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**Promoting Disability-Friendly Campuses to Prospective Students:
An Analysis of University Recruitment Materials**

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Abstract

Estimates are that currently about 9 percent of students on college campuses have some form of disability. These students are all supposed to receive accommodations on those college campuses based on Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act. The focus of this study is how these students receive information about these accommodations, their rights, the campus accessibility, and other issues related to them. The findings of this study show that university viewbooks and other materials sent to interested high school students are depicting disability. However, there does not appear to be much recruitment of prospective students with disabilities past the occasional picture in the viewbook. No cover letter made a mention of unique services for students with disabilities, and less than half of the university general materials mentioned campus disability services (40%). In addition, only 39 percent of the

schools that sent any general materials sent Disabled Student Services (DSS) materials (N=85).

Keywords: Disabled Student Services offices, university recruitment of disabled students, university promotional materials, college students with disabilities

Introduction

Estimates are that currently about 9 percent of students on college campuses have some form of disability, up from 3 percent in 1978 (Heath Resource Center, 1998; Hebel, 2001, July 6). About half of these students are using services provided on those campuses by disabled student services (DSS) offices (Muir, 2003). These students have a variety of disabilities, ranging from mobility impairments to visual or hearing impairments to learning difficulties, and all are supposed to receive accommodations on those college campuses based on Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act. How do these students receive information about these accommodations, their rights, the campus accessibility, and other issues related to them? That is the focus of this study.

The intent is to understand how public colleges and universities are dealing with disability in their promotional materials to future students. Basic public relations practices explain that an organization should know its audiences and focus its message accordingly. University admission offices obviously know that college-bound high school students are their primary audience. Do they also know that a significant percentage of this audience may have a disability and will need information about specific disability services on campuses? Therefore, this study investigates what universities are and are not providing in their general recruitment materials about disability-related topics, as well as what campus disability services materials are providing. The analysis of these materials will illuminate how universities are approaching current recruitment issues related to students with disabilities.

Based on information requested from 99 U.S. universities, the following research questions were investigated: Do their viewbooks and other materials sent to interested high school students depict disability? If someone requests information about a university's services for students with disabilities, what will he or she receive? What do materials from disabled student services look like? What information do they cover?

Students with disabilities and college access

Formalized disability services for college students began at the University of Illinois in 1948 when Tim Nugent founded the Division of Rehabilitation Education Services (Ross, 1998). The intent was to serve returned World War II veterans who had acquired disabilities, and the university's services grew from there. The university's services are now comprehensive, ranging from an independent living center on campus to a top wheelchair sports program. The University of Illinois even has a study abroad program for students with disabilities. In 1998 the

disability magazine, *New Mobility*, named the university the No. 1 disability-friendly campus in America.

Another pioneer in serving students with disabilities is the University of California at Berkeley. The founder of the independent living movement, Ed Roberts, a polio survivor in an iron lung, helped establish a program for disabled students there in 1962. His efforts inspired others and soon about a dozen severely disabled people enrolled. The group, known as the rolling quads, began to knock down the barriers on campus by putting in wheelchair ramps, starting a wheelchair repair service, and employing attendants for their personal needs (Shapiro, 1995). Berkeley's program continues that spirit by focusing not only on accommodation but on educating students on their independent living rights and on how to train their own personal attendants. Berkeley's program is "designed for freshmen and transfer students who have not previously directed their own personal care. This two-semester training period turns out confident students primed to live independently," it reports (Ross, 1998). After that first year, students with disabilities live independently, either on or off campus.

However, these early university programs for disabled students were the exceptions rather than the rule until the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 was passed, Section 504 of which requires any programs or activities that receive federal monies must reasonably accommodate individuals with disabilities and not discriminate against them. This law continues to cover any university or college because almost all, either public and private, receive some kind of federal assistance. This means that universities and colleges cannot limit the admission of qualified students with disabilities, must provide reasonable accommodations, and should allow students with disabilities to participate fully in any required activities. The U.S. Office of Civil Rights enforces Section 504 in educational settings.

Even with Section 504 in place, many colleges and universities did little to become more accessible. However, with the advent of the more publicized 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), colleges and universities began to increase their accessibility. Thomas (2000) reports that the broader reach of the ADA and more accommodation requests from disabled students propelled more schools into compliance. More students became aware of their rights in the years after Section 504 and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, which began as the Education for all Handicapped Children Act in 1975. It mandated free and public education for all children with disabilities. By 1990 many of these children were readying for college and began to request accommodations for their college experience as well. Students with learning disabilities especially began applying to college. In 1996, 35 percent of the freshmen college students with disabilities had learning disabilities; this shows a 10 percent increase of freshmen with learning disabilities since 1991 (Heath Resource Center, 1998). Better testing, diagnosis, and awareness of learning disabilities probably accounts for this sharp rise.

Under Title II of the ADA, any public entity, such as public colleges, cannot deny qualified people with disabilities the right to participate in its programs or activities, and these public entities cannot exclude or discriminate based on disability. Under

Title III of the ADA, places of public accommodation, which covers any private college, cannot deny people with disabilities full and equal access to any services, facilities, or programs that they provide. Since 1990 the courts have been redefining the meaning of the ADA, with the definition of "qualified" coming into question. However, the stated ADA definition of a qualified person with a disability is someone who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, has a record of such an impairment, or is regarded as having such an impairment. The goal is for the definition to cover both people who are unable to do certain things such as walk, as well as those who might be discriminated against because of the stigma associated with their disability such as being HIV positive. "With respect to postsecondary education, a qualified student with a disability is one who is able to meet a program's admission, academic, and technical standards (i.e. all essential nonacademic admissions criteria) either with or without accommodation" (Thomas, 2000, p. 249).

College admissions procedures may not discriminate against students with disabilities in the admissions process; however, students must meet legitimate admissions requirements. But Thomas (2000) reports that college "officials will need to provide an individualized assessment of the qualifications of students with disabilities to ensure that traditional criteria have not arbitrarily screened out otherwise qualified applicants. Also, being qualified may at times require the college to provide the applicant/student with appropriate and reasonable accommodations" (p. 254). A number of court cases and the U.S. Office of Civil Rights have supported the idea that if a student is disabled and qualified, colleges should try to find accommodations that allow the student to participate in its programs (Thomas, 2000). "Once a student has sufficiently documented that he or she has a qualifying disability, a college is responsible for providing reasonable accommodations or modifications that do not result in unfair advantage, require significant alteration to the program or activity, result in the lowering of academic or technical standards, or cause the college undue financial hardship" (Thomas, 2000, p. 255).

Most accommodations for qualified students with disabilities are reasonable and are provided with little fanfare or controversy by colleges, Thomas says. In fact, disability rights attorneys say universities provide better access to students with disabilities than do K-12 schools (Kennedy, 2000). Parking issues on college campuses, which cause problems for non-disabled students, too, are often cited as problematic for students with disabilities because there may not be enough accessible spaces or they may not be close enough to buildings. Also, when construction projects take place on college campuses, students with mobility impairments may find it difficult to find an accessible route around campus. However, disability rights advocates say it is schools' misunderstanding of the ADA and what it means for them that cause even more problems than inaccessible buildings. Rhonda Benedetti, an attorney for Disability Rights Advocates, says, "The attitudinal barriers are many times worse than the architectural barriers. They might put a ramp to the stage of the theater, but their policy doesn't allow students with disabilities to audition for the play" (Kennedy, 2000, p. 17).

In addition, at the college level some faculty may not understand the law and balk at providing necessary accommodations for students with disabilities. According to learning disability researchers Nelson, Dodd, & Smith (1990), some faculty are concerned that accommodating students with learning disabilities may lessen academic standards, but they were open to receiving information about new methods of accommodation that would help them maintain academic standards. However, generally, faculty showed willingness to provide proper accommodations to students with learning disabilities in college (Nelson, Dodd, & Smith, 1990). Another study, this one of students with disabilities at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU), reported that faculty behavior is the most important factor in their college success (Wilson, Getzel, & Brown, 2000). "In numerous ways, students expressed that without full cooperation and support of the classroom faculty, they had little chance of succeeding academically" (p. 41). Students also explained that colleges focused too much on architectural barriers and gave less consideration to programmatic or instructional barriers. The students at VCU also were concerned about lack of DSS staff and services and the unique services that were needed as students matriculated. In addition, students worried about faculty knowledge of disability accommodations. "Students were generally dissatisfied with the degree to which faculty and administrators were knowledgeable and aware of their disability specific needs and the level of cooperation received during implementation of prescribed modifications and accommodations" (Wilson, Getzel, & Brown, 2000, p. 46).

A major problem colleges face in accommodating students with disabilities is cost. A number of college students with disabilities are also clients of state rehabilitation agencies. These agencies pay for college tuition and some personal expenses of clients who are attending college to increase their ability to work. Colleges are supposed to provide academic-specific accommodations for students with disabilities such as classroom access. However, a conflict between colleges and state rehabilitation agencies has arisen over who should pay for personal accommodations needed to meet career and academic goals (Hebel, 2001, July 6). These are accommodations such as sign language interpreters, which can cost \$20,000 annually per student. Many states agree that state rehabilitation agencies and colleges should share costs but at what percentage is under contention. Even disability organizations disagree on who should pay for these accommodations. The National Association of the Deaf says colleges should pay for interpreters because that way state rehabilitation agencies will have more resources for all state residents and won't be favoring those who go to college. In contrast, the Association on Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD) says state rehabilitation agencies should pay for the accommodations because "society as a whole benefits from the education of persons with disabilities;" therefore, the resources should be paid for by taxpayers not the tuition of college students (Hebel, 2001, July 6, p. 45).

However, not all accommodations at colleges are costly. Stodden, et al. (2001) investigated what kind of supports are being provided to college students. They found that testing accommodations, notetakers, personal counseling, and advocacy assistance were the most frequent supports offered. Many of these are

less costly accommodations; for example, at one state college on the East Coast, the DSS office pays a classmate of the disabled student \$100 for the semester to photocopy his or her notes weekly. Stodden et al. found a larger problem affecting college students with disabilities — although there are many more of them in colleges, they are not moving through college programs at the same speed as other students, and thus are paying for more years of college than others. Stodden and Dowrick (2000) explain a college education is crucial for qualified people with disabilities because their employment options are much less without an education. People with disabilities face much higher unemployment and poverty levels than the rest of society, and Stodden (1998) found that poverty levels for college-educated people with disabilities is 15 percent, compared to 50 percent for people with disabilities who dropped out of high school. However, people with disabilities have much more difficulty gaining access to higher education than do non-disabled people, according to the National Organization on Disability (1998). This lack of access to higher education may affect society as a whole because people with disabilities are often referred to as "America's largest untapped talent pool" (Green & Brooke, 2001). Many businesses are faced with labor shortages and employing educated people with disabilities can fill that need.

Colleges, however, continue to face tough financial issues in meeting the needs of growing numbers of students with disabilities. Many times, resources have not grown in proportion to the increased number of students with disabilities entering colleges. Thomas (2000) says that college disabled student services (DSS) offices are "often inadequately funded, given the growth in the number of students requesting accommodation, and seldom have experts on staff who are knowledgeable about a wide range of disabilities that colleges are now attempting to accommodate" (p. 248). As mentioned, the number of freshman college students with disabilities has increased from 3 percent in 1978 to 9 percent in 1998 (Hebel, 2001, July 6). All these issues — increasing numbers of disabled students, financial resources of DSS offices, attitudinal barriers, and an understanding of disability rights laws — influence current university practices, and thus this study investigates how these issues are born out in recruitment and DSS materials.

Methodology

The study was designed around a simple request for information from the researcher to two large public universities in each state in the United States. Public universities were chosen because they are usually less restrictive in admissions, and also as government-funded entities, they should be more aware of their requirements under the Americans with Disabilities Act. All letters were sent to admissions offices at the colleges so as to receive information that would be sent in reply to an inquiry. The letters all contained the following paragraph: "Please send me information about your undergraduate programs for the 2003-2004 school year. I would also be interested in receiving information concerning your provisions for students with disabilities."

The letters, which asked for the information to be sent to the researcher's home address, were sent to 99 colleges (Wyoming only has one state university). The

addresses were obtained from a guidebook to all U.S. colleges and universities. Only one letter had an incorrect address, which was corrected and sent back. Most of the materials arrived quickly and the analysis began about six weeks after the letter was sent.

As a first step, a simple code sheet was developed to assess the general university materials. The intent was to provide a snapshot of what university recruitment materials look like generally. Because modern public relations practitioners acknowledge that diversity is the most important aspect of the U.S. audience (Wilcox, et al, 2003), the code sheet also looked at ethnic imagery to investigate the diversity in the pictures used in the materials and whether students with disabilities were included. Finally, the code sheet looked for any mentions of services for students with disabilities and EEOC/non-discrimination statements. Using SPSS, the data from the code sheet was analyzed. Although the number of materials was small (N=85), the data provide a picture of what is depicted in the university materials' images and how often disability is mentioned or shown.

However, the bulk of analysis was qualitative, focusing on describing the general university materials that did depict or mention disability (N=17) and on disabled student services materials (N=30).

Findings

The first and most surprising finding was that 14 colleges sent no information at all when requested. Some of those missing were quite prominent schools, such as the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill and the University of Missouri-Columbia. No letters from these schools were returned, which would indicate the addresses were incorrect. The only speculation this author has about those 14 schools is that they may expect interested students to get information about their colleges on the Web or that their admissions are so restrictive that they don't send out materials unless students are already admitted. However, relying on the Web solely can be problematic because many university Web sites that use frames or graphics may not be compatible with screen readers that some people may use due to a visual impairment or learning disability (Carnevale, 1999, October 29). For example, one study found that 77 percent of community college Web sites (N=195) did not meet content accessibility standards (Flowers, Bray, & Algozzine, 2001). Also, most parents and high school students probably prefer printed materials that they can review and compare at their leisure.

Out of the 85 schools that sent information, almost half sent a cover letter; however, not one of the cover letters mentioned disability services. All the letters were obviously form letters. In addition, another eight schools sent an application only and no information about their schools, so the analysis of the materials was done on the remaining 77 schools' materials. These materials were primarily 8x11-inch four-color viewbooks (71 percent), with 14 percent in the folded 3.5x8-inch style and 13 percent in the form of CD-ROMs.

Photos in general university materials

All the photographs of students in these materials were coded to assess race/ethnicity and disability. Table 1 lists those findings. It was unexpected to find so many materials with images of disabled students (22 percent), especially when only about one-third of the schools sent any disability services information. A crosstabulation revealed that of those 17 universities that included pictures of disabled students, 12 mentioned disability services in their general materials. That finding would be expected — that when the university had disability awareness to include disabled students in pictures, they would remember to include information about services. The high racial diversity in the general university materials images was expected. In fact, after several recent controversies in which universities such as the University of Wisconsin-Madison, University of Idaho, and Auburn University doctored their materials to add diversity (Hohman, 2000; Lee, 2000), it was suspected that even states with little racial diversity would include a higher proportion of diversity. A number of materials featured a type of "rainbow" picture on their cover, which included one white, one black, one Asian, and one Latino or bi-racial person. The reason racial diversity was assessed was to contrast it to disability, which is the largest "minority" group in the United States with more than 50 million people reporting a legally defined disability (U.S. Census, 2002). Some university materials illustrated racial diversity in a much higher proportion than what it is in some states; whereas, disability images typically are presented in less proportion to their incidence in the general population.

The images of disabled students were equally as ethnically diverse. Eight pictures show white disabled people; seven, African Americans; and two, Asians. This contrasts sharply with research about news photographs of people with disabilities (N=171), which found 80 percent of photos depicted white people, 10.5 percent black, .6 percent Asian, and 2.3 percent Hispanic (Haller, 2000, 1995). Obviously, news photographers do not have control over the race of their subjects like a university PR photographer does. This finding is probably a sign of the diversity awareness university PR professionals have when promoting their campus.

In addition, the analysis of the 17 disability images shows that those colleges that pictured students with disabilities usually created appropriate and non-stigmatizing images. Using Knoll's qualitative schema on photographic images of people with disabilities, the 17 images were analyzed. Knoll (1987) established a systematic way to look at thematic content in images of people with disabilities. He developed a four-tiered qualitative approach for photographs that investigates the artist, image, viewer, and society. In this way, he explored historical and artistic influences, techniques in the content and visual relationships, explicit and implicit meanings, and patterns of meaning.

Using Knoll's interpretive categories, this analysis found that the majority of the photographs (13 of 17) fell into the "one of the gang" category. This category shows the person with a disability "being accepted as a member of a group of friends or acquaintances" (Knoll, 1987, p. 436). These 13 images showed the student with a disability interacting with or grouped with other students. As public relations materials, many of the photographs obviously were staged, but it is still significant that the public relations person or photographer decided not to show the

disabled student as alone, which would fit with Knoll's category of the person being shown as "alienated or isolated from the world of normal human interaction" (p. 434). However, the two pictures in which the disabled students are alone still do not leave the impression of alienation or isolation. For example, the University of Illinois viewbook features a 10½x4-inch picture on page 1 that gives a panoramic view of the campus, with students on the sidewalks, one of whom happens to be a wheelchair user. Although alone, the young man in the wheelchair still appears to be part of the campus community because he is just one of the several dozen people on campus. The other picture in which a disabled student is shown alone is in the Middle Tennessee State University viewbook. An African-American woman using a three-wheel scooter is in a 2x3-inch picture on page 15. Although alone, it is obvious she is on campus because of the red-brick building and landscaped lawn behind her, so there is an underlying message that she is part of the campus community.

Two other photos in the university materials seem to depict disabled people receiving help from a non-disabled person, which could subtly fit with Knoll's category of a disabled person being depicted as "helpless." But in the Georgia State University viewbook it is unclear whether the disabled person is even part of the campus community or has just come onto campus to be helped by someone in the College of Health and Human Sciences, which is being promoted with the picture. The 4x3-inch picture depicts a young woman holding the back of another woman's wheelchair as she leans back toward the floor. They are on a floor mat that would be used for athletics in a gymnasium. The overall impression from the picture is that the non-disabled woman is training or assisting the woman in the wheelchair. The other image of "helping" in the Hunter College viewbook is more ambiguous, which makes it less stigmatizing. It shows an Asian woman in a wheelchair writing on a piece of paper in front of a young man, who is also holding the paper. They are in a computer lab; however, it is unclear who is helping whom.

The rest of the images showed the person with a disability with other people, either staged or candid. One of the best candid shots was in the brochure of the University of California-Berkeley, which is one of the most disability-aware campuses in America. An African American man, who uses a power wheelchair, and an Asian woman are looking intently at a notebook or book. It is unclear but the young man may be reading Braille. In the background are an Asian man and a Hispanic man who are taking no notice of their activity. The impression it leaves is of a natural and equal interaction between the man and woman. Three other images that appeared to be candid shots were of an African American woman wheelchair user cheering with the crowd at a football game in the Mississippi State University brochure, a white woman wheelchair user dressed in cap and gown at graduation in Michigan State's viewbook, and a white male wheelchair user at some kind of street festival in the University of Arizona brochure.

Although 10 of the images appear to be staged, several seem to contain Knoll's category of "This is Me!", which depicts the disabled person as self-assured and assertive. When the person with a disability looks directly at the camera with a self-confident smile, "this is me" comes across loud and clear. For example, in the

Temple University viewbook an African American man with crutches smiles broadly as he stands with a white man and white woman in a large cut-out picture. The picture leaves an impression that he feels confident and equal to his peers. In the University of North Dakota-Grand Forks viewbook, a white male wheelchair user indicates his assertiveness through his hand movements and body language, and the white non-disabled woman in the picture is sitting at his feet, instead of standing over him.

The images in the university materials were not diverse in terms of disability type: 15 of the 17 images were of wheelchair users (88 percent); two pictured used crutches. This is not an unusual finding because modern disability representations are associated with equipment that can provide the viewer of the photograph with an unstated and easily interpreted visual cue. Knoll (1987) calls these "disability symbols" in photographs and they include such things as wheelchairs, canes, or other symbols of impaired mobility. These allow the person to be labeled as disabled without it being stated. In comparison to news photographs of people with disabilities, the prevalent use of wheelchair users is a typical finding. Haller (2000, 1995) found that wheelchair use was the representation of disability most often used in the print photos at 54 percent (N=171). Other disabilities depicted were not near that percentage. Hearing impairment (9.9%), visual impairment (8.8%), and cerebral palsy (7%) were the next three most prevalent representations. However, these images do misrepresent the reality of disability statistics, in which only about 2.2 million people with disabilities use wheelchairs, which is about four percent of the 50 million people with disabilities (U.S. Census, 2002). In fact, disabilities such as arthritis (127 million), hearing impairments (83 million), and visual impairments (31 million) are much more prevalent (Centers for Disease Control, 1996).

Finally, all but one of the images presented the disabled students as "normal" in appearance, meaning there was no body distortion visible that might have indicated "enfreakment," a concept identified by British Disability Studies scholar David Hevey (1992). He argues that this is what many photographers do -- turn people with disabilities into freaks. Through his own photography, he tries to show the alternative to enfreakment. He photographically documents disability activism in Great Britain, which provides some positive images of disability. The image in the university materials that indicate some body distortion was in one of the candid shots, the African American woman wheelchair user cheering with the crowd at a football in the Mississippi State University brochure. She appears to have cerebral palsy or paralysis so her hands are flung halfway into the air as if she can't reach them above her head. The setting of the photo is what indicates she might have "different" arms and hands than the others because she is cheering about the football game and everyone around her is cheering with arms above their heads. However, the sports camaraderie depicted in the picture mediates the image, and she appears to be a fan just like everyone else in the crowd.

Disabled student services (DSS) materials

A separate analysis was conducted on the 30 DSS materials received. The first most obvious difference between DSS materials and general university materials is

their poorer quality and smaller size. Table 2 illustrates what DSS offices sent out, which are predominantly 3½x8-inch brochures (63%) that have spot color and few photos. Some of the brochures appear to be printed at the DSS office on regular paper and folded into brochures. For example, the University of Minnesota has a folded brochure on yellow paper that discusses access issues for disabled students and a folded brochure on off-white paper that discusses general disability services. The brochures have much pertinent information within them; however, their low-tech creation stands in stark contrast to the 18-page, four-color, glossy 8x11 viewbook sent out by the Minnesota admissions office.

Some of the DSS 3½x8-inch brochures, however, had a more professional and graphically appealing appearance. Ohio State University's Office for Disability Services has a 10-page, 3½x8-inch brochure with five black and white photos. Within the space, the brochure goes into depth about services for specific disabilities, discusses missions and values, eligibility for services, and its Adaptive Technology Training Center. The brochure is on card stock paper and has blue spot color and it has been prepared to be a mailer as well. The brochure illustrates that informational materials need not be four-color and glossy to look professional and provide helpful information.

Two of the most high quality DSS brochures came from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and the University of Missouri-St. Louis, respectively. Nebraska-Lincoln was the only DSS brochure that was four-color. Called "Your Guide to Access," it pictured four students on its cover, interestingly none of whom is a wheelchair user. Of the three males and one female, one had a cane and one has a guide dog; the other two students' disabilities are unclear. Inside the 4x8-inch, six-page brochure, there are three more color pictures, of a student in cap and gown with her guide dog, of two students in a classroom with a sign language interpreter, and of a wheelchair user using a weight machine in a gym. The content of the brochure discusses a variety of issues from accessible parking to personal care attendants. It also has a useful address and phone directory of all the university's disability related services on its back page. The Missouri-St. Louis brochure has no photos and is text-based but provides 10 pages of information, including a flow chart on the last page that shows the steps for a disability assessment. It discusses access and campus policies, as well as providing phone numbers of all departments that would have relevance for a disabled student.

Although the glossy viewbook style brochures were missing, two colleges made up for that with a personal touch. For example, the student development coordinator at Johnson State College in Vermont sent his business card and a personal letter that discussed disability services and accommodations available on campus. Also, the disability resource director at the University of Kentucky sent a personal memo extending an invitation to contact him with any specific disability related questions. Unfortunately, that university only sent general university materials and sent no brochure from its Disability Resource Center.

In terms of content, most of the DSS materials covered the wide variety of disabilities and topics related to them well. Table 3 illustrates kinds of information in

the DSS materials. The most prevalent topics are general office information (97%), classroom accommodations, learning disabilities (70%) and assistive technology (67%). The least prevalent topic was personal attendant services (7%), which are services that would only be required by a severely disabled student. Most of the information was written with a legal tone so that the students know their rights.

However, a few materials seemed to have a slight undertone of skepticism about disabilities, especially learning disabilities. For example, Virginia Tech's two-page information sheet spent much of one page discussing eligibility and documentation. Words such as "**acceptable professional** documentation", "**documentation must specify a disability**", and "**should** include measures of aptitude" were boldfaced. The implication seemed to be that the school was suspicious of documentation of disabilities and it wanted to reiterate that only qualified students with disabilities receive services. A similar undertone is expressed in the Illinois State "Disability Concerns" brochure, which focuses almost exclusively on documentation requirements. Ironically, an opposite problem typically exists: Some students with diagnosed learning disabilities try to attempt college classes without asking for accommodations. They may fear the stigma, discrimination, or low expectations that sometimes come with their disability. Learning disability legal expert Matt Cohen says: "The label becomes a scarlet letter branded on the person's identity, shaping people's assumptions and provoking their prejudices. The labels shape people's assumptions about a person's intellectual ability, about their personality, about their aspirations. In the school environment, the child's label may have a significant impact on the teachers' expectations for that child" (2002, Jan. 3). So in fact, university DSS offices should be encouraging more learning-disabled students to use their services, rather than presenting a subtext that learning-disabled students are "faking."

The overall focus of all the DSS materials was as information for students already enrolled at the universities. In addition, the fact that far less than half of universities even sent DSS information indicates that they may believe their focus to be current students, not prospective students. However, based on the findings of this study, universities may need to rethink that approach because they are not acknowledging or actively recruiting many qualified high school students with disabilities.

Discussion and Recommendations

Based on the research questions, this study shows that university viewbooks and other materials sent to interested high school students are depicting disability, which is a positive finding. However, there does not appear to be much recruitment of prospective students with disabilities past the occasional picture in the viewbook. No cover letter made a mention of unique services for students with disabilities, and less than half of the university general materials mentioned campus disability services (40%). In addition, only 39 percent of the schools that sent any general materials sent disabilities services materials (N=85). There appears to be a disconnection between the admissions offices and the DSS offices in which information doesn't flow to the DSS offices about students with disabilities

interested in the university. Also, DSS materials indicate that those offices see their mission as serving those students with disabilities already on campus, rather than reaching out to prospective students. Understandably, as Thomas (2000) says, DSS offices are under-funded and have far fewer financial resources than the university admissions offices, so they probably have to limit their spending on publications and outreach.

Based on this study's findings, it appears that some universities may have some misconceptions about prospective students with disabilities. First, some universities seem to forget they exist. They don't acknowledge them in any aspect of their materials. This may be due to ignorance or misunderstanding about the nature of disability. There may be a false assumption that someone with a disability can't compete in college, or there may be fear that the university isn't as accessible as it should be and it might open itself up to lawsuits. Secondly, those universities that do have some disability awareness still are not going to too much effort to recruit students with disabilities, as they might for a student from an ethnic minority. With this behavior, universities may be missing out on many excellent students with disabilities who might enroll there.

Therefore, this researcher has several recommendations for universities based on this study. First, admissions offices need to get people with disabilities' requests for information into the hands of campus DSS offices. In that way, prospective students will get information they need to see if the campus provides the services and access they require. Admissions offices would also be well-served by an employee who is a liaison to the DSS office, or by a DSS employee who works with admissions to attend recruitment events. For example, if a recruitment event has 400 in attendance, almost 40 people may have questions about disability or campus accessibility based on statistics that 9 percent of college students have a disability. On many campuses, DSS and admissions offices are in very separate departments that have no interaction, which seems to result in little disability information getting into recruitment materials. If about 10 percent of college students have some kind of disability, they represent a significant group who deserves particular consideration.

In connection with this, admissions offices and DSS offices need to partner to produce higher quality brochures and other materials for DSS offices. University admissions offices produce beautiful materials and they are aware of issues such as ethnic diversity. They need to extend that PR excellence into the area of disability awareness. For example, Towson University in Maryland has an attractive four-color brochure focused solely on cultural diversity, which discusses topics such as the African American Cultural Center and the International Education Office on campus; however, its DSS office has no printed brochure. (The office does have a detailed Web page that can be found through a search of the main university Web page.)

At the national level, a guidebook needs to be developed that would discuss DSS services at each U.S. college campus and their levels of disability friendliness. This would be an important resource for high school students with disabilities or any

person with a disability thinking of attending college. In addition, it would gently put pressure on U.S. colleges to compete for good rankings in the guidebook, like they do for the other more general guidebooks such as from *U.S. News & World Report*. This guidebook also would benefit the image of people with disabilities because they would be seen as people with college potential. Obviously, not everyone with a disability can or wants to attend college, but the important underlying message of the guidebook would be that here's a group of potential students, who deserve to be recruited just like any other prospective student.

Finally, the findings from this analysis of university recruitment materials and DSS materials suggest that future research should be done to survey both admissions and DSS offices at universities. Admissions offices should be surveyed on their knowledge level about accessibility issues regarding disabled students and their understanding of disability rights laws. This type of survey might indicate any attitudinal barriers that exist within admissions office or the university in general. DSS offices should be surveyed about their resources, missions, and ability to promote themselves. Many DSS offices are so focused on providing services to students with disabilities that they do not know how to promote themselves to prospective students. If universities are ignorant about meeting the needs of future students with disabilities, that may say something about the campus climate for their current students with disabilities.

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Table 1. DIVERSITY IN IMAGES IN GENERAL UNIVERSITY MATERIALS

<u>Student race/disability in photos</u>	<u>Number of materials</u> (N=77)	<u>Percentage</u>
White	77	100%
Black/African American	74	96%
Asian	65	84%
Latino	59	77%
Disabled	17	22%

Table 2. TYPES OF DISABLED STUDENT SERVICES (DSS) PUBLICATIONS

<u>Format of publication*</u>	<u>Number**</u> (N=30)	<u>Percentage</u>
3½ X 8 inch, 6-8 page brochures	19	63%
8 X 11, 2-pages	5	17%

8 X 11, 4+ pages	3	10%
4-color, 4 X 8 inch, 6-page brochure	1	3%
3½ X 8 inch, 10-page brochure	1	3%
43-page manual	1	3%

* Most were not black and white but had some spot color.

** Some offices sent both brochures and 8x11 applications, but only the primary promotional/information brochure was counted.

Table 3. CONTENT OF DISABLED STUDENT SERVICES PUBLICATIONS

<u>Mentions of Services/Disabilities</u>	<u>Number (N=30)</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
DSS Office information	29	97%
Classroom accommodation	27	90%
Learning disabilities	21	70%
Assistive technology	20	67%
Campus access	17	57%
Physical disabilities	17	57%
Deafness/hearing impairment	16	53%
Blindness/visual impairment	14	47%
Psychiatric/mental health	14	47%
Personal attendant services	2	7%

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