

# “R U READY?”

## Helping Students Assess Their Readiness for Postsecondary Education

Beatrice C. Babbitt • Carol M. White

- Carlos, a student with a learning disability, failed two classes his first semester at college before seeking help from the disability resource center.
- DeVon, who uses a wheelchair, often arrives late for class because she didn't schedule enough time between classes to get from building to building.
- Erik, an emotionally challenged student, does well in class, but finds paying bills and getting along with his new roommates overwhelming.

What do these three young people have in common? They are all students with various disabilities, and they are having difficulty making the transition from high school to postsecondary education.

This article presents a review of the literature about the transitional needs of students with disabilities to higher education, discusses the challenges these students face, and introduces a tool that is being piloted to address these areas of concern.

### Challenges Students Face

Transitioning from high school to postsecondary education is a difficult task for students with disabilities. Challenges they face include academics, developing effective social networks, self-advocacy,

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**Assessing a student's readiness for postsecondary education assists in developing effective transition programming.**

and daily functional skills (see box, “What Does the Literature Say?”). Many students with disabilities are ill prepared to face these challenges; and because of disability-related needs, they often struggle to meet graduation requirements, or they drop out.

### A Tool to Assist in the Transitioning Process

To address the transitional issue, one school district in a large metropolitan area in the southwestern United States has created a tool to assist in assessing students' readiness for postsecondary education (Figure 1). This questionnaire was created to determine the readiness skills of students with disabilities who indicate their desire to transition from

high school to college. Many professional educators have reviewed and validated this tool. Reviewers included members of the school district's transition team, assistive technology department, and special education professors at the local university.

You can use data collected with the tool to assist teachers in developing effective programming to address deficit areas. The tool addresses the following areas of concern:

- Social skills.
- Self-awareness and self-advocacy.
- Daily functional skills.
- Knowledge of academic modifications and accommodations.
- Preparedness.
- Support considerations.

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*The results of the data collected from this assessment can assist the teachers in developing a systematic approach to identify specific areas of need and prepare curriculum accordingly.*

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- Employment and financial concerns.
- Student responsibility.

Students complete the assessment tool to assist in providing a global picture of their individual strengths and deficit areas. For example, in the area of preparedness, this tool assesses academic preparedness, if the student has made arrangements for postsecondary life, and other pertinent areas.

The results of the data collected from this assessment can assist the teachers in developing a systematic approach to identify specific areas of need and prepare curriculum accordingly. This process will help in providing some accountability for preparation outcomes for students with disabilities and aid in the identification of deficits in readiness skills as related to transitioning from high school to postsecondary education.

### **Benefits of Transition Tool**

The benefits of this tool are many. The questionnaire captures, perhaps for the first time, the perspectives of students with disabilities who plan on transitioning from high school to postsecondary education.

The questionnaire and its “key” (Figure 2) allow teachers to gain the student’s perspective of their readiness skills and assist educational professionals in addressing deficit areas. Not profiled in this article is a parallel assessment that teachers have completed, using identical topic areas and providing a comparison between the students’ and teachers’ perspectives. Educators can easily reformulate the questions in Figure 1 to use with teachers, as a way of reflecting on what they perceive are the needs of their students.

### **What Does the Literature Say About Transition for Students With Disabilities?**

An analysis of literature found that students who reported having a disability were less likely than their counterparts without disabilities to have stayed enrolled in school or attain a postsecondary degree or credential within 5 years (National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES), 2000). In a study of high school graduates with learning disabilities, Sitlington and Frank (1990) found that 1 year after graduation, only 6.5% of the 50% of students who had enrolled in some type of postsecondary setting were still in school. Other researchers found that the high dropout rate was attributed to the following areas of concern.

**Social Skills.** Many college students with disabilities have difficulty with complex social interactions and need assistance in dealing with the social demands of college (Chavez, 1984; Evenson & Evenson, 1983).

**Self-Awareness, Self-Advocacy.** Palmer and Roessler (2000) reported that students with disabilities in higher education lack self-advocacy skills and knowledge of their rights and responsibilities to request accommodations.

**Daily Functional Skills.** Daily life tasks of people with disabilities are more complicated than the life tasks of their peers without disabilities (Graham, Weingarden, & Murphy, 1991). These tasks include grooming, mobility, and communication, as well as other tasks most people take for granted.

**Academic Modifications or Accommodations.** Studies have indicated that young adults with disabilities enrolled in postsecondary education have little knowledge of their disability rights or understanding of accommodations (Carroll & Johnson-Bown, 1996).

**Preparedness.** Vogel and Adelman (1992) reported that students with learning disabilities enter college with significantly poorer high school preparation than do their peers. NCES (2000) reported that students with disabilities fall behind their counterparts without disabilities in their high school academic preparation for college and, as a result, are less likely to be qualified for entrance into a 4-year institution and more frequently enroll in a 2-year institution.

**Support Considerations.** Stanley (2000) suggested that these students have special concerns as they attempt to live on their own and deal with the disability in an educational environment. Many of these students are coming from sheltered environments and are facing independence for the first time.

**Employment and Financial Concerns.** The majority of students who work while in college work intensively; about 72% of students polled toiled an average of 31 hours a week (NCES, 1992-93).

**Responsibility.** Brinckerhoff (1996) found a marked difference in the expectations of homework and study time between high school and college. Study time increases dramatically in college with few, if any, checks or follow-through until test time. Brinckerhoff, Shaw, and McGuire (1992) noted that studying in college requires additional skills in rewriting lecture notes, paraphrasing information, and integrating information from a variety of sources.

### **Final Thoughts**

Educational professionals often make basic assumptions about a student’s readiness in transitional areas. But are those assumptions correct? The questionnaire presented in this article allows for a comparison of student and teacher views and assists in developing a comprehensive approach to effective pro-

gramming for students with disabilities who plan on making the transition into postsecondary education.

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**Figure 1. Student Questionnaire**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Grade: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Directions: Please circle the correct response.

Y- Yes                    N- No                    NS- Not sure                    NA- Not Applicable

1. I want to continue my education after high school.	Y	N	NS	NA
2. I have taken the classes needed in high school to prepare me for postsecondary education.	Y	N	NS	NA
3. I know what type of employment I want after postsecondary education.	Y	N	NS	NA
4. I have reviewed information from different postsecondary institutions.	Y	N	NS	NA
5. I know how to use the phone book.	Y	N	NS	NA
6. I have met with or spoken to a representative from the postsecondary institution that I would like to attend.	Y	N	NS	NA
7. I know how to budget money.	Y	N	NS	NA
8. I have access to regular transportation.	Y	N	NS	NA
9. My family is helping me make plans for postsecondary education.	Y	N	NS	NA
10. I know how to use a course catalog.	Y	N	NS	NA
11. I will be helping to pay for postsecondary education.	Y	N	NS	NA
12. I know how to use an ATM.	Y	N	NS	NA
13. I need help making plans for postsecondary education.	Y	N	NS	NA
14. I will seek assistance at the Disability Resource Center at the institution I attend if needed.	Y	N	NS	NA
15. I will be living at home while attending a postsecondary institution.	Y	N	NS	NA
16. I plan to have a job while attaining my postsecondary education.	Y	N	NS	NA
17. I have health/dental/vision insurance.	Y	N	NS	NA
18. I know where I will be living during postsecondary education.	Y	N	NS	NA
19. I can manage a bank account.	Y	N	NS	NA
20. I know the resources/adaptations that will help me be successful in postsecondary education.	Y	N	NS	NA
21. I am aware that I, not my parents, need to initiate a request for services at the institution I attend.	Y	N	NS	NA
22. I know how to apply for financial aid to continue my education.	Y	N	NS	NA
23. I know how to obtain public assistance.	Y	N	NS	NA
24. I will need help filling out all necessary paperwork that is required to go to a postsecondary institution.	Y	N	NS	NA
25. I will be paying rent during my postsecondary education experience.	Y	N	NS	NA
26. I know all the differences between high school and postsecondary education.	Y	N	NS	NA
27. I know how to schedule an appointment.	Y	N	NS	NA
28. I am aware of how my disability will affect me during postsecondary education.	Y	N	NS	NA
29. I can identify the areas that I need to improve on to be successful in postsecondary education.	Y	N	NS	NA
30. I know how to use public transportation.	Y	N	NS	NA
31. I have a back-up plan in place if I find that postsecondary education is not for me.	Y	N	NS	NA
32. I have the skills to make new friends.	Y	N	NS	NA
33. I have the skills to live on my own.	Y	N	NS	NA
34. I will ask for help when I need it.	Y	N	NS	NA
35. I know how to advocate for myself.	Y	N	NS	NA
36. I know how to access the Disability Resource Center.	Y	N	NS	NA

**Figure 1. Student Questionnaire (Continued)**

37. My individualized education program (IEP) is written to help me prepare for postsecondary education.	Y	N	NS	NA
38. I know how to keep my personal information private.	Y	N	NS	NA
39. I know how to obtain medical assistance.	Y	N	NS	NA
40. I know where the post office is located.	Y	N	NS	NA
41. I am comfortable in groups.	Y	N	NS	NA
42. Being around new people will interfere with my learning.	Y	N	NS	NA
43. I have the skills to use a computer or word processor.	Y	N	NS	NA
44. I need specific tools for writing and reading.	Y	N	NS	NA

Indicate preferences here

_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
45. My computer requires technological modifications.	Y	N	NS	NA

Indicate preferences here

_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
46. My academic assignments are modified.	Y	N	NS	NA

Indicate modifications here

_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
47. Instructional methods have been modified to assist my learning.	Y	N	NS	NA

Indicate modifications here

_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
48. I know my academic strengths.	Y	N	NS	NA

They are

_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
49. I know my academic weaknesses.	Y	N	NS	NA

They are

_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
50. I need help in the following areas to be successful in postsecondary education.	Y	N	NS	NA

**Figure 2. Student Questionnaire Key**

**Identified Areas of Concern**

- Social skills
- Self-awareness, self-advocacy
- Daily functional skills
- Academic modifications, accommodations, and needs
- Preparedness
- Support considerations
- Employment and financial concerns
- Responsibility

**Related Questions**

- 32, 41, 42
- 1, 3, 18, 28, 29, 35, 48, 49
- 5, 8, 10, 12, 19, 23, 27, 30,33, 39, 40
- 20, 36, 37, 44, 45, 46, 47
- 2, 4, 6, 26, 31, 43
- 9, 13, 15, 17, 24, 50
- 7, 11, 16, 22, 25
- 14, 21, 34, 38

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