ASSISTING COLLEGE STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES
BY EVALUATING COMMUNITY COLLEGE
STUDENT DEVELOPMENT COURSES

by

Salome Turnberger
A Dissertation
Submitted to the
Graduate Faculty
of
George Mason University
in Partial Fulfillment of
The Requirements for the Degree
of
Doctor of Arts
Community College Education

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                                And Social Sciences

Date: _____April 8, 2008_____   Spring Semester 2008
                                George Mason University
                                Fairfax, VA

Assisting College Students with Learning Disabilities by Evaluating
Community College Student Development Courses

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Arts at George Mason University

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Spring Semester 2008
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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ABSTRACT

ASSISTING COLLEGE STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES BY
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This study examined syllabi for student development courses offered at the 23
main community colleges with 40 branch campuses of the Virginia Community College
System (VCCS) to determine content and structure relevant to the needs of students with
learning disabilities. This dissertation was qualitative with its case study methodology
while quantitative in its content analysis. The researcher's content analysis of the student
development 100, 101, and, 108 course syllabi used a 22-point matrix, and concluded
with recommendations for community colleges, instructors and student development
course syllabi to best serve the academic needs of students with learning disabilities. This
project indicated the importance of the student orientation course to students with
learning disabilities, and concurs with scholars that both topics – orientation courses and
meeting the needs of college students with learning disabilities – require further attention
and research in order to gather information pertinent to developing the college curriculum
while assisting special needs students achieve academic success at community colleges.

Chapter 1. Introduction

Background Information

The number of students with learning disabilities attending community colleges has increased over the last decade. Longo (as cited in Behrens-Blake & Bryant, 1996) referred to this student population as the "greatest challenge to higher education's ability to accept and adapt to diversity of any population accommodated thus far" (p. 108). In 1996, over 35% of freshmen who reported having some type of disability were purported to have a learning disability – an increase from 24.9% in 1991 (Thomas, 2000). The United States Department of Education estimated 38% of students with disabilities at 2-year colleges reported a specific learning disability (2002). These statistics point to the urgency for community colleges to continue focus on its mission while the student population changes.

In this research, the problem statement refers to students with learning disabilities and their impact on instructor planning in an orientation course. In the Virginia Community College System (VCCS), the orientation course is the student development course. An orientation course is usually a credit-bearing class taken to introduce students to community college campus life. Perigo and Upcraft (1989) define orientation as any effort to help freshmen make the transition from their previous environment to the collegiate environment and enhance their success (p. 82). Cohen and Brawer (2003) agree

that orientation programs for students with learning disabilities are essential in order for them to achieve academic success. The functions of the orientation courses are to assist students to navigate the physical campus, become involved in communication with faculty and the student body, and grow in personal development and self-management. Orientation course goals suggest that the student be a part of the learning environment, a member of the interpersonal learning community, and continue to pursue intrapersonal goals by continuing with their college education or vocation. VCCS students are required to take this course and it is within this course that they may confront accommodating their learning disabilities on a different level. How does the VCCS student development course address this student population?

With the increase of this student population and the suggested need for orientation courses, this research analyzed data on the instructional practices implemented within a particular community college-level orientation course which focuses on helping students succeed in college, the student development course (SDV 100, 101 or 108). Students with learning disabilities benefit academically and socially when college instructors have knowledge of disabilities and employ strategies that facilitate success for learning disabled students. Based on solid empirical research, instructors are better equipped to assist student transitions from high school learning strategies to postsecondary education strategies by incorporating sound instructional practices into their student development courses.

Statement of the Problem

The research problem for this doctoral project was identifying content and procedures in a student development course that assist students with learning disabilities as they transition into the community college. This project analyzed student development course syllabi of SDV 100, SDV 101, and SDV 108 courses offered at community colleges in the Virginia Community College System. There was evidence that orientation programs help retain students; thus, a new significance abounds in orientation efforts (Perigo & Upcraft, 1989). Therefore, this research benefited the broader population of community colleges by making available information pertinent to a particular student population within the community college setting.

Research Questions

Developing the research questions arose from the interest in investigating the academic assistance afforded students with learning disabilities. Because students with learning disabilities have increased their attendance at community colleges, this student population requires academic assistance to achieve academic success. Therefore, the orientation course known as the student development course at the Virginia Community Colleges is the focus of this research project. All students enrolled in the VCCS must take a student development (SDV) course within the first 15 credits of enrollment, as these SDV courses are viewed as transition courses between high school and college. It is this transition assistance that especially benefits students with learning disabilities. Thus, the need for instructor planning to meet not only the needs of the entire study body, but more particularly the needs of students with learning disabilities, is essential.

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The research questions proffered are:

1. Are students with learning disabilities acknowledged on the syllabus in the VCCS student development courses SDV 100, SDV 101 and SDV 108?

   A. Are the disabilities offices or disabilities services mentioned on the course syllabus?

   B. Are the characteristics of students with learning disabilities recognized by including a disability statement or mentioning accommodations?

   C. Do the student development courses contain topics that address the academic and social needs of students with learning disabilities?

The need to answer to these questions results from reading Virginia Community College System regulations pertaining to formatting student development courses and requisites for accommodating students with learning disabilities. Tabulations from the syllabi include content, key areas, and trends. Some examples of areas highlighted are the number of writing centers, the number of instructional resource centers, tutoring availability, and self-advocating awareness. It must be noted that institutions may use different titles for similar services offered, e.g. writing center and resource center.

2. Is the student development class linked or team-taught with a general education course and general education instructor?

One model of comparison was Helfrich's study (1999). Other programs were researched and referenced for connections to VCCS schools. Student development courses in the Virginia Community College System linked to core classes were also tabulated.

3. Who are the instructors of the student development courses in the VCCS?

What are the instructors' qualifications or academic credentials?

This information was obtained from the schools' catalogs or colleges' websites. Teacher qualifications, licensure, and degrees were quantified.

4. Are accommodations described on the course syllabus? What learning

disability accommodations are available to the students on each of the VCCS

campuses as obtained from the colleges' websites?

Accommodations were classified and tabulated according to terminologies used by VCCS. Some examples of accommodations noted are extra time on projects and tests, ability to use word processing to take notes and complete essay tests, and the ability to use calculators when otherwise not permitted. School catalogs and VCCS information provide appropriate language terminology.

Significance of the Study

Enrollment of students with learning disabilities at community colleges has increased. The U.S. Department of Education suggested that nearly 60% of students with disabilities, who attended postsecondary institutions, attend those institutions with two-year programs of less than two-year programs (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). Research indicates the success rate for these students in postsecondary education is not favorable (Behrens-Blake & Bryant, 1996). Some students lack confidence in their abilities and have not learned self-advocating skills. "They assume their problem is a lack of intelligence or a combination of social factors that prevent academic success" (Walter, Gomon, Guenzel, & Smith, 1989). If students still hold these stereotypes about

themselves by community college entry, it is essential for the community college instructors to help alleviate this myth.

The student development course is an orientation course that is required of all students attending Virginia Community Colleges. The course has multiple purposes; however, assisting students to become self-aware with new perspective is an integral part. If students with learning disabilities are choosing the community college before a four-year college, effective strategies must be in place to ensure a smooth transition and academic success for this student population. Brawer (1996) reported findings from a study conducted at four North Carolina community colleges indicating that involvement in a freshman orientation course improved student performance regardless of race, age, gender, major, employment status or entrance exam scores. Finn (1999) suggested that existing programs be evaluated to identify services in need of improvement. On the basis of these scholars and others, this research project began with empirical research as support.

Delimitations

This project focused on the 23 community college main campuses in the Virginia Community College System with their 40 branch campuses. Each community college campus was contacted regarding participating. Attempting to obtain cooperation from the 23 colleges was a manageable population for this researcher. Furthermore, the small sample size gave an opportunity to explore, in depth, one system's student development courses.

Limitations

Lack of current data regarding the enrollment of students with learning disabilities within the VCCS presented a statistical dilemma. Contacting the Senior Research Associate at the American Association of Community Colleges (Washington, D.C., personal communication, October 11, 2007) and the Director of Student Services within the VCCS (Richmond, VA, personal communication, November 26, 2007) produced no information about the statistics of students with learning disabilities in the VCCS. Even statistics from the U. S. Department of Education appeared to be based on data collected 5 years ago.

Another limitation to this study was the content, meaning the syllabi themselves. Lack of participation from course instructors, along with possible content omitted for transmittal purposes, hindered this work.

Clarification of Terms

Terms relevant to this research project are: syllabus, learning disability, orientation course, disability services, case study, and accommodations. Due to the complexity of the learning disabilities subject, consider the following definitions for these terms throughout this research.

- Accommodation – An academic adjustment that includes a variation in the manner in which a course is conducted (Brinckerhoff, Shaw, & McGuire, 1992). This may include, but not be limited to, taped textbooks, readers, note takers, extra time on tests, testing in another area.

- Case Study – An inquiry that investigates a contemporary problem within its real-life context (Scholz & Tietje, 2002).

- Disability Services – Practices offered by the community college to students who self-advocate and prove to have a disability, which enables them to access academic assistance to pursue the same curriculum as those without a disability.

- Learning Disability (LD) –

  A generic term that refers to a heterogeneous group of disorders manifested by significant difficulties in the acquisition or use of listening, speaking, reading, writing, reasoning, or mathematical abilities. These disorders are intrinsic to the individual and presumed due to central nervous system dysfunctions. Even though a learning disability may occur concomitantly with other handicapping conditions, it is not a direct result of those conditions. (The National Joint Committee for Learning Disabilities, 1990)

- Orientation course – A course focusing on student development of self-awareness and knowledge of institutional resources; a holistic skills course (Gordon, 1989).

- Syllabus/Syllabi – A written document generated by an instructor and distributed to students that communicates the course goals and objectives and expectations of students.

Conclusion

This introductory chapter provided the framework from which this research originated. Chapter 2, the literature review, provides detailed empirical evidence for this research's validity and clearly demonstrates the need for research on the topic of orientation courses at community colleges connecting with students with learning disabilities. It will be evident that students with learning disabilities need academic assistance and appropriate orientation classes.

Chapter 3, the research methodology, demonstrates the qualitative research method of case study and the quantitative content analysis conducted upon the course syllabi. The syllabi analysis verifies the instructional content within the student development courses that assist students with learning disabilities succeed in community colleges. Chapter 4 explains the findings, and the final chapter recommends contents for a student development course model syllabus that can best serve the academic needs of students with learning disabilities.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

Introduction

The four sections of this literature review focus on college students with

learning disabilities and college orientation courses. Due to the change in legislation

regarding disabilities, the first section explains current definitions and the terms applied

in this research. Next is a review of the historical initiatives and laws affecting the

services provided to students with learning disabilities at community colleges. The

chapter then identifies characteristics of college students with learning disabilities and

addresses the academic issues that confront them. In addition, there is reference to

instructors of students with learning disabilities. The chapter concludes with a research

review of current practices and student development theories in relation to orientation

programs at community colleges. This literature review expands on the Weiss and

Repetto (1997) report that examined the types of services (also viewed as

accommodations) and support provided to college students with learning disabilities.

Defining Learning Disabilities

Chickering (1969), working within the field of student development, defined

transition as being "a change in one's behaviors or relationships in response to the

occurrence of an event or non-event that affects one's beliefs about oneself or the world."

Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman (1995) continued with this framework by defining

transition as "any event or non-event that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles" (p. 27). The high school graduate faces an event of large proportion when transitioning into higher education. Levinson and Ohler (1998) found that students with learning disabilities receive insufficient planning regarding transition needs in pursuing higher education. Due to possible developmental delays and poorly developed social skills, the student with a learning disability faces a greater challenge compared to the non-disabled student. Definitions of learning disabilities primarily focus on an impairment that adversely affects the brain's ability to process information. Accordingly, the Federal Register provided this definition on August 23, 1977:

> "Specific learning disability" means a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding and using language, spoken or written, which may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations. The term does not include children who have learning problems, which are primarily the result of visual, learning or motor handicaps, or mental retardation, or of environmental, cultural or economic disadvantage. (as cited in Pigza, 2002)

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1990 defines learning disabilities as "an impairment of individuals who have average (or above average) intelligence, but who have specific difficulties with one or more of the basic psychological processes which affect their ability to acquire competence in reading, spelling, and writing" (Glimps, 1994).

In a literature search conducted by Mull, Sitlington, and Alper (2001), the authors found that the only agreement of the definition of learning disability is that there is a variety of definitions. Of 26 articles reviewed by Mull et al., 20 did not discuss any definition of learning disability; 3 articles had reference to the National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities definition. This supports Kavale (1993) who stated that "a learning disability is an assortment of correlative conditions that influence the phenomenon in varying degrees; it is a complex and multivariate problem." He suggests that any legal problem stems from a failure to provide a comprehensive and unified perspective about the nature of learning disabilities (p. 172). Torgenson (1993) agrees with this concern, stating "everyone can agree that the concept of learning disabilities is surrounded by ambiguity" (p. 153). This ambiguity is disconcerting because Barnett's (1992) research found that based on information provided by the American Association of Community Colleges, learning disabilities constitute the largest single category of disability served by disability services offices in community colleges.

Although this literature review provided several definitions of the term "learning disabilities," the definition from The National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities (NJCLD) seemed most appropriate for this research project:

A generic term that refers to a heterogeneous group of disorders manifested by significant difficulties in the acquisition or use of listening, speaking, reading, writing, reasoning, or mathematical abilities. These disorders are intrinsic to the individual and presumed due to central nervous system dysfunctions. Even though

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a learning disability may occur concomitantly with other handicapping conditions, it is not a direct result of those conditions. (1990, p. 65)

Historical Initiatives

The first medical periodical devoted to learning disability, *Observation on Cretinism*, was published in 1850 (Gillberg & Soderstrom, 2003). In the early 1900s if children could not read, they were considered to have "word blindness." In 1937, Samuel Orton published *Reading, Writing, and Speech Problems in Children* in an attempt to explain developmental disorders in children (Doris, 1993, p. 101). In 1957, Dr. Samuel Kirk, a psychologist and a member of the Urbana-Champaign College faculty, coined the term "learning disability." Recognized as the "father of modern special education," Kirk first used the term learning disability in the textbook *Educating Exceptional Children* (Zigmond, 1993, p. 253). The pioneer research of educators such as Orton and Kirk was responsible for recognizing that learning disabilities were a special area of need in training children.

In the early 1970s, persons with disabilities used the laws against racial discrimination to begin legislating for equal rights in educational systems. In 1975, this pressure for equal rights led Congress to enact Public Law 94-142 or The Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (Roberts & Mather, 1995). This was the first federal law to help students with special learning needs receive free and appropriate public education at the kindergarten through 12th grade levels. It was subsequently renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Act in 1990. In 1999, the Supreme Court narrowed the definition of who qualifies as an individual with a disability. The Court held

that if an individual uses a "mitigating measure" because of which the individual does not have an impairment that is currently substantially limiting, the individual is not considered to have a disability (Rothstein, 2003).

Currently, there are three federal laws that help students with disabilities access higher education. The three federal mandates for schools of higher education are: The Individuals With Disabilities Act (IDEA) of 1990 and its amendments of 1997, Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990, and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Paul, 2000). Along with these federal laws, community colleges in Virginia must adhere to a state law known as The Virginians With Disabilities Act (VDA), Section 51.5-40 et. seq. of the Code of Virginia (Virginia College Quest, 2003). This act protects the rights of students with learning disabilities to access postsecondary education.

The Individuals With Disabilities Education Act of 1990 and IDEA Amendments of 1997 include postsecondary education as a major post-high school outcome (Mull et al., 2001). This special education legislation guarantees a free and appropriate education through 12th grade and defines transition services for students with learning disabilities. Once transition to postsecondary education is complete, the Americans With Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act are applied to the education rights of students with learning disabilities.

The civil rights legislation of the Americans With Disabilities Amendment (ADA) became effective in 1992. The ADA prohibits discrimination in all places of public accommodation (a step beyond Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, which only

governed programs and activities receiving federal funding); included in the definition of discrimination are all postsecondary institutions, most of which were already subject to Section 504 (Pigza, 2002). However, its implications for higher education are ambiguous and not as specific as Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Pigza explained that the courts continue to rely on the regulations of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 when addressing claims of discrimination against postsecondary educational institutions. Specific to higher education, Section 504 provides regulations regarding admissions and recruitment, academic adjustments, housing, financial aid, general treatment, and nonacademic services for all disabled students (Pigza, 2002).

Section 504 (29 U.S.C. Section 794) states: "No otherwise qualified individual with handicaps shall, solely by reason of her or his handicap, be excluded from the participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal assistance" (Thomas, 2000). Rothstein (2003) comments on the federal law mandate that, "In spite of almost 30 years of judicial and federal agency interpretation, the issues facing college and universities with respect to students with disabilities have become increasingly complex" (p. 1). This is in agreement with Orrick, Herrington, and Sutcliffe in 1994 (as cited in Pigza, 2002), who state the courts "have yet to address fully what constitutes a 'reasonable' or 'fundamental' modification under the ADA" (p. 12).

Students with disabilities present a legal and educational challenge to colleges and universities. Because of Section 504 of 1973 and the American Disabilities Act of 1990, enrollment of students with learning disabilities in colleges has increased. In 1985, the

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Supreme Court case of Alexander v. Choate (Thomas, 2000) ruled that otherwise qualified students with disabilities are entitled to meaningful access and reasonable accommodation. In the 1990s, the ADA gave greater awareness to the issues of civil rights for the disabled, and litigation again increased from the 1970s (Pigza, 2002). Institutions of higher education must modify their programs and services to provide accommodations to students with disabilities (Schuh, 2005).

In "College Students and Disability Law," Thomas (2000) recommends guidelines for practitioners to follow that will help colleges accommodate students with learning disabilities. The suggestions are to deter legal action against the college from a student with a learning disability, as well as help students succeed. Along with highlighting the mandated laws for community colleges, Thomas' guidelines provide a framework from which practitioners can make decisions for assisting students with learning disabilities. Some of Thomas' guidelines that pertain to this topic include:

- Within the Student Disability Services staff should be one or more staff who has knowledge of disability law and assessment of disabilities.

- Ensure that the Student Disability Services is sufficiently staffed and adequately funded to add increasing number of inquiries and demands for accommodation.

- Engage in the in-service training of administrators, staff and professionals the need for accommodation and access.

- Handle inquiries and requests for accommodation in a timely fashion. (p. 14)

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The research about the legal aspects of higher education and students with learning disabilities is sparse; nevertheless, community colleges continue to implement their original open-door policy of serving the community, including those with learning disabilities. Community college administration, faculty, and staff must recognize that students with learning disabilities add to the diversity of the community college population. Keep in mind that community colleges are viewed as the institution of higher education most accessible to students with diverse needs. With its open admissions policy, community colleges provide access to postsecondary education for the underrepresented in higher education. Continuation of this original policy is vital because every year an increasing number of students with disabilities enter postsecondary education (Almeida, 1991; Quick, Lehmann, & Deniston, 2003). In 1991, 25% of all first-time, full-time freshmen who reported having a disability also had a learning disability (Bigaj, Shaw, Cullen, McGuire, & Yost, 1995). The National Center for Education Statistics at the U. S. Department of Education reported that in 1997-1998 an estimated 195,870 out of 428,280 students with disabilities enrolled in postsecondary institutions and many were likely to be attending two-year institutions (2002). Thirty-eight percent of this number self-identified as having a specific learning disability. Figures from the U.S. Department of Education suggested that nearly 60% of students with disabilities who attend postsecondary institutions attended institutions with two-year programs or less than two-year programs (U.S. Department of Education, 2002).

It appears that administering to a diverse student body in higher education has come full circle. The Truman Commission of 1948 (as cited in Brint & Karabel, 1989) stated:

> The commission does not subscribe to the belief that higher education should be confined to intellectual elite, much less small elite drawn largely from families in the higher income brackets. Nor does it believe that a broadening of opportunity means a dilution of standards either of admission or scholarly attainment in college works (U.S. President's Commission, 1948, p. 6) to the current practices and mandates of state and federal governments, the community college continues to educate all of the community with its diverse needs. (p. 69)

Attorney Kincaid (2004), who specializes in disabilities and education, recommends college disability service providers be more proactive in helping high school students adjust to higher education. She offers the following guidelines: inform students that the disability service office exists in physical location and on the internet, inform students about the role of the disability service office and what documentation is needed, and provide information on support services through other college offices.

Despite these suggestions, Rioux-Bailey (2004) warns that not all community colleges offer the same services or have the same policies regarding access and enrollment. Within higher education, the offices responsible for enforcing laws and serving disabled students are housed in divisions of student affairs. Student affairs professionals are often undertrained and lack experience in the area of learning disability law and advocating students' rights regarding accommodations in the university

community (Vogel, 1993). The challenge for institutions is to provide high quality student support services that help first-year students succeed and make sure that they are aware of and use these services when appropriate (Pigza, 2002, p. 428). The challenge for first-year students is to see these services as important to their success, and not think that using them shows some kind of weakness on their part (Upcraft, Gardner, & Barefoot, 2005).

A recognized means of support to all students, including students with learning disabilities, is the extended orientation course or student development course. Thus, this doctoral project evaluated orientation courses at the community colleges of Virginia for their support of this underrepresented student population.

College Students With Disabilities

Students receiving special education services in high school find several differences in disability services when entering college. Olivas, Professor of Law at the University of Houston, believed these differences will be a pressing legal issue in the future (2004). Olivas foresees overly ambitious parents demanding colleges grant similar services as provided in high school. Nonetheless, some of the differences students with learning disabilities – and their families – must be prepared to accept are different law applications, different student and teacher responsibilities, and different types (quality and quantity) of services. Grading methods, teaching strategies, time spent in class, and freedom/independence pose additional challenges for students with learning disabilities (Shaw, Brinckerhoff, Kistler, & McGuire, 1991).

Along with these concerns, research indicates students with learning disabilities have documented characteristics and traits. Eaton and Coull (as cited in Smith, English, & Vasek, 2002) list some of the traits that a freshmen student with a learning disability might possess:

- Being unprepared for responsibility

- Inability to manage free time

- Being overwhelmed by workload

- Difficulty learning time management skills

- Difficulty making new friends

- Missing the academic support of parents

- Inability to communicate about their disability

- Failing classes

- Being distracted and not being able to focus

- Being realistic about how the disability affects goals and ambitions. (p. 492)

To help college students succeed with these behaviors, Eaton and Coull highly recommend parent involvement. But by age 18, the teen is an adult by the Age of Majority Law. Therefore, colleges cannot communicate with parents without student consent. Unlike secondary school education, parent and teen must work through college issues without a counselor advocate's intervention.

Tinto (1985) presented issues similar to Eaton and Coull's (as cited in Smith et al., 2002), but condensed them into identifying four clusters of experiences associated with the difficult transition from high school to college:

- Difficulty in adjusting to the college environment

- Experiencing academic and social difficulty

- Suffering from incongruence between student expectations and institutional demands

- Feeling of social isolation.

Higbee (as cited in Pigza, 2002) highlighted cognitive difficulties facing a student with learning disabilities rather than the social aspects noted by Tinto (1985). The cognitive difficulties include:

- Developmental aphasia – disorder of language functions

- Dyscalculia – calculating disability

- Dysgraphia – writing disability

- Dyslexia – reading disability

- Specific language disability – difficulty with symbol systems

- Cognitive problems – difficulty organizing or sequencing thoughts or distinguishing between concepts

- Directional problems – troubles with left and right, directions, maps

- Perceptual problems – sensory intake or processing difficulties.

Consistent with these observations, Rita and Bacote (1997) organized their summer high school-to-college transition program accordingly: intensive reading, composition, math, counseling, and career sections to address social and academic concerns.

Like Tinto (1996), Feldman and Messerli (1995) also established that the skills required by students to be successful in college included self-advocacy, initiative, and time management. For a smooth transition, they suggest students with learning disabilities be able to self-report their disability, articulate accommodations needed, and coordinate different services. Students must realize that colleges are only required to provide accommodations that make the curriculum accessible. Success versus access is a major adjustment to which some students must adapt. Colleges do not have to make modifications that would fundamentally alter the nature of a service, program or activity, or would result in undue financial or administrative burdens to the college (U.S. Department of Education, 2002).

From her focus group study, Finn (1999) summarized the kinds of support services students might request. Students in the focus groups most often needed coursework accommodations, testing accommodations, LD staff member support, peer support groups, and tutors. As evidence of the power of community, the students at Dabney S. Lancaster Community College, Clifton Forge, Virginia, formed a peer support group. The Challenged Mentally, Physically, and Socially (CHAMPS) program connected students with mental, physical, and social challenges. The program's purpose promoted community awareness of persons with disabilities, to engender peer support, and to explore available resources (Barnett, 1993).

Instructors of Students with Learning Disabilities

Titley (1985) would concur with Eaton and Coull (as cited in Smith et al., 2002) about the importance of parent involvement in student transition from high school to

college. Not only do students and parents' benefit, but faculty, staff, and the institution can also benefit from college orientation programs.

Instructor awareness of difficulties for students with learning disabilities is very important. Students and teachers must work together toward a smooth transition. Mitchell and Sedlacek (1995) found students with learning disabilities were concerned that instructors lacked knowledge about learning disabilities, and were therefore less sympathetic, less understanding, and less likely to provide reasonable accommodations. However, a survey conducted by Norton (1997) found that community college faculty were generally responsive to the needs of students with disabilities. Glimps (1994) promoted dialogue between students and faculty as an essential key to academic success.

McGrath (1996) cautioned that if community colleges are to respond to students' needs, then faculty must make substantial changes in their approach to teaching and learning. McGrath's work informed college instructors of some of the obstacles that a transitioning student with a learning disability might face, and he suggested topics to discuss in an orientation class – and in particular prompted counselors or mentors to keep in contact with students at risk. According to Brinckerhoff et al. (1992), "One of the expanding roles of LD service providers is to provide content tutors and faculty with information about the merits of learning strategies instruction so that they can incorporate these techniques into their teaching on a daily basis" (p. 253). Finn (1999) suggested the following teacher strategies be used in community colleges to help students with learning disabilities: teaching students learning strategies, working on students' self-esteem, setting up study groups, reviewing

course schedules, reviewing homework, and intervening in matters relating to faculty and parents.

Rita and Bacote (1997) found that college students with disabilities used academic support services 63% more than students without a disability. Students who lack the skills to self-advocate may hide their disability and neglect available services. Students may not self-advocate, but they nonetheless rely on the professional nature of faculty to assist them in achieving success. Similarly, Glimps (1994) reported that students with disabilities depend on faculty willingness to meet individual needs for access to education, training, and ultimately to careers.

Barretti (1993) provided insight into the problems that challenge students with learning disabilities and offered solutions for transition programs at community colleges. He, like Tinto (1996) and Eaton and Coull (as cited in Smith et al., 2002), acknowledged that some students with learning disabilities are academically and socially ill-prepared for college immediately after high school. The U.S. Department of Education estimated that on average 40% of all entering community college students require remedial education assistance in at least one area of basic competence – reading, writing, mathematics (as cited in Hankin, 1996).

Current Practice and Theory for Orientation Classes

Freshmen orientation programs originated at Boston University in the early 1800s. The development of the extended orientation course began in the 1980s. Barefoot and Fidler (1994) found that many campuses offer freshman seminars with a decidedly academic focus: where all sections address a common topic or theme or a variety of

topics as chosen by each instructor. It appears that some freshman seminars primarily

focus on basic academic skills of reading, writing, note taking and test taking. However,

Cuseo (1997) recommended a range of topics for freshmen orientation seminars such as

the meaning, value, and expectations of liberal arts education; self-concept and self-

esteem; goal setting and motivation; learning skills; and self-management. In harmony

with Cuseo's theory, Howell (2001) acknowledged many traditional and non-traditional

students alike are inadequately prepared, academically and psychologically, for college-

level work and learning. It makes sense, therefore, that Derby and Smith (2004) designed

the orientation class for their research purposes as a course to facilitate self-development

through a variety of exercises and activities that relate to the student's personal and

educational development (p. 767).

One of the major transitions from high school to college involves unlearning past

attitudes, values, and behaviors and learning new ones (Feldman & Newcomb, 1969).

Community colleges, along with the U.S. Department of Education, acknowledge the

need to assist students' transition into college. The orientation courses at the community

colleges within the VCCS are viewed as a tool which assists student growth and

development by learning new aspects of self and the community to which they belong.

Boyer stated a successful freshman year program will convince students that they are part

of an intellectually vital, caring community (1988, p. 57). If students view themselves as

part of a community, they are more likely to get involved in their personal development.

Astin (1975) explained his theory of involvement as the amount of physical and

psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience (p. 134). More

simply stated, the basic tenet of the involvement theory is that the successful student is an active participant in the process of learning, rather than a passive observer (Derby & Smith, 2004, p. 765). Similarly, Tinto (1985) posits that student success hinges on constructing educational communities at the college, program, and classroom levels, which integrate into the institution's ongoing social and intellectual life (p. 188).

Some researchers suggest orientation courses be organized to promote social learning and personal development along with academic success. Tinto's theory of student departure, developed in 1975, theorized that "students enter a college with varying patterns of personal, family, and academic characteristics and skills" (as cited in Pascarella & Terezini, 1991). Along with this viewpoint, Cook (1996), at Salt Lake Community College, stated the main purpose of orientation should be to assist the student in making a smooth transition and adjustment to collegiate life while at the same time breaking down some of the fears and anxieties that may exist. Barefoot and Gardner combine these ideas by using the terms "holistic" and "developmental" (as cited in Ward-Roof & Hatch, 2003, p. 148). This perspective may be the reason 60% of two-year institutions provide first-year-seminar programs (Mullendore & Banahan, 2005). In addition, in 1988, the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges developed the Commission on the Future of Community Colleges, stating "we urge that community colleges give more attention to student retention. Every college should develop a comprehensive First Year Program with orientation for all full-time, part-time, and evening students" (Cuseo, 1997, p. 11). Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) viewed orientation programs and classes as necessary to promote social learning and personal

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student development, along with academic success. Brawer (1996) reported findings from the 1995 Glass and Garrett study at four North Carolina community colleges indicating that involvement in a freshmen orientation course improved student performance regardless of race, age, gender, major, employment status, or entrance exam scores.

The goal of the freshmen seminar is helping the student assimilate into college life and succeed interpersonally and academically. Students with disabilities are twice as likely to drop out of school as are students with no physical or learning disabilities (Cohen & Brawer, 2003). Alley et al. (as cited in Levinson & Ohler, 1998) also recognized that persons with learning disabilities are found to be passive learners who might not engage in exploratory activities such as part-time jobs or extracurricular activities (p. 2). Orientation programs must be sensitive to the needs of students with disabilities and make sure there are necessary accommodations for their participation in orientation in place (Schuh, 2005). In an orientation class, students may struggle with their fears and inadequacies during their transition to college. Often students will think that such problems and fears are uniquely their own, or unique to their type of student. This, on occasion, can lead to isolation. Alliances and support systems can be built and new understandings arrived at when younger and older students – those who have been out of school and those in transfer and terminal programs – all discover that they share similar fears, doubts, and concerns (Helfgot, 1989, p. 32). Boyer (1988) resolved isolation with a sense of community. In addition, Tinto (1985) recommended an in-class and out-of-class link that increased the likelihood that entering students will experience

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both academic and social integration – key elements of a successful transition to college life.

How are community colleges successfully addressing this academic need for social and developmental transition skills for the student with learning disabilities? Freshmen orientation seminars have been subject to more forms of systematic evaluation than any other course in American higher education (Cuseo, 1997). A few community colleges that have documented the success of orientation seminars for students with disabilities include John Wood Community College (Illinois) with the Special Needs Transition Initiative Program, The Extended Opportunities Programs and Services Program (California), and Bronx Community College (New York) (Cohen & Brawer, 2003). Brawer (1996) found from her study of the Valencia Community College in Florida that 81% of students enrolling in the extended orientation course succeeded in passing their first-term courses, compared with only 56% of students who enrolled in other college preparatory courses. Additionally, research on students who participated in a freshman orientation seminar at Sacramento Community College in California found that these students completed courses at a 50% higher rate than those students who had not participated (Barefoot, 1993).

In 1991, University of Wisconsin - Madison honored New River Community College in Dublin, Virginia, for its model program serving students with learning disabilities (Barnett, 1993). The Learning Enrichment and Achievement Program (LEAP) offered students with learning disabilities a comprehensive schedule of

academics, tutoring, and counseling support by trained staff. In the past 20 years the program has served over 900 students with learning disabilities.

Johnson (2003) reported to the Center on Disabilities at California State University that assessment of postsecondary orientation programs for students with disabilities revealed there has been little research about the subject. Cuseo, director of freshman seminar at Marymount College in Palos Verdes, California, and author of *The Freshman Seminar*, supported freshman orientation seminars. Cuseo (1997) reminded community college faculty of their mission, offered possible research questions, suggested relevant topics to be used in comparing different orientation courses, provided administrative concerns in course delivery, and concluded by suggesting questions that must be addressed when college faculty are forming an orientation class. He offered the following topics to be included in a freshmen seminar: the college experience, academic skill development, academic and career planning, and life management. Furthermore, Barnett (1993) documented similar findings suggesting the following components are necessary for students with learning disabilities to achieve success: administrative commitment, community linkages, staff expertise, and faculty support.

Rita and Bacote (1997) presented findings of their orientation program at Bronx Community College in *The Benefits of College Discovery Prefreshman Summer Program for Minority and Low-Income Students*. The College Discovery Prefreshmen Summer Program (CDPSP) is a summer bridge program to help incoming minority and low-income freshmen with academic, personal, and social development skills. Rita and

Bacote's research suggests that at-risk students be taught personal and social skills to participate in the community college life because of their social, emotional, and developmental delays.

Finn (1999) noted that in 1991, 25% of all college freshmen reported having a disability. According to the *National Longitudinal Study of Special Education Students* (Bigaj et al., 1993) persons with learning disabilities attend two-year vocational, community, or junior colleges more frequently than four-year colleges or universities. However, Boyer (1988) reminded the reader that disability rates are not always accurate because the rates are often based on student self-reports. Finn (1999) stated that existing programs need to be evaluated to identify services in need of improvement. If students with learning disabilities are choosing a community college before a four-year college, effective strategies must be in place to ensure a smooth transition and academic success for this student population. If students lack the skills to self-advocate, they may hide their disability and neglect available services.

Chaves (2003) reported that freshman orientation programs are a proven method to assist in raising students' levels of academic performance, retention, and degree program completion. In addition, Brawer (1996), Cuseo (1997), Glass and Garrett (1995) and Upcraft et al. (2005) acknowledged the importance of an extended orientation course. Rainone (1997) reported the significance of a student development course by citing Forrest, who offered this insight about the freshmen seminar:

probably the single most important move an institution can make to increase

student persistence to graduation is to ensure that students receive the guidance

they need at the beginning of the journey by including a formal course during the first term on campus. (p. 18)

The Virginia Community College System (VCCS) adheres to this philosophy and rationale by offering student development courses. VCCS requires students to enroll in this course within the first 15 credits of their attendance. Accordingly, VCCS's student development course (SDV 100, SDV 101, SDV 108) is the system's orientation course. However, as noted earlier, neither the Senior Research Associate at the American Association of Community Colleges (Washington, D.C., personal communication, October 11, 2007) nor the Director of Student Services within the VCCS (Richmond, VA, personal communication, November 26, 2007) produced information about the statistics of students with learning disabilities in the VCCS. Statistics from the U. S. Department of Education appeared to be based on data collected 5 years ago. Thus there is a clear and demonstrated need for more research.

Conclusion

The literature review pointed overwhelmingly to the need for orientation courses to help students with learning disabilities succeed academically and socially in higher education. The literature supported the social and academic needs of students with learning disabilities by suggesting solutions for students, instructors, and administrators at community colleges. The programs Partnership in Action Program, the Extended Opportunities Programs and Services, as well as the federally funded Student Support Services programs all agree smooth student entry and orientation support is necessary to help student success (Cohen & Brawer, 2003).

The following chapter provides details of the methodology applied to collect student development course syllabi from faculty within the Virginia Community College System to perform a content analysis on topics and content relevant to the academic needs of students with learning disabilities.

Chapter 3. Methodology

Nature of the Study

This study examined the content of Virginia Community Colleges' student development/orientation course syllabi to better understand how each community college addressed the academic needs of students with learning disabilities. The student development course within the VCCS has a variety of titles, including Student Success (SDV 100), College Survival Skills (SDV 100/108), College Success Skills (SDV 100), Student Orientation First Year Success (SDV 101) or simply, Orientation (SDV 100).

For the purpose of this study, the term "Learning Disability" is a broad generic term that refers to a number of different behavioral and educational performance deficits that range from mild to severe (Hartman, 1993). Learning disabilities are represented by processing deficits (visual and auditory) and are not due to a physical disability.

This study aligned with research suggesting the importance of the orientation course and its necessity for supporting all college entry students, especially those with learning disabilities. Questioning whether student development courses assist students with learning disabilities to successfully transition into the community college is the project's focus.

The broad categories examined on the student development course syllabi are course topics, disability policies, course information, and course policies. The syllabus,

which serves as a learning tool (Parkes & Harris, 2002), previewed the topics and areas of academic and social needs that instructors address in the orientation course. Tincani (2004) advocated that the success of students with disabilities begins with this overlooked but important part of the course: the syllabus. Parkes and Harris (2002) found that syllabi are a ubiquitous part of the teaching process, making the scarcity of scholarship research pertaining to syllabi unexpected. Based on the syllabus research of Slattery and Carlson (2005), Tincani (2004), Chaves (2003), Parkes and Harris (2002), Cuseo (1997), and Palek, Walsh, Williams (1988), this researcher deemed the student development course syllabi from VCCS colleges a significant study.

In this qualitative study, results are presented in a narrative format. A case study is "an inquiry that investigates a contemporary problem within its real-life context" (Scholz & Tietje, 2002). Case study research can determine the frequency of instructional content that promotes academic success for students with learning disabilities. This case study examined the assistance provided for students with learning disabilities in their real-life higher education challenge of completing the student development/orientation class. The orientation course is a natural setting to study because a student development course is required before a student receives a degree from the Virginia Community College System. Moreover, analyzing documents is a commonly used method in case study research for exploratory purposes (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006). Cross and Steadman's *Classroom Research Implementing the Scholarship of Teaching* (1996) supported narrative and qualitative methodology. Topics presented by Cross and Steadman to correlate to this research include:

- orientation course organization with consideration for students with learning
  disability,

- the style and format of the course syllabi,

- academic and social support offered to students with learning disabilities, and

- qualifications that enable an instructor to assist this student population.

This is a qualitative dissertation; however, quantitative methods were used to
analyze the frequency of topics within the course syllabi in percentage and ratio format.
This quantitative research used Krippendorff's (1980) content analysis method to
examine syllabi provided by VCCS student development instructors. Krippendorff
defines content analysis as a research technique for making replicable and valid
inferences from data to their context. He stated that, "like all research, content analysis is
to provide knowledge, new insights, a presentation of facts, and a practical guide to
action" (p. 21). Syllabi were analyzed for content, topics, style and format, as well as
statements relevant to the needs of students with learning disabilities. A 22 item matrix
was presented in table format and a guide toward action finalizes this research.

Research Questions

Scholarship in curriculum design and support for students with learning
disabilities validates the research questions. From the syllabi, tabulations were marked
from the content regarding key topics, objectives, self-disclosing statements, and course
policy. Some areas highlighted are the mention of writing centers, instructional resource
centers, tutoring availability, self-advocating awareness, and the disability office or

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student support office. However, institutions may use different titles for similar services offered, e.g. writing center versus resource center.

The following research questions were applied to the student development course syllabi to complete the content analysis:

1. Are students with learning disabilities acknowledged on the syllabus in the VCCS student development courses SDV 100, SDV 101 and SDV 108?

   A. Are the disabilities offices or disabilities services mentioned on the course syllabi?

   B. Are the characteristics of students with learning disabilities recognized by including a disability statement or mentioning accommodations?

   C. Does the student development course contain topics that address the academic and social needs of students with learning disabilities?

As cited in Chapter 2, students with learning disabilities are increasing in attendance at the community colleges. Legally and professionally, instructors and institutions are required to assist this special population. Answers to these questions are lacking in current literature; therefore, this study contributes important scholarship to understanding how one community college system attempts to assist students with learning disabilities.

2. Is the student development course connected in some way with a general education course and general education instructor?

One model of comparison was Helfrich's (1999) study. This approach provided a natural avenue for strengthening student abilities by bridging skills and content interfaces

in the curriculum (Smith, 1994). Smith also advocates that team teaching and interdisciplinary study are often pursued to create a greater sense of academic community and engagement and to build greater curricular coherence for students (p. 128). Therefore, student development courses linked to core classes or team-taught were tabulated in this study.

3. Who are the instructors of the development courses within the VCCS? What are the instructor qualifications to teach students with learning disabilities?

This information was obtained by reading the school catalog or college website directories. Teacher qualifications, licensure, and degrees were tabulated. Qualifications are important because communication between faculty and students with disabilities can directly affect the students' level of success (Habanek, 2005). Habanek underscores the importance of the professor side of the agreement in the syllabus, offering the perspective that the professor has a base of knowledge and skill to offer to students (2005). A survey of Purdue University students revealed that more important to the student than the content provided in the preparatory seminar was the knowledge that "help was available" (Dale & Zych as cited in Miner, 1998). Students with learning disabilities benefit from knowing the instructor is available and prepared to help them; students may be more willing to self-advocate to the responsive professor.

4. What learning disability accommodations are available to the students on each of the VCCS campuses as noted on the colleges' websites? What, if any, accommodations are discussed on the course syllabus?

A college website offers further information about the college, its instructors, and the programs offered. Since students with learning disabilities might read the website for information pertaining to their disability, it was evident that this too was a source to investigate for students with learning disabilities. Therefore, the websites were reviewed to obtain disability services information in reference to possible classroom and testing accommodations, along with the course instructors' qualifications.

Accommodations were listed and tabulated according to terminologies used by VCCS. Some examples of accommodations noted are extra time on projects/tests, ability to use word processing for note taking and essay test completion, and ability to use calculators when otherwise not permitted. School catalogs and VCCS information provide appropriate language terminology.

Research Population

Much of the literature referring to students with learning disabilities indicated that chances for these students to be successful at the community college are against them from the time of enrollment (Paul, 2000). In contrast, the research population for this study was instructors of students with learning disabilities. Although the Disability Counselor or Academic Counselor is in direct contact with this student population and often the first contact during enrollment, students may not understand the academic impact of their learning disability until their orientation course, or other courses, and not in the counseling center. Therefore, any counselor or professor within the Virginia Community College System teaching an orientation course was part of the research

population. In some community colleges, student development course instructors may not be in the counseling area. These professionals were also acceptable subjects.

In summary, any disability counselor, counselor, or instructor in the VCCS teaching a student development course was part of the research sample. Some colleges have two or more campuses; all instructors at branch campuses were contacted. This sample size was manageable and could lead to a broader study of other systems. In addition, it lended itself to assessment within the system to determine commonalities and differences within the same course description.

Instrumentation

There were many more items on the syllabi than are presented in this research, thus, collecting data to analyze from syllabi began with a 22-point matrix based on previous research cited in Chapter 2. Significant syllabus items included: course objectives, assignments, attendance policy, late assignment policy, participation calculation, makeup policy, honesty, and behavior. Furthermore, dissertation research performed by Robles (2002) highlighted topics of campus structure, career planning, counseling, study skills, and time management evaluated as effective topics in a course syllabus. Thus, previous research served as a template for the matrix developed for this study.

As research progressed, the original matrix was regrouped by subject matter into the coding sheets presented in Appendices A, B, C, and D. Each syllabus was analyzed for the following 22 matrix points:

1. instructor name

2. phone

3. office hours and location

4. college name and address

5. course credit

6. course title and number

7. meeting days, time, location

8. course link with another course or teacher

9. text required

10. attendance policy statement

11. course schedule of dates and topics

12. grading scale and policy

13. late assignment policy

14. criteria for evaluating assignments

15. self-advocating statement

16. support services

17. alternative assessments policy

18. instructional methods

19. disabilities services office location, phone, contact

20. study skills segment

21. career segment

22. time management segment.

Data Collection

The two sources of data collection are (1) student development course syllabi and (2) community college websites. Data collection occurred when student development course instructors electronically mailed a copy of their course syllabus. This researcher followed procedures set by the Human Subjects and Review Board mandated by George Mason University and followed the directive of ethical research. A basic ethical rule of social research is that participation should be voluntary and no harm is done (Babbie, 2007). Once the Human Subjects Review Board approved this study, instructors were contacted. Of the 23 VCCS colleges' 40 campuses, with approximately 70 possible instructors, 30 student development course syllabi were submitted (30/70 = 43%).

Virginia Community College System (VCCS) student development course instructors were contacted by electronic mail message with a request for a copy of their syllabus (Appendix E). As often as possible, the instructors submitted the syllabus by electronic mail. Course instructors were located through the college websites under the Student Development Office, the Counseling Department or by viewing the faculty listing for the identification of the term counselor. Regularly, instructors could not be located by a course search; therefore, an electronic mail was sent to as many counselors on the campuses that were located on the particular campus faculty listing. Often, one counselor would direct contact to another counselor. Occasionally a department dean or disabilities coordinator was contacted asking for names of student development course instructors (Appendix F). There were 55 general emails sent to instructors. In several cases there was no response to the original request, and a second request was sent. Five

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specific request letters were sent to Deans of Instruction to locate the appropriate student development instructor. From a total of 60 email requests, 30 syllabi were electronically returned to the researcher. Syllabi were coded by number to protect the instructors' identities.

Each community college website was reviewed for accommodations listed for students with learning disabilities. Several searches within each college website were conducted. The steps taken to locate accommodations were as follows: First, the generic search for Disability Services was entered into the "search" box of the main page of the community college. Accommodations were generally located under the title of Student Resources. If a page was located, the dropdown menu for requesting accommodations was read. If no page resulted from the first search, the term Disability Office was typed into the "search" box. Occasionally the Disability Services information was located on the Counseling Department Homepage. There were numerous paths taken in the search for accommodations on each of the college pages. There was no consistency in the final goal of finding accommodations for students with learning disabilities. Of the 23 VCCS colleges, 14 college web sites listed references to possible accommodations for students with learning disabilities.

The same manner of search was conducted to identify student development course instructor qualifications: reading the faculty directory on the college websites.

Treatment of Data

According to Babbie (2007), content analysis is a social research method appropriate for studying human communications through social artifacts. The syllabi

prepared by the instructors and investigated in this research are considered artifacts. Furthermore, Krippendorff (1980) contended the intent of the content analysis is to summarize the data, to represent them so they can be better comprehended and interpreted, and to discover patterns and relationships within data that the "naked eye" would not easily discern. This research provided a broad scope of the contents included in the syllabi of the student development courses. In the data presentation patterns were discerned.

The content analysis of student development course syllabi determined the courses' most often utilized content, topics, and components. This researcher listed, tabulated frequency, and categorized content, topics and components of the syllabi for the student development courses. Topics and the frequency in the community colleges were compared. Some examples of focus were the number of syllabi that encouraged the use of writing centers, mentioned instructional resource centers, referred to tutoring availability, and suggested self-advocating awareness. Content was coded based on the same titles used in the syllabus.

Conclusion

In order to respond effectively to the problem statement regarding what content and structure instructors use in the student development courses that help students with learning disabilities at the community college, the student development course syllabus was the focus in this qualitative case study. This study evaluated syllabus content used in these courses to support students with learning disabilities. In this light, a quantitative measure of content analysis was incorporated. Reviewing and analyzing course syllabi

and college disabilities resources' websites provided insight into instructional practices implemented in student development courses that help students with learning disabilities succeed in community colleges.

The following chapter provides the data gathered from the course syllabi. Resulting from Chapter 4 will be the concluding chapter with final recommendations.

Chapter 4. Findings

Introduction

The research problem for this doctoral project was identifying the content and

structure of the student development/orientation (SDV) course syllabi that assists students

with learning disabilities transition into community college academics. Approximately

43% of the instructors of the SDV courses within the Virginia Community College

System voluntarily submitted their syllabi at the researcher's request via electronic mail.

The researcher then completed a content analysis of 30 SDV course syllabi, the results of

which are presented in this chapter.

Data Presentation

Empirical research justified the research questions in relation to academic

assistance for students with learning disabilities. The four research questions evaluated

the student development course syllabi of the community college orientation course

(SDV 100/101/108) within the Virginia Community College System.

1. **Are students with learning disabilities acknowledged on the syllabus in the VCCS student development courses SDV 100, SDV 101 and SDV 108?**

   A. **Are the disabilities office or disabilities services mentioned on the course syllabus?**

B. How are the characteristics of students with learning disabilities acknowledged?

C. Is the student development course syllabus structured and written to assist students with learning disabilities?

Specific information related to question A is documentation of disability office location, phone number, a personal contact name and phone number, and individual college disability office websites.

Six of 30 syllabi (20%) mentioned the disabilities office on the syllabus; 2 syllabi referred students to the college website, leaving 22 of 30 syllabi without reference to the disabilities office. This means that 73.3 % of the orientation course syllabi, also known as student development (SDV 100/101/108), did not direct students to campus services for learning disabled students. Six syllabi named the location of the disability office; however, only 5 of the syllabi provided a phone number for that office. The same 6 syllabi included a personal contact in the disability office.

The disability services included library assistance, writing center availability, and tutoring options. Eleven of the 30 syllabi offered the library as a support service. One of these 11 syllabi directed students to a writing center. Once again, of the same 11 syllabi, 3 mentioned tutoring availability. Two syllabi had an undeterminable response to the question. These results reflect only 36.6% of the orientation/student development course syllabi including reference to disability services. Recall from the literature review that students with learning disabilities are increasingly applying to community colleges, and

that this course is required of students within the first 15 credits on Virginia Community College campuses.

In response to question B, of the 30 syllabi collected, there was no mention of characteristics of students with learning disabilities. Eleven of 30 syllabi (36.6%) contained a disability statement which acknowledged students' possible needs for accommodations. The statements on syllabi ranged from one sentence to a paragraph. Interestingly, 2 of these 11 were online or distance education courses. There was inconsistency in these statements within different campuses under the same college. That is, one syllabus would include a statement, while a syllabus from a different campus under the same college would not include the statement. However, of the 11 syllabi, there were 3 colleges, 2 campuses each, where each syllabus included a disability statement: 6 of the 11 had consistent syllabus content for this criterion. However, the disability statements did not refer to types of accommodations or prompt students to self-advocate. Of these 11, 5 were the same syllabi in which the disability office and services were recognized.

Question C refers to the syllabi's structure. The length of the syllabi in the data collected varied from 1 page to 18 pages. Instructors of traditional meeting courses provided minimal schedule and policy information, while the instructors of independent study courses provided full explanations of each activity in full detail in the syllabus. Realizing that some students with learning disabilities require classroom accommodations and assistance with learning skills leads this researcher to deduce that completing a self-study course with an 18-page syllabus would be difficult for a student

in the first semester on a college campus. It is clear that choosing to enroll in an independent study is optional for any student; yet, is it a feasible option for a student with a learning disability?

In this study, 16 of the 30 syllabi (53.3%) included a list of assignments; 9 of the 30 syllabi (39%) had criteria for evaluating assignments. Of these, only 5 syllabi (16.6%) provided both a list of assignments and an evaluation method. The literature review references numerous scholars who recommend listing assignments and evaluation method(s) in a course syllabus. Scholars disagree whether an orientation course should receive a pass/fail or a specific grade. In this research, 3 of 30 syllabi (10%) used a pass/fail method of grade reporting.

In close consideration to the assignment list is the topic list. The syllabi were analyzed for topics deemed from scholarly literature to be pertinent in an orientation course. Therefore, the following topics and rate of inclusion on student development course syllabi were calculated. Appropriate topics suggested for this course, and each topic's rate of inclusion within the 30 syllabi, include:

- study skills – 19/30 or 63.3%

- career planning – 24/30 or 80%

- time management – 17/30 or 56.6%

- test-taking skills – 15/30 or 50%

- human relations – 10/30 or 33.3%

- money management – 5/30 or 16.6%

- diversity – 2/30 or 6.6%, and

- learning styles – 7/30 or 23.3%.

Of the 30 syllabi, while only one instructor included all 8 of these topics in the course, there were 2 syllabi with zero topics listed. One syllabus contained 6 of the topics while 9 syllabi included 5 of the items and 2 syllabi contained 4 items. Eleven of the syllabi included 2 or 3 of the above topics, whereas 4 syllabi had one topic designated.

Some syllabi were difficult to interpret; that is, they provided titles to activities without explaining the topic of discussion (i.e. "college survival online exercise"). This mode of communication provides little information for any student.

Appendices A, B, and C include coding sheets, tables, and graphs with representative numbers of these three parts of the first research question.

2. **Is the student development course connected in some way with a general education course and general education instructor?**

Three of the 30 courses (10%) offered were team-taught, meaning two or three instructors presented different segments of the course to the students. On each of these three courses' syllabi, the two instructors for each course appeared to be from the same department, namely the Student Services Department. Thus there was a 10% level of participation in the team teaching modality within a 40-campus community college system. There is no indication on any syllabus studied that an SDV course is connected to an academic class. Research indicates that team teaching in higher education is beneficial for students' abilities to make personal connections, as well as community college connections, to broaden their own scope of learning and experience. For the related coding sheet and findings in tabulated and graph formats, see Appendix C.

3. Who are the student development course instructors in the VCCS? What are the instructor qualifications or degrees?

The population for this research was any instructor of a student development course at a community college within the VCCS. The student development course within the VCCS is listed as Student Success (SDV 100), College Survival Skills (SDV 100/108), College Success Skills (SDV 100), Student Orientation First Year Success (SDV 101) and Orientation (SDV 100). Of the 23 main colleges' and branch campuses totaling 40 campuses, with approximately 70 possible instructors, 30 instructors participated. To this researcher this is a small sample of participation due to the course syllabus being a public document and the lack of participation in the study. Nevertheless, the resulting response rate of 43% is based on the approximate number of instructors on the 40 campuses. The syllabus as a public document is a matter of opinion. College instructors write the syllabus with a class in mind; however, after dissemination this is a public document. Also, due to internet posting, without required password, the documents are publicly accessible. For these reasons, this researcher classified the course syllabus as a public document. It is possible that instructors who view their syllabus for personal use only refrained from participation.

From reading course syllabi, the instructors' information and qualifications were unattainable, as instructors did not usually include their degree accomplishments on the syllabus. Seven syllabi, representing 23.3% of the samples collected, included an identifying term: Four instructors (13.3%) used the title "counselor" in their syllabus; three instructors used the term "Professor" on their syllabus. Three instructors had

doctorates. One instructor used the term Mrs. out of the 15 courses taught by female

instructors. Referring to the research of Collins (1997), instructors who inform the

students about the manner in which a student addresses the instructor open

communication. A student might prefer to know that an instructor is Mrs. Instructor vs.

Ms. Instructor or even Dr. Instructor. This information also allows for a personal

connection between professor and student.

This researcher is troubled to learn that while comparing instructor information

located on the college website to the corresponding instructor's syllabus, only 6 of 30

instructors identified themselves as being their respective campus's designated disability

counselor. Why would an instructor and counselor omit this information? A goal of the

student development course is to help students transition into college by assisting

students. At times, students with learning disabilities require additional assistance and

information; this is an opportunity to support students who need academic assistance

succeed in the community college setting. Withholding or omitting information does not

help a sometimes-difficult transition.

Appendix C tabulates information related to the instructor, the college, and the

course. Similar items found in the research suggest the instructor provide certain

professional information, course title and number, semester date, instructor information

(name, contact information, office hours), and textbook. The personal information

suggested throughout the literature on this matter is name, phone, office hours and

location, email address and title or position. For unknown reasons, 8 of the 30 syllabi

(26.6%) included no personal information (name, phone, office hours or location, email

address). Four of the 30 syllabi (13.3%) included all items (name, phone, office hours and location, email address, and title or position). Eight other syllabi (26.6%) included all the aforementioned items except title or position.

Fifteen of 30 instructors (50%) excluded office location. There was no correlation suggested between the web-based/self-directed course instructors disregarding an office location and traditional course instructors withholding office location.

4. **On the course syllabus, are accommodations for students with learning disabilities described? What learning disability accommodations are available to the students on each of the Virginia Community College System campuses as obtained from the college websites?**

As there was no acknowledgement of learning accommodations on any of the collected syllabi, information to answer this question was obtained from the college websites. Accommodations reviewed on college websites are included in Appendix D. Separate classroom and test accommodations are noted.

Of the main and branch campuses, there were 23 websites. Of the 23 websites, 14 contained information referring to classroom and testing accommodations. This represents 61% (14/23) of the VCCS campuses and branch campuses offering information about potential accommodations to students with learning disabilities. It appears to this researcher that the college websites are not comprehensive in presenting possible information about classroom and testing accommodations to students with learning disabilities. There may be a cause, whether legal or lack of insight, for not listing a college's accommodations. Even so, some classroom accommodations noted on campus

websites were tutors, note takers, and taped material. Test accommodations noted on the websites include alternate exams, distraction-free test sites, extended time, test readers, oral test administration, and preferential classroom seating. Information obtained from a college website may suggest to students that each accommodation listed is provided to every student with a learning disability. It is possible that a few colleges list accommodations to avoid this dilemma. A standard notation on websites included the phrase that accommodations are "granted on an individual basis." When self-advocating is difficult – or unknown – to some students, where are students with learning disabilities attending colleges within the VCCS expected to get the initial help and support they require, if not on the college website?

Two syllabi deem special mention due to content significant to this research. Reading information on one syllabus was prevented due to referral of students to the course's electronic Blackboard posting of information: Syllabus sample 8 referred students to their own Blackboard account to view student support and test accommodations, which excluded that information from being available to public readers of the college website. In contrast, the latter syllabus excludes students from viewing information due to its placement for instructors: Sample syllabus 12 was a PowerPoint file for staff and instructors, leaving a void of information for inquiring students.

Relationship of Findings to Literature

Research question response was derived from the syllabi within one community college system; however, the basis for the research questions was empirical research cited in the literature review. Repeatedly, the literature presented similar findings regarding

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purpose and function of the orientation course and preparedness of its instructors. Conversely, question response produced unrelated results between the practices within the student development courses 100/101/108 and empirical research of scholars in curriculum design.

Question 1 B/Appendix B

The characteristics of students with learning disabilities were lacking in all the syllabi. A disability statement, whether college provided or instructor generated, is generally required for legal compliance (Collins, 1997; Parkes & Harris, 2002). To accommodate students with learning disabilities Gross (1993) recommends: "Ask your students to clarify any special needs; remember that disabled are students first, disabled second; and finally, be sensitive to the 'nonvisible or 'hidden' disabilities" (p. 31). Some students with learning disabilities have not mastered the action of self-advocacy. With instructor knowledge of the lack of some students' communication abilities, this information on a syllabus might draw a student out to communicate academic needs.

Question 1 C/Appendix C

To help alleviate anxiety due to assignment management, Slattery and Carlson (2005) recommend the syllabus include a list of assignments and due dates. In addition, Tata (1999) suggests providing and adhering to a grading rubric to prevent students from perceiving grades as unfair. Furthermore, helping all students to know an instructor's expectations and having a clear view of their requirements as a student, it is recommended instructors state how students are evaluated and how grades will be assigned. Parkes and Harris (2002), in "The Purposes of a Syllabus," and Collins (1997),

in "An Inclusive Course Syllabus," explain the need for clear expectations and academic honesty. Continuing, Parkes and Harris clarify that if there is no explicit policy on late assignments, students may feel they have been treated unfairly, whether they submit an imperfect assignment on time or a completed one after the deadline. These practical suggestions, if used by instructors of the student development courses within the VCCS, would eliminate undue anxiety for both instructor and student. Students taking the orientation course would realize instructor expectations and be able to set appropriate timelines and goals to complete the course successfully.

Question 2/Appendix D

The study by Helfrich (1999) determined that linking the orientation course (Success 100) to another course provided higher retention rates for freshmen at Frederick Community College, Maryland. Concurring with Helfrich's research is the dissertation research of Robles (2002) which recommended faculty to co-teach the freshman seminar classes with counselors to expose new students to several faculty members.

Appendix D includes similar items as the syllabus survey completed by Meuschke et al. (2002) at Santa Clarita Community College District, California, as well as parallel recommendations of Parkes and Harris (2002). Instructor information listed in a thorough syllabus would include name, phone, office hours and location, email address, title or position. Course information valuable to the student include course title and number, class time, day, and location.

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Question 3

Collins (1997) suggested using instructor information to set a tone which invites inclusivity and which promotes success of all students. He believes instructors should provide students with information about themselves, for example how students should address the instructor, as a means to student success. To this researcher tone was easily read into the syllabi; it would benefit instructor and student if more vs. less information was provided on VCCS syllabi.

Question 4

Brinckerhoff et al. (1992) cite D'Amico suggesting that

it is essential to recognize the individual nature of a learning disability for any student who requests services, and to develop a means of effectively meeting that individual need, rather than providing the same academic adjustment or auxiliary aid for every student who identifies as having a learning disability.

The course syllabi and websites analyzed for this research appeared to follow D'Amico's thinking. Furthermore, if students do not self-advocate, there is no need for the college to announce its possible accommodations. The community college may have its own interest at stake. Due to the litigiousness of our times, posting all available accommodations on a college website could invite legal situations. A student might request an accommodation found on the college website that the Disability Counselor deems inappropriate. If the information is not available from the start, students are not put off when denied.

Conclusion

From the exercise of tabulating items' recurrence, it appears that some VCCS instructors have a good knowledge of the academic needs of students with learning disabilities. It also is apparent that other instructors need to be more forthcoming in their communication with students. Consequently, there is great variety in the syllabi for VCCS student development courses.

Further evaluation and recommendations follow in the last chapter of this dissertation. Potential questions for further research, both within the Virginia Community College System and other community college systems, are offered.

Chapter 5. Conclusions and Recommendations

Introduction

The research problem for this doctoral project identified the content and

procedures implemented by instructors in their VCCS student development course syllabi

that assist students with learning disabilities transition into community college

academics. This study contained three interrelated topics in its problem statement. The

purpose of this study was to a) examine student development course syllabi, b) for their

academic assistance, to c) students with learning disabilities. Gordon (1989) considered

the term orientation when "applied to higher education to mean helping students adjust to

their new physical and social surrounding and to academic expectations" (p. 183). The

goal of the student development class is to assimilate students into higher education.

Therefore, the four research questions posed to analyze the content and purpose of the

student development course syllabus within the Virginia Community College System

were:

1. Are students with learning disabilities acknowledged on the syllabus in the

   VCCS student development courses SDV 100, SDV 101 and SDV 108?

   A. Are the disabilities office or disabilities services mentioned on the course

   syllabus?

B. How are the characteristics of students with learning disabilities acknowledged?

C. Is the student development course syllabus structured and written to assist students with learning disabilities?

2. Is the student development course connected in some way with a general education course and general education instructor?

3. Who are the student development course instructors in the VCCS? What are the instructor qualifications or degrees?

4. Are accommodations for students with learning disabilities described on the course syllabus? What learning disability accommodations are available to the students on each of the Virginia Community College System campuses as obtained from the colleges' websites?

The syllabi examined in this study appear to be of the skills type for an orientation course with a broad subject matter. Parallel to the research by Gordon (1989), Fidler and Hunter (1989), and Jewler (1989), representative topics in the VCCS syllabi included college survival skills, time management, study and test skills, learning styles, time and money management, campus resources, and diversity and sexuality. Also recommended are class discussions or individual explorations of career planning, diet, and exercise. All syllabi examined in this project included one or more of these suggested topics.

The student development course (SDV 100/101/108) was the object of study because it is a required course for students attending any campus within the Virginia Community College System. The course description in the VCCS *Policy Manual* states:

All curricular students, except those in career studies certificate programs, shall

participate in an SDV course designed primarily to foster student success. This

course should be completed within the first 15 credit hours of enrollment at the

community college, unless the student is not required to complete an SDV course

because it is waived. (2007, p. 6-9)

With the majority of students eventually enrolling in this course, it is apparent that

students with learning disabilities would enroll in this course; therefore, the student

development course syllabus is a practical tool to study.

Recommendations

Orientation courses evolved out of the counseling movement in higher education

and the obvious need to help freshmen adjust to the college environment (Gordon, 1989).

The student development course (SDV 100/101/108) is the orientation course in the

Virginia Community College System. Based on the research for this project and the

review of scholarly literature about orientation courses the following recommendations

are made.

Increase Faculty Awareness

Increase Virginia Community College System faculty awareness of the academic

needs of students with learning disabilities attending Virginia community colleges.

Gordon (1989) commented that freshmen courses are only as effective as the people

responsible for instruction (p. 194). VCCS may accomplish increased awareness by

implementing one or more of the following four recommendations:

1. Producing video workshops for teacher training and development, as Perin did for City University of New York (1990), is one method to increase awareness. Videos can include students with learning disabilities in live classroom activities. Workshop topics evolve from the videos; however, include topics that are important to students with learning disabilities: learning strategies, test-taking accommodations, managing time, and college support services. Producing a student-centered video would increase student involvement while stressing the importance of instructor teaching styles. Current or former students are potential participants for video development.

2. Suggest to the community college's student services office and the disabilities counselor that the offices collaborate with their college's web development office to make information about specific support services for students with learning disabilities easier to access.

3. Instructors must be considerate of the tone in which syllabus content is presented (Collins, 1997, p. 102). Furthermore, the syllabus should mention the rights and responsibilities of students with disabilities and provide a discussion of how the instructor will accommodate students with particular learning needs (Parkes & Harris, 2002). In response to instructors who provide less information in favor of flexibility, Collins (1997) reminds readers of the nature of the diverse, nontraditional community college student. Nontraditional students (first generation college students, single parents, older students, students with disabilities) may require clear directions; instructors

cannot assume students know policies and procedures of college life, nor have time to cope with changes in their schedule. Along with the philosophies of Collins (1997) and Gross (1993), this researcher recommends instructors include more rather than less material in a course syllabus to lessen student anxieties about the course. The recommended basic information includes current year, semester, course title and number, meeting time and location, instructor's name, office address, office phone, office hours.

4. Instructors encourage students with disabilities to self-advocate (Brinckerhoff et al., 1992; Glimps, 1994; Harris & Robertson, 2001). Bear in mind that only 11 of the 30 syllabi examined in this research had a disability statement. The literature abounds with studies that address the concern of students that their instructors are uneasy and not accepting of the student's "invisible disability." Furthermore, Adelman and Vogel concluded that "developing self-understanding of one's learning disability and the use of effective learning strategies were important for success in the adult world" (as cited in Brinckerhoff et al., 1992, p. 90). A goal of education is creating lifelong learners; community college instructors of the orientation course SDV 100/101/108 must assist this special population in their lifelong learning. In *Effective Communication: Faculty and Students With Disabilities* completed by the University of Washington (2002), the team considered a statement in the syllabus inviting students with disabilities to discuss their needs, along with reading the statement out loud for the first two class sessions, as an

Increase Teacher-to-Teacher and Teacher-to-Student Contact

Increase teacher-to-teacher contact as well as teacher-to-student contact. Ask volunteer instructors to pilot a team-taught student development course for a semester to obtain feedback on academic accommodations for students with learning disabilities and evaluate student performance. The research completed by Helfrich (1999), in a neighboring state and community college to VCCS, proved the benefits of this teaching methodology. This recommendation followed the suggestion that teachers can bridge the gap between research and practice by improving the teaching and learning environment (Cross and Angelo, 1988, p. 2). Jewler, co-director of the University 101 program at the University of South Carolina, believed this mode of instruction "not only provides a structure where faculty and staff can learn from one another but also increase visibility of our program throughout the campus" (p. 212). Walter et al. (1989) suggest faculty become sensitive to conditions that promote learning and to instructional design solutions to student learning problems. With abounding research that supported this teaching methodology, VCCS instructors might take heed to increase student success through team teaching.

Instructors Need to Include Identification on Syllabi

The premise of this research was that the syllabus transmitted to the researcher by email is the same syllabus provided to students. Information may have been deleted from course syllabus for transmission purpose. An instructor's name and other personal information that usually appear on a syllabus may have been removed. As instructors were contacted, they were informed of the anonymity of this research. The researcher informed participants that it was syllabus content that was relevant, not personal information. Regardless of this statement, it is possible that some participants removed identifying information before submitting the syllabi to preserve their anonymity. Cooperation of only 43% is not acceptable to this researcher given that a course syllabus is a public document. Collins (1997), the University of Minnesota Director of Academic Affairs, reminds instructors that a syllabus is a public document and serves as a significant figure of our approach to our work (p. 102).

Based on the full disclosure philosophy of Collins (1997), with student success as a goal, students benefit when the syllabus includes more detail in the instructor information section. Potential information – not usually noted in syllabi in this research – may include how students should address the instructor, what to do if suggested office hours are not assessable, and a list of available resources (human personnel and non-human computer labs). Recall from the findings that of 30 syllabi there were 3 professors identified as having doctorates and one identified as a Mrs. Leaving out this type of information could lead to ambiguity for any student on the issue of how to address one's instructor.

This third recommendation, then, is to answer these questions on the syllabi: Who are the student development course instructors? What are their qualifications? Gajar (1996) cited Blosser's 1984 research finding that only 9% of directors of college disability programs were trained in special education. Despite the fact that the term special education is used on the secondary level, to be effective, counselors and instructors on the postsecondary level require training about disability services and all the components of helping students with learning disabilities. Based on the findings of this research, it could be suggested that the number of instructors who received training on the topic of students with learning disabilities may not have risen significantly since 1984.

Anonymously Poll Student Development Course Instructors and Students

Originally this researcher wanted to survey all VCCS instructors to obtain information with regards to gaining knowledge of how students with learning disabilities are being assisted on the community college campuses. But the official procedure requested from the George Mason University Human Subjects and Review Board of obtaining permission from each college dean seemed daunting and untimely. Therefore, this researcher suggests open-ended survey research, granted by the Virginia Community College System in Richmond, to anonymously poll instructors and students of the student development courses (SDV 100/101/108). The survey would include questions related to classroom and testing accommodations, student development course content, and interventions for students with learning disabilities. Some starting questions: What accommodations are efficient? What accommodations are not working? What concerns

need addressing on campus in reference to students with learning disabilities? What is the student opinion of the SDV course? Do students with learning disabilities make contact with the disability counselor? This recommendation follows the research of Quick et al. (2003), Norton (1997), as well as Patton and Polloway (1992), who urge the need for "continued research program development, and support must be directed toward this population" (p. 10).

Increase Postsecondary Contact With Secondary Schools

To increase the success of students with learning disabilities in the student development course at the community colleges, increase Virginia Community College System contact with high schools. The preparedness of students with learning disabilities is one concern cited throughout the literature; however, Carlson (as cited in Brinckerhoff et al., 1992) stressed that the emphasis at the secondary level should shift from subject matter tutoring to instruction in establishing skills that will serve to lessen the impact of a learning disability on future learning. The Carnegie foundation highlighted this urgency in early research during the 1960s highlighting the need for transition services between the levels of education (Brint & Karabel, 1989). In addition, Harris and Robertson (2001) and Gajar (1996) recommend strengthening communication between secondary and postsecondary schools, and suggest research be completed on the topic of transition issues between high school and postsecondary institutions. These authors provide reason that the SDV courses within the VCCS need to address the appropriateness of the content discussed in the student development courses.

Due to the confidentiality of students in special education programs in high school, community college counselors must request meetings with high school teachers and their students within the special education department. Names and addresses of interested college students could be requested for future information to be delivered by the community college. Students must develop the skills of communicating about their academic needs before entering the community college. Make this a proactive, albeit aggressive, dissemination to help a student group that requires prompting and reminding.

Suggested Course Description for Student Development Course

Based on this study's research, the following is the researcher's suggestion for a more definitive course description for the Student Development (orientation) course:

> The student development orientation course is designed to assist student transition into the community college while fostering personal and academic success. This course should be completed within the first 15 credit hours of enrollment at the community college. Instructor and student contact is a necessary component for student success; therefore, it is strongly suggested that students register for the on-campus course. Distance learning and online courses are offered only with academic advisor agreement. This course encourages all students to succeed regardless of diversity, age, gender, educational background, or disability.

<div align="center">

Conclusion

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There was wide variety in the style of syllabus writing for the student development courses offered within the VCCS. Based on the matrix tabulations, the syllabi appeared less student-centered and more of a required document for instructors to

disseminate. The researcher's overall impression was that students with learning

disabilities receive limited assistance in the VCCS student development courses

examined.

There are many more items on the syllabi than were included in this study.

Extraneous items on one or two syllabi ranged from cell phone policies to bringing

children to class and gambling, along with 4 of 30 colleges having the emergency

evacuation plan described. Although deemed necessary to the instructor and perhaps

required by the college, these items were not essential for this research so were omitted

from analysis. Nor were these topics mentioned by any authors in the scholarship on

syllabus writing or orientation courses.

Upcraft et al. (2005) reiterate that institutions must develop a variety of

specialized and targeted approaches for special populations. Students with learning

disabilities require support transitioning from high school to higher education. Self-

advocating for accommodations is not a skill all first-time college students have

mastered. Instructors of the student development course would be assisting – not

coddling – students by acknowledging the fact of services required by students and

rendered by the college. According to Scott (as cited in Brinckerhoff et al., 1992),

attaining an accommodation in college is a two-way street. It is the responsibility of the

institution to provide the accommodation, and the responsibility of the student to make a

timely request. However, if the student lacks this skill, it is incumbent upon the instructor

to educate the student. Once again, based on the tabulations noted within the appendices,

students with learning disabilities would benefit from instructor and college acknowledgment.

Students with learning disabilities are enrolling in the community college at greater rates (Finn, 1999); Cohen and Brawer (2003) remind instructors that students with learning disabilities are twice as likely to drop out compared to students without disabilities. Orientation programs must be sensitive to the needs of these students (Schuh, 2005). Further, "The syllabi can be used to demonstrate that courses are in alignment with the department and or institutional mission statements" (Woolcock, n.d.). For community college instructors of orientation courses to promote academic success for all students, it is beneficial to write the student development course syllabus while considering students with learning disabilities. After all, fostering student success is the Virginia Community College System's description for the student development courses.

Syllabi's Disability Policy:
Are the Disabilities Office or Disabilities Services Mentioned on the Virginia Community College System Student Development Courses' 100 and 108 Syllabi?

Syllabus Code	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
Disability Statement	✓						✓		✓	✓				✓	✓
Disability Service Office															
Location								✓		✓				✓	
Phone Number								✓		✓					
Email															
Contact Name								✓		✓					
Support Services															
Library	✓	✓		✓				✓		✓					
Tutoring								✓		✓					
Writing Center										✓					

Syllabus Code	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30
Disability Statement	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓									✓
Disability Service Office															
Location	✓	✓	✓	✓											
Phone Number	✓	✓	✓	✓											
Email															
Contact Name	✓	✓	✓	✓											
Support Services															
Library	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓				✓	✓
Tutoring	✓														
Writing Center	✓														

Type of Information	Number of Syllabi Including This Information (*N*=30)	Percentage of Syllabi Including This Information
Disability Statement	13	43%
Disability Service Office		
Location	7	23%
Phone Number	6	20%
Email	0	0%
Contact Name	6	20%
Support Services		
Library	14	47%
Tutoring	3	10%
Writing Center	2	6%

Note. Percentages rounded to nearest decimal.

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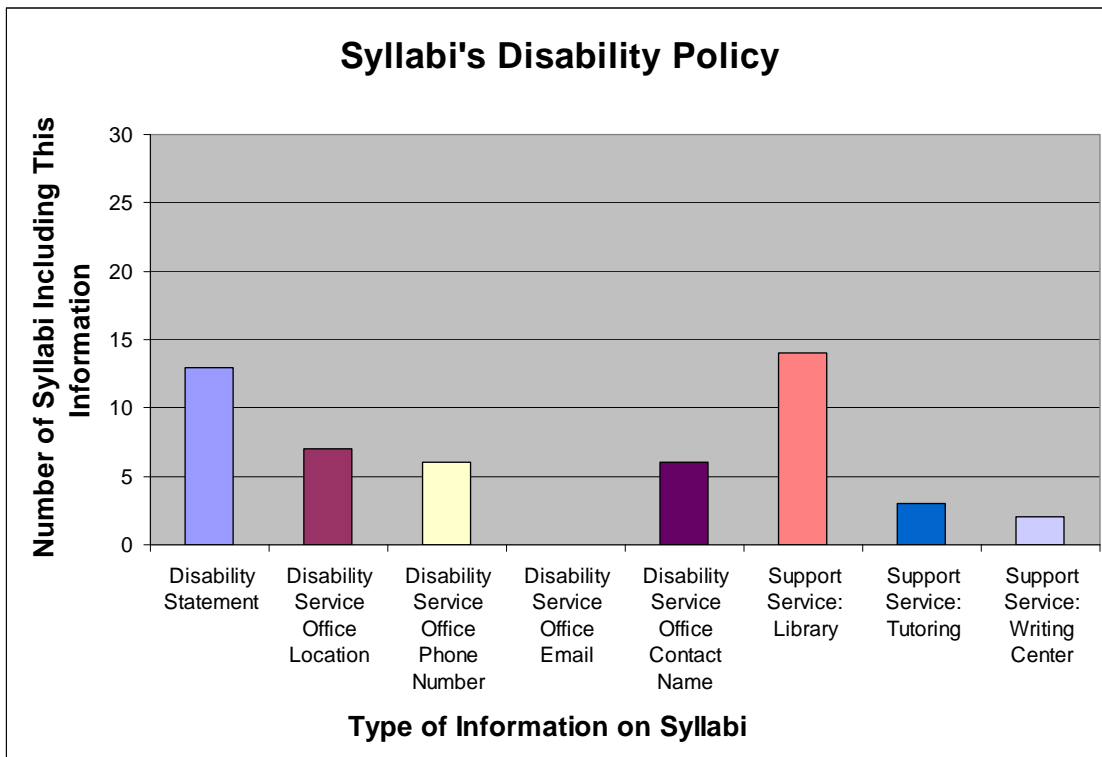
Syllabi's Schedules, Policies, Procedures

Syllabi's Schedules, Policies, and Procedures:
Are the Virginia Community College System Student Development Course Syllabi Structured and Written to Assist Students With Learning Disabilities?

Syllabus Code	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
Instructional Methods															
Blackboard	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓			✓					
Email													✓	✓	✓
Lecture															
Independent Study			✓		✓		✓							✓	
Distance Education			✓		✓		✓								
Traditional Class Meeting	✓	✓		✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Alternative Assessments															
Topics															
Study Skills	✓			✓		✓		✓			✓		✓	✓	✓
Career Planning	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
Time Management		✓		✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓			✓	✓
Test Taking				✓		✓	✓	✓			✓			✓	✓
Human Relations				✓		✓	✓						✓	✓	✓
Diversity				✓											
Money Management			✓	✓			✓			✓					
Learning Style		✓		✓			✓	✓	✓						
Dates to Add, Drop, Withdraw		✓	✓				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓
Attendance Policy or Statement						✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	
Academic Integrity or Honesty Policy	✓					✓	✓	✓	✓	✓				✓	✓
Late Work Policy	✓		✓					✓		✓			✓	✓	✓
Missed Class Policy	✓		✓						✓				✓		
Course Schedule															
Date/Session/Week	✓	✓					✓			✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Topic		✓	✓				✓			✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
List of Assignments								✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Assignment Point Value	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Grading Scale	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓			✓	✓		✓	✓
Criteria for Evaluating Assignments			✓					✓		✓				✓	✓

Syllabus Code	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30
Instructional Methods															
Blackboard	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓						✓				
Email	✓	✓	✓		✓										
Lecture															
Independent Study														✓	✓
Distance Education			✓		✓						✓				
Traditional Class Meeting	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		
Alternative Assessments															
Topics															
Study Skills		✓		✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Career Planning	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓			✓	✓
Time Management	✓	✓	✓			✓		✓		✓	✓				✓
Test Taking	✓	✓	✓			✓				✓	✓			✓	✓
Human Relations	✓	✓								✓	✓				
Diversity														✓	
Money Management														✓	
Learning Style														✓	✓
Dates to Add, Drop, Withdraw	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓				✓			✓	
Attendance Policy or Statement	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓			✓	✓
Academic Integrity or Honesty Policy	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓					✓			✓	✓
Late Work Policy			✓	✓	✓					✓				✓	✓
Missed Class policy			✓	✓	✓					✓					
Course Schedule															
Date/Session/Week	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		
Topic	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		
List of Assignments	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓					✓	✓	✓	✓	
Assignment Point Value		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓
Grading Scale		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓
Criteria for Evaluating Assignments	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓										

Type of Information	Number of Syllabi Including This Information (N=30)	Percentage of Syllabi Including This Information
Instructional Methods		
Blackboard	12	4%
Email	7	23%
Lecture	0	0%
Type of Course		
Independent Study	6	20%
Distance Education	6	20%
Traditional Class Meeting	21	70%
Alternative Assessments	0	0%
Topics		
Study Skills	19	63%
Career Planning	25	83%
Time Management	17	57%
Test Taking	16	53%
Human Relations	10	33%
Diversity	2	7%
Money Management	5	17%
Learning Style	7	23%
Policies		
Dates to Add, Drop, Withdraw	15	50%
Attendance Policy or Statement	18	60%
Academic Integrity or Honesty Policy	17	57%
Late Work Policy	13	43%
Missed Class Policy	8	27%
Course Schedule		
Date/Session/Week	20	67%
Topic	20	67%
Assignments and Grading		
List of Assignments	17	57%
Assignment Point Value	25	83%
Grading Scale	23	77%
Criteria for Evaluating Assignments	10	33%

Note. Percentages rounded to nearest decimal.

Syllabi's Schedules, Policies, Procedures

Number of Syllabi Including This Information

30 25 20 15 10 5 0

Type of Information

- Instructional Method: Blackboard
- Instructional Method: Email
- Instructional Method: Lecture
- Independent Study
- Distance Education
- Traditional Class Meeting
- Alternative Assessment
- Study Skills
- Career Planning
- Time Management
- Test Taking
- Human Relations
- Diversity
- Money Management
- Learning Style
- Dates to Add, Drop, Withdraw
- Attendance Policy or Statement
- Academic Integrity or Honesty Policy
- Late Work Policy
- Missed Class Policy
- Schedule: Date/Session/Week
- Schedule: Topic
- List of Assignments
- Assignment Point Value
- Criteria for Evaluating Assignments
- Grading Scale

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Syllabi's Instructor and Course Information:
Who Are the Virginia Community College System Student Development Course Instructors? What Are Their Qualifications or Degrees? Is the Orientation/Student Development Course Linked or Team-Taught With a General Education Course and General Education Instructor?
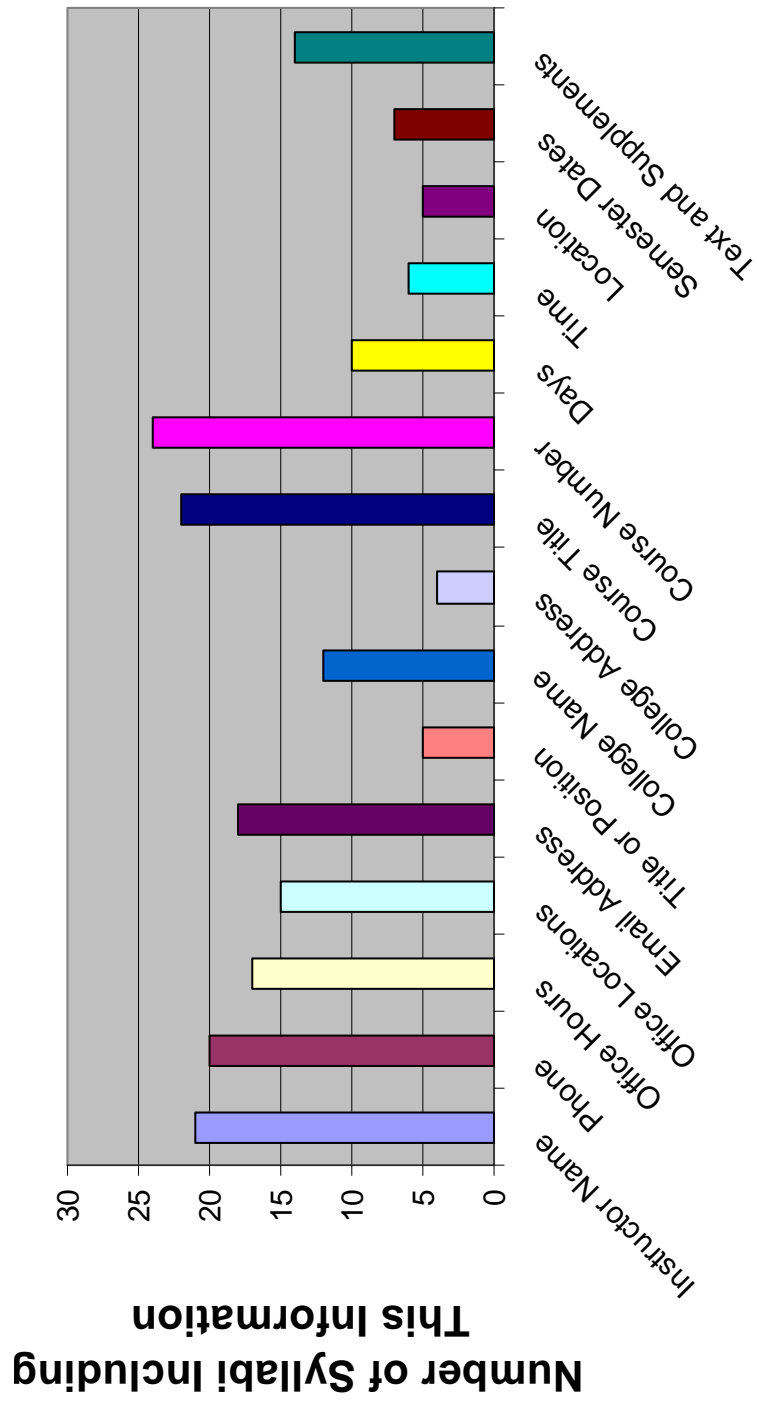
Syllabus Code	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
Instructor Information															
Name	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓					✓
Phone	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓					✓
Office Hours	✓		✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓					✓
Office Locations	✓	✓				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓					✓
Email address	✓	✓	✓				✓	✓	✓	✓					✓
Title or Position		✓						✓	✓						
College Information															
Name	✓	✓						✓	✓	✓				✓	✓
Address			✓					✓	✓						
Course Information															
Title	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Number	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓
Days		✓				✓		✓		✓	✓	✓			
Time		✓				✓		✓		✓					
Location						✓		✓		✓					
Semester Dates		✓	✓					✓		✓					
Text and Supplements	✓					✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓			✓
Number of Pages in Syllabus	3	2	6	1	2	2	4	6	2		9	5	13	18	8
Team Taught or Linked										✓					

Syllabus Code	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30
Instructor Information															
Name	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓			✓	✓
Phone	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓			✓	✓
Office Hours			✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓			✓	✓
Office Locations		✓	✓			✓				✓	✓			✓	✓
Email address		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓			✓	✓
Title or Position														✓	✓
College Information															
Name		✓			✓	✓			✓						✓
Address						✓									
Course Information															
Title		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓			✓	✓
Number	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓			✓	✓
Days	✓			✓										✓	✓
Time														✓	✓
Location														✓	✓
Semester Dates			✓	✓										✓	
Text and Supplements							✓	✓		✓	✓			✓	✓
Number of Pages in Syllabus	2	4	7	4	9									8	10
Team Taught or Linked	✓			✓											

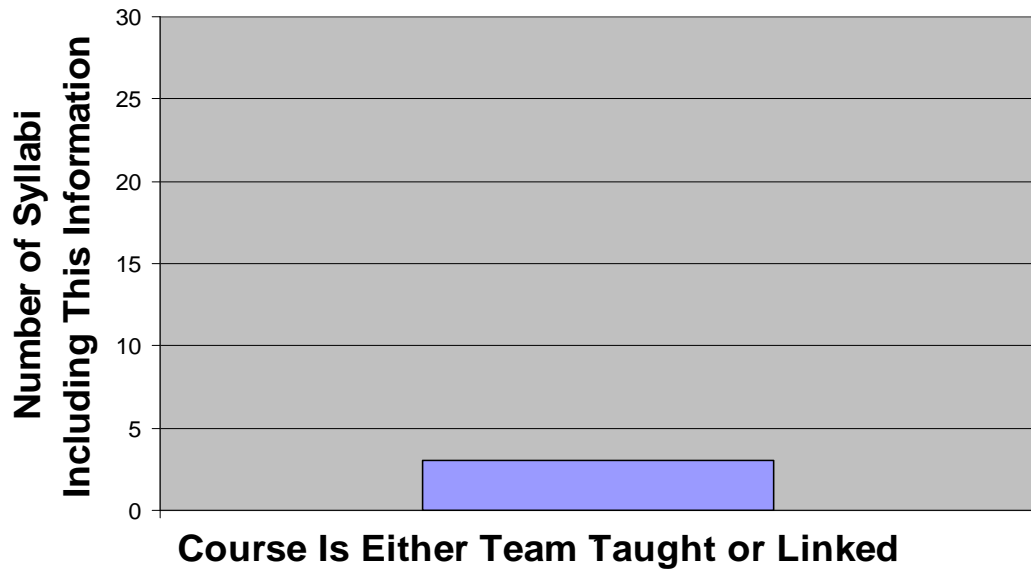| Type of Information	Number of Syllabi Including This Information (*N*=30)	Percentage of Syllabi Including This Information
Instructor Information		
Name	21	70%
Phone	20	67%
Office Hours	17	57%
Office Locations	15	50%
Email Address	18	60%
Title or Position	5	17%
College Information		
College Name	12	40%
College Address	4	13%
Course Information		
Course Title	22	73%
Course Number	24	80%
Days	10	33%
Time	6	20%
Location	5	17%
Semester Dates	7	23%
Text and Supplements	14	47%
Number of Syllabus Pages	Range 1-18	
Team Taught or Linked	3	10%

Note. Percentages rounded to nearest decimal.

Syllabi's Instructor and Course Information

Type of Information

Number of Syllabi Including This Information

Instructor Name
Phone
Office Hours
Office Locations
Email Address
Title or Position
College Name
College Address
Course Title
Course Number
Days
Time
Location
Semester Dates
Text and Supplements

Is Course Team Taught or Linked?

Number of Syllabi Including This Information

Course Is Either Team Taught or Linked

College's Classroom and Test Accommodations Noted on Website

College's Classroom and Test Accommodations Noted on Website:
What Learning Disability Accommodations Are Available to the Students on
Each of the Virginia Community College System Campuses,
as Obtained From the Colleges' Websites?

Website Code	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
Classroom Accommodations														
Tutor	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓		✓		✓		✓	
Note Takers	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Taped Material/Recorders	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Test Accommodations														
Alternate Exams							✓	✓					✓	
Distraction Free Test Site	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓			✓				
Extended Time	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓				✓	✓		
Test Readers			✓	✓		✓	✓				✓	✓		✓
Oral Test Administration		✓	✓					✓	✓		✓			
Preferential Seating			✓				✓					✓		✓

Note. Of the 23 Virginia Community College System Websites, 14 listed references to classroom and testing accommodations.

Type of Information	Number of VCCS Main Campus Websites Including This Information (N=23)	Percentage of VCCS Websites Including This Information
Classroom Accommodations	8	35%
Tutor	12	52%
Note Takers	11	48%
Taped Material/Recorders		
Test Accommodations		
Alternate Exams	3	13%
Distraction-Free Test	7	30%
Site	8	35%
Extended Time	7	30%
Test Readers	5	22%
Oral Test Administration	4	17%
Preferential Seating		

Note. VCCS = Virginia Community College System. Percentages rounded to nearest decimal.

College's Classroom and Test Accommodations Noted on Website
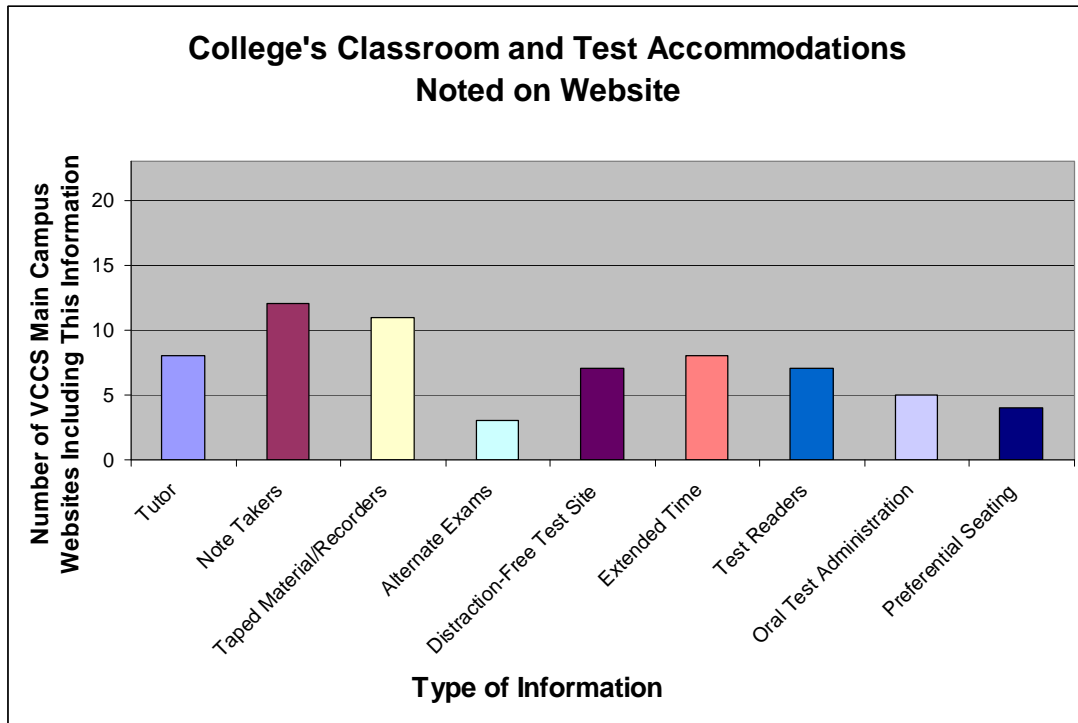
Note. VCCS = Virginia Community College System.

Syllabus Request Letter – Counselor/Instructor

Dear Counselor and Instructor,

  As a high school teacher and a graduate student at George Mason University, I'm interested in the Student Development Course offered at your community college. I'd like to read a syllabus; I'm completing a dissertation on the commonalities and differences between college SDV courses.

  When you are able, given holiday and breaks, would you please send a copy of the SDV 100 College Success syllabus or direct this request to the instructor of this course? If you have questions I'd be happy to respond.

  Thank you for your time and attention.

Sincerely,
Salome Turnberger

Dear ---------,

       As a counselor in the Student Services you may know the instructor for the SDV 100 course. I request and hope you can assist me by passing this email to the correct instructor.

       I've been a public school teacher for fifteen years; currently I am a special education biology teacher in Fairfax County. Along with this, I am a doctoral candidate at George Mason University. My degree, upon completion of dissertation, will be a Doctor of Arts Community College Education. Because I instruct students with learning disabilities I wanted to further my interest in this student population at the community college level.

       For my research and dissertation, I chose to look at the student development course syllabus for several reasons. Students are required to take this course and it is within this course that they may confront accommodating their learning disabilities on a different level. It is my intent to see how the student development course addresses this student population. Therefore, I am writing to request that I may read your course syllabus. I am looking to read how students with learning disabilities may be assisted with transition into community college through this course. Comparisons and differences between the syllabi of all the colleges within the VCCS will be noted. Instructor names may be withheld; it is my intent to obtain at least one syllabus from each of the VCCS campuses.

       My classroom phone contact is 703-xxx-xxxx; my George Mason contact is xxx@gmu.edu. My doctoral committee chairman is Dr. Victoria Salmon. Her contact information is: Dr.Victoria N. Salmon

            Associate Professor/Academic Director
            Higher Education Program/1B3
            George Mason University
            Fairfax VA 22030
            xxx@gmu.edu
            703-xxx-xxxx

       I appreciate your time and effort. I'd be happy to explain further by replying to questions or comments.

Sincerely,
Salome Turnberger

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CURRICULUM VITAE

Salome Turnberger is a native of East Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania. She lived in Pennsylvania and New Jersey before her family settled in Newark, Delaware. She is a graduate of Marywood College in Scranton, Pennsylvania, where she received her Bachelor of Science in Home Economics Education. This degree began her teaching career in Prince George's County, Maryland, for a 12-year teaching position. During this time, she received a Master of Arts, Human Resource Development, from Marymount University in Arlington, Virginia and a Special Education K-12 certification at George Mason University in Arlington, Virginia. The career change enabled her teaching Special Education with Learning Disabled students briefly in Prince William County, Virginia, and currently in Fairfax County Public Schools, Virginia as a Special Education Biology Teacher. Continuing at George Mason University, Salome enrolled in the Higher Education Program pursuing a Doctor of Arts. Portions of her doctoral credits were obtained at the Hertford College of Oxford University. She plans to pursue post-doctoral scholarship in assisting students with learning disabilities through linking U.S. policy and research with U.K. research.