity as opposed to manipulating the system and governmental programs. The mid-level administrator concluded that their community college has a genuine desire to see students with learning disabilities be successful and the institution strives to assist these individuals in the appropriate manner. The focus of the community college is to prepare students for the job world and help individuals get jobs. Not everyone will succeed but as the participant pointed out, that is regardless of whether they have a learning disability or not, “that’s the real equality.”

One senior level administrator referred to funding as being the greatest obstacle faced when striving to serve the learning disabled population:

I’m a step removed, as I mentioned before from the front lines. My efforts usually fall into the funding area. I’m the champion trying to ask for additional funding. Money is always going to be number one I think. We could double our budget and probably find a use for all of it. I think we’re adequately funded we just could always do more and there’s a lot of hands out reaching for the same dollar as we are. That’s probably the biggest and
I would also say that over the last two years we’ve had the best results we’ve had financially as far as asking for budget and getting some help from our budget process.

When defining the budgetary issues further, the same senior level administrator concluded that the biggest issue was personnel, considering technology and other resources are generally a onetime expense. When new personnel are hired the community college knows the expense will be recurring and with benefits among other things, new personnel can become tremendously expensive. The senior level administrator indicated the community college would like to add more personnel when it becomes feasible and mentioned new off campus sites would be opening; therefore, it was going to be important to have additional personnel to ensure adequate services were provided to students in need.

Another senior level administrator also spoke of funding as being the greatest obstacle personally faced when striving to serve the learning disabled population. The participant referred to themselves as the budget person who has to deal with all faculty and staff. Ideally community colleges would have unlimited funding but unfortunately that is unrealistic. The senior level administrator concluded that it is important to stretch the available money as far as it can reach and often times, as the senior level administrator put it, you may have to “rob Peter to pay Paul,” meaning that when one department is not using the allocated budget adequately, the money allotted to said department may be used by another department in need. The only document obtained during this study with a relationship to funding was a hand-out entitled *Money Management – Coping with Less Income*. The hand-out offered some simple tips for all individuals about money management and ways to increase income along with some motivational quotes.
Navigation. One mid-level administrator elaborated on the challenges of providing the extra time that students with learning disabilities often need. Students with learning disabilities do not always understand how college works and many times they do not have someone in their family who understands how college works. As a result, they require a great deal of extra attention and assistance with the task of finding a program in which they can have success and, ultimately, obtaining employment. The participant stated that students participate in career counseling with the center for disabilities. According to the mid-level administrator, the center for disabilities provides the majority of necessary services appropriate for students with learning disabilities. The career counseling helps students determine their interest. Many times students have done very little, if any, career exploration.

In discussing navigational issues in a community college spectrum, senior level administrators pointed out that students with learning disabilities often have difficulty with juggling the complexities that come with post-secondary education, which may include social activities, multi-tasking, and the concern that comes with the stigma of being learning disabled students. One senior level administrator discussed these challenges. In high school, students generally had a great deal of support, including significant interaction between the high school and their parents. Upon entering post-secondary education, parents typically become disconnected, especially because of FERPA. The students do not have the same support system and everything seems more difficult for them.

Rural. One front-line community college official was positive about the economic environment. Despite the limited job market in rural southern Appalachia, the participant spoke of how beneficial hands on learning offered by the community college was with the technical programs such as welding, auto body shop, auto body service, or machine tools. It is jobs such as
these that are available in these small towns. The participant further emphasized the excellent relationships between the community college and partnered businesses:

We have such good working relationships. Actually if they'll go through our program they’ll get hired. I mean it’s really good for them, but now it’s hard.

The same participant spoke of how critical it is for the students with learning disabilities to see themselves have success, see what they can do, and how positive and encouraging the teachers were in working with these students:

The community college can offer these certificate programs that four year institutions cannot and they work well for the students who enroll in them. They are not nearly as hard and students are not required to go through the developmental math, reading, and English they normally would.

Another front-line community college official suggested that many students at their community college were first generation students, meaning they did not have parents who attended college; therefore, their value of education is different. It creates further issues. Many students with learning disabilities have little support in the home and from parents. As the participant stated, “it is just that much more to work with.” Being from an area that is so rural, the issues become exacerbated in that resources are simply unavailable. The participant did feel the community college placed emphasis on student needs whether it came down to funding or equipment. But as the participant concluded, just being in a rural community, students often struggle with understanding their learning disability and how they can complete college.

Another front-line community college official mentioned the issues with job obtainment in the rural areas, not just for students with learning disabilities but for all students. One significant issue mentioned was internet access. Multiple opportunities to obtain online jobs and
work from home occurred; however, internet access is not something that is always readily available in rural areas such as the Appalachian Mountains.

Issues with living in rural environment were a recurring theme throughout this study. A mid-level administrator pointed out that living in a rural environment where unemployment was extremely high made it unrealistic for students with learning disabilities to obtain certain items that may benefit their academics due to low income levels. Financial problems were probably the biggest problem linked with being rural. Transportation needs were also mentioned.

Jobs are limited in rural areas, making it more difficult for students with learning disabilities to obtain a job. Industries have closed and as one senior level administrator noted, the learning disabled population has to compete with so many other individuals for these limited positions. Stigmas are still attached with being a learning disabled student. The participant stated that stigmas were prevalent in the rural area in which they lived. It is not a good thing but unfortunately it still happens.

One senior level administrator discussed poverty in their region of the state, emphasizing that approximately 95% of the student population receives financial aid. The participant pointed out they had worked in many locations but had never seen it that high. The senior level administrator concluded that they serve a population base of great need. In many instances, the students may not have received the appropriate care or attention prior to coming to the community college, which can create barriers. In dealing with this issue the participant stated:

Students are not numbers here, there is always someone here to assist but the assistance starts from the first step the students make on campus. Regardless of what assistance is needed. In the two and a half years I’ve been here I have not had an issue with anyone,
any faculty member, any staff member that’s objected or was concerned about working with students. I’ve had this in the past but not here.

Perceptions Regarding Institutional Policies and Practices

The research question regarding institutional policies and practices sought to gain an understanding of these policies and practices based on perceptions of rural community college officials in Southern Appalachia. It also provided a good opportunity for participants to discuss policies or practices which they agreed or disagreed with, as well as entities needing improvement or expansion. Participants did not always respond with answers related to policies or procedures.

One front-line community college official spoke about developing a clearer procedure for student access, which would ensure that when students are not eligible for student support service programs they are still assured appropriate accommodations and services. The participant expressed a concern in the communication between the department and the students. The front-line community college official further noted that these issues were being addressed but might need enhancement because some students had been confused. The participant stated they liked to double check and make everyone involved aware of exactly how to proceed.

When asked about creating new policies or procedures, another front-line community college official responded “I think we’re good now.” When further pressed on the issue, they were vague in simply stating:

I really think we do a good job. We have had great feedback from our student evaluation surveys. This survey is administered to our disability students during the fall and spring semesters.
At one point, a mid-level administrator noted that the institution they worked at might have some faculty who are unaware of what constitutes a learning disability. Participants, however, were typically pleased with the methods their institutions used in handling their learning disabled populations. When asked about the greatest obstacle faced personally, one mid-level administrator spoke directly of policies and the challenging issues with ensuring that students followed them. The participant stated that students were expected to follow policy but there may be mitigating circumstances that come into play requiring a closer look. Sometimes participants struggled to answer this question. One mid-level administrator simply stated they did not know of a policy that should be changed or enhanced because they were unaware of any issues that needed improvement. The participant further noted they did not know of any policy or procedure to be adopted by their institution that would benefit the learning disabled population, “We hear about issues that go on and we’re aware of a lot of things but I’ve never really noticed that there is anything major that comes up with that population.”

Sometimes senior level administrators were vague when speaking of policies or procedures, and simply implied that they felt their institution was doing a good job and they were content with the work of the staff and faculty. Senior level administrators would often say that they were unaware of any policies they were working on or needed to implement. One senior level administrator noted that he/she did not view policies as being a barrier in serving the learning disabled population and further concluded that the community college had always been receptive to the ideas coming from students and faculty, “I tell them the best ideas I’ve ever had come from them.”

One senior level administrator pointed out that although resources were limited, the need for money is a state issue. Of course, it is something typically driven by enrollment and therefore
allocations are enrollment driven. Another senior level administrator stated that he/she did not know how much longer they would be able to manage without a full-time ADA coordinator; and that currently, situations were dealt with as they arose on case-by-case basis. According to the senior level administrator, if he/she was able to provide such a resource it would be forthcoming.

One thing this particular senior level administrator hoped to avoid because of a scarcity of resources was simply handing over a list of accommodations to the faculty. If this were to happen the faculty might not always know how to respond appropriately. Strong communication between staff and faculty benefits the students. Failure to communicate can create another barrier between faculty and learning disabled students. The act of facilitation aids in the removing of this barrier.

A certain senior level administrator spoke of an older campus, a branch of their community college, failing to meet ADA compliance. When asked about obstacles and policies, the participant referred to challenges related to construction occurring at this campus and issues in the allocation of funds to ensure ADA compliance. The senior level administrator concluded that funds are being received from the state and the state is committed to the project. The project will eventually be completed.

**Implementation of new policies.** Participants were asked about policies and procedures they would like to see implemented at their institutions. As a front-line community college official stated:

I think we’re working on this, but I can see a change. We teach more and more online classes and we’re starting to build more things into the structure in terms of resources such as blackboard and online classes. I would like to see in a standard practice the way the courses are arranged and organized that we have resources for students with
disabilities already built in there. Here is where you go to access this resource to help you with this part of this class. And I think we’re headed there. I definitely think that we are, I can tell that we’ve made huge strides in the last year, but I think that’s something we can continue to work on.

The front-line community college official further stated their community college is just now entering the stages of discussing this possibility with their representative of instructional learning and online instruction. While the community college is only now beginning to entertain this idea, the participant felt everyone was on board. Another front-line community college official responded:

I’m just in that phase right now where if I have time when I’m not doing direct services for students I’m looking at that program development and what everyone else is doing. We’ve been doing what we’ve been doing for a long time but I feel strongly that you still need to be looking at what is going on around you. We have the opportunity. We have access to a lot of resources in terms of post-secondary education to see what other colleges are doing. We’ve done peer reviews of other colleges. We’re members at the local level, state level, and national level with associations of higher education disabilities including Virginia Head and the National Head organizations so there are lots of resources and the beauty of that is often times you can just pick up the phone and call somebody. That’s a big part of it. It’s not all just what’s online.

One front-line community college official spoke favorably of the way the institution communicated and kept everyone involved informed by stating:

In terms of what we do here on campus, I think the system of communications we have with faculty members is beneficial. I give them a list of all the things we do each
semester and then a list of the accommodations for students. Those kinds of things which are institutional policies I think definitely have to continue such as keeping open lines of communication. The student success center deals with the students sort of on the front line. When the student comes in from the high school or if they’re a nontraditional student and have been out of school for a while, the student success center is really good about sending the students to this office so the appropriate process can begin. It’s centralized here and everyone knows where to send them. I think that’s a procedure, not necessarily a policy but I think it’s a procedure that works and it’s something that we need to continue.

**Documentation.** Documentation is a key component when dealing with students with learning disabilities. The rights of students have to be ensured and it is necessary for community colleges to obtain the appropriate documentation indicating they are providing for these rights in an effective and efficient manner. Documentation was mentioned more than once as data was collected. One front-line community college official reiterated the change in ADA requirements:

> In terms of policies, we are obviously bound by law and then we are bound by the VCCS policies, the Virginia Community College System policies. I don’t know how realistic it would be to think about changing any of those. I know something that has come down the pipe recently is a change in the language in terms of documentation requirements. You should require this, rather than you must require this. I think it makes sense in a little more of a gray area. I haven’t dealt with that yet but I’m sure that I will. But that’s just a law and we’ll have to deal with it.

One front-line community college official pointed out how difficult it is to obtain the required testing for non-traditional students. The students have often been out of school for a
while and may not have the appropriate documentation concerning their learning disability. The tests typically run around $300 and most students with learning disabilities simply do not have the money. The participant suggested some form of payment agreement with the state or test distributors.

On more than one occasion, participants in this study indicated that they viewed ADA regulation changes in not having to require documentation for learning disabled students as a positive change. Institutions acknowledge that this documentation is nice to have and most still make the request to obtain this information; however, now providing accommodations comes easier due to the fact this documentation is not a requirement and not something that has to be on hand in order for a student to obtain services. As one mid-level administrator stated:

I think probably the biggest thing and I don’t know that this has really affected us. With the changes in ADA where we don’t have to require as much documentation and the community college system is where we have had in our policy manual that “we shall” do this, now we’re saying “we may”. So we have some flexibility which I think is very important in the community college. There are people out there who didn’t go to public school and weren’t identified and don’t have the documentation. You know how expensive it is to go try to get that documentation. I think that has probably been a good thing. It will give us more opportunities and more avenues to reach students.

Community college officials enjoy this new flexibility regarding documentation and hope it will be instrumental toward enhancing the learning experience for students. One institution provided a document which outlined requirements for appropriate documentation in regard to serving students with learning disabilities. The document indicated which information is necessary and how it is to be obtained. One example is documentation concerning student’s
disabilities. The documentation should be current and support the reasonable accommodations requested by students. Information detailing how a student’s disability impacts them, along with any special considerations provided from qualified professionals needs to be documented by the community college. Individual Education Plans are helpful but are not sufficient forms of documentation. Specific documentation pertinent to learning disabilities must be comprehensive, including multiple types of test as opposed to relying on a single test for diagnoses.

*Accommodation ideas.* One front-line community college official spoke of accommodation letters when asked about new policies and procedures. Apparently, the department had printed off the required letters of accommodation for the student in the past. They are, however, now trying to be more efficient and “go green,” so they are trying to eliminate the use of excess paper. The letters of accommodation have been scanned and will be sent to students through campus email only. The students may print these emails as necessary and provide a copy to their instructors. If students do not have access to a computer, the department will help them print the letters in their office or one of the technology labs, but the idea is to make the students receiving accommodations more responsible. The participant further stated that they intended to speak with the faculty so that everyone would be aware of the new change and the faculty would know the letters of accommodation would be coming from the students now. The participant said one employee had been sent to another institution to learn new ideas. Emailing letters of accommodation was a recommendation to help conserve paper. In using campus email, the community college will have proof they sent the letter of accommodation to students, beyond this point it will be the responsibility of the students. Students can then choose which instructors and which classes will receive the letter of accommodation.
The front-line community college official also provided a copy of this accommodation letter for the document review portion of this study. As previously mentioned, the letters are emailed to the instructors from the Center for Students with Disabilities and clearly list the accommodations that are to be provided to each intended student. It asks instructors to discuss the accommodations privately with each intended student to determine appropriate arrangements. The letters have been signed by both the student and the Center for Students with Disabilities Coordinator prior to going to the instructor. As is indicated on these letters, all information contained is strictly confidential and is not to be discussed with other parties except as requested in writing by the student.

**Other institutions.** When asked about the policies and procedure used by surrounding institutions most participants stated that they were unaware of such policies and/or procedures despite having close working relationships with neighboring schools. Some participants, however, offered valuable responses describing what other institutions are doing:

I’ve looked at web pages at other colleges that are really thorough and give a lot of information that we don’t have. I’d like to make a web page that would be like that. It’s for all disabilities but for particularly learning disabilities. To give them an idea for what kinds of strategies are available, what kind of support they can get, and accommodations that are available.

**Managing self-advocacy.** Students with learning disabilities do not seem to be able to manage their time efficiently. As one mid-level administrator pointed out, the center for disabilities has taken measures to assist with this impediment. Goals have been set for the learning specialist stating that any student dealing with these issues will work with the learning specialist in using college planners, calendars, and mapping out their time effectively and
efficiently. The participant further noted that time management seems to be a major barrier these students do not understand and have not had much help with.

**Tutoring challenges.** According to one mid-level administrator, one of the biggest issues was trying to find tutors for students with learning disabilities. The participant noted that, even when the community college could pay tutors, it was difficult to find other students or other faculty that wanted to spend time tutoring. Another issue was finding tutors knowledgeable of particular classes in which students in need of services were enrolled. The participant concluded that supposedly it came down to supply and demand; however, they were unable to offer a solution to fix the issue.

**Requirements.** The notion of graduation requirements was discussed during this study. Should learning disabled students be held to the same graduation requirements as non-learning disabled students? The example provided by mid-level administrator was as follows:

Sometimes we have an issue with a student who because of their disability might not be able to take a class that’s required for graduation and we don’t seem to have a clear cut policy on that. We have made substitutions. For instance a student who might have some anxiety issues that’s not able to take public speaking, we’ve tried to work with that but we don’t have anything clear cut on that and maybe there is no clear cut answer to that because it just depends on the disability. Honestly, I think we’re doing a great job here.

One document obtained during this study provided bulleted information with regard to acceptable assessments and the criteria these assessments must meet:

- Testing can only be performed by a qualified professional who is appropriately licensed or certified to conduct the assessment.
• Evaluations must be current. While a diagnosis of a learning disability is generally viewed as life-long, the severity of the condition can change over time, so all assessments must indicate the student’s current performance.

• Documentation must be comprehensive, including multiple types of tests, instead of relying on one test for diagnosis.

• Assessment scoring and interpretation must provide specific evidence that a learning disability does or does not exist. Clear evidence of a substantial limitation to learning must be indicated.

• Three specific areas must be addressed in the overall evaluation: 1) aptitude, 2) academic achievement, and 3) information processing.

**Professional development.** Another recurring theme was the idea that many community college officials, professors, or staff members were unfamiliar with educating the learning disabled population. When participants were asked about new policies or procedures that would be beneficial to their institution, their responses often concerned some form of professional development in which employees could become better trained and more knowledgeable about the learning disabled population. As indicated by one mid-level administrator:

> I think our program is doing a great job here. I just wish we could reach more students. We do a lot of educational things for our faculty but our faculty population changes a lot here. We have many adjunct faculty and it’s hard to get them all up to speed on what needs to be done and we can’t offer any incentives for that so it makes it hard, especially for part-time. We’re just lucky to get people to teach sometimes. We have some wonderful faculty though. Our full-time faculty that have been working in the positions, I wish we had more opportunities for them to sort of mentor some of these part-time
people so they don’t have to go through the experience and perhaps lose a student in the process. Hopefully we’re getting through to those people but I’m just afraid they don’t have time to learn everything we want them to. I wish there were some way to educate all faculty more and I don’t know how you do that other than just trial and error. We do a lot of stuff on our website and we do workshops but I’m not sure that’s a procedure.

Another mid-level administrator commented that although there were occasional workshops held for faculty members, it would be beneficial to have more engagement from faculty. The same participant believed this would better serve students by creating a better relationship with the instructors, and consequently, students would be more successful. It would be ideal to have mentoring programs for adjunct faculty. It would also be beneficial to make any trainings or workshops conducted for full-time faculty available to adjunct employees on DVD or web stream.

New ideas. When asked about new policies or procedures that may enhance the community college experience for the learning disabled population, one mid-level administrator suggested the idea of priority registration for students with disabilities. With this suggestion, students with learning disabilities would be allowed to register prior to other students to ensure they got the sections needed. The example the participant provided was that some learning disabled students may not be able to sit in a class that is three hours long and may perform much more efficiently with a class that is broken up into an hour long class that met three separate times over the course of the week. The participant concluded that this idea had been suggested but is something that still needs work in that the community college currently has no priority registration.
One mid-level administrator stated that the community college had become too dependent on Individual Education Plans (IEP's) coming from the high schools or clinician statements from public sites. The participant did not feel enough documentation was obtained for what seemed to be one of the most significant issues related to serving this population. As a result of the limitations with obtaining the appropriate documentation, more responsibilities are placed upon the students and many times the students simply deal with these responsibilities insufficiently because of financial limitations.

I have to put it back on the students because that’s one of my limitations. I don’t have a clinician. I have to put the responsibility back on the students and say, you have to foot the bill for all of this. That’s really one of the weaknesses of the college but fortunately we’re not going to move into a clinician relationship with any of our students.

The mid-level administrator suggested there is probably a legitimate need within the state to have a clinician handle these obstacles for the community college system. The clinician may float between institutions and provide a more in-depth analysis as to what services or accommodations would be appropriate on a more case-by-case basis. The participant said they had mentioned this idea before but was probably behind many other priorities and further recognized that while their institution was doing a good job providing accommodations there was much room for improvement.

One mid-level administrator discussed a federal policy that has begun to have an impact on students with learning disabilities, Return to Title 4. According to the participant, students who have a bad semester or who do not pass their courses are now responsible for paying back a part of their financial aid. As a result, the participant pointed out, students who fail to withdraw from classes or pass at least 66% of their courses may risk issues with the financial aid office.
The mid-level administrator suggested the need for a federal policy noting that when a student has a documented learning disability the standards are lowered because that student may require more time completing their programs or obtaining their degrees.

We have students that don’t withdraw from classes and they don’t pass 66% of their course. They can get in trouble with their financial aid. I think I’d like to see on a federal policy basis some kind of accommodation or something that would say; if I have a documented learning disability, hold me to that standard because I need just a little bit more time to get through college.

Some senior level administrators stated they were unfamiliar with policies and procedures of other institutions. Many new ideas surfaced during the interviews of this study. During the documents review portion of this study, one community college offered a list of ideas for marketing disability services. The list included items such as:

- Pre-year presentation to full-time faculty and adjunct faculty.
- Attractive display and brochures for faculty and staff during pre-year conference.
- Disability awareness week: each October have a week of activities, student panel, guest speaker, interactive displays on all campus sites.
- A disability display is set up in the court yard during “Club Day” with Disability staff available to answer questions.
- Classroom presentation on Disability Awareness for Education majors.
- Offer workshops on Test Taking and Note Taking to all students.
- A Facebook page.
- A Twitter Page.
• A special day event for Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors to visit our campus each year.

• 30 minute presentation about our disability services to Friends and Family at orientation sessions.

• Continuing presentations on disabilities to faculty and staff throughout the year.

Conclusion

The research presented in this chapter clearly indicated that community college leaders face a broad array of difficulties and concerns when serving students with learning disabilities. Numerous methods and tactics are used by community colleges to overcome the challenges and obstacles in serving the learning disabled population. As research in this chapter has demonstrated, community colleges officials realize the importance of improvement toward enhancing the learning environment for students with learning disabilities so that these students may be served in the most effective and efficient manner. A more detailed discussion of these findings is presented in the following chapter.
Chapter 5

Adult students with learning disabilities represent one of the fastest growing populations of students attending post-secondary institutions in the United States (Mull, Sitlington, & Alper, 2001). Community colleges face significant challenges when serving learning disabled (LD) students. Little empirical research on the challenges faced by community colleges and the staff who provide these services has been conducted (Keim, Ryan, & Nolan, 1998). As LD populations continue to become more prevalent among community colleges, it is critical that these institutions examine the difficulties that arise when serving these students so that they may make better informed decisions concerning the education of these students (McCleary-Jones, 2008).

Hand and Payne (2008) pointed out that increasing participation in higher education has become a priority in the Appalachian region in hopes of building a workforce that is more educationally equipped for economic needs. Statistics indicate a direct link between economic development and educational achievement (Hand & Payne, 2008). In 2000, 17.6% of the Appalachian adult population had completed college compared to 24.4% of the U.S. adult population (Appalachian Regional Commission, 2004). In rural communities such as the Appalachian region, students with learning disabilities encounter problems such as a limited number of jobs and lower occupational attainment (Richards, 2004). As a result of this, LD individuals often feel it necessary to relocate in order to expand their career opportunities and further improve themselves (Richards, 2004). According to Parker (2001), although individuals with learning disabilities may make contributions elsewhere, they represent another extraction of resources from the rural communities when moving away. It is important that rural community
colleges use their assets to assist students with learning disabilities in making transition plans that include post-secondary goals as well as work components (Richards 2004).

Findings Related to the Literature

The Rural Context

The findings of the current study confirm the findings of previous studies which indicate the challenges of living in a rural setting increase the difficulties faced by community college students with learning disabilities. Many of the extraction industries such as logging, mining, and farming have declined in rural America resulting in economic struggles, which force individuals with learning disabilities to compete with a larger number of people who are seeking the same limited jobs. Stigmas are still attached with being a learning disabled student. Despite awareness efforts, negative stigmas surrounding learning disabilities still exist. The findings of the current study support the professional literature of Cohen and Brawer (1996) and Pennington, Williams and Karvonen (2006) which suggested that community colleges serving rural America are tasked with being educational institutions while simultaneously serving the unique needs of rural populations and may not always be understood by other entities of higher education. The combined burden has resulted in a number of unique challenges and situations faced by leaders of rural community colleges.

Being in a rural setting, presents significant challenges to students with learning disabilities. The current study emphasizes that learning disabled students are competing for jobs that are already limited. The individuals are competing for jobs in regions of economic strain due to low capital income, fewer employment opportunities, lower general academic achievement, and the financial instability found in many rural communities and countries. As a result of these issues, job opportunities are limited. Since many of the jobs available in these localities such as
factory workers, coal miners, and farmers, require little education, higher education is not something that has traditionally been valued in these areas. Educational resources and service programs are also limited in these areas simply due to the financial strains and low demand.

Populations in rural areas remain relatively small, making it difficult to secure funds necessary to obtain appropriate educational tools and other resources that will benefit the learning disabled population. Pennington, Williams, and Karvonen (2006) stated that federal and state requirements for data and surveys do not acknowledge small, over-worked staffs of rural community colleges. As a result of strategic planning requirements and a general inability of funding formulas to respond to student needs, rural colleges also experience less flexibility in terms of the services they are able to provide and the methods for which these services are provided. Additionally, it is difficult for rural community colleges to gain political exposure, and the resulting resources, at their state capitals, when competing with four year institutions and larger community colleges (Pennington, Williams, & Karvonen, 2006).

The current study suggests that the low income levels associated with rural living environments often make it unrealistic for students with learning disabilities to obtain certain items that may benefit their academic progress. Katsinas and Miller (1998) pointed out many challenges learning disabled students in rural areas face such as not having enough funding to appropriately staff broad based curriculums in general education, transfer programs, and vocational and occupational areas. Students with learning disabilities often have to deal with institutional barriers such as this along with their own unique set of learning challenges (Beale, 2005). In order to be successful in a higher education setting, students with learning disabilities need to have an understanding of their individual needs and what accommodations are appropriate to promote their academic success. In congruence with this information, a senior
level administrator participating in this study discussed poverty in their region of the state, emphasizing that approximately 95% of the student population receives financial aid. The senior level administrator concluded that they serve a population base of great need, which in many instances, students have not received the appropriate care or attention prior to coming to the community college and this can create barriers. As one front-line community college official pointed out, “Being in a rural community I think students often struggle with understanding their learning disability and how they can get through college.”

**Promoting Awareness**

A great lack of awareness concerning the services and accommodations available to the learning disabled population on a community college level is present. Students often are never provided information concerning these services unless the students seek out the information on their own. The current study agrees with the literature, indicating that students with learning disabilities are used to having everything handled for them in high school and often are not able to make the necessary transition of becoming self-advocates appropriate for community college success. Janiga and Costenbader (2002) even suggested that students may sometimes be not even consider community college as an option as a result of teachers, counselors, and parents encouraging them to pursue vocational education. A comprehensive transition plan is crucial to ensure that the student’s goals are considered (Janiga & Costenbader, 2002). One participant of this study suggested a transition team which consisted of both community college and high school staff to ensure the student is well aware of the services that are pertinent to their unique learning challenges, and the actions they may need to take in order to make their community college experience a success. Many times the information concerning the services for students with learning disabilities are promoted appropriately by the use of web sites, bulletin board
postings, flyers, pamphlets, or information provided in each class syllabus. Although it is not something that is focused upon, there is mention of these services in classes as well as student orientation. With the vast amount of information involved in serving students with learning disabilities, it is conceivable that this area requires a more detailed explanation than what some community colleges have indicated they are providing. For whatever reason, students with learning disabilities, however, do not make an effort to obtain these services until it is late in the semester and their academic success is already in jeopardy. Students with learning disabilities often want to distance themselves from the negative labels that were attached in high school of being a learning disabled student. As one mid-level participant stated:

  I think helping students with disabilities work through self-esteem issues is definitely difficult. They have had so many negative messages in public school, made to feel like they can’t do things, and so I think the task of helping them to overcome that and to understand disabilities and that they can do things that they thought they couldn’t is probably very difficult.

McCleary-Jones (2007) suggested that learning disabilities now constitute by far the largest single category of disability served by disability service offices in the community colleges. Although learning disabilities have become so prevalent, one participant of the current study considered stigmas concerning learning disabilities to be on a decline and noted that students have become more accepting in terms of receiving accommodations and have obtained a stronger voice in their academic careers. Community colleges must realize that creating awareness enables students with learning disabilities to come forward and ask for help without fear of stigma realizing that it is socially acceptable to seek assistance when needed. With this awareness, students recognize that education equals empowerment, and have developed a desire
to advocate for themselves and ask for what they need. As one senior level administrator pointed out, “Many efforts have been made to improve awareness and marketing, to increase connections, and connect learning disabled students to the resources promoting their success.” As long as these attempts are continued by community colleges, the higher education experience for the learning disabled population will continue to improve.

Self-Identification

Janiga and Costenbader (2002) ascertained that students with learning disabilities often deny their learning problems and will refrain from self-identifying upon entering higher education, wanting to distance themselves from the special education label they carried in elementary and secondary school. The findings of the current study concur that stepping into a higher education atmosphere upon coming out of high school is difficult for many students and learning disabled students often view this as a way to shed their past label of having a learning disability. While community colleges try to promote the educational achievement of students with learning disabilities, faculty members often have limited exposure to learning disabilities because many students with learning disabilities are reluctant to self-identify upon entering higher education. It is due to issues they may have encountered in secondary education such as being misunderstood by faculty, invoking stigma, and having to work considerably harder than non-labeled peers (Janiga & Costenbader, 2002).

Self-identification was mentioned by more participants in the current study than any other issue. As one senior level administrator stated:

In many cases, if I’m working with a student, I may not even know the student is part of the learning disabled population. I think one of the things that happens, and we see this here, when students leave high school and they enter college, they don’t apply for the
services that are available or let me say this, they don’t even request the services that are available. They have to identify themselves to us.

Generally, faculty and staff are effective in recognizing when someone is struggling and in need of services. However, it becomes much easier for the student to have success once they self-identify and begin receiving assistance. The findings of the current study clearly suggest that issues with self-identification are a consistent struggle from one semester to the next for many students. Many students with learning disabilities want to try a semester without any assistance. Both the current study and the research of Janiga and Costenbader (2002) suggests that students with learning disabilities want to shed the label they have carried throughout their academic career, although, community colleges never publicize or announce the disabilities or the students participating. More than one senior level administrator noted identification as the biggest obstacle when striving to serve the learning disabled population. Students with learning disabilities are not used to identifying or articulating their learning disabilities and the needs that go along with them. They are not familiar with the documentation that is associated with learning disabilities and are unsure of how to acquire the appropriate documentation. Although efforts are made to promote awareness of available services, due to their learning disabilities, many students may still not understand where to go or the steps necessary to self-identify. As one mid-level participant of this study pointed out:

It’s very problematic for us to serve a learning disabled student at this college. Now, what do we do? Well first is self-disclosure. We’re not going to ask. We simply aren’t going to do that and so we don’t get a lot of students identifying as learning disabled. We simply don’t pursue it. We can’t. It’s illegal and besides that, it’s not the right thing to do.
No documentation concerning a student’s learning disability is requested or sought by the community colleges; therefore, there is no record of any need unless the student takes the appropriate steps to acquire the appropriate services. The concept is amicable with the findings of the current study which concurs it is the responsibility of the student to self-identify. Reflecting on their time as an instructor, another senior level administrator concurred that it was difficult to recognize which students had learning disabilities and as an instructor it is often unclear which students might require services. Other participants of this study reiterated this uncertainty. Many learning disabled students feel they are going to be unable to do certain things.

**Serving the Learning Disabled Population**

One of the primary issues related to serving students with learning disabilities is an understanding and acceptance of the support needs of these individuals. Learning disabilities are the most common form of disabilities found among the college population. Learning disabilities have the highest growth rate of all disability categories associated with higher education; however, many times these limitations go unrecognized (McCleary-Jones, 2008). According to McCleary-Jones (2008), about 5% to 10% of Americans have learning disabilities. Community colleges need to understand that while no two individuals are exactly the same, many share similar characteristics.

The current study agrees with the literature related to the desire of community college officials to provide access for LD students and the support necessary for their success. The individuals must, however, understand this success is dependent on professional educators becoming more knowledgeable about the changing demands of education. Creative solutions are essential for assisting the learning disabled population with gaining access to tools and
information they require to succeed in a community college environment. The current study demonstrates that there is no single method of dealing with these individuals that will work for every learning disabled student. In order to be responsive to the need of this growing population, community colleges must learn to empower students and promote a successful transition between school and work. If the inclusion and acceptance that have renewed the possibilities for LD students in the community college setting are sustained, individuals with learning disabilities will continue to choose community college as the path for fulfilling their academic aspirations. Indeed, it is this acceptance of all that should be a primary goal of disability programs on community college campuses (Prentice, 2002). It is the responsibility of the community college to ensure that all students are aware of the services available and encouraged to take advantage of them. As one senior level administrator stated, “We’ve got to make people more aware of what we have available and to encourage more people to participate and I think we need to market that a little better than what we’ve done.”

**Staffing**

Not having enough staff members to serve all the needs of every student seemed to be a theme that arose in more than one discussion. Despite being short staffed, participants remained optimistic. As one participant of this study concluded, “There will never be enough instructors or staff to serve every need of every student, but it is important that every effort is made to adequately serve these students.” Staff members working consistently in the programs for disabled students have generally been educated in disability issues and how they might be addressed in a community college setting. Unfortunately, most educators have not had the opportunity to benefit from such training. Few teachers in colleges and universities have any significant exposure to learning disabilities; as a result, these students may feel misunderstood in
the higher education setting and negatively affected by teacher perceptions of their disability (Prentice, 2002).

Research conducted by Prentice (2002) is supported by the findings of the current study as one senior level administrator participant spoke of staff development which implemented different activities in an attempt to help staff and faculty become more aware of how to deal with students with learning disabilities more appropriately. Staff development is an issue that should be addressed by community colleges in an attempt to generate information and create an understanding of how to appropriately serve the learning disabled population.

Community college officials and instructors must work together to identify beneficial opportunities to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the student services provided. The success of the learning disabled population is beneficial to the education and development of our nation as a whole. Although, Pennington, Williams, and Karvonen (2006) imply that because rural community colleges are typically small, their student populations are small. As many participants of this study indicated, rural community colleges simply try to do the best they can with the staff and resources they have available. Another issue concerning the staff in relation to serving the learning disabled populations lies in the fact that most rural community colleges have a designated advocate for the learning disabled population; however, due to financial limitations this employee may have multiple responsibilities, thereby limiting the effectiveness and efficiency with which they serve the learning disabled population. As stated by one participant of this study when discussing tending to the needs of the learning disabled population, "it is part of a couple other jobs."

The current study suggests that most community colleges try to make maximum use of the resources they have and the staff they are allowed. Simply put by one front-line community
college official, “Every student that walks in belongs to all of us. We all have an obligation to serve them. I think that’s the beauty of the people that work in here, even though there will never be enough of us to meet the individual needs of everyone, we certainly make every effort.” If all community colleges embody this approach, learning disabled students will be successful.

**Accommodations**

Many community colleges struggle with providing accommodations to students with learning disabilities. The issue relates to the responsibility of students to self-identify is a barrier in serving this population. Accommodations simply cannot be provided without the appropriate documentation of student needs. Multiple problems, however, occur once the necessary documentation has been obtained. One participant touched on such issues as having multiple tests on the same day or even at the same time, providing a room free of distractions in which to test, and having a proctor or someone to read a test to the student.

I’d run into having multiple test on the same day or at the same time and of course part of giving accommodations is sometimes they have to be in a room by themselves, you have to read a test, and sometimes it’s just difficult to be three places at one time.

More than one participant in this study suggested that instructors are understanding of these issues and work well with the counselors and other accommodating individuals. As one front-line community college official emphasized, community colleges often have to do the best they can with what they have. Rural community colleges often struggle with bridging the gap between high-school and higher education, determining eligibility access for LD students, determining reasonable accommodations to support these individuals, and fostering the level of interdependence these students require (Brinckerhoff, Shaw, & McGuire, 1992). The findings of the current study indicate that in most cases, institutions where dedicated to providing the
necessary and appropriate accommodations and modifications for the learning disabled population whether it be through individual tutoring, working through the instructors, or just modifications to assignments. Improvement in these areas will benefit both the learning disabled population and community colleges.

Funding

Higher education institutions are often funded once state legislators have funded other major programs. Public colleges are generally considered a discretionary item and typically funded with left over monies from more pressing state priorities, such as programs like Medicaid which attract large amounts of federal funds (Katsinas & Palmer, 2005). Community colleges are often only funded once state legislators have funded other major programs. Community colleges may also have to wait until such functions such as correction facilities and K-12 education have been provided funding. As one senior level administrator stated:

We try to provide financial aid, we try to provide adequate resources, but our students are adult students, returning students, families trying to work and go to school sometimes. There are all kinds of stories in there...and there is no quick fix for those.

Tuition fees and local taxes are often viewed as solutions, but this only shifts the costs to the students and their families rather than the state. According to Katsinas and Palmer (2005), personnel costs are four-fifths of institutional operating budgets and so cutting costs is usually associated with a reduction in faculty and staff. In relation to this literature, one participant of this study felt that their state labeled people as a way of generating funds and dollars through free lunches and other programs. The participant added that the nomenclature of having a learning disability is received by too many students and suggested there was a certain degree of
manipulation in labeling individuals with learning disabilities. Community colleges obviously feel the necessity to do this because of inadequate funding issues.

One senior level administrator participating in this study noted funding as being the greatest obstacle personally faced when striving to serve the learning disabled population. Ideally, community colleges would have unlimited funding but unfortunately that is unrealistic. The participant concluded that it is important to stretch the available money as far as it can reach and often times it is necessary to “rob Peter to pay Paul,” meaning that when one department is not using their budget adequately, the money allotted to said department may be used by another department in need.

In the difficult current economic climate, community college leaders and boards of trustees have been forced to either dramatically increase tuition rate or cut programs and in some cases do both. It is important to consider the struggles that may arise when a community college district lacks one of the two key prerequisites of financial sustainability; access to a viable local revenue stream and citizens willing to tax themselves (Katsinas & Palmer, 2005). Unfortunately, despite the efforts to obtain adequate funding, community colleges rarely seem to have enough. The current study agrees with Katsinas and Palmer (2005), noting funding issues as an obstacle when serving the learning disabled population. One senior level administrator suggested that money is always going to be a primary need. “We could double our budget and probably find a use for all of it.” According to the participant, a multitude of hands are reaching for the same dollar.

**Policies and Practices**

Community colleges typically have the goal of promoting the safety and success of all students in a positive learning environment. When asked about policies or procedures regarding
the learning disabled population, whether referring to state, federal, or institutional, community college officials were typically positive though vague. Most participants of this qualitative study praised their respective community colleges. One senior level administrator stated that he/she did not view policies as being a barrier to serving the learning disabled population and further concluded their community college had always been receptive to the ideas coming from students and faculty. The current study implies that strong communication between staff and faculty benefits the students. Failure to communicate can create another barrier between faculty and learning disabled students. One senior level administrator stated, “We have a population base of great need and in many instances the students may not have received attention and care prior to coming to this institution that might be a barrier before getting here.” Facilitation in promoting awareness toward the learning disabled population aids in the process of removing this barrier. Miller and Tuttle (2007) state that several community colleges have even moved into the policy making arena by calling meetings of policy makers to debate issues that can impact local industry. They also actively bring citizens together to learn about issues that have the potential to affect local business. It is an excellent idea that all community college officials should consider implementing. If these same strategies are used to promote the success of the learning disabled population as a whole, the community will prosper. Appropriate policies and procedures are critical when seeking to effectively serve the learning disabled population.

**Discussion**

The findings of the current study indicate that community colleges possess many characteristics which may help facilitate and promote the success of students with learning disabilities; however, significant improvements are necessary in rural southern Appalachia community colleges. A careful review of the findings of this study as well as future research will
serve students with learning disabilities well. The themes illustrated in this study provide a starting point for future researchers examining this under researched topic in these under researched localities.

**Implications for Action**

The study will benefit practitioners by providing additional knowledge related to the issues community colleges face in effectively serving the learning disabled population. The current study reviewed approaches implemented by participating rural community colleges in southern Appalachia to serve students with learning disabilities. Several primary themes have emerged over the course of this study concerning the way rural southern Appalachian community colleges serve their learning disabled population. These themes are:

**The Rural Context.** The findings of the current study demonstrate the necessity to improve the educational environment for learning disabled students in a rural community college setting. Community colleges in rural areas face limited resources as a result of geographical isolation and small populations. As a result of these barriers, many students with learning disabilities become discouraged and fail to attempt higher education. When these individuals are unable to support themselves, it leads to a strain on the local economic environment which is why many of these rural areas are so poverty stricken. If these regions are able to obtain the appropriate resources necessary to successfully serve and educate these individuals, the individuals themselves will become a resource for their localities.

**Promoting Awareness.** Findings of the current study indicate the presence of barriers to serving the learning disabled population many of which stem from a lack of awareness of these services among students with learning disabilities. Students with learning disabilities are served much differently in a community college setting than the means by which they supported in high
school. Upon entering community college many students with learning disabilities are unaware of where or how to seek help and have a difficult time navigating the tedious processes of registering for classes, obtaining the appropriate books and materials, learning their schedule, and adapting to the new environment. One of the most significant suggestions of the current study is the creation of a transition team that involves both high school and community college staff. The team may develop goals with the student, ensuring their high school courses and community college courses are all geared toward achieving the set goal. Many community colleges also have work programs with local industries. It may provide an opportunity for these students to gain employment.

Another idea surfacing during the course of this study is to include more information about serving the learning disabled population during student orientation. Community colleges must take advantage of the opportunity to discuss services and accommodations available to naïve learning disabled students whenever the opportunity exists. Findings of the current study indicate that learning disabilities are usually briefly mentioned at orientation. Given the amount of information students receive during this time, LD students may fail to realize the positive impact these services could have on their academic careers.

**Self-Identification.** Self-identification proved to be one of the most notable challenges evident through the research conducted during this study. Students must become self-advocates upon entering higher education. They are often unaware of how to appropriately handle the significant transition. Many times students with learning disabilities fail to seek services; perhaps because they wish to distance themselves from the stigma of their disability or perhaps they are not knowledgeable about how or whom to approach to acquire the necessary services.
Serving the Learning Disabled Population. A new idea brought forth in the current study is to develop a close working relationship between college staff who provide LD support and guidance counselors of local high schools. It would be beneficial to the community college and the learning disabled students if guidance counselors have an opportunity to come onto the campus early and learn about some of the services offered to the learning disabled population. Similar practices include transition teams which are mandated in some states.

Staffing. One of the primary issues related to serving students with learning disabilities is an understanding and acceptance of the support needs of these individuals. Generally staff members of the programs for disabled students have been educated in disability issues and how they might be addressed in a community college setting. In order to serve the learning disabled population. Community colleges leaders must recognize the need to properly educate all community college officials and faculty so they can properly deal with this population. One participant was very candid in expressing that they did not feel their services directed toward the learning disabled population were adequate; further noting that some faculty did not possess the appropriate sensitivity for providing assistance to these students.

Accommodations. Participants in the current study advocated for priority registration for students with learning disabilities. It is difficult for students with learning disabilities to navigate the complexities of community college registration. Priority registration would allow students with learning disabilities the opportunity to register before other students to help ensure they received the classes they required to graduate or advance their education. It would also allow more time to provide assistance to these students considering they may encounter more obstacles than other students.
Policies and Practices. Participants were vague when asked about policies and typically expressed accordance with the policies employed by their institutions. Participants did not seem knowledgeable about policies and practices utilized by neighboring community colleges and institutions. Perhaps they did not feel comfortable speaking about such items. It is important for community college officials to be aware of the policies and practices of neighboring community colleges. In some cases, it will be beneficial to share or expand upon the policies and practices currently being used to ensure the most effective and efficient educational environment is available.

Recommendations for Community College Leaders

The findings of the current study lead to several recommendations for community college leaders regarding services for students with learning disabilities.

- Students with learning disabilities will achieve success in community colleges when they have a strong support group including faculty and administrators able to provide the appropriate services and assistance. Examples in this study include transition teams. One mid-level administrator in particular discussed the importance of these teams and emphasized that they are tasked with the responsibility of assisting students with learning disabilities in transitioning from high school into their next phase of life, whether that be higher education, finding a job, or independent living.

- Community colleges need to provide staff with appropriate skills that are necessary to appropriately support students with learning disabilities. A greater emphasis should be placed on training and development of staff and faculty, particularly those dealing directly with these students, to enhance the learning environment for the learning disabled population. As one mid-level participant stated, “I wish there were some way
to educate all faculty more, and I don’t know how you do that, other than just trial and error.”

- Staff and faculty members of higher education institutions should know the policies and practices utilized by their institution and those of neighboring institutions. It is recommend that neighboring community colleges share information in order to ensure the most appropriate policies and practices are incorporated with the learning disabled population. A greater understanding of these practices and policies will result in a multitude of methods and approaches toward serving students with learning disabilities. As one front-line community college official stated when referring to the implementation of new policies, “I think we definitely have to continue such things as keeping open lines of communication.”

- Community colleges must obtain ample and appropriate documentation when serving students with learning disabilities. Documentation is critical to the improvement of services and accommodations provided to the learning disabled population. Documentation may serve institutions and provide an understanding of what practices, accommodations, services, and policies have been effective in the past. Community colleges can and should review appropriate documentation in an effort to learn what is working and what needs improvement. One mid-level administrator, however, indicated that they did not feel enough documentation was obtained during the identification process and that as a result of this more responsibilities are placed on the students. It sometimes results in a lack of information because students often failed to handle this responsibility appropriately. It would be beneficial to have a clinician available to assist with obtaining necessary documentation. Is important for
community colleges to recognize these issues and take efforts to continually improve them.

These recommendations are supported by research conducted by Lindstrom, Downey-McCarthy, Kerewsky and Flannery (2009) which further concluded that the initial process of enrolling and submitting college applications and completing placement test and financial aid packets overwhelmed many students with learning disabilities. Lindstrom (2009) also indicated there is often a lack of information pertaining to the variety of programs and services available to a college student with learning disabilities. Lindstrom (2009) suggest that faculty and staff place emphasis on connecting students with learning disabilities with supplemental programs. Community college personal must assist in coordinating with a wide range of programs such as disability services, financial aid, tutoring, advising, and more.

**Recommendation for Further Research**

Further research needs to be conducted in order to gain a broader and more in-depth understanding of how to appropriately serve the learning disabled population. The study only examined southern rural Appalachian community colleges. Research of other populations and locations is pertinent and will be beneficial to serving students with learning disabilities more effectively and efficiently. Future studies concerning the attitudes of learning disabled students toward self-identification would be significantly beneficial toward serving the learning disabled population. The current study indicated that issues with self-identification may be the biggest obstacle in serving these students. If research can conclude why students are reluctant to self-identify, despite the efforts to ensure confidentiality, perhaps the appropriate steps can be taken to rectify this issue. If community colleges want more students with learning disabilities to self-identify they must develop ways to combat these issues. Faculty and staff must become more
skilled in dealing with the learning disabled population and information promoting awareness for services must be readily available and easily accessible.

Staffing was a recurring topic throughout the current study which suggests that many community college officials may not be as knowledgeable about some of the newer technology available which may be beneficial in serving the learning disabled population. It may be something future researchers need to consider. Another consideration that may be relevant to future research is that community college officials shift positions frequently. Several participants of this study were relatively new to their current positions. In order to obtain productive information, it would be ideal for participants to have ample experience serving the learning disabled population. When asked about learning disabilities, individuals interviewed as participants of this research would often get off topic in speaking about deaf or blind students. This may indicate a misunderstanding of learning disabilities on a community college level. It could also indicate a need to create awareness among staff and faculty. Future research on improving the ways awareness concerning the learning disabled population is generated will be beneficial to all students and faculty.

**Concluding Remarks**

The research conducted in this study provided valuable insight to the numerous methods and practices used to serve the learning disabled population. The study indicated that, while rural southern Appalachia community colleges possess many characteristics beneficial to serving the learning disabled population, there continue to be several notable issues and recurring themes. The most prevalent challenges community colleges face in serving students with learning disabilities are creating awareness and lack of self-identification. The issues have been thoroughly discussed. Community colleges must seek continual improvement toward severing
these students and create a positive educational atmosphere so that students with learning disabilities will feel comfortable and continue to pursue higher education. Community colleges contain many traits that assist and facilitate the empowerment of students with learning disabilities. The traits should be shared with surrounding community colleges so that the ideas toward serving students with learning disabilities may be expanded upon, which maximizes their potential. A collaborative effort among the rural southern Appalachia community college body will benefit education as a whole. The ultimate goal of the current study was to assist rural southern Appalachia community colleges when serving students with learning disabilities. An intense review and focus on the findings resulting during the course of this study will provide guidance toward enhancing the community college experience for the learning disabled population in rural southern Appalachian community colleges and allow these institutions to serve these students more effectively and efficiently.
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APPLICATION FOR
HUMAN SUBJECT RESEARCH DETERMINATION
MECC INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

DATE: 11/02/2012

IRB REVIEW # (Completed by IRB Manager): 2012/13004

RESPONSIBLE PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: SETH GENT

PROJECT TITLE: Impediments to Serving Students with Learning Disabilities in a Rural Community College Setting: The Administrative Perspective

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None

PURPOSE (Describe the reason for the project, not the expectations of the project.)

The purpose of this qualitative study is to examine the challenges rural community colleges in southern Appalachia face when promoting awareness and providing assistance to students with learning disabilities who are seeking to reach their individual goals in a community college setting. Additionally, the study will explore the institutional policies and practices, as well as teaching methods these unique institutions use to improve the community college experience for LD students. Through a case study approach, data will be gathered from interviews and document analysis.

BRIEF PROJECT DESCRIPTION (Briefly describe the research design.)

This study will examine five rural community colleges located in the Appalachia region of Southwest Virginia, Northeast Tennessee, Northwest North Carolina, and Southeast Kentucky. It will examine the methods the chosen community colleges employ to support the issues involved with serving their respective learning disabled (LD) populations. Three interviews will be conducted at each community college participating in this study, with a total of 15 individual interview participants. The first will be a senior level administrator, preferably the Vice President of Student Development Services, who will provide institutional permission for this study. The second will be a mid-level administrator, preferably the Director of Student Affairs. The third will be the Director of any program located on the community college dealing directly with students with learning disabilities. Semi-structured interviews will be conducted. Initial interview questions will be consistent for all interviews, but some variations may occur in
follow-up interview questions; the variation may be due to the different positions and job responsibilities of the interviewees and the differing programs offered at each of the community colleges. Document reviews will also be involved in this study. A list of appropriate documents pertaining to student awareness and services pertinent to serving students with learning disabilities will be requested at the time of the interviews. With an issue as intrinsic as learning disabilities, it is important to have a well-developed understanding of the historical background that has brought the education of students with learning disabilities to where it is today.

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<th>Does the project involve obtaining information about living humans?</th>
<th>X Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
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<td>2.</td>
<td>Does the project involve intervention or interactions with humans?</td>
<td>X Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
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<td>3.</td>
<td>Is the information individually identifiable?</td>
<td>X Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
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<td>(i.e., the identity of the subject is or may readily be ascertained by the investigator or readily associated with the information?)</td>
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For this application, Private Information is information about behavior that occurs in a context in which an individual can reasonably expect that no observation or recording is taking place or information for specific purposes which the individual can reasonably expect will not be made public.

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<th>Is the information to be gathered private?</th>
<th>X Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
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<td>5.</td>
<td>Will data be systematically gathered, analyzed, and disseminated?</td>
<td>X Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
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<td>6.</td>
<td>Will the data be used outside of the setting or population from which they were collected?</td>
<td>X Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
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<td>7.</td>
<td>Will the findings lead to new procedures or processes or be usable in outside applications?</td>
<td>X Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
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I, Seth Gent, the responsible principal investigator, verify the above to be current and accurate.

Seth Gent ___________________________  11/02/2012
Investigator's Signature  Date

If your project is determined to involve human subject research, you will be requested to apply for review by the MECC Institutional Review Board.

Do not begin your project until the MECC IRB gives written notice of approval.

This form and all other project documentation presented for IRB review must be kept confidential and is for the strict use of the Mountain Empire Community College Institutional Review Board only.

Checklist of Required Attachments

The following documents must be submitted with this completed form:
1. **Copy of complete research proposal/project description**

Submit all completed documents to the MECC IRB Manager: **Nikki Morrison**
Dalton Cantrell Hall, Room 215
276-523-2400, ext. 416
Fax: 276-523-4130
NMORRISON@ME.VCCS.EDU

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<th>SIGNATURE OF IRB CHAIR:</th>
<th>DATE</th>
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**DETERMINATION:**
- [ ] Human Subject Research (Requires IRB Review)
- [ ] Not Human Subject Research (Does Not Require IRB Review)
Appendix B

Date October 23, 2012 Proposal Number 2012/13004

Dear Dr. Williams (Gent)

Your proposal submission, "Impediments to serving students with learning disabilities in a rural community college setting: The administrative perspective", is approved EXEMPT by the Darden College of Education Human Subjects Review Committee and you may begin collecting data. If any significant changes occur, especially methodological changes, notify the Chair of the DCOE HSRC, and supply any required addenda requested. You may begin your research.

The designation of EXEMPT is granted indefinitely, provided no modifications occur. If this research is funded externally for this project in the future, you will likely have to submit an application and documentation to the University IRB for their approval as well.

If you have not done so, PRIOR TO THE START OF YOUR STUDY, you must send a signed and dated PDF file of your exemption application submission to nbrown@odu.edu.

Very sincerely yours,

Nina Brown, Ed.D, LPC, NCC, FAGPA
Professor and Eminent Scholar, Department of Counseling and Human Services
Chair, DCOE Human Subjects Review Committee
Old Dominion University
Norfolk, VA 23529

nbrown@odu.edu
Appendix C

Informed Research Consent

Project Title:

Impediments to Serving Learning Disabilities in a Rural Community College Setting: The Administrative Perspective

Researcher:

Seth A. Gent, Ph.D Candidate
Old Dominion University
Department of Educational Foundations and Leadership, Darden College of Education

Purpose of Study:

The purpose of this qualitative study is to examine the challenges rural community colleges in southern Appalachia face when promoting awareness and providing assistance to students with learning disabilities who are seeking to reach their individual goals in a community college setting. Additionally, the study will explore the institutional policies and practices, as well as teaching methods these unique institutions use to improve the community college experience for LD students. Through a case study approach, data will be gathered from interviews and document analysis. This study will benefit rural community college leaders in southern Appalachia in determining what problems are most substantial when attempting to appropriately serve their respective learning disabled populations and what surrounding colleges are doing to diminish these issues. It will also provide insight on what difficulties rural community colleges in southern Appalachia face when promoting student awareness to the learning disabled population and what barriers these institutions face when assisting students with learning disabilities in reaching their individual goals. Ideally rural community college leaders in southern Appalachia will be able to learn from the practices, methods, and approaches of surrounding institutions and ways to approach these challenges efficiently, effectively, and successfully. This study will benefit practitioners in providing a good starting point for expanding on the issues community colleges face in effectively serving the learning disabled population. This area is highly under researched despite its importance. This study will illustrate what the participating rural community colleges in southern Appalachia are doing to assist students with learning disabilities in overcoming the challenges they face in a higher education setting and will discuss some unique practices, methods, and approaches being used by the participating community colleges to improve the experience for students with learning disabilities.

This form certifies that as an interview participant for the study, Impediments to Serving Learning Disabilities in a Rural Community College Setting: The Administrative Perspective, being conducted by Seth A. Gent as Doctoral Candidate at Old Dominion University, I agree to and understand the following terms:

- The nature of the study has been explained to me as a participant in a way that I fully
comprehend, and I understand that my participation is completely voluntary.

- I understand that as a participant of this study I am permitted to cease and desists cooperation and participation at any point during the research.

- I understand that this research proposal has been deemed to be Exempt by the ODU Darden College of Education Human Subjects Review Committee due to the utilization of standard data collection procedures with an adult population.

- I am aware the interview procedure will be conducted in such a manner that the human subjects and the community college will not be identified either directly or through identifiers linked to the human subjects.

- I agree to allow my interview to be recorded using a digital recording device so that it may be accurately transcribed and understand that upon completion of this study all recordings will be destroyed.

- I understand that all information obtained during my participation in this study will be kept confidential and that all data will be recorded without using the names of the participants or institutions involved.

- I understand that I will be provided a transcribed copy of my interview upon transcription, during which time I will be able to make any clarifications or adjustments necessary to my response.

________________________  __________________________
Interview Participant: Date:
Appendix D

Interview Protocol
Community College Administrative Participant Interviews

Call or email faculty member to schedule interview and confirm the meeting time and place.

Meet the individual, introduce yourself, and establish rapport.

“As you know I am conducting a qualitative research study concerning the challenges rural southern Appalachia community colleges face when serving students with learning disabilities. I certainly want to take this opportunity to thank you for your time and assistance in helping me with this.”

"I would like to record our conversation if that is okay with you, so that I will have an accurate record. Our conversation will be confidential. I will not use your name in any discussions or in the any writings related to the research. Only group data will be reported. Is that okay?"

<Be sure to tape record the above paragraphs and the participant’s answer.>

"Do you have any questions about this project? Shall we begin?"

1. “Please give me some background information on yourself.”
   "Where are you from?"
   "Where did you go to school?"
   "What jobs did you hold prior to this one?"
   "Are you content with your current position or do you have other aspirations?"

2. “What do you view as being the single most difficult task in serving the learning disabled population on this campus, and why?”
   "How often does this issue arise?"
   "How is this usually handled?"

3. “What changes have been made in the last 2 years to enhance the community college experience for the learning disabled population?”
   "How do you feel about these changes?"
4. "What impact have these changes had on the learning experience for the disabled population at this institution?"

5. "What is the greatest obstacle you face personally when striving to serve the learning disabled population, and why?"
   
   "How often do you encounter these issues?"

   "How is this usually handled?"

6. "What policies or procedures would you like to see changed or enhanced?"

   "What policies are you certain should be continued?"

   "How long have these been in effect?"

7. "If you could create one procedure in relation to serving the learning disabled population to be adopted by this institution, what would it be?"

   "Why do you think this would be beneficial to your institution?"

   "Have you made this suggestion before, if so how was it received?"

8. "What common difficulties, that you observe, do learning disabled students generally encounter?"

   "How do these issues contrast with the difficulties you face as an administrator serving these individuals?"

   "What approach would you suggest to correct this issue?"

9. "What difficulties do the regional climate and economic environment surrounding this campus present to students with learning disabilities?"

10. "What are your thoughts on the services and accommodations provided to the learning disabled population at this institution?"

    "What policies and procedures concerning students with learning disabilities from other institutions are you aware of, that you would you like to see implemented here?"
“Thank you so much for taking the time out of your busy schedule to meet with me today. I greatly appreciate the opportunity to come and speak with you. Is there anything else you feel would be helpful for me to know? ........ Again, thank you very much.”