

Effects on Retention of Students with Learning Disabilities Utilizing Services at Community
Colleges

Jacquelyn R. Martin

The College at Brockport, State University of New York

Acknowledgements

I would like to take the time to thank all of the people in my life that have made this Action Research Project possible, and have kept me motivated throughout the process. First and foremost I would like to thank the Counselor Education Department as a whole; they have supported me and have helped me grow into the person I am now personally and professionally. I would especially like to thank Dr. Tom Hernandez for your continuous support and understanding throughout my process of attempting to find a life balance, as well as your patience with me during the Action Research Project process and my last semester in the program. You always had faith in me and provided my confidence and strength. I would also like to thank Dr. Kitty Fallon for helping me to truly understand what it's like to be an amazing counselor. You pushed me to work my hardest and have helped me learn about myself the most.

I couldn't imagine what my time during this program would be like without my best friends that I made in Self in Society- my Fab Five. You are all truly inspirational, strong, beautiful women and have assisted me through each step of the process to get my Master's degree. You have helped me stay strong and we have created a bond that no one can break. I thank you and love you all from the bottom of my heart, Keturah, Kelsey, Anna and Dianne.

I also would not be the person I am today without my family. We have gone through amazing times and very difficult times, but have grown stronger through it all. You have taught me all I know on how to be a genuine human being. I have learned to follow my heart and my dreams and reach for the stars. Your support financially, mentally, and emotionally means the world to me.

Love Always,

Jacquelyn Martin

Abstract

Retention of students with learning disabilities in community college has become a concern to college officials. In this study retention rates and grade point averages of students with learning disabilities at community college were observed. This is a quantitative study and there was no interaction with participants. Data was collected through databases utilized by the urban, northeastern community college. Correlations between utilizing services and counseling and retention rate and GPA were calculated utilizing SPSS. It was discovered that there were weak correlations between retention status and accommodation and services use as well as GPA and accommodation and services use. There were moderately strong correlations between GPA between semesters, cumulatively and retention status.

Effects on Retention of Students with Learning Disabilities Utilizing Services at Community
College

Disability services offices are a required entity on college campus for the accommodation and advocacy of students with all types of disabilities. Students with learning disabilities often go unnoticed and are not reached out to because their disabilities are more hidden than physical disabilities (Cory, 2011). There are accommodations for students with learning disabilities at the college level but often times can go unutilized by said students. Once students with learning disabilities provide proper documentation to the office they are able to utilize services that will help them succeed in college such as extra time on tests, calculator use, and separate testing areas. Students at the Urban Community College also get the opportunity to meet with a counselor regarding any questions or concerns regarding school and personal life. Creating and maintaining this relationship with the students and providing accommodations can potentially help students feel connected to the school, and in turn perhaps increase grade point average (GPA) and retention rates. This research project will look at the GPA and retention of students with learning disabilities for the Fall 2013 to Fall 2014 academic semesters. The researcher will be comparing the rates and retention of samples of students with learning disabilities that utilize the one-on-one appointments, that use services but not counseling, that have documentation but are not utilizing services, and students of the general population to determine if their GPA rates are on similar levels. This project will hopefully show whether or not students with learning disabilities who utilize disability services have an increased GPA and higher rates of retention. This will also help to determine if disability services and one-on-one meetings are effective in helping and accommodating students.

Review of the Literature

Approximately 5 to 10 percent of the American population has been diagnosed with a learning disability. In fact, this group of individuals is now one of the largest minorities in the nation (McCleary-Jones, 2007). This population is becoming more recognized, which, in turn creates more awareness of their needs. Through the assistance of federal legislation such as the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the 1973 Rehabilitation Act, creation of awareness and accommodations for learning disabilities has been made possible (Cory, 2011). These pieces of legislation have enabled assistance for people with disabilities in several areas, including colleges.

Increasing numbers of students with disabilities are attending community colleges as their primary avenue for higher education (Hollins & Foley, 2013; Mamiseishvili & Koch, 2012; McCleary-Jones, 2008). Community colleges are often the primary route for students with learning disabilities to attend college because of their affordable rates and their ability to serve students with varying academic backgrounds and preparedness levels, which are not typically found in four year institutions (Mamiseishvili & Koch, 2012). This can be attributed to factors such as enhanced technology, increase in support services, greater self-determination and increased public awareness (Ketevan & Koch, 2012). The rising number of students with disabilities presents universities with new challenges and opportunities (Orr, 2010). In order to accommodate for the new challenges and opportunities, colleges are required to have disability services offices. These services were created to provide accommodations for students with disabilities that impair their functioning and success within the college community (McCleary-Jones, 2008).

In order to receive any services provided by a college disability services office, one must present valid documentation of disability and potential recommended accommodations (Sparks & Lovett, 2013). Once documentation is approved, students have access to such accommodations as, but not limited to, extended time on tests, calculator use, and testing in separate locations (Orr, 2010). The goal of providing accessible and reasonable accommodations is to increase student retention. This literature review will explore the definitions of learning disabilities and accommodations. It will also explore reasons retention is low in students with learning disabilities, and academic and social challenges these students face in a college setting. The literature review will also review disability services and accommodations students with learning disabilities can utilize to prevent attrition in a college setting.

Learning Disabilities

Through review of previous research, there has not been one distinguished and agreed upon definition of the term learning disability. Researchers have found one definition challenging to determine due to the variety of disabilities within the umbrella term of learning disabilities. Researchers determined that the term learning disability provides a general, holistic view of a group of students experiencing challenges academically (Hollins and Foley, 2013; McCleary-Jones, 2007). According to the American Psychiatric Association (2000), learning disabilities are diagnosed when “the individual’s achievement on a standardized test in reading, mathematics, or written expression is substantially below that expected for age, schooling, and level of intelligence (p. 49). There are several specific types of learning disabilities that make up a general group. These may include attention deficit hyperactive disorder (ADHD), dyscalculia, dyslexia, dysgraphia, auditory processing disorder and language processing disorder. Each of these specific learning disabilities and individuals that experience them have unique

characteristics and require different accommodations and treatments (McCleary-Jones, 2007).

These unique characteristics pose greater challenges in determining and providing accommodations and treatments for specific learning disabilities especially in the postsecondary school setting.

Accommodations

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 requires colleges to provide accommodations and access to students with disabilities, while also protecting students from discrimination in the educational setting (Cory, 2011). Reasonable accommodations are defined as “minor changes in how instruction is delivered and/or how a student participates, without substantially altering curriculum or expectations” (Scanlon & Baker, 2012, p22).

Accommodations vary from individual to individual depending on the circumstances, which is why they are determined on a case-by-case basis (Cory, 2011). Retention and success of students has been shown to improve with the utilization of accommodations provided by the college (Orr, 2010).

Retention

Student retention has become an issue for all universities around the world. Attrition, or dropout rates, of students within a community college have been close to fifty percent (O’Keefe, 2013; Windham, Rehfuss, Williams, Pugh and Tincher-Ladner, 2014). Researchers have determined that students with low first-semester grade point averages (GPA) are at an increased risk of attrition (Mamiseishvili & Koch, 2012). Reasons for attrition for students with disabilities are lack of feeling of belonging, rejection, difficulty adjusting to social or academic challenges associated with college, and difficulty with required college level math courses (O’Keefe, 2013; Prevatt, Welles, Li and Proctor, 2010). Attrition causes a decrease in revenue and investment into

the college due to decreasing funding through student fees (O'Keefe, 2013). In turn, the support services for students in need are decreased due to the lack of funding.

A potential solution to the problem of attrition is in depth and various forms of engagement of students because researchers have found that engagement of students at community college positively impacts retention rates (Windham, et. al, 2014). Though students with disabilities encounter several challenges within their college experiences, engagement and accommodations from the college and disability services office will hopefully decrease their chances of attrition. "Access to appropriate accommodations may play a critical role in the success of students with disabilities" (Mamiseishville & Koch, 2012, p331). There are several challenges students face with attempting to receive appropriate accommodations.

Challenges Faced by Students with Disabilities

Learning disabilities affect individuals' day to day lives within their social, employment, educational, and personal experiences (May & LaMont, 2014). For the purpose of this literature review the focus will be primarily on the effect on education for students with learning disabilities. Though the community college is more accepting of students from varying academic backgrounds, students with disabilities still encounter several academic challenges such as difficulty registering for classes, availability of separate testing locations, and lack of sensitivity and knowledge of learning disabilities by faculty (McCleary-Jones, 2008).

Challenges with Academics

Researchers have found consistent themes regarding academics for students with learning disabilities. One theme is emotional scarring due to learning differently (Orr, 2010). Learning difficulties can lead to higher levels of anxiety, depression and stress for students with learning disabilities in comparison to their peers without learning disabilities (Lufi & Awwad, 2013). The

college level work load and academic experience can be overwhelming. Many students with learning disabilities experience more intense levels of cognitive, emotional and physical symptoms of test anxiety during academic performance (Lufi & Awwad, 2013). Test anxiety could be due to these students often identifying as having inadequate study skills, note-taking capabilities, and difficulties with taking tests (Hollins & Foley, 2013). Students do have accessibility to services and accommodations to assist with the aforementioned struggles; however, their struggles with academics affect their comfort in their social surroundings as well.

The other major theme of academic struggle for students with disabilities is regarding interpersonal relationships and social connectivity (Orr, 2010). College students with learning disabilities report higher levels of loneliness and social isolation than their peers without learning disabilities (Lufi & Awwad, 2013). Students with disabilities experience an increase of labeling and stigmatization as a result of differential treatment (Hollins & Folley, 2013). Stigmatization and labeling create even more challenges in addition to academic performance for students with learning disabilities. Many students with learning disabilities struggle with academic success due to social skill deficits and difficulty creating and maintaining relationships with peers and faculty (May & LaMont, 2014).

Faculty Cooperation

Researchers have discovered that the success of college students with learning disabilities can be influenced by the students' perceptions of faculty and professor support (Orr, 2010). However, the professors report uncertainty in their own ability and willingness to provide many accommodations to students with learning disabilities due to beliefs that the accommodations will disrupt the classroom routine. Professors also have difficulty distinguishing the difference between curriculum modification and accommodations (Scanlon & Baker, 2012). Some faculty

have also had false notions that learning disabilities are considered barriers and deficits within an individual that are due to the individual's lack of managing self. They may also believe that the individual is responsible for finding solutions to their problems with learning disabilities (May & LaMont, 2014). This predicament poses a challenge for students with disabilities to build rapport with professors who are unwilling to accommodate their specific needs, which in turn could affect the student's entire college experience and cause dropout. Without the support and cooperation from faculty, the disability services office and accommodations the college provides can be of little assistance to the students with learning disabilities.

Disability Services to Address Challenges

The ADA requires colleges to provide disability accommodations and access in a nondiscriminatory way. Some reasonable accommodations college campuses provide students with learning disabilities are interpreters, conversion of texts, and extended time on tests (Cory, 2011). With proper documentation students with learning disabilities are able to utilize accommodations provided by the college (Orr, 2010). The disability services goal of inclusivity is for students to obtain an "appropriate education in the least restrictive environment" (Scanlon & Baker, 2012, p212). This means that the accommodations disability services offices offer are meant to help students obtain the same education as their peers with assistance that will not interfere with their experience as an inclusive student.

In addition to providing legally mandated accommodations, numerous colleges offer a variety of support programs for students with disabilities. These include specialized academic advising, personal counseling, time-management and study skills, and more (Sparks & Lovett, 2013). These types of support programs offer students with learning disabilities additional, optional accommodations to help with their experience in college outside of academics. The relationships formed and the skills learned through these support programs could prevent

attrition of students with learning disabilities. The disability services staff acts as advocates for students with learning disabilities to ensure they are receiving proper accommodations to assist them in succeeding academically (McCleary-Jones, 2007). As advocates, they should also ensure that students are feeling safe and integrated within the college community. The advocates can direct students with disabilities to utilize support services and accommodations because many students do not utilize additional support services on their own (Sparks & Lovett, 2013).

In conclusion, students with learning disabilities are a minority group that is overlooked within the college community. Students with learning disabilities have faced several struggles in their college experiences. Some of the most common struggles are academics and interpersonal relationships. These challenges can often create high attrition rates. To help prevent attrition, the Americans with Disabilities Act and other legislation have made it mandatory for colleges to provide accommodations and integrate students with disabilities into the college setting. Colleges that have provided reasonable accommodations for students with documented learning disabilities to be able to succeed academically. Though they are not required, many colleges also provide students with disabilities support services to help with the social context of the college setting. The relationships that students create and maintain throughout their college experience are one of the most significant reasons for retention. The more faculty and students understand the importance of relationship building and support for students with learning disabilities, the better success rates and retention rates they will have.

The problem at hand is that students with learning disabilities have a high rate of attrition and are not utilizing all of the disabilities services available. The students with learning disabilities can be stigmatized and struggle academically and socially within a college setting. The effect of students with learning disabilities utilization of disability services on retention and

grade point average will be researched. I hypothesize that in comparison to students with documented learning disabilities that do not utilize disability services, the retention rate and grade point average of students that utilize support services and accommodations through disability services will be higher.

Method

Participants

This study took place at an urban community college campus in the northeastern United States. This study utilized a random sample from the general population and a convenient sample from the population that utilized disability services. The researcher collected information on 167 students with disabilities from data already processed from the 2013-2014 academic year within the college database that the disability services office utilized. The researcher also gathered information from the student service's database on 167 students in the general population that utilized student services during the fall 2014 semester. There were 102 females and 65 males that reported having a disability. The age range of student was between 19-62 years old. Of the 167 students that reported a disability, 134 reported having a learning related disability.

Materials and Procedure

All of the data were collected were through previously collected information through databases the college uses. No students were contacted or interacted with regarding the research study. There were 167 students listed as reported disabilities, that entire sample was utilized for the purposes of this research study. There was data collected on 167 students from the general population to create equal sized sample groups. The data was collected through a sign-in database system utilized to track students' reasons for utilizing student services. For this research

study in particular, information on students who signed into the student services office for academic advisement purposes during the Fall 2014 semester were reviewed.

The type of data that were collected for the general population was GPA for the Fall 2013, Spring 2014 and Fall 2014 semesters, as well as cumulative GPA and status of the student. The data that was collected regarding student with disabilities was the same as mentioned above as well as disability type, accommodations utilized, counseling utilized, age and gender. All of the aforementioned information was coded and analyzed.

The types of analytical tests included descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation coefficients at the .01 level. The researcher observed potential correlations between utilization of accommodations and services and retention and GPA of students with learning disabilities. These variables were also compared to the retention and GPA of the general student population.

Results

There were 167 students that identified as having a disability and provided documentation for their disabilities. As shown in Table 1, there were 101 females and 66 males that identified having a disability. The age range of students with disabilities was 19 to 62 years old; majority being in the 19 to 25 age range. In Table 2, all ages and frequency of students of each age range is shown in detail.

Table 1
Male and Female Students with Documented Disabilities

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid 0	101	60.5	60.5	60.5
1	66	39.5	39.5	100.0
Total	167	100.0	100.0	

Table 2
Ages of Students with Document Disabilities

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	19	13	7.8	7.8	7.8
	20	33	19.8	19.8	27.5
	21	21	12.6	12.6	40.1
	22	14	8.4	8.4	48.5
	23	8	4.8	4.8	53.3
	24	5	3.0	3.0	56.3
	25	8	4.8	4.8	61.1
	26	3	1.8	1.8	62.9
	27	5	3.0	3.0	65.9
	28	3	1.8	1.8	67.7
	29	1	.6	.6	68.3
	30	4	2.4	2.4	70.7
	31	1	.6	.6	71.3
	32	4	2.4	2.4	73.7
	33	2	1.2	1.2	74.9
	34	3	1.8	1.8	76.6
	35	1	.6	.6	77.2
	36	2	1.2	1.2	78.4
	39	1	.6	.6	79.0
	40	2	1.2	1.2	80.2
	41	1	.6	.6	80.8
	44	1	.6	.6	81.4
	45	2	1.2	1.2	82.6
	46	2	1.2	1.2	83.8
	47	1	.6	.6	84.4
	49	3	1.8	1.8	86.2
	50	3	1.8	1.8	88.0
	51	5	3.0	3.0	91.0
	52	4	2.4	2.4	93.4
	53	1	.6	.6	94.0
	55	1	.6	.6	94.6
	57	1	.6	.6	95.2
	58	2	1.2	1.2	96.4
	59	2	1.2	1.2	97.6
	60	2	1.2	1.2	98.8
	62	2	1.2	1.2	100.0
Total		167	100.0	100.0	

There are several majors students with disabilities are taking. The most popular majors are Liberal Arts, Human Services, and Criminal Justice; which are all housed in the urban

satellite campus of this community college. As shown in Table 3, the Transitional Studies major (TS01); which is required as a starting major for students whom are not at the college English and Math levels, has the most amount of students with disabilities out of all of the majors. The general Liberal Arts majors (LA01, LA04, LA05, LA13 and LAU5) combined have the second largest students with disabilities population with 30 students. Human Services majors (HU01, HU05, HU10, HU37 and HU39) are also popular with students with disabilities, equating to 22 students with documented disabilities. Criminal Justice majors (CJ01, CJ02 and CJ03) is another major group that students with disabilities join, equating to 20 students with documented disabilities in those programs.

There are a few options for degree types that coincide with majority of majors available at this community college. As shown in Table 4, there are five options for degree types: associate of arts, associate of applied science, associate of science, certificate, and non-degree. Majority of students with disabilities are in associates of science programs and associate of applied science. As shown in Table 4, there are 93 students working to obtain an associate of science degree and 47 students working to obtain an associate of applied science degree. These degrees are often times utilized for students to further their education at 4-year schools.

Since the data that were observed was over a three semester period, the retention status of students at the end of the third semester was considered. As shown in Table 5, 34 students graduated by the third semester observed, 64 students are continuing their education by registering for Spring 2015 semester classes, and 63 are not continuing their education, meaning they did not register for classes for the Spring 2015 semester. In Table 5 there are also 6 student's data missing, these students were non-matriculated students and therefore did not have a retention status.

Table 3
Majors of Students with Documented Disabilities

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	AD01	1	.6	.6	.6
	AS01	6	3.6	3.6	4.2
	AS02	1	.6	.6	4.8
	ASE1	1	.6	.6	5.4
	AT01	1	.6	.6	6.0
	BU01	1	.6	.6	6.6
	BUE1	1	.6	.6	7.2
	CJ01	5	3.0	3.0	10.2
	CJ02	3	1.8	1.8	12.0
	CJ03	12	7.2	7.2	19.2
	EA01	2	1.2	1.2	20.4
	EC01	2	1.2	1.2	21.6
	EC41	1	.6	.6	22.2
	ED01	1	.6	.6	22.8
	EDE1	2	1.2	1.2	24.0
	EE01	6	3.6	3.6	27.5
	EE02	4	2.4	2.4	29.9
	EP01	1	.6	.6	30.5
	ES01	1	.6	.6	31.1
	ETE1	1	.6	.6	31.7
	FR01	1	.6	.6	32.3
	HM04	1	.6	.6	32.9
	HU01	10	6.0	6.0	38.9
	HU05	2	1.2	1.2	40.1
	HU10	8	4.8	4.8	44.9
	HU37	1	.6	.6	45.5
	HU39	1	.6	.6	46.1
	HUE1	14	8.4	8.4	54.5
	LA01	2	1.2	1.2	55.7
	LA04	20	12.0	12.0	67.7
	LA05	6	3.6	3.6	71.3
	LA13	1	.6	.6	71.9
	LAU5	1	.6	.6	72.5
	NM01	8	4.8	4.8	77.2
	NM07	1	.6	.6	77.8
	OF01	1	.6	.6	78.4
	OF02	1	.6	.6	79.0
	TA02	1	.6	.6	79.6
	TA03	1	.6	.6	80.2
	TS01	31	18.6	18.6	98.8
	VC01	2	1.2	1.2	100.0
	Total	167	100.0	100.0	

Table 4
Degree Types of Students with Documented Disabilities

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	AA	11	6.6	6.6	6.6
	AAS	47	28.1	28.1	34.7
	AS	93	55.7	55.7	90.4
	CER	7	4.2	4.2	94.6
	NON	9	5.4	5.4	100.0
	Total	167	100.0	100.0	

Table 5
Retention Status of Students with Documented Disabilities

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	0	63	37.7	39.1	39.1
	1	64	38.3	39.8	78.9
	2	34	20.4	21.1	100.0
	Total	161	96.4	100.0	
Missing	System	6	3.6		
Total		167	100.0		

Many students with documented disabilities are eligible for and utilize accommodations. The most common accommodations for students with learning related disabilities are calculator use, extended time on testing, and testing with reduced distraction, meaning testing in a different location. As shown in Table 6, of the 167 students with documented disabilities 81 were qualified for and utilized the calculator use accommodation. As shown in Table 7, 156 students were qualified for and utilized the extended time for testing accommodation. As shown in Table 8, the same 156 students utilizing extended time on testing also were eligible for and utilized the testing with reduced distraction accommodation. Students with learning disabilities are most prevalent of students with documented disabilities to utilize the three aforementioned accommodations.

Table 6

Amount of Students Eligible to Utilize Calculator Use Accommodation

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid 0	86	51.5	51.5	51.5
1	81	48.5	48.5	100.0
Total	167	100.0	100.0	

Table 7

Amount of Students Eligible to Utilize Extended Time for Tests Accommodation

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid 0	11	6.6	6.6	6.6
1	156	93.4	93.4	100.0
Total	167	100.0	100.0	

Table 8

Amount of Students Eligible to Utilize Testing with Reduced Distraction

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid 0	11	6.6	6.6	6.6
1	156	93.4	93.4	100.0
Total	167	100.0	100.0	

Out of the 167 students that identified as having a disability, 134 students' disabilities were learning related. The types of disabilities that were documented were related to physical disabilities, learning disabilities, emotional health issues, brain injury, and other health related issues. As shown in Table 9, there were only 34 students that had disabilities not related to learning disabilities. There were 101 students that had documentation identifying them as having a learning disability, including ADHD. There were 32 students that had documented disabilities related to learning disabilities such as autism, brain injury, and emotional disorders. The students that had disabilities related to learning disabilities utilized majority of the same accommodations as students in the learning disabilities category. As shown in Table 10, there were 133 students that utilized the services and accommodations they were qualified for. There were only 34 students with documented disabilities that did not utilize services. Majority of the students that did not utilize services were students that did not have a learning related disability. On the

contrary, not as many students with documented disabilities utilized the counseling services available. As shown in Table 11, only 36 of the 167 students with documented disabilities utilized the counselor available. There could be many reasons and factors that correlate with the low number of students utilizing counseling services.

Table 9
Disability Types for Students with Documented Disabilities

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid 0	34	20.4	20.4	20.4
1	101	60.5	60.5	80.8
2	32	19.2	19.2	100.0
Total	167	100.0	100.0	

Table 10
Students with Documented Disabilities Utilizing Services

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid 0	34	20.4	20.4	20.4
1	133	79.6	79.6	100.0
Total	167	100.0	100.0	

Table 11
Students with Documented Disabilities Utilizing Counseling

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid 0	131	78.4	78.4	78.4
1	36	21.6	21.6	100.0
Total	167	100.0	100.0	

There were several significant correlations discovered through observing connections between counseling services, accommodation services, GPA and retention status of students with documented disabilities. As would be expected, the cumulative GPA of students is strongly correlated with the Fall 2013, Spring 2014, and Fall 2014 semester GPA's. As Shown in Table 12, the strongest correlation of .752 at the .001 correlation level is between the Fall 2013 semester GPA and the cumulative GPA. If a student does well in one semester, they are likely to

do well in following semesters and in turn have a higher cumulative GPA. Retention status and GPA's was also moderately correlated at the .01 level as shown in Table 12. This moderate correlation means that students with higher GPA's are also more likely to continue the following semester and graduate from the community college. There was a weak correlation of .184 at the .05 correlation level between utilizing counseling services and cumulative GPA. Surprisingly, there was also no correlation between cumulative GPA and the utilization of accommodations. Also shown in Table 12, there is a weak correlation between utilizing accommodations and utilizing counseling services. There is also a negative correlation between status and utilization of accommodation services.

Compared with all the correlations of the students with disabilities in Table 12, the correlations of the general population, as shown in Table 16, are weaker. Though both groups had correlations between GPA and status, the students with disabilities had a stronger correlation in each area. There was no data available to determine if and what resources students in the general population utilized. These results can help to potentially enhance the services available to students with disabilities to ensure they are academically successful.

Table 12
Correlations between Counseling and Services Used and GPA and Retention Status of Students with Disabilities

		Used Accommoda- tions	Counseling	GPA F2013	GPA S2014	GPA F2014	Cum GPA	Status
Used Accommoda- tions	Pearson Correlation	1	.193*	.041	.005	.160*	.079	-.023
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.013	.602	.948	.040	.309	.775
	N	167	167	166	167	166	167	161
Counseling	Pearson Correlation	.193*	1	.176*	.150	.248**	.184*	.108
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.013		.023	.054	.001	.018	.172
	N	167	167	166	167	166	167	161
GPA F2013	Pearson Correlation	.041	.176*	1	.603**	.354**	.752**	.513**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.602	.023		.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	166	166	166	166	165	166	161
GPA S2014	Pearson Correlation	.005	.150	.603**	1	.542**	.582**	.472**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.948	.054	.000		.000	.000	.000

	N	167	167	166	167	166	167	161
GPA F2014	Pearson Correlation	.160*	.248**	.354**	.542**	1	.472**	.346**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.040	.001	.000	.000		.000	.000
	N	166	166	165	166	166	166	160
Cum GPA	Pearson Correlation	.079	.184*	.752**	.582**	.472**	1	.522**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.309	.018	.000	.000	.000		.000
	N	167	167	166	167	166	167	161
Status	Pearson Correlation	-.023	.108	.513**	.472**	.346**	.522**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.775	.172	.000	.000	.000	.000	
	N	161	161	161	161	160	161	161

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 13

Correlations of General Population between GPA and Retention Status

		GPAF2013	GPAS2014	GPAF2014	Cum.GPA	Status
GPAF2013	Pearson Correlation	1	.635**	.218*	.311**	.267**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.005	.000	.001
	N	166	166	166	166	166
GPAS2014	Pearson Correlation	.635**	1	.278**	.386**	.294**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000	.000
	N	166	166	166	166	166
GPAF2014	Pearson Correlation	.218**	.278**	1	.708**	.528**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.005	.000		.000	.000
	N	166	166	167	167	167
Cum.GPA	Pearson Correlation	.311**	.386**	.708**	1	.456**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000		.000
	N	166	166	167	167	167
Status	Pearson Correlation	.267**	.294**	.528**	.456**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	.000	.000	.000	
	N	166	166	167	167	167

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Discussion

The data that were collected and observed in this study was based around students with disabilities utilizing services within a community college setting. How the utilization of services and accommodations corresponded with their grade point average and retention status were the main focuses of the study. The results showed that majority of the students that utilized accommodations were students with learning related disabilities. This finding was similar to previous research done by Cory (2011); students with learning disabilities utilized unique

accommodations that were circumstantial to each individual case. Each accommodation utilized was specific to each need for assistance for students with disabilities. The results also showed that there were weak correlations between utilization of accommodations and services and GPA and retention status. It was expected that the correlations would have been stronger for all categories. Previous research has shown that utilization of accommodations helps increase retention rate and GPA of students with learning disabilities (Orr, 2010). This discrepancy could be due to the fact that services are not promoted and retention rates at this institution are not high even in the general population. There could be several reasons the correlations were not as strong as expected, which will be discussed within this section. There are also several suggestions and potential research to enhance the strength of aforementioned correlations in the future.

There were three questions the research at hand was revolved around. The first question was does utilizing disability services increase GPA and retention rates? According to the data that were collected there was no correlation between GPA and utilization of accommodations provided by disability services. There was a weak correlation between retention and utilization of accommodations. This does not mean that utilization of disability services does not increase GPA and retention rates; however, in this study the two are not strongly correlated. This is a discrepancy from the literature reviewed such as Orr (2010) research on how utilization of accommodations increased retention rate. The second question was does one-on-one counseling impact GPA and retention rates? According to the data that were collected in this study counseling also had weak correlations with GPA and retention. This also does not mean that utilization of counseling does not impact GPA and retention; however, in this study and at this particular institution the two are not strongly correlated. The third research question was what is retention and GPA of students with disabilities in comparison to general population? According

to the data that were collected in this study both students with disabilities and the general population had moderate correlations between GPA's and retention status. The Fall 2014 semester proved to be the strongest correlation with cumulative GPA and retention status for both general population and students with disabilities.

Limitations

One major limitation to this study is that quantitative data was the only data observed. There were no interactions with students to gain deeper meaning or understanding behind the disabilities and their perceptions on the issues related to accommodations and retention in a college setting. Another limitation to this study is that only one satellite campus of one community college was utilized to collect data. A significant limitation to this study and all research related to students with disabilities and retention is that the students that are not retained are often times not captured in the data. Since students that drop out are no longer a part of the college, it is difficult to reach out to them to determine their reasons behind dropping out.

As seen in the results, not many students are utilizing the counseling services. One limitation could be that there is only one counselor available for students who utilize disability services. Due to the amount of work and tasks this individual has on a daily basis, it is impossible to meet with all students with disabilities regularly. Also due to the fact that he plays a role in both academic and student affairs, students may be apprehensive to discuss issues regarding professors and academic struggles. There is not enough assistance for all students with disabilities to be successful with only one staff member trained in disability services. With the understanding that there is budget constraints there are program recommendations to assist these students more diligently.

Program Recommendations

One recommendation I have for the disability services program at this community college is to promote the services to students more. As research has shown, students do not utilize all resources available to them for several reasons; either the services are unknown or there is a stigma or fear with utilizing services. Promoting of services will hopefully help destigmatize the usage of services as well as make students aware they are available. One group that is not captured in the research is the students who have not submitted documentation regarding a disability they may have. Promoting the services available to students and destigmatizing utilization of services can assist the program to grow and help additional students more effectively. Also, the negative correlation between retention status and accommodation utilization reiterates the fact that the same students that are dropping out of school are the ones not utilizing resources available to them.

Another recommendation for the community college as a whole in the realm of student services is to encourage students to utilize resources available to them such as counseling. There are so many resources that go unrecognized by students. As shown in the research there is little to no correlation between accommodations, utilizing services and GPA, and a negative correlation between said service utilization and retention status. As proven through previous research, it is believed that there is an importance to building and maintaining relationships within the college setting to enhance retention (McCleary-Jones, 2008). Students connect to people within a school, not the institution itself. More connections can be made with students than are being made now. Programs such as peer mentoring, group work, and outreach programs can help create connections with students, especially those whom may struggle in their college experience.

Another recommendation is to gain connections and build relationships more with the faculty. Educate the professors on struggles students might be facing and how they can help their students. Professors can provide referrals for students to utilize resources. There could be a better system to ensure that students are utilizing the resources they are referred to. Also, educating the professors on disability services and difficulties students with learning disabilities may face. As stated in previous research, faculty have difficulties accommodating students with disabilities in class because they believe they have a lack of knowledge in how to assist and work with these students (May & LaMont, 2014). Keeping open communication and sharing of knowledge will allow staff, faculty and students to maintain a cohesive system and environment for successful learning.

One last recommendation regarding disability services for this community college is to enhance and change its program to accommodate and work with students more effectively and consistently. Previous research has explored the lack of connection students with disabilities feel to others in the college, which causes a sense of loneliness and helplessness ((Lufi & Awwad, 2013). Perhaps a peer mentor program could be put in place for students with disabilities, so that they are part of a group, team or have at least one relationship to support them emotionally and mentally during their time in college. A program like this could help students with disabilities gain knowledge, skills, and relationships to help them feel comfortable at the college and in turn decrease attrition rates.

Future Research

There should be more schools observed and researched regarding issues with students with learning disabilities and the services they utilize. It would behoove researchers to also observe longer periods of time to explore potential patterns of GPA, credit amounts, and services

utilized. Additional research can also include qualitative data to coincide with the quantitative data collected. Student's input and opinions on their own educational experience should be considered.

Another potential for future research is attempting to reach out to students that have dropped out of college. Qualitative data can be collected through reaching out to previous students regarding their reasoning behind dropping out. This could potential be a sensitive subject for some students, which should be kept in mind for future researchers. Another way to reach these students is to gain qualitative data on student who have taken breaks during their college career. This can be observed with students with disabilities and the general population. There are several reasons students may not stay in school, or take breaks. Through researching these potential reasons further, researchers can gain an enhanced understanding of students. In turn, through this research we can discover ways to prevent attrition and decrease the number of students dropping out of community colleges.

Conclusion

Through reviewing literature and personal experiences, it has been realized that there is an issue with retaining students with learning disabilities at community college and keeping them academically successful. Through researching GPA and retention rates of students with disabilities, in particular learning disabilities, it was discovered that the two are moderately correlated. If students are doing poorly academically, they are more likely to drop out of school and even less likely to graduate. Part of this problem is due to students not utilizing all resources available to them. One of those resources being counseling services, I believe is most crucial because building relationships is a key factor in retaining students at a college. Since students with learning disabilities have a harder time forming and maintaining relationships with people

at college, counseling could potential proactively help them feel connected to the college.

Utilizing counseling services would just be the first connection a student would have; other relationships could be formed from that initial trusting relationship. Professional staff such as counselors can also help to encourage students to utilize services they may be ashamed to use, but really need and would benefit them academically. Future research could be constructed to help determine what struggles students are facing in more detail, and discover potential programs that could help alleviate stress and diminish struggles for students to ensure academic success.

References

- American Psychiatric Association. (2000). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (4th ed., text rev.). Washington, DC: Author.
- Cory, R. C. (2011). Disability services offices for students with disabilities: a campus resource. *New Directions for Higher Education*. 154, 27-36.
- Hollins, N. & Foley, A.R. (2013). The experiences of students with learning disabilities in a higher education virtual campus. *Education Tech Research Development*. 61, 607-624.
- Lufi, D. & Awwad, A. (2013). Using the Minnesota multiphasic personality inventory-2 to develop a scale to identify test anxiety among students with learning disabilities. *Learning Disability Quarterly*. 36(4), 242-249.
- Mamiseishvili, K., Koch, L. C. (2012). Students with disabilities at 2-year institutions in the United States: factors related to success. *Community College Review*. 40(4), 320-339.
- May, B. & LaMont, E. (2014). Rethinking learning disabilities in the college classroom: a multicultural perspective. *Social Work Education*. 33(7), 959-975.
- McCleary-Jones, V. (2007). Learning disabilities in the community college and the role of disability services departments. *Journal of Cultural Diversity*. 14(1), 43-47.
- McCleary-Jones, V. (2008). Students with learning disabilities in the community college: their goals, issues challenges and successes. *The ABNF Journal*. 14-21.
- O'Keeffe, P. (2013). A sense of belonging: improving student retention. *College Student Journal*. 47(4), 605-613.
- Orr, A.C. (2010). "People like me don't go to college." The legacy of learning disability. *Journal of Ethnographic & Qualitative Research*. 4, 213-225.

- Prevatt, F., Welles, T. L., Li, H., Proctor, B. (2010). The contribution of memory and anxiety to the math performance of college students with learning disabilities. *Learning Disabilities Research and Practice*. 25(1), 39-47.
- Scanlon, D. & Baker, D. (2012). An accommodations model for the secondary inclusive classroom. *Learning Disability Quarterly*. 35(4), 212-224.
- Sparks, R. L., Lovett, B. J. (2013). Applying objective diagnostic criteria to students in a college support program for learning disabilities. *Learning Disability Quarterly*. 36(4), 23-24.
- Windham, M. H., Rehfuss, M. C., Williams, C. R., Pugh, J. V., Tincher-Ladner, L. (2014). Retention of first year community college students. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*. 38, 466-477.