STORIES OF EXCEPTIONAL STUDENTS: 
THE TRANSITION TO POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION 

by 

Catherine Lipson 

A thesis submitted to 

Sonoma State University  
In partial fulfillment of the requirements 
For the degree of 

MASTER OF ARTS IN EDUCATION  

With an Authorized Concentration 
In Special Education 


Dr. Emiliano Ayala, Chair 

Dr. Mary Dingle 

Mr. Brent Boyer, M.A.
Copyright 2011

by

Catherine Lipson
AUTHORIZATION FOR REPRODUCTION
OF MASTER’S THESIS

Permission to reproduce parts of this thesis must be obtained from the author.

Date

Signature

Address

City, State, Zip
Stories of exceptional students:  
The transition to postsecondary education

Master’s Thesis by  
Catherine Lipson

ABSTRACT

Purpose of the Study:

The number of students with disabilities participating in postsecondary education has steadily increased over the past decade. At some high schools, students with disabilities receive transition interventions beyond the college and career counseling offered to the general education students. Few studies have examined the outcome of transition planning or interventions, especially for those exceptional students who attend transfer or university-level college classes. This study will examine the self-reported transition experiences of current college students with disabilities.

Procedure:

This research study includes interviews with nine students with disabilities enrolled at Sonoma State University. Interview questions examine academic strategies, life-skills supports, transition interventions, and other factors that lead to successful outcomes for these exceptional students. The content of the interviews clarifies emerging themes related to students’ perspectives as fully-included participants within the postsecondary environment.

Findings and Conclusions:

Major emerging themes included the development of improved skills to ensure full participation in the postsecondary environment, and the availability of helpful individuals during and beyond transition. Unanticipated themes included career planning and the importance of choice during the educational process. There appears to be an unfulfilled need for early transition planning for college-bound students with disabilities, which is difficult to fulfill for high school guidance counselors or case managers due to workload requirements.

Chair: Dr. Emiliano Ayala

Signature
Date
MA Program: Special Education
Sonoma State University
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To Dr. Emiliano Ayala, my committee chair, I extend my thanks for making this thesis possible, and for his many helpful insights about transition topics, beginning in spring semester 2009. To Brent Boyer, Associate Director of Disability Services for Students, I offer my gratitude for his help with defining the purposes of the study, and for contacting prospective interview participants at Sonoma State University. To Dr. Mary Dingle, I add my thanks for key guidance with the research design and methodology. I include my thanks to Dr. Perry Marker, who reviewed early drafts of Chapters 1-3 during fall semester 2010, and contributed his knowledge of the research process.

A special thanks to Jeffrey Ludovici of College Services and Support, who reviewed my interview questions and made several helpful suggestions about conducting interviews. I would like to add my thanks to Tara Johnson, at Santa Rosa Junior College, for providing a method for contacting students with disabilities. To Deborah Paggi, my colleague from Sonoma State's Rising Stars program, I offer my thanks for her help with testing out my interview questions. I also thank Chris Schultz, at College of Marin, for contributing his insights into the needs of exceptional students.

To all my loved ones within the Lipson household, I would like to extend my warmest thanks for your support. My two-legged and four-legged family members all pitched in to help me persist with various tasks, keeping my spirits up and entertaining me in their own unique styles.

I hold the deepest gratitude for the eleven exceptional students who participated in interviews and shared their stories with me. I hope each one of you knows how important you are, and how much I learned just by sitting in a room with you and listening. I dedicate this thesis to you; may the short quotes offered here remind you of a quiet hour when two people thought about how many different ways there are to learn. I wish you all the best with your academic goals, and in the extraordinary life ahead of you.
Table of Contents

Chapter 1 .................................................................................................................................1
Introduction ...............................................................................................................................1
  Problem Statement/Description ..........................................................................................2
  Significance of Project .........................................................................................................4
  Support for the Study ..........................................................................................................5
  Definition of Terms Used ....................................................................................................6
  Limitations of the Study .......................................................................................................6

Chapter 2 .................................................................................................................................8
Review of Related Literature ..................................................................................................8
  Demographic Studies of Postsecondary Students with Disabilities .................................9
  Transition Interventions: Disabilities Support Providers in Higher Education ...............12
  Transition Strategies: Outcomes of Interventions .............................................................16
  Student Perspectives: Self-determination and Self-advocacy ............................................19
  Importance of Grounded Theory Methods for Interviewing Exceptional Students ..........22
  Summary of Literature Review ............................................................................................28

Chapter 3 .................................................................................................................................32
Methodology ............................................................................................................................32
  Rationale of Data Collection Methodology .........................................................................34
  Characteristics of Interview Participants ..........................................................................35
  Developing Interview Questions .........................................................................................38
  Procedures for Data Collection ..........................................................................................44
    Pre-interview procedures ..................................................................................................44
    Interview materials and procedure ..................................................................................46
  Additional Resources Used in Study ...................................................................................47
  Data Collection and Analysis .............................................................................................48
    Using the code key ............................................................................................................48

Chapter 4 .................................................................................................................................52
Results and Data Analysis ......................................................................................................52
  Analyzing Interview Responses .........................................................................................52
    Question 1: Important academic strategies .....................................................................52
    Question 2: Important life-skills supports .......................................................................57
    Question 3: Valuable transition advice or services in high school ..................................61
    Question 4: Advice for 11th and 12th grade students .......................................................65
  Summary of Interview Responses .......................................................................................69
    Inclusive learning experiences .........................................................................................72

Chapter 5 .................................................................................................................................73
Discussion and Conclusions ..................................................................................................73
  Helpful Individuals .............................................................................................................74
  Improved Skills ....................................................................................................................75
  Conclusions Based on Evidence .........................................................................................76
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Recommendations for Future Transition Interventions</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendations for Future Research</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix A – Request for Research Participants</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix B – Pre-Interview Notes</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix C – Interview Questions and Note Sheet</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix D – Informed Consent for Interview Participants</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix E – Listing of Interview Dates and Participants</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix F – Institutional Review Board Approval</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Stories of Exceptional Students:  
The Transition to Postsecondary Education

Chapter 1

Introduction

Young adults with disabilities face many challenges during their transition to postsecondary education. Parents, teachers, counselors, and case managers often wonder what will happen to students with disabilities after high school. As an Education Specialist and English/Language Arts teacher, I have worked with students with disabilities and low-income, first-generation college students since 2003. These experiences prompted me to ask many questions about the long-term educational outcome for my students with disabilities. As a classroom Special Day Class (SDC) and Resource Specialist (RSP) teacher for the past two school years, I never had sufficient time to follow up with my former students. However, as a special educator, I have noticed that many students with disabilities are reluctant to pursue higher education in comparison to their non-disabled peers. Thus, this thesis provides answers about the outcome of transition interventions that are of interest to me as well as prospective college students with disabilities.

My preliminary investigation into the impact of transition strategies uncovered important data from local colleges and universities, and within government reports. Statistics from the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 show that about 30% of young adults with disabilities begin some form of postsecondary education during the first two years after leaving high school, which compares to nearly 70% of high school graduates in the general population (Newman, Wagner, Cameto, & Knokey, 2009). From
this study, it is evident that many students with disabilities decide not to pursue postsecondary education despite an increased focus on transition support and services. These findings support my own impressions following informal interviews with my students. While face-to-face interviews are a very time-intensive method of collecting information, they provide the advantage of removing any “filters” between students’ experiences and my own preconceptions. Therefore, I used this same method to collect information from nine current college students with disabilities for this study. Since they are still in the process of making the transition to postsecondary education, these students are the experts in the challenges and rewards of this journey.

**Problem Statement/Description**

During my investigation, I asked students with disabilities to describe and explain the academic strategies and life skills supports that have helped them succeed with their postsecondary goals. For any student with an Individual Education Plan (IEP) during high school, transition planning takes the form of an Individualized Transition Plan (ITP). Long before the student arrives at a postsecondary educational setting, the IEP team addresses the student’s academic, employment, and life skills goals. Once a student enters postsecondary education, however, there is no longer much opportunity for the team members—parents, teachers, case manager, counselors, and the student—to evaluate whether the plan adequately prepared the student. I investigated how individual students describe the outcome of transition planning efforts. Given that students received some form of transition preparation in the areas of academic strategies and life skills supports, I asked them to describe how their experiences prepared them for
postsecondary education. This research question gives individual students a chance to describe the outcome of transition planning efforts:

How does transition preparation in the areas of academic strategies and life skills supports prepare students with disabilities to succeed in postsecondary education?

Self-reported experiences of students with disabilities can provide a reality check as to what actually works for students at a specific point in time. Through my contacts with many current college students, I have learned that for some, specific academic strategies are the key to completing college requirements, while for others, general support with life skills is most important. I investigated factors that might show some differences for students with disabilities, that make them more likely, or perhaps less likely, to utilize the many supports available. As they navigate the transition from secondary to postsecondary education, these young people are truly exceptional students, because they are making the commitment to pursue their educational goals.

My inquiry also included the students’ self-assessments of their inclusion in academic and social activities and their progress in communications skills. A variety of self-determination and self-advocacy skills is essential for students to succeed. Checking current publications on these topics helped me frame interview questions that allowed students to rate their own progress. One variable in the inquiry is the extent to which students were given direct instruction in transition skills before, or at the beginning of, their postsecondary education.

According to information from the 2005 College Student survey, only about 51% of respondents felt that they were “very successful” adjusting to the demands of college life (Saenz & Barrera, 2007). In this context, it is clear that many college students nationwide are struggling with transition. The supports offered to all postsecondary
students are also available to students with disabilities: orientation programs, peer or professional counseling, tutoring, faculty office hours, career planning, and assistance with technology. If a postsecondary student has made the effort to self-identify his or her disability, additional accommodations and supports are available. The level of support each student obtains depends on personal choices about self-advocacy and inclusion. This area of inquiry focuses on a student’s recognition of personal factors that contribute to success. If students have a good grasp on what is expected in terms of communicating within a postsecondary environment, they may be more likely to seek support in areas where they may feel unsure of their abilities.

**Significance of Project**

By limiting this inquiry to a small set of transition topics, I can provide specific descriptions of learning strategies and life skills supports that current students could find helpful. These strategies and supports may have been acquired through direct instruction, or they may have been acquired on an “as-needed” basis, as students encounter the new challenges presented at the postsecondary level. For skills acquired through direct instruction, the results can help other students, parents, and postsecondary staff to get feedback about retention and maintenance of classroom-based transition training once students actually begin college life. It is also helpful for students, parents, and postsecondary staff to know which information is acquired experientially. Since it is often difficult to predict which skills and supports students will need, reports from current students are valuable for peers who may also encounter unusual or unexpected situations. As a secondary and postsecondary teacher, I can use what I learn from current students to help me refine and improve the transition training I offer.
Support for the Study

Important foundation studies into transition topics have been conducted by surveying or interviewing students in the San Francisco Bay Area and in Oregon. At the University of California, Berkeley, researchers measured postsecondary student adjustment following a transition course for students with learning disorders (Chiba & Low, 2007). Their survey included questions such as “How have you adjusted socially to Cal?” (Chiba & Low, 2007). Another study from the University of Oregon examined barriers and supports for students with disabilities enrolling at four area community colleges (Lindstrom, Downey-McCarthy, Kerewsky, & Flannery, 2009). The number of students interviewed was small, but the multiple-case design allowed for triangulation due to numerous sources of evidence (Lindstrom et al., 2009). Case study research techniques also include setting the boundaries of the study, defining the unit of analysis, and developing a theory to guide data collection efforts (Yin, 2009). Another important part of the data analysis effort is developing a system to code the interview data, using a technique called pattern coding (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This approach provides a reliable and consistent way to report information from current college students with disabilities.

An important source of support for the study included background interviews with Disability Services faculty and staff at College of Marin, Santa Rosa Junior College, and Sonoma State University. Using these resources helped me define the area population of students with disabilities at the postsecondary level, and to identify students who could serve as representatives of this population. I talked with secondary special education teachers, counselors, and transition coordinators at the county level, to gain a greater
understanding of programs currently in place to help exceptional students in the transition process.

**Definition of Terms Used**

Accommodation: Educational institutions are required to provide accommodations to students with qualifying disabilities, to ensure that they provide all the same benefits of services, programs, or activities available to those without disabilities.

Disability Services: Within the context of postsecondary education, student services may include disability services such as needs assessments, documenting a disability, academic advising, and arranging accommodations for qualifying students.

Exceptional Student: A student with uncommon learning needs, who may choose to self-identify a disability in order to receive accommodations that allow full participation in the secondary or postsecondary environment.

Self-advocacy: For people with disabilities, self-advocacy usually refers to informing others of their rights, needs, and interests. For an exceptional student, this may include informing individual instructors about the need for accommodations in a class.

**Limitations of the Study**

Limitations of the study applied to the postsecondary students with disabilities chosen for the interviews. The research study focused on academic strategies and life-skills supports used by exceptional students during the transition from high school to postsecondary education. The primary group of students interviewed were full-time students who entered postsecondary education immediately after high school. Their transition experience included the orientation and academic counseling services offered
to all entering college freshman, supplemented with additional supports from disabilities services providers.

A second limitation narrowed the possible choices of students with disabilities to those enrolled in classes designed for the academic mainstream. The rationale for this limitation is to focus on students who are able to take advantage of a wide range of academic and life-skills support services alongside their peers in a postsecondary setting. Students who are enrolled in sheltered postsecondary courses, designed primarily for adults with severe disabilities, may have a more limited range of options available to them. Therefore, those students were not included in the research study.
Chapter 2

Review of Related Literature

The spirit animating this literature review is the attempt to share a small part of the human story. The statistics and longitudinal studies that describe postsecondary students with disabilities can give the reader some notion that education institutions are rapidly adapting to yet another trend, yet the students themselves are much more than components of a trend. While it is tempting to use statistics to predict which services will be most useful for students, it is important to remember that each student has unique educational goals. These descriptive studies form the first section of the literature review.

The second section of the literature review relates to the roles of postsecondary educators and researchers. Examining disability services currently available at postsecondary institutions guides the research focus to questions faced by all postsecondary educators. Narratives provided by students with disabilities might reflect a more difficult transition process than that of normally-developing peers. The literature shows that disabilities support providers are convinced that students with disabilities benefit from interventions and support beyond that offered to the general student population.

The third and fourth sections examine transition interventions, the growth of self-determination and self-advocacy by students, and the need for students to share their perspectives. Reading the literature about interventions that prepare students for the transition into adult life can give the impression that educators fully appreciate the challenges faced by students. The self-determination and self-advocacy skills of the most
successful students appear to be an outcome of transition interventions that propelled those students towards postsecondary goals. However, these forms of evidence must admit to being fragmentary in nature. Taken separately, each study yields only a snapshot of a few students during a limited time period. Considered in the aggregate, the literature suggests that the transition process is highly individualized, providing only a tenuous claim for clear, consistent solutions to the many challenges faced by students with disabilities.

The final section of the literature review examines grounded theory methods as applied to qualitative data analysis. Careful use of the grounded theory method to guide interviews with individual students can illuminate the students’ perspective on their experiences during the transition process. The literature explaining qualitative research practices, interviewing techniques, and the development of theory based on personal narratives will help support the effort to clearly understand what the students are willing to share. To complete the literature review, a brief discussion of the paradigms involved in interpreting qualitative data ensures that the research conclusions are both useful and meaningful.

**Demographic Studies of Postsecondary Students with Disabilities**

Publications and reports that describe the inclusion of students with disabilities in postsecondary education provided context for this research study. Foremost among these sources were reports provided by the U. S. Department of Education. Large-scale, nationally-based demographic reports provide information about the likelihood that students with disabilities will enroll in postsecondary education. The National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS-2) reports that 45 percent of students with
disabilities have continued on to postsecondary education within four years of leaving high school (U.S. Dept. of Education, 2005). The figures and charts in the NLTS-2 compare enrollment rate of students with various disabilities. The majority of postsecondary students surveyed (86%) were enrolled as full-time students. This is significant because full-time students are more likely to utilize support services than part-time students. However, the NLTS-2 study found that more than half (55%) of students with disabilities in high school “did not consider themselves to have a disability by the time they had transitioned to postsecondary education” (p. 27). Of the 37% of students who disclosed a disability to their postsecondary institution, 62% received accommodations and supports (p. 29). Respondents were asked questions about the level of support they received, such as “Do you think you are getting enough services, accommodations, or help with schoolwork to do your best there?” (p. 32). Overall, fewer than 3 in 10 students with disclosed disabilities in the survey (29%) were reported to have graduated or completed their programs (p. 45). These findings imply that students might underreport disabilities upon entering postsecondary education, might not always use every support available, and might have a lower completion rate than students without disabilities. Each of these factors could adversely affect transition outcomes.

An earlier analysis, the 1999 Statistical Analysis Report titled *Students With Disabilities in Postsecondary Education: A Profile of Preparation, Participation, and Outcomes*, also provided a comprehensive profile of this student population. The 1999 study analyzed four different surveys compiled by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). Data on the percentage of students enrolled in postsecondary education, including distribution by type of institution, and by disability status and type,
suggests that information collected within local community college districts has consistently followed the national trend of a steadily increasing number of students with disabilities attending college.

As described by Dr. Sheryl E. Burgstahler in *Indicators of Institutional Change* (2008), “The literature on millennial students describes the current student population as the most diverse group of students ever to come through colleges and universities” (p. 249). Burgstahler cites materials about students with disabilities drawn from DeBard (2004), the Chronicle of Higher Education Almanac (2007), Henderson (2001), and the National Center for Education Statistics (2005). Of these materials, the Henderson (2001) study provides the most useful summary and discussion, reporting on surveys from the 1980’s and 1990’s which showed that as many as 9% of incoming college freshmen report at least one disability. In addition, these surveys tracked the proportion of students with different types of disabilities: a significant increase in students who listed Learning Disabilities (LD) occurred between 1988, with 16% reported as LD, and 1991, with 25% reported as LD (Henderson, 2001). Similar material is also contained on the website *Enhancing Success* provided by Northern Illinois University at http://www.niu.edu/success/disabilities.shtml. The website explains how to interpret the data, including notes such as “Above data should be interpreted in the following way: for example, in 2000, 40.4 percent of students with disabilities reported a Learning Disability” (Northern Illinois University, 2003).

Statistics about postsecondary participation by Marin and Sonoma County students with disabilities are available through the California Postsecondary Education Commission. The website (http://www.cpec.ca.gov) provided details about the relative
proportions of students with various disabilities at Santa Rosa Junior College for the years 2005-2008. For instance, out of a total enrollment of 32,321 (2007), 491 students were classified as Learning Disabled, which came to 1.52% of the total student population. While this is a small percentage of overall students, it represented the largest sub-group of students with disabilities, comprising approximately 25% of the 1,923 students reporting some type of disability. The percentages were smaller at College of Marin, where for 2007, total enrollment was listed at 6,575, with 63 students classified as Learning Disabled (0.95% of total students.) The largest group at College of Marin reporting a disability in 2007 were those with mobility impairments (125 students out of 334 students with disabilities.)

At both community colleges, the data from 2005-2009 reveals yearly fluctuations of types of disability, and a small but steady increase in the numbers of students with disabilities. For 2009, Sonoma State University reported 222 students with a Learning Disability out of a total undergraduate population of 7,482, which can also be expressed as 2.96% of total students. Since there were only 343 students at Sonoma State who reported a disability in 2009, that means that Learning Disabilities represented 64% of all reported disabilities that year. With smaller enrollments at College of Marin and Sonoma State, a relatively small number of reported disabilities in certain categories can easily skew the percentages. Percentages reported for Learning Disabilities are more likely to remain stable from one year to the next, due to the larger sample size.

**Transition Interventions: Disabilities Support Providers in Higher Education**

The legal requirements for providing services to students with disabilities in postsecondary education are described in the book *Accommodations in Higher Education*...
under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA): A No-nonsense Guide for Clinicians, Educators, Administrators, and Lawyers (1998) edited by M. Gordon and S. Keiser. The various sections include a wealth of information on what the ADA of 1990 requires from colleges and universities, from educational and assessment accommodations to the legal requirements for clinical evaluation. Looking at the legislation itself reveals that educational institutions must provide accommodations to persons with qualifying disabilities, because they may not deny “the benefits of services, programs, or activities of a public entity” (Americans with Disabilities Act, 1990). A much less detailed treatment of these topics appears in the pamphlet Students with Disabilities Preparing for Postsecondary Education: Know Your Rights and Responsibilities (2007) from the U. S. Department of Education’s Office of Civil Rights. The question of who arranges, and pays for, an evaluation for first-time postsecondary students is explained in this source. The pamphlet is aimed at students, and provides concise answers to a list of frequently asked questions. However, the scope of the pamphlet provides only a hint of the material contained in the Gordon and Keiser book. Sections on the clinical evidence and testing required to document a disability are included for Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (AD/HD), Language-Based Learning Disabilities, Mood and Anxiety Disorders, Physical Disabilities, and Visual Disorders. A useful appendix contains the Association on Higher Education and Disability’s (AHEAD) guidelines on documenting a Learning Disability in adolescents and adults.

Postsecondary support providers must consider a variety of factors when deciding on an approach to interventions during the transition period. The article Transition to Higher Education (1993) by R. Hartman considers both the data associated with the
transition period to postsecondary studies, and the implications for campus student services personnel. The conclusion to this article advocates integrating early, active transition training with appropriate admissions and support services for best transition results. A more recent article by Trammel and Hathaway (2007) examined help-seeking patterns in college students with disabilities. The researchers recorded how often college students with and without disabilities sought help from professors, and found that students with disabilities had help-seeking patterns similar to those of their peers without disabilities. This information shows that individual college professors often become support providers, even though they may have little knowledge or training in the needs of students with disabilities.

*College and Career Success for Students with Learning Disabilities* (1996), by R. Dolber, is a comprehensive book for students with disabilities heading for college. Chapters such as “Tips for College Success” are filled with lists, as well as advice such as “rest assured that no college freshman enters with mastery of all these areas” (p. 130). However, some students, with or without disabilities, will benefit from the experience of family members who are already familiar with the college application process or other requirements for college entry. When disabilities support providers plan transition interventions at the postsecondary level, they must certainly keep in mind that not all students with disabilities come from college-oriented households.

Another example of a transition intervention for college students with disabilities is the DO-IT project (Disabilities, Opportunities, Internetworking, and Technology) established at University of Washington and chaired by Dr. Sheryl Burgstahler. For example, the web site associated with this project includes a video and publication on
how to prepare for college. Students can also access an electronic community of teens with disabilities to share their thoughts on the transition process. The need for this type of support before entering college is illustrated in the online report With Their Whole Lives Ahead of Them, (2010) prepared by Public Agenda, an organization sponsored by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. According to a survey of young adults, who did not necessarily have any disabilities, “six in 10 of those who went on to further education gave their high school counselors poor grades for their college advice” (Public Agenda, 1). This report from a national sample of young adults was similar to the findings of a survey of 36 high school students with disabilities from Sebastopol and Windsor high schools, which asked about their sources of information (Lipson, personal communication, May 3, 2009). The majority of the local students reported that classroom Special Education teachers or Workability teachers were sources for transition information, but that high school guidance counselors provided no significant transition advice (Lipson, personal communication, 2009).

The Burgstahler article, The Role of Technology in Preparing Youth with Disabilities for Postsecondary Education and Employment (2003), also includes a useful overview of the significance of postsecondary education in the lives of these students. Burgstahler’s comments on the research-based literature emphasize positive outcomes for students with disabilities, as well as suggesting interventions that increase student success in postsecondary activities. One recommendation was to make web-based information more accessible to students with disabilities. The importance of technology-based interventions was also echoed in the article Assistive Technology Specialists: Bringing Knowledge of Assistive Technology to School Districts (Lahm, 2003). Practicing with assistive
technology before, or at the very beginning, of the postsecondary transition often leads to more successful educational outcomes.

An evaluation of student and staff satisfaction surveys created by the California Postsecondary Education Commission (CPEC) tracked the outcomes of various types of assistance for students with disabilities. The survey results reported in *Student and Staff Satisfaction with Programs for Students with Disabilities* (CPEC, 1993) showed that the overwhelming majority of students with disabilities who completed the survey felt that they were receiving appropriate assistance from Disabled Student Services staff and their instructors in college courses. Recent research suggests that student satisfaction can be enhanced when support providers focus on mentoring within the postsecondary environment. A person-centered approach described by Huang and McMillend (2010) provided non-disabled peer mentors who worked with young adults with Autism Spectrum Disorders. This one-on-one approach allowed students to improve social skills, which in turn supported their functional skills within the postsecondary environment.

Since students must participate in the larger educational community outside the classroom, it seems appropriate to investigate the relationship between social skills, self-advocacy skills, and academic success. The literature shows that support providers at the postsecondary level must consider multiple approaches to transition interventions.

**Transition Strategies: Outcomes of Interventions**

Important studies into transition topics have been conducted by observing, surveying, or interviewing students at community colleges, four-year public universities, and four-year private universities. For example, a study from the University of Oregon examined barriers and supports for students with disabilities enrolling at four area
Community colleges (Lindstrom, Downey-McCarthy, Kerewsky, & Flannery, 2009). The number of students interviewed was small, (seven students), but the multiple-case design allowed for triangulation due to numerous sources of evidence (Lindstrom et al., 2009). The researchers uncovered both individual and systemic obstacles to enrollment in postsecondary education. Although all the community colleges provided disabilities resource programs, the students who found a helpful “designated individual” within the college community were most successful (Lindstrom et al., 2009). A key component of a successful transition was individualized supports and services, including regular opportunities for feedback. In other words, reading about disability services on a web site or going to an orientation meeting was insufficient for college students with disabilities. The authors noted that establishing an ongoing relationship with well-informed human services professional staff members was more likely to lead to success in the college environment (Lindstrom et al., 2009).

An eight-year study of student adjustment following transition training for students with learning disabilities was titled A Course-based Model to Promote Successful Transition to College for Students with Learning Disorders (Chiba & Low, 2007). The authors are from UC Berkeley, where Dr. Chiba is a Disability Services Coordinator, and Dr. Low is a psychologist in the Counseling and Psychological Services group. Their article provides an analysis of participant responses to a pre/post and a follow-up questionnaire. The students had the opportunity to reflect on interventions and resources that contributed to their educational experience. Individual reflections were an important addition to the data collected from the questionnaires. According to written responses collected by Chiba and Low (2007), students found the opportunities for peer
support provided by the transition class to be helpful. “I learned how to express in words what was going on with me and how people including professors could assist me. That was probably what helped me the most in this class” (p. 50).

Another look at student outcomes during transition appears in the article *Computer-supported Studying: Stories of Successful Transition to Postsecondary Education* (Anderson-Inman, Knox-Quinn, & Szymanski, 1999). The researchers, who come from University of Oregon and Lane Community College, followed three students with disabilities as they tested interventions during their transition to postsecondary education. During the project, one student was able to become proficient at taking notes during class, using a computer. Another used symbol maps and an electronic reading environment, while the third used outlining software and a calendar. The authors describe a learning curve when students first began using the computer-supported study techniques, but then as the students gained confidence, they were able to progress more quickly (Anderson-Inman et al., 1999). The methodology used in this study included both interventions and observation. The process of technology adoption was the focus for much of the paper.

Both the Anderson-Inman et al. (1999) research and the Chiba and Low (2007) research suggest that interactions with staff members and peers provide encouragement and feedback during the intervention. In the interventions documented by Anderson-Inman et al. (1999), each student had opportunities for ongoing interaction with staff members during technology training. Students enrolled in transition courses at U. C. Berkeley were able to interact with staff members and their peers, as described by Chiba and Low (2007). Both studies suggested that follow-up research would be useful, to
determine if the research participants retained all the benefits after the initial training period or intervention was completed.

In a study conducted at Virginia Commonwealth University, researchers found that students with disabilities might not identify a disability until after they encounter difficulty with postsecondary work (Getzel & Briel, 2006). Many students at community colleges with open enrollment policies did not enroll immediately after leaving high school, thus missing some transition activities offered to college-bound 12th grade students. An article presented by the HEATH Resource Center at George Washington University describes the placement exams and documentation requirements for establishing eligibility for disability services (Sauvinakis, 2003). In some cases, a student’s disability is not diagnosed until after admission to college (National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities, 1994). For any type of non-traditional student entering postsecondary education, finding the appropriate support services improves the chances of academic success. The extra level of intervention provided by transition activities makes it more likely that postsecondary students with disabilities will continue with transfer-level or career-oriented studies. However, none of the literature reviewed claims a predictable cause-and-effect relationship between specific transition activities and long-term positive outcomes for students with disabilities.

**Student Perspectives: Self-determination and Self-advocacy**

The terms self-determination and self-advocacy are not interchangeable: self-determination describes the choices that students with disabilities make about their educational and career goals, while self-advocacy describes the actions they take to implement those choices. Self-determination strategies were shown to be important in
achieving positive adult outcomes (Wehmeyer, Gragoudas, & Shogren, 2006). Effective decision making and problem-solving skills, self-regulation of learning, and self-advocacy skills are all associated with a student’s ability to achieve desired outcomes in postsecondary activities. An important skill for any student making the transition to postsecondary education is to construct a network of support. Students with disabilities report that forming relationships with college personnel and classmates was “very important” (Getzel & Briel, 2006). Adaptive strategies such as stress management, assertive communication, and/or problem solving are also an appropriate part of formal or informal transition curriculum (Wehman & Thoma, 2006). “Participants identified (a) problem solving, (b) understanding one’s disability, (c) goal setting, and (d) self-management as critical skills” (Getzel & Thoma, 2008).

The student perspective is also found in a study titled Universal Design of Instruction: Reflections of Students (2008), which was written by a group of five recent college graduates with disabilities. The authors represent a cross-section of students with disabilities. Their reflections include some general comments, such as “select flexible curriculum” (Durre, Richardson, Smith, Shulman, & Steel, 2008). However, specific comments also focused on unique disabilities, such as “Some instructors continue to lecture with their back to the class while writing on the white board. This makes it impossible for me to lip-read” (p. 90). Collecting and publishing the views and perspectives of students can become, in itself, a form of self-advocacy and self-determination for participants. A diversity of outcomes becomes possible when students with disabilities begin to share their own stories. This diversity is part of the shift towards equality for groups historically excluded from higher education, such as adults with
disabilities. As described in *Qualitative evaluation and changing social policy* (House, 2005), educators seeking to determine the value of interventions can “solicit the views of stakeholders to determine which social benefits were at issue” (p. 1076).

Using interview methods that consciously seek to gather multiple perspectives is appropriate to my research, because it fits into special educators’ efforts to foster self-determination and self-advocacy among students with disabilities. As part of a community that values inclusion and diversity in a postsecondary setting, it is important to show students that their ideas and experiences are valuable within that community. To ensure that interview data is reliable, qualitative researchers have resorted to interview methods that minimize the interviewer’s influence. As described in *The interview: from neutral stance to political involvement* (Fontana & Frey, 2005), researchers record multiple perspectives through techniques such as oral history, creative interviewing, polyphonic interviewing, and interpretive interactionism. Interview situations are necessarily a social process, and therefore a social relationship between interviewer and respondent will result from even a short conversation. Within this relationship, both participants are continuously developing the meaning of the conversation, “which is accomplished at the intersection of the interaction of the interviewer and the respondent” (p. 717).

Self-determination strategies can be rehearsed in classroom settings at high schools with practice, role-plays, discussions, or teacher presentations. However, some students insist that these skill-based lessons don’t translate well to real-world situations. A local School-to-Career teacher, Joanne Collins, described her students’ response to an exercise where they practiced filling out job applications. “They refused to fill them out
completely,” she said. “When I prompted them to finish the task, one boy said, ‘I’ll do it right when I’m applying for a real job.’” (Lipson, personal communication with J. Collins, December 17, 2010). At the high school level, students are almost never asked what types of transition interventions they prefer. As college-going adults, students play a greater role in selecting appropriate interventions. According to Getzel and Thoma (2008), “the voices of college students with disabilities are essential” when choosing self-determination strategies. The researchers recommended an increased focus on “the experiences of students with disabilities attending postsecondary programs to identify effective strategies that enable them to remain in these settings” (Getzel & Thoma, 2008).

Importance of Grounded Theory Methods for Interviewing Exceptional Students

Since the purpose of conducting interviews is to explore students’ viewpoints, the grounded theory approach supplies an appropriate methodology. The literature explaining grounded theory approaches focuses on social sciences, where it is difficult to separate causes and effects as in the more clinical types of quantitative research. Especially when students reach adulthood, it is difficult to accurately track the outcome of any interventions or services they have received. The grounded theory approach as explained by Glaser and Strauss (1967) includes the use of conceptual categories generated from data. The researcher can provide a somewhat structured interview process, suggesting a set of initial categories, but is likely to reveal even more categories. For instance, I started with the two broad categories of academic strategies and life skills supports in my interview questions, but then allowed students’ responses to add more conceptual categories as the interviews progress.
In *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory, 3rd ed.* (2008), authors Strauss and Corbin elaborate the importance of the “level of significance accorded to each of the different phenomena” (p. 50). Concepts and themes, derived from qualitative data, are the basic units of analysis described in this research approach. When the researcher avoids focusing too strongly on a set of expected concepts or themes at the outset, he or she is then prepared to add new concepts or themes as suggested by analysis of the data. Developing the judgment needed to recognize a significant theme is the key to becoming an effective analyst of qualitative information (Strauss & Corbin, 2008).

The following rationale for interviewing is described in Seidman’s book *Interviewing as Qualitative Research, 3rd ed.* (2006): “Interviewing allows us to put behavior in context and provides access to understanding their action” (p. 10). Successive interviews can provide insights into the complexities of the transition process for students with disabilities. Each interview subject has the potential to illuminate the meaning of educational experiences, which of course are unique to each person. The use of open-ended questions allows the interviewer to “build upon and explore their participants’ responses to those questions” (p. 15). When combined with the ability to track significant themes, a careful review of interview data can make individual experiences even more meaningful by providing context.

A useful discussion of interview approaches in *The interview: From structured questions to negotiated text*, by Fontana and Frey (2000) includes reflexive strategies for the interviewer. For example, if an interviewer tells a respondent “I am a mother of three” versus “I am a university professor,” this could influence the response (p. 666). With my
own background as a SSU PreCollege instructor, a special educator, a writer, and a mother of three college students, I have a number of choices before me when identifying my relationship to a given student’s experiences. Ultimately, I decided to include a brief personal introduction (see Appendix B). As I have found in my classroom, it is best to be extremely brief in relating my personal anecdotes to a student’s experiences. However, to omit all aspects of my own experiences which parallel the student’s life is also a mistake. I have found that to refuse to share my personal stories gives students a feeling of detachment and coldness that would not be desirable during an interview. The idea of “sharedness of meanings” (Fontana and Frey, 2000) appears to be an appropriate goal when trying to understand students’ viewpoints. As described in Patton (2002), an interview can be considered an opportunity for self-analysis and interpretation. The results of the interview process can increase self-awareness in participants, thus reinforcing self-determination within the postsecondary environment.

Some of the techniques of case study research also contributed to setting the boundaries of the study, defining the unit of analysis, and developing theories to guide data collection efforts (Yin, 2009). Examples of these boundaries include the characteristics of interview subjects selected, the time allotted for each interview, and the number of questions asked. Another important part of the data analysis effort is developing a system to code the interview data, using a technique called pattern coding (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This approach provides a reliable and consistent way to report information from current college students with disabilities. The codes I used when transcribing the interviews were related to the themes uncovered in the course of the narratives. I also uncovered additional themes as I pursued my analysis, which made it
vitally important to use a system to keeping track of interview data. As Strauss and Corbin (2008) noted, “it would have been impossible without the use of memos” to follow up on data collection and analysis (p. 227). The methodology discussion provided in Chapter 3 includes the details of the data collection method used in this research study.

Student responses to a variety of transition interventions were described by C. Chiba and R. Low in A Course-based Model to Promote Successful Transition to College for Students with Learning Disorders (2007). This study gave students pre/post and follow-up questionnaires, then analyzed the resulting data using two-sample binomial chi-square analyses on each pre- and post-question. Although the authors provided an extensive technical discussion of their results, they succeeded in supplying an understandable model of data analysis. Using a much simpler process to analyze interview responses yielded meaningful insights into student experiences.

The textbook Educational Research (Johnson & Christensen, 2000) also provided useful information on data analysis. One technique of particular interest is combining survey responses with interviews. The example given in Chapter 11 described the Creswell and Brown (1992) study “How Chairpersons Enhance Faculty Research,” and provided a good example of interviews that revealed the subjects’ understanding of concepts related to teaching, relationships with students, and interactions with fellow staff members (Johnson & Christensen, 2000). In addition, the textbook Action Research: A Guide for the Teacher Researcher (2007) by Geoffrey E. Mills provided useful examples and case studies. In Appendix B, the author explained the descriptive statistics used to analyze teacher responses to the question “To what degree has the at-risk program changed your classroom practice?” (p. 226). Adapting a grounded theory model, research
questions were first explored using a questionnaire and descriptive analysis, then revisited during interviews with subjects.

A study of professional development for higher education professionals provided an example of presenting survey data. Figure 12-1 in Engaging Higher Education Faculty in Universal Design (Spencer & Romero, 2008) presents an easy-to-read bar chart of data resulting from a survey of students’ perceived needs as learners. For example, approximately 9% of students surveyed would like professors to provide focused assignments, a technique advocated by Universal Design principles. For data analysis procedures, a thesis titled Assistive Technology as an Accommodation on Accountability Assessments (2008), by B. Atchison provided an example of how to organize a research project so that readers could easily find all the pertinent information from interviews and questionnaires.

A study of help-seeking by college students with disabilities at Randolph-Macon College (2007) provided a discussion of the difficulty of obtaining data. According to the researchers, “student motives for seeking help were partially determined by the faculty participants who chose a reason for each student visit (and presumably were accurate in their assessments)” (Trammell & Hathaway, 2007). The data for this research was collected in logbooks, used by faculty members to record information about student visits. Interviewing students directly might have yielded different results.

To complete the review of research methods involved in the study, I consulted the chapter “Paradigmatic Controversies, Contradictions, and Emerging Confluences,” by Y. Lincoln and E. Guba, in the Handbook of Qualitative Research, 2nd ed. (2000). The chapter contains a useful set of diagrams comparing five research paradigms: positivism,
post-positivism, critical theory, constructivism, and participatory (pp. 166-167). The model of education proposed by positivism and post-positivism sees students learning by a process of accretion, as facts build upon facts (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). Researchers assume they can learn about a given problem in the same way—building factual stories about events and activities that can be measured and compared. Students, and even teacher-researchers, as described in Mills’ Action Research text, don’t have a way to describe what is lacking or not yet provided within their current educational context. All they can do is measure the speed or accuracy with which they are able to reach educational outcomes, which are usually determined by someone else.

In contrast, the other paradigms described by Lincoln and Guba provide a variety of models for describing educational outcomes. Critical theory places education into a context of social action, where a student’s gender, race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, and disabilities may have an important impact on their experiences (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). The history of educating persons with disabilities has certainly unfolded as a series of social actions, when viewed from the critical theory perspective. The constructivist viewpoint holds that all members of a learning community can work together and build consensus about the goals of educational efforts. The participatory approach redefines research subjects as co-researchers, who will demonstrate self-reflective awareness during the inquiry process. By providing authentic voices of students in the midst of the transition process, the research approach I have outlined combines these constructivist and participatory elements.
Summary of Literature Review

The articles reviewed for this study provided a variety of ways to look at transition preparation in the context of postsecondary education. Many of the sources illustrated approaches or methodology that I used for research design. For example, the large-scale longitudinal data in the NLTS-2 (U. S. Department of Education, 2005) made a useful comparison with local statistics for community college attendance by students with disabilities. This data helped me connect transition training efforts by local high school teachers and college disabilities services staff to nationwide trends for students with disabilities to enter colleges and other postsecondary training programs. I also consulted national surveys of students without disabilities, which documented problems with college adjustment and retention among the larger population of general education students. Interviewing current students who have completed one or more semesters of college was a reasonable approach to uncovering their challenges and their successes in the postsecondary environment.

Experiences reported by disabilities support providers in the secondary and postsecondary environments seem to be quite similar. Efforts to begin transition training prior to leaving high school are common, as documented in studies by Dolber (1996), Trammel and Hathaway (2007), and Hartman (1993). Resource materials provided by the U. S. Department of Education or college Disabilities Services departments all attempt to reach prospective college students with helpful guidelines. However, many high school and college support providers see the need for additional outreach efforts, often pointing to additional use of technology to deliver transition training. Programs such as the DO-IT project at the University of Washington have had success in providing electronically-
based information to new and prospective students (Burgstahler, 2003.) However, there continues to be a need for mentoring and counseling in postsecondary environments, as described in the Huang and McMillend (2010) paper. Relying solely on one type of delivery method for transition training is unlikely to support student success. Transition preparation and support needs continue as students begin their college experiences (Chiba & Low, 2007).

The Burgstahler (2003) and Anderson-Inman et al. (1999) articles had excellent introductory sections where the researchers discussed the issues surrounding transition. The Anderson-Inman et al. (1999) article included student work samples that illustrated the success of specific interventions, while Burgstahler (2003) offered more general advice and recommendations for anyone who wants to improve postsecondary access to students with disabilities. In Chiba and Low (2007), as well as Durre et al. (2008) and Burgstahler (2003), students had the opportunity to reflect on interventions and resources that contributed to their educational experience. The article by Lindstrom et al. (2009) recommended additional efforts to gather information from current postsecondary students with disabilities. Although my inquiry only allowed me to look at outcomes for a small sample of students, it still provided some valuable information about the results of transition interventions. One of my interview questions prompted students to reflect on transition training they received in high school or immediately prior to college, inviting them to comment on specific interventions that they found helpful.

The social and emotional aspects of the transition process, which formed part of the focus of the Durre et al. (2008) article, can support students’ increased levels of self-advocacy. Since high school staff may be unfamiliar with the various services available
to college students, it is likely that many college freshmen expect the same level of support that they experienced in their high school classrooms. When they arrive at a college campus, they find that they must assume greater responsibility for finding services and supports they might need. Their social and emotional coping skills must take a giant leap forward, in response to new and unfamiliar situations. While transition preparation can attempt to boost students’ self-advocacy skills, researchers conclude that students must become advocates for themselves to secure needed supports and services (Getzel & Thoma, 2008). Elements of my interview protocol inquire about how students manage the workload in college classes. Students’ answers reveal their perspectives on self-determination and self-advocacy, since the question assumes that each student is fully in charge of managing whatever problems may arise.

In the literature of qualitative research, the in-person interview is often seen as complementary to data gathering efforts using statistics, observations, or surveys. The literature review furnished ideas for interview questions, and also suggested an overall context for the participant responses. However, since each respondent has a unique perspective, it is always important for an interviewer to adjust any preconceived notions about context. As Strauss and Corbin (2008) pointed out, it might become necessary to examine “broader, more macro, issues” in the course of research (p. 227). At the conclusion of the literature review, I find significant gaps in the literature regarding the context of students’ experiences within postsecondary education. While I was able to find a variety of suggestions about helpful strategies for students, each postsecondary environment is unique and likely to change from one year to the next. This variability in
the educational environment is one of the macro issues that makes it difficult to support any claims about interventions that will work in every situation.

My research design used open-ended interview questions to investigate the students’ perspectives. The interview protocol that appears in Appendix C lists the primary questions, clarifying questions, and thematic codes for categorizing students’ answers. These tools allowed me to suggest and refine a set of emerging themes to describe student perceptions. For example, one initial theme was academic difficulties or challenges due to a student’s present skill levels. Another theme was availability of supports and interventions at the college level. Students who responded to the question about their high school transition experiences described their expectations about college, including whether these expectations were realistic. By answering interview questions, students made the “history” of their emerging perspectives clear. Because students are unlike me in many ways, it was appropriate to collect information about their views before constructing a theory of how transition preparation affected their success in postsecondary education. The literature review process provided many insights into transition preparation practices, and helped supply the methodology for collecting information from interview participants. The inquiry provided the means to look at transition preparation, academic strategies, and life-skills supports from the students' point of view. The interview questions and responses made it possible to connect information uncovered by previous researchers to the experiences of the interview participants.
Chapter 3
Methodology

Within the literature on transition preparation for high school students with disabilities, it has been difficult to define the outcomes of specific transition interventions longitudinally. Every postsecondary student who completes a survey or participates in an interview can answer questions about his or her current skills or reflect upon experiences from the past. The diversity of postsecondary students with disabilities also complicates any inquiry into when and where these skills were developed. Given my research question of

How does transition preparation in the areas of academic strategies and life skills supports prepare students with disabilities to succeed in postsecondary education?

I utilized the approach described by Fontana and Frey (2005). Specifically, I designed interview questions that invited students to share experiences that could help define any outcome of transition-related interventions. Such insights and experiences are uniquely valuable to professionals working in the field of special education who seek to improve or enhance transition related services and supports. Asking postsecondary students to describe and explain the academic strategies and life skills supports that have helped them manage their college workloads is an indirect way to examine whether previous interventions, in the form of transition training, have had a positive effect. However, asking students directly, “How did your high school Special Education case manager help you prepare for college?” would certainly imply that the interviewer expected a detailed and positive answer. To avoid prejudicing the responses from
interview participants, all questions allow the student to indicate which experiences or interactions held the most significance.

For any student with an Individual Education Plan (IEP) during high school, transition planning takes the form of an Individualized Transition Plan (ITP). Long before the student arrives at a postsecondary educational setting, the IEP team has addressed the student’s academic, employment, and life skills goals. Once a student enters postsecondary education, however, there is no longer much opportunity for the team members—parents, teachers, case manager, counselors, and the student—to evaluate whether the transition plan adequately prepared the student. Given the limited information noted in the research in this area, while we are aware of the basic demographics of students with disabilities, we still need a greater understanding from a student perspective on what actually works.

Using open-ended interview questions allows the students themselves to describe the outcomes of earlier transition planning efforts. In some cases, students do not distinguish between secondary and postsecondary transition preparation. The students interviewed for this research effort were self-selected, and their explanations and descriptions fit the criteria for “information-rich cases” described in Patton (2002). In addition, since all the informants attend Sonoma State University, their responses provide an illustration of “snowball or chain sampling” (Patton, 2002). When the interview responses are compared, certain events are mentioned repeatedly by a majority of the participants. This indicates the importance of those events in determining the positive outcomes reported by the participants. Demographics of the interview participants are discussed in a subsequent section.
Rationale of Data Collection Methodology

The primary goal of this inquiry is to collect information about transition from current college undergraduate students with disabilities. The self-reported experiences of this sample of students can provide a reality check as to what actually works for students at a specific point in time. The research question, as expressed in Chapter 1, focuses on two important skill areas: academic strategies and life-skills supports. Through my contacts with many current college students, I have learned that for some, specific academic strategies are the key to completing college requirements, while for others, general support with life skills is most important. Analyzing the interview responses can indicate whether students with disabilities are more likely, or perhaps less likely, to utilize the many supports available to all college students. Available research evidence suggests that individualized supports and services are key to success in the postsecondary environment (Lindstrom et al., 2009; Anderson-Inman et al., 1999).

Another area of concern includes the students’ self-assessments of their inclusion in academic and social activities. According to information from the 2005 College Student survey, only about 51% of respondents felt that they were “very successful” adjusting to the demands of college life (Saenz & Barrera, 2007). In this context, it is clear that many college students nationwide are struggling with transition. The supports offered to all postsecondary students are also available to students with disabilities: orientation programs, peer or professional counseling, tutoring, faculty office hours, career planning, and assistance with technology (C. Lipson, personal communication with B. Boyer, February 22, 2011). If a postsecondary student has decided to self-identify his or her disability, additional accommodations and supports are available. The level of
support each student obtains depends on personal choices about self-advocacy and inclusion. This area of inquiry uncovers each student’s recognition of personal factors that contribute to success. The importance of adaptive strategies such as establishing personal relationships have been documented by a number of researchers, including Getzel and Briel (2006), Wehman and Thoma (2006), and Trammel and Hathaway (2007).

If students have a good grasp on expectations within the postsecondary environment, they are more likely to seek support in areas where they may feel unsure of their abilities. When postsecondary students provide a description of their improved abilities, they are in effect reporting on the outcome of transition interventions. Even with a relatively small number of participants, the information revealed through these interviews adds to existing evidence about the effectiveness of various transition planning efforts. Collecting individual reflections was an important component of studies conducted by Chiba and Low (2007) and Durre et al. (2008). University special education researchers, high school special education teachers, speech and language therapists, guidance counselors, school psychologists, college disabilities services counselors, and parents of students with disabilities can potentially learn more about transition outcomes from the perspectives of current postsecondary students.

**Characteristics of Interview Participants**

Twenty different students at Sonoma State University replied to an emailed “Request for Research Participants,” distributed in late February, 2011. This leads to the conclusion that exceptional students at this four-year college are actively reading and responding to emails sent through Disabilities Services for Students. Eleven of those
students were able to participate in interviews held at Sonoma State University during March, 2011. Of the eleven undergraduate students interviewed, nine responses were included for purposes of data analysis. The timeline and sequence for the interviews appears in Appendix E. The two interviews not included were from undergraduate transfer students over the age of thirty-five. Using interview responses from students who progressed directly from secondary education into a four-year college increased the likelihood that they would recall transition supports offered at the elementary or secondary level.

For the nine student participants, the demographics are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Semesters enrolled at SSU</th>
<th>Age of students</th>
<th>Race/Gender of students</th>
<th>Identified Disabilities</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Two semesters</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>White/F, White/F, White/F</td>
<td>Dyslexia, Dyslexia, Deaf/Hard of Hearing</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>26 (transfer student)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four semesters</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>White/F, Asian/F</td>
<td>ADHD with anxiety or OCD, Auditory processing</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>19</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Five-six semesters</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>White/F, White/F, White/M</td>
<td>Specific learning disability, Asperger’s/Autism Spectrum Disorder, ADHD with OCD</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>21</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eight semesters</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>White/F</td>
<td>Visual impairment</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although these nine students do not form a representative sample of the population of students with disabilities at Sonoma State, they do represent considerable diversity in their identified disabilities. My original goal, to interview first and second year students with disabilities about their transition experiences, was articulated before I
created the “Request for Research Participants” letter. After interviewing several Disabilities Services professionals, I decided not to specify an upper limit on postsecondary semesters in the letter, because I was uncertain if enough first and second year participants would use the email method. Since interested students contacted me through an email address I included in the letter, I did not know the age, gender, or disability of participants until I met them for the interview. If I had used another method to contact potential participants, I could have selected either a more homogenous, or a more representative sample of students. The resulting self-selected participants represent a potential source of analytic bias due to their status as “elite” informants. Since each of them volunteered as a participant, it could be inferred that these students are articulate, socially involved, and well-informed about the purposes of university research. The effect of the “availability heuristic” on research findings is discussed in Miles and Huberman (1999). However, these students can also be seen as “high performers” or “risk-takers” within their environment, due to their adjustment to the postsecondary environment. Since the research goal is to determine which academic strategies and life-skills supports lead to success in postsecondary education, it makes sense to interview students who have experienced some measure of success. Their comments provide opportunities for theoretical sampling within grounded theory, described by Strauss and Corbin (1998) as “sampling on the basis of the emerging concepts” (p. 73).

An adapted grounded theory approach guided interviews with students who have successfully completed two or more semesters, and allowed them to describe the outcomes of transition planning efforts. Students enrolled for two or more semesters have accumulated some transition experiences in the areas of academic strategies and life-
skills supports, so the interviews provide a record of their narratives and emerging perspectives. The open-ended questions also helped students assess their own transition to postsecondary education. The information from these interviews adds to the literature on self-determination and self-advocacy in postsecondary students with disabilities.

**Developing Interview Questions**

During interviews with current college students with disabilities, I asked about the academic skills and support services they are currently utilizing. I provided two categories for them to consider: the first category was Academic Skills. In any academic environment, students need to read, write, and calculate in order to pass their classes. They may also need to perform a number of other actions: use a computer, play music, create illustrations, prepare food, or any of dozens of other activities. Within each class, they need listening and speaking skills, and the social skills appropriate to a gathering of adults. All of these skills are practiced within the context of secondary school, and the students are already acquainted with their own strengths and weaknesses in these areas. The purpose of questioning students about their present level of academic skills is to determine if they felt well prepared for their present academic environment, or if they feel that they needed to make up deficits in skills that were not addressed in high school.

A characteristic common to many students with disabilities is that they have trouble generalizing skills from one academic discipline to another (C. Lipson, personal communication with J. Collins, December 17, 2010). If students were given specific practice in academic skills in high school, and then find that the skills needed for college are far different from what they experienced previously, this will have implications for
the additional practice needed to master these skills. The initial version of Question 1 appears below:

1. Please describe some of the most important academic strategies you use to help you succeed in your college classes.

After discussing this question in an email with a college counselor (J. Ludovici, personal communication, January 7, 2011), I revised the question to make it more specific. Adding the words “manage the workload” and deleting “help you succeed” shifted the emphasis to the actual tasks students must complete to satisfy class requirements. It also removes the burden of evaluating the criteria for success from the very beginning of the interview process. Thus, the type of information obtained tended to be a list of actions, of specific things students commonly do to process information within the context of a given course. The final version of Question 1 is:

1. Please describe some of the most important academic strategies you use to help manage the workload in your college classes.

Using the phrase “the most important” implies that the student is using a variety of academic strategies, and asks the student to make value judgments about specific techniques. This tactic echoes the sample focus group questions found in Lindstrom, Downy-McCarthy, Kerewsky, and Flannery (2009), which offer participants the terms "most important" and "most helpful."

As a follow-up, I created a list of clarifying questions, ensuring that students would include a variety of academic strategies in their answers. For instance, if a student started the interview by giving detailed descriptions of interactions with a note-taker, then I did not use the follow-up question about note-taking. However, I still brought up study groups and the other strategies, if the student did not mention them. Specific academic
strategies recommended in Burgstahler (2003) are included in the follow-up questions. Using clarifying questions allows students to confirm that their initial answer really represents their most important strategy: students are free to explain why they don’t use the other, less-preferred strategies.

1a. clarifying questions: How often do you use specific study skills that you learned in high school or in a support class at your college? Note-taking? Outlines? Review? Online tutorials? Study groups? Tutoring?

It is important to note that the initial answers that students gave, before any clarifying prompts, must generally be considered their “most important” strategy. When conducting the data analysis of interview responses, using a printed transcript allowed evaluation of what the students consider their core strategies, and which strategies are less frequently used. Only when the student clearly and explicitly chooses to shift the “most important” emphasis to a strategy suggested later in the interview, is the interviewer justified in changing the ranking of the responses.

The second category of inquiry addressed Life-Skills supports in the context of college attendance. Students can describe any life-skills supports or services related to their college activities; purely recreational activities that have no impact on college attendance are not part of the inquiry. However, students who hold paid or volunteer positions that have an impact on time management may choose to describe their work arrangements. The clarifying questions reflect areas that could have an impact on a student’s daily life, such as getting help from Disabilities Services staff, mental health professionals, medical professionals, or Department of Rehabilitation advisors. These support providers were among those included in the findings of Trammel and Hathaway (2007). If students did not volunteer information about life-skills supports offered by
parents, sibling, peers, or college professors, those clarifying questions were also included.

In terms of preparation prior to college, life-skills supports are rarely taught in a systematic way. If a student has participated in life skills classes during high school, or has attended college skills seminars that include life skills training, the student could comment on how helpful that prior training is. For the life-skills support category, it is possible that skills learned earlier are quite difficult to transfer to a new environment, where less support is offered. Even though Disability Support Services are available in postsecondary settings, it is up to the individual student to seek them out. Unlike high school, a case manager or guidance counselor will not send a note to students and pull them out of class for meetings. During interviews, I encouraged students to reflect on the differences in life-skills supports in the college environment. The final version of Question 2 appears below:

2. Please describe some of the most important life-skills supports you use to help manage the workload in your college classes.

The rationale for changing “help you succeed” to the more specific “manage the workload” in Question 2 is the same as for Question 1. The use of the term “workload” is not accidental in either case: it implies that the student has a great deal of work, which could become overwhelming if not managed appropriately. The clarifying questions provide a list of people, whether paid or unpaid, who could possibly help students develop the life skills that help support academic success.

2a. clarifying questions: How often do you seek support from Disabilities Services staff? Medical professionals? Dept. of Rehabilitation? Mental Health professionals? Parents? Peers or siblings? Professors in academic classes?
In this case, the clarifying questions were developed through conversations with a diverse group of educators, who described the various situations in which postsecondary students need support to develop appropriate life skills. These conversations are described more fully in the section on Additional Resources Used in Study. As with the first question, the prompts were used to follow up with students after they indicated which supporting resources have been most important for them. Giving students the chance to comment about which supports were not necessary confirms the validity of their first reply in the category of important life-skills supports. This data analysis technique is discussed in Patton (2002) as "looking for negative evidence" (p. 263).

The two final research questions ask students to focus on the differences between high school and postsecondary education. The purpose of including these questions is to provide a chance for students to reflect on changes in their perspectives. Asking interview respondents to compare past and present situations was part of the Lindstrom et al. (2009) approach, where the interviewers asked community college staff members about changes in services. This retrospective type of question could help students clarify how they have increased their self-advocacy skills since high school. Question 3 asks students to assess which advice or services have turned out to be the most valuable. The wording of Question 3 deliberately avoids asking about particular people who might have offered transition services, which allows students to volunteer this information.

3. In thinking about your high school experience, please list some transition advice and/or services offered in high school that you feel are most valuable to you now. The clarifying questions focus on a sequence of events that often (although not always) take place in 11th and 12th grades in California public high schools for all students, regardless of disability. Only the last follow-up prompt, about contacting college
Disabilities Services before choosing or beginning postsecondary studies, is specific to students with disabilities. Students are then free to interpret these questions as pertaining to advice or services targeted for their particular disability. Alternatively, students who were mainstreamed for most classes, and attended transition events designed for regular education students, were able to comment on the value of those experiences for them.

3a. clarifying questions: Transition activities at high school? Visits to colleges? College nights? Appointments with college Disabilities Services counselors?

The last interview question asks students to reflect on their experience and offer advice to younger students. Unlike the other questions, Question 4 retains the original wording that includes “succeed in college.” The initial answer to this question could include academic strategies, reinforcing the student’s answer to Question 1. Or, it is possible that a student might choose to re-emphasize something about helpful life-skills support, a topic already covered in Question 2. Finally, a student could possibly give advice that had not made the top of the list with any of the previous questions. If a student switches emphasis in this manner, it implies that the interview process has helped promote greater self-awareness. The benefit of conducting a face-to-face interview, using open-ended questions, is that interview participants may have the change to slow down, explore topics, and discover different aspects of an experience.

4. What advice would you give a student with disabilities in 11th or 12th grade, to help them prepare to succeed in college?

The wording of Question 4 is deliberately much more open-ended than a similar question posed in the Lindstrom et al. (2009) study: “Would you recommend this community college program to other students with disabilities? Why or why not?” (p. 13). To some extent, using specific clarifying questions at the end of the interview prompted students to
repeat earlier themes. This provides closure for participants, or it could also open up new areas not included in other questions. Once again, the clarifying questions allow students to assess and evaluate their own experiences, in the context of helping similar students succeed in college. Finally, the last clarifying questions address the topic of goals, and return to the overall purpose of transition preparation. One of the purposes in discussing transition with students is to give them opportunities to formulate and re-evaluate their own goals throughout their academic career.

4a. clarifying questions: What surprised you? Which areas gave you the most trouble? Which areas seemed easier due to your preparation? Have your goals changed?

Students may have a wide range of opinions about what was and was not helpful during their high school experiences. Giving interview participants the chance to reflect on an earlier life stage is a first step towards interpreting their responses. As described in Patton (2002), both the interviewer and interviewee “are participants in the meaning-making process” (p. 404). As students tell the story of their past and present transition experiences, they can increase their own understanding of how participating in education has changed their lives.

**Procedures for Data Collection**

**Pre-interview procedures.** To help me identify postsecondary students with disabilities, I contacted college and university Disabilities Services counselors, and other community members who work with students with disabilities. This effort began in January 2011 and continued until I identified interview participants. One approach for selecting participants was to focus on students in the first or second year of postsecondary education, assuming that they have the clearest memories of high school transition
experiences. However, older students and transfer students also have important insights to offer, and I hesitated to exclude interested participants from the interviews. I resolved the issue by collecting information from a variety of respondents, but only using information from respondents between the ages of nineteen and twenty-six for the data analysis.

At each of the colleges, I used a letter requesting research participants. The format for this letter was suggested by Tara Johnson, Disability Specialist for the Disabilities Resources Department at Santa Rosa Junior College. She thought that students would respond to a flyer-type announcement, and asked me to include my own email contact information so students could reach me directly. I sent Ms. Johnson the initial version of the letter, and she suggested minor changes. She volunteered to send this letter using email to SRJC students who were signed up with Disability Resources. The revised version of this letter appears in Appendix A – Request for Research Participants.

Using this method to contact potential interview participants meant that all research subjects were self-selected. When I met with Ms. Johnson, I also proposed attending one or more developmental English or math classes, which many students with disabilities attend when they begin college. She thought it would afford more confidentiality if students would voluntarily contact me, using the information we provided. I decided to go along with her advice, even though it significantly restricted the sample population.

After I created the Request for Research Participants letter, I met with Brent Boyer, Associate Director of Disabilities Services for Students at Sonoma State. Mr. Boyer was also enthusiastic about using the letter to contact Sonoma State students. He
used the same method that Ms. Johnson had recommended, and sent the letter to students on his Disabilities Services for Students contact list. As a result, I was able to contact a number of SSU students during March 2011. I also spoke with Chris Schulz, Coordinator for the Disabled Students Program at College of Marin (COM) in mid-March. He asked me to send him a version of the request for participants for College of Marin students with disabilities. By the end of March, there were no responses to the COM Request for Research Participants letter.

**Interview materials and procedure.** To help me analyze and present my data, I designed my interview materials and procedure so that all subjects are answering the same questions. Since I used a multiple-case model, I wanted each interview and data collection protocol to be as similar as possible. I consulted research articles and texts by Robert K. Yin (2009) for guidance on “within-case” design. I created a worksheet to help me record my codes and organize my notes. I used an audio recorder for the interviews, and then transcribed the results for data analysis purposes. By using these materials and procedures, I could easily summarize my findings and draw meaningful conclusions.

Appendix B contains the Pre-Interview Notes pages, which recorded demographic information on interview subjects. Appendix C contains the Interview Questions and Note Sheet, which includes a column for keeping track of time, a column for adding thematic codes, and a larger column to note students’ remarks. Appendix D contains the Informed Consent for Interview Participants form. Appendix E contains a chronological listing of all interviews with student participants.
Additional Resources Used in Study

An important source of support for the study were background interviews I held with Disability Services faculty and staff at College of Marin, Santa Rosa Junior College, and Sonoma State University. In the literature about qualitative research and evaluation, these sources are described as “key informants” (Patton, 2002). The interviews with disabilities services providers helped me define the characteristic of students with disabilities at the postsecondary level, and identify students who could serve as representatives of this population. Over a period of months, as I conducted the literature review, I also talked with secondary special education teachers, counselors, and transition coordinators, to gain a greater understanding of programs currently in place to help students in the transition process. When cited in the text, facts derived from these conversations are listed as “personal communication,” along with the date of the interview, phone call, or email.

I used an additional resource by finding an outside reviewer for my interview questions. I contacted Jeffrey Ludovici, MA, a consultant who works with college students, including those with disabilities. He made some helpful suggestions that I incorporated before interviewing any students. Another key informant from the local community helped me test the revised interview questions. Deborah Paggi works part-time as an instructional assistant in one of the Santa Rosa Junior College language laboratories for English Learners. She also has a college-age son with a disability. I know Ms. Paggi as a colleague from the PreCollege program at Sonoma State. After I rehearsed the questions and follow-up prompts with her, Ms. Paggi’s advice helped me frame the introductory remarks I used with students, before starting with the interview questions.
Data Collection and Analysis

The Pre-interview Notes were helpful in ensuring that each interview would begin in a similar manner. I collected basic demographic information about each student before turning on the audio recorder. To introduce myself, I used the same brief paragraph before each interview. I gave each student a “code name” to ensure that their responses were kept confidential. Each student had a chance to read and sign the consent form I provided. I also asked students if they wished to receive a transcript of their answers. The majority of them received this transcript within two weeks of their interview.

During the interviews, I used the Interview Questions and Note Sheet to keep track of the time, note possible themes as students were speaking, and write a brief list of answers for each question. After transcribing the student’s recorded answers, I cross-referenced the number of answers corresponding to a set of thematic codes. The purpose of comparing the different responses to each question was to see if there was any similarity or agreement among the participants. The results of the data analysis are recorded in Chapter 4.

Using the code key. I created a simple code key to use while the students were speaking to me during the interview. This practice adapts the grounded theory method as described by Glaser and Strauss (1967), to provide initial categories or themes which may or may not be supported after data analysis. My interview note sheets included a column to note the time, and a column for initial or emerging themes. The thematic code key was also visible in the footer of each interview note sheet, where I assigned a color to each code. When I heard the student say something that indicated a concern for independence, I could simply write the word “pink” in the column. Adding the time made it easier to
find that part of the interview later, as I was transcribing it. Using eleven simple codes to start was sufficient to give some shape to the subsequent data analysis effort. After collecting data from several participants, I added more codes as additional themes started to show up in the narratives. However, it turned out that not all the codes I included were necessary. I deleted a code for “difficulties unrelated to disability” that none of my participants used. If I had included the over-thirty-five transfer students, this code would have been useful, but it never seemed to apply to my core group of participants. I added the code “pink” denoting independence during the first interview, since it was immediately obvious that this was a theme of importance in many students’ lives.

A final list of the codes used appears below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Red</th>
<th>difficulty with obtaining services</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Orange</td>
<td>academic challenges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yellow</td>
<td>time management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green</td>
<td>helpful individuals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigo</td>
<td>improved skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purple</td>
<td>being well prepared</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>feeling unsafe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pink</td>
<td>independence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brown</td>
<td>increased self-advocacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gray</td>
<td>exclusion or prejudice</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Red: The rationale for including the theme of “difficulty with obtaining services” came from conversations with students and parents while I was working at public high schools. If students recalled any difficulties with obtaining accommodations or services while answering Question 3, that code could be useful. It could also apply if students encountered any difficulties at the college level. Supported by data in Newman (2009).

- Orange: The theme of “academic challenges” refers to the difficulties reflected in the demographic information on the college population. Since many college students take more than four years to complete college, and a significant portion of college freshman never complete their studies, it made sense to include this category. However, this theme was not correlated to any particular question, until the clarifying questions at the very end of the interview. Supported by data in Getzel and Briel (2006), as well as Saenz and Barerra (2007).
Yellow: The theme of “time management” could be expected to occur in a variety of contexts. Many transition interventions attempt to help students improve their time management skills. Supported by evidence in Dolber (1993).

Green and Blue: The theme of “helpful individuals” provides a chance to track help-seeking behavior among students. A closely related theme is “family support,” which could reflect a family’s emphasis on the importance of education. These themes also relate to the availability of mentors, which is a large topic of research in several academic disciplines. Supported by evidence in Lindstrom et al. (2009), as well as Getzel and Briel (2006).

Indigo and Purple: The rationale for including “improved skills” as a theme is that college students may feel that they have already improved their skills since leaving high school. Alternatively, they may feel that they need to make additional improvements in a number of areas. The skills are not necessarily academic, but could also include social skills, communication skills, or other life skills such as stress management. Most transition interventions focus on improving academic skills, while a few focus on improving social or communication skills. A related theme is “being well prepared,” which could apply to any type of pre-college preparation. Specific discussion of skills occurs in Anderson-Inman et al. (1999) and Lahm (2003).

Gray and Black: Including a theme for “exclusion or prejudice” ensures that students who feel less equipped to fully join the college community will be able to articulate their difficulties in this area. It is possible that students feel a sense of inclusion at the college level, and will only refer to exclusion in terms of the past. However, this is by no means guaranteed. The theme “feeling unsafe” refers to the challenges of living among strangers for the first time, especially if students have come from a different area. These factors are discussed in the context of social action in Lincoln and Guba (2002).

Pink and Brown: The related themes of “independence” and “self-advocacy” illustrate the growing maturity and confidence of college students in the nineteen-to-twenty-six age group. When leaving home and venturing to college, students often express their new-found ability to choose their own schedules, friends, and
interests. Making choices about obtaining services is likely to be a part of an overall pattern of developing greater self-advocacy skills. Supported by evidence from Wehmeyer, Gragoudas, and Shogren (2006), as well as Getzel and Thoma (2008).
Chapter 4
Results and Data Analysis

This chapter presents the results collected from interview participants. Audio files from the interviews became the basis for typed transcripts. To provide a convenient method for comparing responses, I used thematic codes as explained in Chapter 3. Using transcripts marked with these thematic codes, I visually compared and analyzed the participants’ responses to each interview question, as described in the following sections. Within responses to each interview question, I tracked how often certain themes occurred. Themes mentioned repeatedly by the majority of participants provided evidence about the types of transition interventions that produce positive outcomes for students with disabilities in postsecondary education. The results provided answers to the overall research question, “How does transition preparation in the areas of academic strategies and life skills supports prepare students with disabilities to succeed in postsecondary education?”

Analyzing Interview Responses

Question 1: Important academic strategies. As the interviews began, participating students had the chance to speak about something straightforward and familiar to them: academic strategies they use in their classes. Seven of the nine participants volunteered specific academic strategies during the first ten minutes of the interview. These strategies ranged from preparing diagrams and outlines, using a note-taker for lecture classes, getting extended time on tests, and using a planner, to finding a private, quiet place to study. Each of these academic strategies fitted a thematic description as “improved skills,” because the interview participants clearly indicated that
their proficiency has increased through the repeated use of these strategies. For example, an interview participant described how she relies on highlighting important information:

“I’ve been doing it, probably, since high school, I would say. But more so, I’ve been doing it since I came to college” (Peggy). Another student explained, “I didn’t really take much notes in high school. Usually they put them on the board, and you just kind of copy it. I’ve learned that typing on my laptop is a lot better, because I can type faster than I can think” (Jane).

For each occurrence of these improved skills or strategies in a transcript, I underlined the phrase with an indigo colored pencil. After all transcripts were marked, I spread pages across a table to compare the copies visually, noting the frequency that “improved skills” appeared within the first two pages. By using a chart to tally the answers, it was easy to see that more indigo underlines appeared than any other color.

Besides study skills, some students also mentioned improvements in test-taking skills:

“I’ve taken some exams in the classroom, and I see how well I do. If I don’t do as well, that I know I’m struggling, then I need to have the test-taking accommodations for that on a case-by-case” (Michelle). One student described the source of an academic strategy, which she learned during the Freshman Interest Group course: “They told us a lot of like, important information, like how to write an outline for an essay” (Peggy).

The second most common color on the first two pages was yellow, denoting the “time management” theme. Four of the nine students specifically mentioned time management strategies, such as to-do lists, within the first ten minutes. A third-year student described time management as a challenge: “I’m still trying to learn how to prioritize my time. I learned a lot of time management skills. Putting that to the test is
Students indicated that they had used planners and to-do lists in high school, but that these tools gained increased importance once they entered college: “I just have a lot of good time management I’ve learned from different programs. So definitely I have to be on top of things, and I have to have my life very, kind of organized and scheduled” (Jane).

Without exception, each student was quickly able to describe these academic and time management strategies as important. While describing an academic strategy (highlighting), the student echoed a part of the question by including the statement “it helps me focus on the more important information” (Peggy). Referring to time management, a student said, “Probably the most important is giving myself more time. So making sure I put it as a first priority that I take my time going through it” (Wendy).

The next prevalent theme in responses to the first question was specific references to “helpful individuals.” Seven of the nine participants mentioned meeting with friends, classmates, roommates, or tutors to study. Five of the nine described working with a note-taker: “I also get together with my note-takers, we go over the information then as well” (Kay). Clarifying questions about study groups and tutoring from Learning Skills Services also prompted students to describe using those strategies. A second-year student explained: “They also have specialists, and I go to a math specialist. That’s, right now, I’m trying to work out the one unit math tutoring class” (Casey). However, none of the students needed to use tutoring for every class.

As first-year students, most participants had been required to use the Writing Center to support an English class. Many of the students used tutors from the Learning Skills Services program for math classes. However, their initial responses to questions
about academic strategies centered around actions they could take on their own. Four of
the students included specific statements concerning self-advocacy or independence, such
as “I really try to work it out” (Casey) or “It’s your responsibility on your part to make
sure that you are in communication with the professor” (Josie).

As anticipated, there was considerable overlap between classroom-oriented
academic strategies and a wide range of personal skills, such as stress management,
working with groups, communicating with professors, and scheduling time to go to
tutoring. Three students mentioned the need to maintain or improve attention skills. One
student articulated this within the first minute of the interview, saying that he needs to
“keep a centered and focused brain” (Randy). For some students, working with groups
increased their focus, especially if they were able to discuss concepts and procedures
during class. Other students explained that they prefer studying in a quiet place, and
might choose to listen to music to block distractions: “My classes this semester are much
more writing-based, so I find it’s much more easy to concentrate if I listen to music”
(Kay). Three students mentioned strategies that helped them feel well prepared, including
getting textbooks early.

A few students offered a source for their current academic strategies. During the
first question, one student mentioned that the Freshman Interest Group class provided
some good advice about time management and stress management, while another student
credited her mother with a particular study strategy: “I got that idea from my mom. She
knows how much I struggle with stuff, she said you should probably take breaks, it’s
going to help you learn things more” (Danielle). Professors, Learning Skills Services
staff, and Writing Center staff received credit for helping with assignments, but none of
the students explained whether they learned specific strategies from these sources. Instead, making time to utilize these on-campus resources was mentioned as an important strategy, in response to the last clarifying question about tutoring. For example, a freshman student explained: “I spent a lot of time last semester with my professors, getting help and going to the math support center” (Kay).

The majority of the answers to the first interview question centered around strategies that helped student’s master academic content in the college environment. Seven students answered in ten minutes or less (two page transcripts), while two students extended their answers to twelve to fifteen minutes, mentioning many topics that anticipated the next question about life-skills supports. Besides answering the interview question about which academic strategies are most important for success, these responses also answer the research question by suggesting the connection between transition preparation experiences and specific academic strategies. Students indicated that they have built on existing academic skills and added new skills in response to the greater demands of college academic workloads. They appear to have adopted improved skills as a response to particular classes or situations, but most were not specific about the source of the improvements. A third-year student was one of the few who reflected back to a specific transition experience: “When I was taking remedial math, here when I first started going here—my math teacher told me, that her biggest tip to students, is to re-type your notes, after you come home from class” (Josie). The student discussed the difference this technique made: “I didn’t actually start doing it until last semester... When I started doing it, I was shocked at how much of the material I was able to absorb” (Josie).
Question 2: Important life-skills supports. For the majority of students, the first response to the question about life-skills supports involved people who have offered them support. Eight of the nine students responded by listing various people on campus, including the Disabilities Services staff, the Counseling and Psychological Services staff, individual professors, individual tutors, and a variety of friends and roommates. As a second-year student described: “I go to the psychology center, the CAPS program, it’s called, on campus. They have like a stress management person” (Casey). When students hear the word “support,” they apparently picture the faces of certain individuals. In addition, the two students who use Department of Rehabilitation services both indicated that DOR counselors offered helpful support: “They do what they can to give me the most support that they can” (Michelle). Each of these responses illustrated the theme of “helpful individuals” in the context of life-skills supports.

Three of the nine students started this topic by mentioning the Freshman Interest Group or the First Year Experience as a source of life-skills support. A freshman student described the Freshman Interest Group orientation: “They had a summer orientation where I met my roommate, she’s in my FIG class… they have a lot of events within the village that I try to participate in” (Kay). Five students mentioned parent or family support within the first five minutes that they discussed the life-skills topic, while the remainder of the students brought up family members as a response to clarifying questions. A freshman explained the value of family experiences: “I have my family, I have my sister, she’s gone through college. She can help me through, kind of like, the college process, going to college with a disability” (Jane). Only one student mentioned difficulties in getting life-skills support: “It’s hard, for like the psychiatrist, because I
don’t have a car” (Casey). Due to a lack of transportation, she had a concern about getting services from an off-campus psychiatrist in a timely manner.

An important factor that the students mentioned was their close proximity to the Sonoma State campus. All but one interview participant is currently living on campus, with the remaining student living within walking distance. Using resources available on campus is much easier when there is no need to drive. However, some students also described problems associated with life on campus. Even with the suites available on the Sonoma State campus, there is less privacy in student housing than most of the students were accustomed to at home. As seen in the response to Question 1, three students mentioned the need to improve their attention and focus skills. One of these students said that this year’s housing didn’t include sufficient quiet study rooms, so he now needs to use the library more often: “That was kind of hard, because there’s not really a place, other than the library, that I can go to really kind of focus” (Randy). Only two students reported changing roommates or moving to a different residence, in both instances during the first two semesters of college attendance. The students reported these housing challenges as relatively minor adjustments that didn’t adversely affect their studies: “I talked to my residential life coordinator, I told him I wanted to move out, had to get approved for moving out first” (Josie).

The life-skills support question uncovered some themes that were not on my list of transition-related topics: one of these was career plans. Four students said that they have plans to teach, or to work with children. Three students have already volunteered in classrooms or provided in-home care for children. One student didn’t mention this career-related information until she responded to a clarifying question about using the Health
Center: “most of the times I got sick, were from volunteering in that classroom” (Peggy).

Asking about health problems turned out to be an opportunity for “following up surprises,” a technique for assessing data quality described in Miles and Huberman (1994). For a healthy young adult, seeking medical attention represents an exception, or surprise, within normal daily patterns. Asking students whether they used the Health Center or other medical resources revealed what kind of support systems these young adults could quickly utilize in an out-of-the-ordinary situation. One student had scheduled surgery (for her visual impairment), one student was referred to an off-campus orthopedist for a knee injury, and one student had to go to the emergency room after a concussion that happened in her residence hall. In every case, the students expressed satisfaction with the medical care they received, and were pleased that they were able to complete all their course work in spite of these physical setbacks. The student who had realignment surgery explained “the small classes in my major... were incredibly supportive and understanding, while my eyes readjusted” (Wendy). This description is consistent with the overall impression that interview participants view their friends, classmates, and professors as potential sources of support, even for events beyond the classroom.

After the first few minutes of discussion about life skills, the answers from third and fourth year students began to diverge from the first and second year students to some extent. The younger students responded to queries about specific sources of support by listing parents, siblings, friends, and specific professors who they felt were helpful. They also tended to gravitate back towards academic concerns: “One of my big things, is when I get homework, I do it right away” (Jane). The older students offered more statements
about career goals, independent living, and self-advocacy. For example, the 26-year-old transfer student immediately answered the question about life skills by saying, “I try to maintain a social life that’s balanced” (Michelle).

The life-skills topic also caused one student, a junior, to make the first mention of possible exclusion or prejudice due to a disability: “I don’t tell people outright, that I have it” (Josie). Making this statement in relation to life skills implies that this student, who has Asperger’s syndrome, has some degree of anxiety over acceptance within the college environment. Unlike the other students, she has doubts about how to ask for and receive support from others. This student gave extended answers to the life-skills question, using detailed anecdotes to illustrate her points. She communicates well, but uses a different style than most others. It might be possible to interpret this student’s responses as “outliers” in cases where they consistently differ from responses offered by the majority of participants. Since the question about life skills is more open to interpretation than the question about academic strategies, it is natural that responses should begin to diverge. In addition, as participants become more accustomed to the interview situation, responses are less likely to be predictable. By the time a student has been speaking for fifteen to twenty minutes, he or she is likely to gain energy and confidence as the artificiality of the interview situation begins to fade.

The connection between the life-skills support question and the overall topic of transition preparation is best illustrated when students mentioned experiences during their freshman year at college. The benefits of the Freshman Year Experience (FYE) program were summarized by a participant: “It kind of gives you a community to be with, and kind of keep going” (Jane). The life-skills supports offered in the Freshman Year Experience
and Freshman Interest Group programs are specific to first-year, residential college students, whether or not they have disabilities. Forming relationships with classmates, roommates, professors, and support providers is a recommended practice for all students entering college, but is particularly important for those students with an identified disability. The responses of the interview participants confirmed the research of Lindstrom, Downey-McCarthy, Kerewsky, and Flannery (2009), which found that students who establishing ongoing relationships were likely to succeed in the college environment.

**Question 3: Valuable transition advice or services in high school.** Four of the nine students answered this question by recalling specific transition experiences that took place during high school. Of these four, only two students mentioned transition counseling and guidance that occurred within a Special Education context. A fourth-year student recalled: “The top of my list was the chair of our special ed department at my high school, was incredible” (Wendy). A third-year student described a discussion during her senior year in high school: “My teacher asked everybody, so, what are your biggest graduation jitters right now?” (Josie). A freshman student recalled participating in Link Crew during high school: this program trains high school students to help middle school students with the transition to high school. In schools that use Link Crew, participation is not restricted to special education students. The remaining student, a sophomore, recalled hearing about Sonoma State quite early on, during her 10th grade year. She interpreted transition as a reference to her college search, which certainly included considerations about obtaining disability services, but was in most respects similar to the college search process for any general education student.
Seven of the nine students interpreted the question about transition advice or services as a reference to specific events, recalling occasions when individuals helped them with their college search or other college preparation such as writing an application essay. General education teachers provided assistance for these mainstreamed students: “My English teachers were also very helpful with teaching me how to write a college paper and a resume” (Kay). The job descriptions of the people helping them with their transition to college varied widely: one student mentioned a high school counselor, another student mentioned the school psychologist. One student’s disabilities were identified at the end of high school: “I didn’t really get help until the last year of high school. So like, it was, I saw an educational therapist. So I was able to use a lot of the techniques that we went over with her” (Casey). The two students who started the topic by mentioning transition advice from their special education teachers expanded their narratives at this point. They recalled additional details and built stories about working with parents, family members, and special education teachers while choosing colleges. The other five students mentioned family friends with expertise in the college application process, as well as high school teachers who integrated preparation for college into their general education curriculum. One of these students discussed help provided through family friends, and added: “I don’t think my school helped me all that much, my high school” (Jane).

Responses to the clarifying question about college visits amounted to a continuation of the college search narrative. Eight of the nine students made statements about additional help and support they received from individuals during their college application and search process. One student recalled: “Back in high school, I had a
teacher there, who was also my mentor. He really encouraged me to visit different college campuses” (Michelle). These individuals included parents, friends of older siblings who were already in college, the older siblings, teachers, and education professionals outside of their high schools. Two of the three students from Southern California mentioned receiving support from “outside” professionals other than their teachers or guidance counselors. One of these students mentioned an aunt who is a college counselor, and who was helpful when considering colleges. Another student, who attended a private school, described the support offered by a friend’s mother, a guidance counselor at a public high school: “she compiled a list for me... and this was one of them” (Randy).

At this point in the interviews, it became apparent that none of the interview participants grew up in Sonoma County. As the students’ college search narratives unfolded, it seemed that a large part of their stories centered around considering colleges out of their immediate area. The stories included comments about Sonoma State’s reputation for small class sizes and supportive professors: “it’s not a big school, so there’s more attention on the students than on anything else” (Peggy). A discussion of the campus environment provides an opportunity to mention negative evidence: none of these students indicated that they feel unsafe at Sonoma State. When I initially created thematic codes, I included “feeling unsafe” after hearing that some Santa Rosa Junior College students had concerns about going to night classes (C. Lipson, personal communication with D. Paggi, February 10, 2011). When I interviewed two older transfer students, without using their transcripts in this analysis, one of them indicated that she had concerns about safety related to her off-campus housing situation in Santa Rosa (C.
Lipson, personal communication, March 15, 2011). By contrast, the perception of a safe campus environment at Sonoma State was likely to be a factor in college choices made by students with disabilities.

The results for Question 3 diverged significantly from the comments about strategies and supports collected in Questions 1 and 2. Among the four interview questions, I began to think of Question 3 as the most poorly written. I had hoped to find out if students recalled specific transition interventions from their high school case managers or other educators, but most of the students interpreted the question as an invitation to talk about how and why they chose to come to Sonoma State. Students also talked about initial experiences during their first semester on campus, such as a Freshman Year Experience class: “We definitely had a lot of activities, and used time management. Created a lot of friends” (Danielle).

The vagueness of the third question also spurred a few students to begin narratives about themes I hadn’t expected. One student talked about starting her career preparation efforts early, as far back as middle school, because of her experiences with a sibling with severe disabilities, instead of the result of ITP efforts in high school: “I started when I was 10, like, volunteering and working with 12-year-olds” (Casey). Another student initiated a theme about leaving behind the difficulties of high school: “this is only a certain amount of time, before college, a brand new beginning” (Randy). A student recalled working with a speech therapist during middle school to improve her eye contact during conversations, and explained, “I’ve gotten better with it… There are still those little things that I have to get past” (Josie). At the time, I coded Josie’s statement as “improved skills,” meaning that her communication skills have improved.
However, she made the statement soon after describing inappropriate assumptions about people with disabilities. In this context, it seems that her statement about improving her social interactions could also be a response to exclusion or prejudice.

Vague interview questions tend to produce responses that are difficult to categorize. However, the question about transition advice or services received during high school did produce responses that described transition preparation activities. While transition activities such as a college search or help with application essays are common to all prospective college students, these activities are of particular value to students with disabilities. Once again, students voiced the opinion that having individual supporters during these transition activities, whether they occurred during high school or at the beginning of college, helped support their success.

**Question 4: Advice for 11th and 12th grade students.** Five of the nine students emphasized various aspects of self-advocacy in their advice to 11th and 12th grade students with disabilities. One of the youngest participants made a very strong statement about self-advocacy: “I definitely say, use your resources” (Jane). She continued by advising new students to go to Disability Services, have testing done, apply for services, and use the Writing Center. Her advice reflected her recent experiences as a college freshman. However, she completely ignored the second half of the question, which included the qualifier “to help them prepare to succeed in college.” Other students who discussed self-advocacy also focused on things students could do during the first year of college. Interestingly, the fourth-year student in this group was the exception, because she focused on self-advocacy while still in high school: “really know your rights as a student. I learned that in high school” (Wendy).
Three students responded with advice about improving specific academic or life skills, including finding ways to improve focus and attention: “Definitely study breaks, study for half hour, take 15 minute breaks. So your mind doesn’t get overwhelmed” (Danielle). Five students followed up their initial remarks about improved skills or self-advocacy with examples of how they prepared themselves for college. An example from a third-year student: “Towards 12th grade, go on campus tours of the colleges that you’re looking at, if you haven’t already done it in 11th grade” (Josie). Specific advice on how to prepare for college included starting college searches or college visits early, doing volunteer work in areas of interest, and talking to older students about majors, professions, or interests. A freshman student advised: “I would recommend to them, that they get out and participate” (Kay).

The clarifying questions for this section attempted to reveal any areas where a student’s responses might reflect exceptional situations within their overall experiences. Asking a student “What surprised you?” assumes that the student was, in general, very well prepared to begin college life. Five students mentioned the difficulty of academic work at the university level: “What surprised me is college is really hard!” (Jane). Three students answered this question by invoking their perceptions of Sonoma State classrooms as welcoming, supportive environments: “professors have been open, and really understanding” (Michelle). The implication behind that statement is that some college professors might not be willing to make accommodations for students with disabilities. The remaining student explained an unexpected situation with her roommate during freshman year: “we were just... so fed up with each other” (Danielle).
Clarifying questions about difficult or easy areas drew a variety of responses. Five students stated that academic work gave them the most trouble. A succinct example: “The most trouble... math classes? (laughs) Just math classes” (Wendy). Every student listed specific areas where advance preparation or improved skills made life easier, including working with note-takers and, for the student with a hearing impairment, a sign language interpreter. One student used this opportunity to talk about what she called core values: “you still work hard, and you know you need to get good grades, and that quitting is not an option” (Casey).

The final clarifying question, “Have your goals changed?” reflected students’ improved self-advocacy skills, which include planning for life after college. Two students began college hoping to become teachers, and still plan to pursue that goal despite the difficulties. One second-year student said her career goals have not changed, but she now thinks a different major will help her reach that goal. In addition, she has branched out into some new areas: “I’m taking anthropology classes, I added that as a minor” (Casey). The rest of the students say they have changed or adjusted their academic and career goals, for example: “I’ve changed, three different majors, and I think it’s part of the learning experience” (Michelle). This section of the interview also prompted some participants to continue with themes not included in the data analysis. Five students extended their discussion of goals to include career plans. A second-year student explained: “I want to do this, I want to be an ultrasound technician. I want to help people. So definitely less on my problem, and more like getting past it. I know I can now” (Danielle). For purposes of data analysis, these career-oriented responses were included
in the self-advocacy category, but it might have been more appropriate to add a separate category.

Another aspect of self-advocacy mentioned near the end of the interviews was the importance of communication skills. I had considered including a separate category for communicating the need for accommodations, in the context of self-advocacy. As one freshman student noted, “communication is probably what is really important about college. Make sure your professors know what you need” (Kay). A second-year student offered the following advice: “talk to teachers, or your counselors, because they have most of the advice that you’ll probably need” (Peggy). Communication skills are useful in many contexts besides the simple categories of academic strategies and life-skills supports. Since receptive and expressive communication involves the interaction of many complex transactional skills, evaluating growth and success in communication skills during the young adult years is an undertaking far beyond the scope of the current research study.

The final theme deserving of attention at the close of the interviews relates to new beginnings and exploring options. Four students indicated that they thought branching out and exploring different possibilities is an important part of life during the college years. According to one of these students: “you can develop more... knowing what you want to do, a better understanding of what you can do” (Casey). Themes such as “trying new things” and “venturing out” were coded either for independence, or for self-advocacy, depending on the context of where they occurred. It is possible that these themes should be placed in a special category, but since relatively few students articulated these ideas, placing an additional code into the analysis seemed unnecessary.
The function of the fourth interview question was to confirm and expand on the earlier responses. Asking interview participants what advice they would give to 11th and 12th-grade students often caused them to reiterate statements they had made earlier. However, there were subtle differences in the responses when comparing answers to Question 1 and Question 4. While the emphasis continued to be on improving specific academic and life skills, there was more focus on self-advocacy in the responses to Question 4. This shift to advising and valuing self-advocacy in the postsecondary context is supported in the literature as seen in Getzel and Thoma (2008). The comment made by one freshman, that “communication is key” (Kay), echoes the findings of Getzel and Briel (2006), which recommended assertive communication among other adaptive strategies. There was little discussion about any direct cause-and-effect acquisition of self-advocacy skills. In the context of the advice offered by the interview participants, it appears that experiential learning, including trying new strategies, seemed to offer the best chance to develop the necessary skills. As one second-year student commented: “It’s just like being open-minded, and don’t be so set in your ways. I mean, going with the flow more, and really picking and choosing your battles” (Casey).

Summary of Interview Responses

After completing the analysis of each question, a final summary of student responses to all questions shows that certain themes recurred across several questions. For student responses offered prior to any clarifying questions, there seemed to be a definite pattern for students to focus on helpful individuals. These individuals helped students with academic strategies, life-skills supports, and preparation for college. The second most common response from students focused on improved skills. Students listed
specific skills that helped them manage their academic classes, and reiterated the importance of these skills in their advice to high school students. The theme of “being well prepared” occurred in responses to all four questions. In the context of advice to 11th and 12th grade students, being prepared meant to start college searches and other tasks related to entering college as early as possible.

Prior to the clarifying questions, the themes of family support and difficulty with obtaining services only occurred with the question about important life-skills supports. Students mentioned time management as an important academic strategy, and recommended self-advocacy skills for students preparing to enter college. Each of these emerging themes was predicted in the literature on the transition to postsecondary education. In particular, Lindstrom et al. (2009) described the importance of seeking out individualized services and supports, while Wehman and Thoma (2006) listed various adaptive strategies as important components of transition preparation efforts.

**Student Responses Offered Prior to/After Clarifying Questions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Question 1: Academic Strategies</th>
<th>Question 2: Life-skills Supports</th>
<th>Question 3: Services in High School</th>
<th>Question 4: Advice for 11th/12th graders</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>helpful individuals</td>
<td>7/3</td>
<td>8/3</td>
<td>7/8</td>
<td>0/3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>improved skills</td>
<td>7/3</td>
<td>0/1</td>
<td>0/1</td>
<td>3/9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>time management</td>
<td>4/3</td>
<td>0/1</td>
<td>0/0</td>
<td>0/1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>being well prepared</td>
<td>3/1</td>
<td>3/1</td>
<td>4/1</td>
<td>5/3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>family support</td>
<td>0/0</td>
<td>5/2</td>
<td>0/1</td>
<td>0/1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>difficulty with services</td>
<td>0/0</td>
<td>1/1</td>
<td>0/0</td>
<td>0/2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>self-advocacy</td>
<td>0/2</td>
<td>0/4</td>
<td>0/2</td>
<td>5/9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>academic challenges</td>
<td>0/1</td>
<td>0/1</td>
<td>0/2</td>
<td>0/5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>independence</td>
<td>0/2</td>
<td>0/1</td>
<td>0/1</td>
<td>0/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>exclusion or prejudice</td>
<td>0/0</td>
<td>0/1</td>
<td>0/1</td>
<td>0/3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As the interview participants responded to the clarifying questions, the themes they discussed showed more variety. Students continued to describe instances where specific individuals helped them with academic strategies, life-skills supports, and college preparation, and encouraged high school students to seek support in these areas. As part of their advice to prospective college students, interview participants re-iterated the significance of improved skills, including self-advocacy skills. The question “What surprised you?” caused some students to explain the difficulty of college work when compared to high school expectations.

The clarifying questions also illustrated some of the “minority reports” in areas such as difficulties with obtaining services, and exclusion or prejudice due to a disability. As they considered giving advice to prospective college students, a few participants described occasions in high school when teachers did not give them accommodations, or when classmates showed inappropriate behavior towards people with disabilities. As one student recalled: “Really know your rights as a student. I learned that in high school, because I had a teacher who didn’t accommodate” (Wendy). A significant number of students discussed career plans, an area that was not included in the original list of codes. Finally, some students exhibited an interest in exploring new opportunities and “branching out” while in college, including changing majors. A student explained: “I’m participating in different things that I never thought I could in the past” (Michelle). Since this theme is closely related to the more general desire for independence, some of the statements about opportunities were included in that category.
Inclusive learning experiences. After completing the four interview questions, most of the students had additional insights to offer. Their advice, helpful hints, and narratives about developing self-advocacy skills extended some of the interviews beyond the realm of data analysis. These responses indicated that participants had begun to see themselves as co-researchers within the academic community. The interview process encouraged participants to continue learning about themselves: “knowing things about themselves that they didn’t know—or at least were not fully aware of—before the interview” (Patton, 2002: 405). Giving postsecondary students the opportunity to become transition experts provides useful information for parents, secondary teachers, and university researchers. In addition, the participants illustrate the value of inclusive learning experiences for all students and teachers. As one student said, “We are all here, regardless of what’s wrong with us or what isn’t wrong with us” (Josie). It is certainly an honor and a privilege to hear the voices of these exceptional individuals.
Chapter 5
Discussion and Conclusions

“Take the hard way... it’ll be better in the long run.” (Casey)

Using one-on-one interviews to collect information from postsecondary students with disabilities provides an opportunity to reflect upon the specific context shared by all participants. Since the participating students initiated contact with the interviewer, they comprise a self-selected sample within the larger community of undergraduate students at Sonoma State University. Participants mentioned some transition preparation efforts during middle school and high school, but they indicated that the period immediately before and during their first college year held the most significance for them. The interview responses provided important information that helps address the primary research question of this study:

How does transition preparation in the areas of academic strategies and life skills supports prepare students with disabilities to succeed in postsecondary education?

During the interviews, participants made judgments about which academic strategies and life-skills supports were most important to them. The interview transcripts and subsequent data analysis reflect the assessments of the participants about the most worthwhile activities for the initial transition from high school to college, as well as ongoing improvements in self-advocacy and self-determination during college. In the interview responses, the majority of informants refer to or mention a few key themes.

The themes most frequently mentioned by the participants gain significance when considered in the context of the larger academic community. After completing the data analysis and preparing a summary of the results, it appears that two themes predominate in the interview transcripts: helpful individuals and improved skills.
Helpful Individuals

When asked about important academic strategies, life-skills supports, and other transition interventions provided before and during college, the majority of interview participants (eight out of nine) described specific instances when they received help from specific people. Descriptions of the support offered by these “helpful individuals” also occurred in their responses to clarifying questions. These individuals included peers, family members, and university faculty and staff. This trend is consistent with research findings described by Trammel and Hathaway (2007), which showed that students with disabilities sought help from their professors or other college staff members with the same frequency as other college students.

Interview participants indicated that their growing self-advocacy skills helped facilitate their ability to make contact with and collaborate with people in the college environment. “You’re only in classes for a semester, so it’s important to try to talk to your teachers as often as you can” (Peggy). Ongoing contact with Disability Services provided significant support. “Definitely, to go and use all your resources, go to the DSS” (Jane). Relationships with peers were highly valued by most interview participants: “Friendship gets you through a lot of problems, because, it’s definitely a stress-reliever” (Danielle). This aligns with existing research that highlights how college students surveyed by Chiba and Low (2007) reported that interactions with classmates were beneficial in their adjustment to college life.

The theme of “helpful individuals” is significant because it represents day-to-day interactions between students and available support providers at the postsecondary level. In this regard, students seek help from specific individuals to help them master academic
content, or look for people who will enhance their personal sense of well-being within the campus environment. The wording of their comments regarding routine events, such as giving a Disabilities Services counselor the paperwork needed to gain accommodations, indicates that they see these events as personal interactions: “They’re definitely really understanding and helpful” (Danielle). The interview participants who received services tended to recall and value people more vividly than paperwork. Preparing for college, planning a class schedule each semester, informing professors about accommodations, and studying with classmates all provide illustrations of how students collaborate with others to achieve academic and personal goals. These collaborations are significant because they demonstrate how students can increase their participation within the academic community, and within the larger community of educated adults. As reported by Lindstrom et al. (2009), students who interact with a “designated individual” tend to be the most successful within the college environment.

**Improved Skills**

The second predominating theme is “improved skills,” which can be defined as “specific academic strategies within the context of college courses.” As they responded to the research questions (notably the clarifying questions), participants re-emphasized the importance of improved skills, especially when offering advice on college preparation. For example, Danielle noted “Definitely, study breaks: study for half an hour, take fifteen minute breaks.” Responses to the interview question about academic strategies also addressed the overall research question, and connected transition preparation experiences with specific academic strategies that were seen as helpful or important. Comments provided by the respondents indicated that they built upon existing academic skills and
adopted new skills in response to particular classes or situations. For example, a student with high school theater training had this advice on participating during regular college classes: “Make sure everybody else can hear what you think” (Kay). The use of a variety of strategies and supports, reflecting students’ personal choices, also appears in the literature on self-determination. According to Getzel and Thoma (2008), transition strategies are most effective when each student has opportunities to use self-determination when implementing the strategies.

In addition, students connected their overall progress and success to improved academic strategies and life skills: “You eventually reach that goal, but it’s a journey to get there. It’s what makes the academic experience more valuable” (Michelle). The achievements highlight that exceptional students are able to develop the skills they need in the postsecondary environment. Besides improving specific academic or life skills, students also increased their awareness of their own particular needs: “I’ll take being normal and fine, and able to do my homework in 30 minutes, instead of like, three hours” (Jane). Self-advocacy was the most important aspect of personal growth mentioned by participants: “Know what your rights are, and be okay with accepting the help that you need” (Wendy). This evidence about academic strategies, life skills, and self-advocacy were similar to findings by Wehman and Thoma (2006), which recommended offering adaptive strategies as part of the transition curriculum.

Conclusions Based on Evidence

Universities such as Sonoma State are required to provide accommodations within the learning environment so that students with disabilities can participate in the same college courses as students without disabilities. In many cases, as seen through the
interview responses collected from Sonoma State undergraduates, students successfully communicate the need for these accommodations. However, relying on a self-selected sample of highly articulate informants could possibly overstate the extent to which all students are prepared to communicate effectively with peers, professors, and Disabilities Services staff members about their needs. The fact that participating students emphasized the need for specific skills such as note-taking, which often includes the cooperation of both the instructor and another person who takes written notes, implies that these accommodations are not taken lightly. Frequent mentions of the importance of time management may reflect a significant amount of extra time for students with disabilities to implement their accommodations. For students less skilled in communicating their needs, it is possible that accommodations are not implemented in a timely manner, leading to less successful educational outcomes.

The evidence collected from the interview participants does tend to align with similar findings noted in the research, thus could apply to the overall population of students with disabilities. However, based upon the limited number of respondents, and the fact that they may have been a unique subgroup within this population, it is appropriate to be conservative in drawing conclusions based on these informants. Regardless, the data analysis from the interviews supports one clear conclusion: personal interactions with peers, instructors, counselors, and Disabilities Services staff members provide the most effective support during the transition process and as a critical resource while at the postsecondary level. At all stages in the journey from high school classrooms to college lecture halls, students thrive when they receive one-on-one attention from helpful, knowledgeable people. This conclusion is supported in the literature by surveys
conducted by Chiba and Low (2007), as well as interviews conducted by Lindstrom et al. (2009). A second conclusion and related implications are less well defined. While informants noted they are more likely to achieve their academic and personal goals when they adopt a variety of adaptive strategies (which improve their academic skills, their life skills, and their levels of self-advocacy), how these strategies are acquired and what they should look like is less clear. Since exceptional students face unique challenges and possess unique talents, it is difficult to recommend specific adaptive strategies and interventions. According to Getzel and Thoma (2008), it is appropriate for each individual student to decide which adaptive strategies are most effective. While these skills are important, it is not appropriate to provide a cookie-cutter list of strategies but rather, these strategies should emerge from the specific individuals’ unique academic and social needs.

**Recommendations for Future Transition Interventions**

Students with disabilities are able to function more effectively in the postsecondary environment when they obtain appropriate accommodations. For any students with disabilities who are mainstreamed into regular education classes in high school, attending college preparation events offered to all students is helpful and should certainly continue. However, students with disabilities also seem to benefit from a more personalized approach to transition. Meeting individually with teachers or counselors who understand the college environment, and the challenges it presents to students with disabilities, is an effective strategy. These same skills then are useful as they continue to seek “helpful individuals” at the postsecondary level.
The recommendation to start college planning early, repeated by the majority of the interview participants, is a signal that 11th and 12th grade students should look for a mentor early in the college application process. Because of constraints within the public school system, high school Special Education case managers and guidance counselors are unlikely to have sufficient time to provide this type of mentoring. As increasing numbers of students with disabilities plan to enter postsecondary education, there is an unfilled need for pre-college transition services. The IDEA requires that secondary special education providers must include transition planning services, but when students leave high school, they need to seek out disabilities services providers on their own. Most students interviewed for this study found these services on their own or with family assistance, but many other students with disabilities are potentially missing opportunities to continue their education, due to inadequate transition services. While some school districts have transition programs, these usually provide vocational and life-skills training for students with moderate to severe disabilities. Given the increasing numbers of college-bound students with mild to moderate disabilities, it would be appropriate to locate and study any school districts or non-public schools that currently provide personalized pre-college counseling, including helping students develop self-determination skills.

At the very least, current Special Education case managers and school counselors could accelerate their schedule for referring students with disabilities to college planning resources within their local community. For example, any high school student with a disability can make an appointment at a community college Disabilities Resources office during 10th or 11th grade, and talk to disabilities counselors, long before making decisions
about college attendance. Finding guidance for the transition from high school to college is an important task for any student, regardless of their abilities or disabilities. Those fortunate students who find reliable guides for college planning are likely to have the most successful transition outcomes.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

Several areas of interest for future research were suggested during the data analysis. Two emerging concepts were uncovered during discussions prompted by clarifying questions, including exploring career goals and exploration of personal interests. When prompted with questions about choosing a career or major, many (but not all) college students will talk about personal or intellectual fulfillment as a reason for choosing a particular academic field. The chance to explore options is reflected in these comments from students: “I’m kind of like, let me put my fingers in all the baskets, and see which ones I like more” (Jane), and “Now’s the opportunity; because there’s not many opportunities of being able to explore oneself later on, as much as this time” (Randy). Since a significant number of participants did not mention these concepts, they were not included as a theme in the data analysis. However, if future researchers plan a similar series of interview questions, it might be appropriate to add clarifying questions concerning these concepts. It would be possible to add: “What about your career plans?” instead of relying on the more general question “Have your goals changed?” As for pursuing personal interests, this could be part of questions concerning personal adjustment and expectations during college. Neither of these themes are unique to college students with disabilities, although it would be interesting to study the role that disabilities play in students’ choices of postsecondary options. The survey results
collected by Chiba and Low (2007) recommended further study into personal adjustment by students with disabilities.

Another research area suggested during the data analysis is the interaction between a learning disability and a student’s learning style. Several students described using strategies that were coded as “improved skills,” but their use of these strategies also demonstrated an increased awareness of their own learning styles. This type of research would be more suitable when developing an extended case study or group of case studies, over a longer time period. Two students described some intriguing interactions between their disabilities and their learning styles. Wendy, the fourth-year student with a visual impairment, called herself a visual learner; she talked about using visual materials, such as diagrams, as study aids. Josie, the third-year student with Asperger’s syndrome, described strategies that helped her improve her conversational skills. She needs these conversational skills to participate effectively in classes that include discussions, which have turned out to be her preferred learning environment. Although many secondary teachers try to help students become aware of their preferred learning styles, the increased academic demands at college may motivate students to seek out different strategies. Increased focus on learning styles during the ITP process in high school could potentially raise students’ awareness of the greater variety of teaching approaches they will encounter in college.

Several other areas of interest were suggested by factors not included in the data analysis. The first of these is the transition experiences of older transfer students. After interviewing two Sonoma State students who started their education at Santa Rosa Junior College, I concluded that their experiences were quite different from those of the other
undergraduates. Including their interview transcripts in the data analysis could have introduced several new themes. However, it would probably be more useful to conduct a separate study of exceptional students who successfully transfer from a community college to a four-year college. Both of the older transfer students were receiving support through a Department of Rehabilitation counselor. Exploring the interaction between DOR services and the disability services provided by postsecondary learning institutions would provide a very extensive topic for future research.

Another area of inquiry is suggested by the lack of responses from Santa Rosa Junior College and College of Marin students with disabilities. I would not say that I was surprised that none of these community college students responded to the emailed “Request for Research Participants” letter. In the initial conversation with Tara Johnson at the Disabilities Resources Department at Santa Rosa Junior College, I expressed the thought that students would be more likely to participate after they met me face-to-face, rather than responding to an email. However, Ms. Johnson had some concerns about preserving the confidentiality of her students, which was of course quite understandable. To attempt to contact community college students with disabilities in the future, I would suggest other methods, such as attending an orientation session for students with disabilities, or even offering to work as a volunteer tutor. Each of those methods would be more time-consuming than sending an email to a distribution list, so a research project based on those methods would necessarily need to allow for a longer time frame.

Finally, I noted that none of the interview participants grew up in Sonoma County, which leads to another possible research question examining students with disabilities who attend colleges one or more hours away from their parents’ homes. Is
there something special about Sonoma State University that makes it a magnet for
students with mild disabilities? To research this question, it would be necessary to
examine other universities of a similar size, located in suburban areas. For this Sonoma
State graduate student and part-time summer instructor, it was encouraging to hear about
my own college’s reputation for small class sizes, attentive professors, and outstanding
quality of life for undergraduates. Finding out if these factors translate into consistently
positive outcomes for exceptional students would be a fascinating project for some future
researcher with ample time and academic support.
Appendix A – Request for Research Participants

PROJECT PARTICIPANTS NEEDED
High School to College Transition Experience
for college students with disabilities

If you have completed at least one semester at Santa Rosa Junior College, and are registered with Disability Resources, you are invited to participate in a research project.

➢ **Focus of the research project:** What academic strategies and life skills supports help you manage the workload in your college classes?

➢ **Research Team:** The primary researcher and interviewer is Catherine Lipson, Masters in Special Education candidate at Sonoma State University. Ms. Lipson has been a Special Education case manager at the high school level, and is an instructor with Sonoma State’s Rising Stars summer outreach program. Dr. Emiliano Ayala of the SSU Special Education department is the committee chair overseeing the research effort.

➢ **Participant Contributions:** Current SRJC students with disabilities can participate in interviews during February and March 2011. Interviews, about 30 minutes in length, will focus on your experiences with academic strategies and life skills supports. Participants may also contribute insights about their transition experiences at SRJC and during their high school years. All interview responses will be confidential.

➢ **Why we need your help:** Responses from current SRJC students with disabilities will help Special Education and Disabilities Resources professionals provide support during the transition process from high school to postsecondary education.

➢ **Contact information:** If you would like to participate in an interview, please contact Catherine Lipson. Email contact: lipson@sonoma.edu

Thanks for your interest in this project!
Appendix B – Pre-Interview Notes

Pre-interview notes

Thank you for agreeing to meet with me today. To get started, let’s double-check the information you gave me when I contacted you.

Name: _____________________________
Age: ______________________________
Semesters enrolled here: _____________
Semesters enrolled at other colleges or training programs: ________
Classes enrolled in at present: ______________________________
Identified disability at this college: _________________________
Identified disability in high school: _________________________
Contact information: _________________________________

Wonderful! To be fair, I should tell you just a little more about myself, Catherine Lipson. (Reiterate a few points, especially if the initial phone or email contact was brief.) I used to write technical manuals and training documents, but then I decided to switch to teaching high school English. I have always loved books and writing. Pretty soon, I became interested in teaching students with mild disabilities, who were mostly mainstreamed. I liked having smaller classes, and I also liked meeting my student’s families. As a summer job, I teach younger students at Sonoma State, for the PreCollege program. I decided to do this interviewing project because I want to know more about what happens when students actually get to college. I have three children who are now in their 20’s, and they have all had different experiences in college.

Now I’ll explain the purpose of the consent form. Since I am interviewing students as a Master’s thesis project, this information will turn into a published report at Sonoma State University. This means that after I finish typing up your answers, I will quote some of them, and paraphrase some of them, to use in the finished report. I will use a code name for you in the report, to help keep your information confidential. Sonoma State has given me this consent form to use. When you sign here, you are agreeing to let me use your story for educational purposes. People who read the report will include my professors, and possibly other special education teachers who are taking classes at SSU. The finished thesis will be available in the SSU library for anyone who is interested in this topic.

(Give student a chance to sign the consent form. Answer any questions that the student may have.)
Thanks! Now we’re ready to begin the interview. I have a tape recorder for your answers. I will also take some notes, which will help me organize your answers later, when I am typing.

I will start out with two categories, which are academic strategies and life-skills supports. By academic strategies, I am talking about things that help you inside a classroom, at a learning center or lab, or while studying for a particular class. By life-skills supports, I am talking about things that help you stay in college, such as getting financial aid, getting counseling, improving your social life, or getting help with transportation and parking. We’ll start with the academic strategies, but keep in mind that I’m only separating the two types of questions to make the interview process a little simpler. Feel free to let your answers overlap into other areas, if that is easier for you.

(Begin with interview questions.)
Appendix C – Interview Questions and Note Sheet

Interview Questions and Note Sheet

1. Please describe some of the most important academic strategies you use to help manage the workload in your college classes.
   
   a. clarifying questions: How often do you use specific study skills that you learned in high school or in a support class at your college? Note-taking? Outlines? Review? Online tutorials? Study groups? Tutoring?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Code Key:  
Red = difficulty with obtaining services  Orange = academic challenges
Yellow = time management  Green = helpful individuals  Blue = family support
Indigo = improved skills  Purple = being well prepared  Gray = exclusion or prejudice
Black = feeling unsafe  Pink = independence  Brown = increased self-advocacy
2. Please describe some of the most important life-skills supports you use to help manage the workload in your college classes.

b. clarifying questions: How often do you seek support from Disabilities Services staff? Medical professionals? Dept. of Rehabilitation? Mental Health professionals? Parents? Peers or siblings? Professors in academic classes?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Code Key: Red = difficulty with obtaining services Orange = academic challenges
Yellow = time management Green = helpful individuals
Indigo = improved skills Purple = being well prepared
Black = feeling unsafe Pink = independence
Brown = increased self-advocacy
3. In thinking about your high school experience, please list some transition advice and/or services offered in high school that you feel are most valuable to you now.

c. clarifying questions: Transition activities at high school? Visits to colleges? College nights? Appointments with college Disabilities Services counselors?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Code Key:
- Red = difficulty with obtaining services
- Orange = academic challenges
- Yellow = time management
- Green = helpful individuals
- Blue = family support
- Indigo = improved skills
- Purple = being well prepared
- Gray = exclusion or prejudice
- Black = feeling unsafe
- Pink = independence
- Brown = increased self-advocacy
4. What advice would you give a student with disabilities in 11th or 12th grade, to help them prepare to succeed in college?

d. clarifying questions: What surprised you? Which areas gave you the most trouble? Which areas seemed easier due to your preparation? Have your goals changed?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
(End interview by thanking the student. Ask if the student would like a written transcript of his/her answers.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Code Key:**
- Red = difficulty with obtaining services
- Orange = academic challenges
- Yellow = time management
- Green = helpful individuals
- Blue = family support
- Indigo = improved skills
- Purple = being well prepared
- Gray = exclusion or prejudice
- Black = feeling unsafe
- Pink = independence
- Brown = increased self-advocacy
Appendix D – Informed Consent for Interview Participants

You are invited to participate in a study of Postsecondary Students with Disabilities being conducted by Catherine Lipson of Sonoma State University. The purpose of the study is to learn which academic strategies and life-skills supports are most important for success in postsecondary education. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you attend college classes and you have informed Disabilities Support Services that you have a disability.

If you decide to participate, Ms. Lipson will schedule an interview with you. The purpose of the interview is to hear what you have to say about the transition process you have experienced as a postsecondary student. Your responses will be tape-recorded, and Ms. Lipson will also take notes. You may request a transcript of the interview after it is completed.

If you would like to participate but cannot attend an interview in person, alternate arrangements can be made to conduct interviews by phone.

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. If you give us your permission by signing this document, we plan to disclose the information to the thesis committee members in the Department of Special Education at Sonoma State University. Once the thesis is published, it will be accessible in the Sonoma State library.

There is no compensation provided in this project.

Your decision whether or not to participate will not prejudice your future relations with Sonoma State University. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and to discontinue participation at any time without prejudice.

If you have any questions, please ask us. My name is Catherine Lipson and I can be reached at 707-481-1767 or lipson@sonoma.edu. My Faculty advisor and committee chair is Dr. Emiliano Ayala, who can be reached at 707-664-3940 or emiliano.ayala@sonoma.edu.

You will be given a copy of this form to keep. YOU ARE MAKING A DECISION WHETHER OR NOT TO PARTICIPATE. YOUR SIGNATURE INDICATES THAT YOU HAVE DECIDED TO PARTICIPATE HAVING READ THE INFORMATION PROVIDED ABOVE.

__________________________  _______________________
participant signature      date                        principal investigator  date
Appendix E – Listing of Interview Dates and Participants

All interview participants met with Catherine Lipson at the Sonoma State University library during the month of March, 2011. Each participant chose a pseudonym to use in written transcripts and the thesis.

Interview participants included in the data analysis:

March 8, 2011: Danielle, 20, enrolled 6 semesters, specific learning disability
March 9, 2011: Kay, 19, enrolled 2 semesters, specific learning disability (dyslexia)
March 9, 2011: Casey, 20, enrolled 4 semesters, attention deficit disorder, anxiety, depression
March 10, 2011: Peggy, 19, enrolled 4 semesters, auditory processing deficits
March 10, 2011: Wendy, 22, enrolled 8 semesters, visual impairment
March 17, 2011: Jane, 19, enrolled 2 semesters, specific learning disability (dyslexia)
March 17, 2011: Josie, 21, enrolled 6 semesters, Asperger’s syndrome
March 29, 2011: Michelle, 26, transfer student, enrolled 2 semesters, hearing impairment
March 30, 2011: Randy, 21, enrolled 5 semesters, obsessive/compulsive disorder, attention deficit disorder

Interview participants not included in the data analysis:

March 15, 2011: Kitti, 48, transfer student, enrolled 5 semesters, mental illness
March 21, 2011: Sara, 43, transfer student, enrolled 2 semesters, attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder, anxiety, depression
Appendix F – Institutional Review Board Approval

Sonoma State University
Institutional Review Board

Dear Ms. Lipson:

Subject: IRB Application # 2144, TRANSITION STRATEGIES AND SUPPORTS FOR POSTSECONDARY STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

I am pleased to inform you that your application to the Sonoma State Institutional Review Board has been reviewed and approved. Please contact Carol Hall or me immediately should you encounter any unforeseen difficulties, or make any significant changes to your planned procedures.

This approval is effective from 01/06/11 through 01/05/12. Please notify Carol Hall (707-664-2448, carol.hall@sonoma.edu) when your project has been completed. A progress report and renewal application is required by 12/05/12 if your project will continue past the end date listed above.

Thank you for your cooperation with our processes. We wish you the best of fortune as you complete your research project.

Sincerely,

Duane Dove, Ph.D
Chair, Sonoma State IRB

Carol A. Hall
Office of Research & Sponsored Programs
Stevenson 1024
(707) 664-2448
carol.hall@sonoma.edu
References


