Standards of Practice in Postsecondary Special Needs Programming: Student and Administrator Opinion

M. J. REED, E. LUND-LUCAS & K. O'ROURKE

Ryerson University, Trent University, Loyalist College

ABSTRACT

Standards of practice for postsecondary special needs programmes are an important element to determining programme effectiveness and programme successes. A number of groups have now suggested practice standards for postsecondary special needs programmes. We amalgamated these suggested practices and queried Ontario students and administrators regarding their opinion of these practice standards. Overall, strong support for most suggested practices was found among students and administrators. However, administrators less strongly supported practices that required enhanced funding, staffing and resources. In addition, students less strongly supported practices that could reduce individualized programming and increase time commitments. Administrators pointed out barriers to achieving practice standards. Time commitments, workload, funding, unclear working definitions (i.e., standards for transition, disabilities) and institutional policy constraints were barriers to achieving suggested practice standards.

RÉSUMÉ

Les normes qui régissent les pratiques des programmes adaptés du niveau postsecondaire représentent un élément important dans la détermination de l'efficacité de ceux-ci et de leur succès. Un certain nombre de groupes ont suggéré des normes de pratique pour ces programmes éducatifs spéciaux. Nous avons regroupé ces pratiques suggérées et avons interrogé des étudiants en Ontario ainsi que des administrateurs afin d'obtenir leur opinion sur ces normes de pratique. En général, un soutien important à l'égard de la plupart des pratiques suggérées a été noté parmi les étudiants et les membres de l'administration. Toutefois, les administrateurs ont réservé un accueil moins enthousiaste aux pratiques qui nécessitent une augmentation du financement, du personnel et des ressources. De plus, les étudiants ont moins bien accueilli les pratiques qui seraient susceptibles de réduire les programmes personnalisés et qui augmenteraient leur investissement en terme de temps. Les administrateurs ont précisé les obstacles à la réalisation de ces pratiques; les barrières identifiées pour leur mise en place furent : l'investissement en terme de temps, la charge de travail, le financement, des conditions de travail mal définies (c'est-à-dire les normes de transition, d'incapacités) et les contraintes des politiques institutionnelles.

Service provision for students with disabilities has become increasingly important in today's climate. Canadian and American sources cite an increasing number of students with disabilities entering postsecondary institutions (e.g., Fichten, 1995; Greenbaum, Graham & Scales, 1995; Hill, 1992; University of Alberta, 1993; Vogel, Leyser, Kwyland & Brulle, 1999; Wilchesky, 1986) and students with learning disabilities make up the largest proportion of these students (Stewart, Cornish & Somers, 1995; Vogel et al., 1999). Researchers have estimated that between thirty and fifty percent of students with learning disabilities, who enter postsecondary institutions, complete their education. These graduation rates do not differ from non-disabled students (Fichten, 1995; Greenbaum et al., 1995; Vogel et al., 1999). Studies also show that

employment rates for students with learning disabilities who have attended postsecondary institutions are significantly higher than students with learning disabilities who do not attend (Greenbaum, Graham & Scales, 1996) and are equivalent to non-disabled postsecondary graduates (Statistics Canada, 1997).

While there are increasing numbers of students with disabilities entering postsecondary institutions, these students represent only 0.25% of the Canadian population with disabilities (Leitch, 1998). This low proportion may be due to barriers that exist for entry into these institutions. Fichten (1995) argued that both systematic and individual barriers exist for students with disabilities at postsecondary institutions. Some of these barriers include attitudes of service providers and faculty, lack of funding for appropriate accommodations, discrimination, lack of knowledge of special needs programmes and student rights (Fichten, 1995; Greenbaum et al., 1996; The National Educational Association of Disabled Students [NEADS], 1999a, 1999b; Raskin, Goldberg, Higgins & Herman, 1999). Some of these barriers to education for students with disabilities might be overcome with the development of standards of practice in postsecondary programming.

The Canadian Association of Disability Service Providers in Postsecondary Education (CADSPPE) (1999) and Hill (1992) have called for postsecondary institutions to develop policies and practices that ensure students in special needs programmes are dealt with equitably. Saucier and Gagliano (1998) explained that policy discrimination is evident in postsecondary institutional administrative practice and in education accessibility. One way to assess policy discrimination is through programme evaluation. Those involved in postsecondary special needs programming argue that programme evaluation is necessary to ensure that students are treated equitably (e.g., Collier, 1999; University of Alberta, 1993). However, Brinkeroff, Shaw and McGuire (1993) found that many postsecondary institutions are not collecting data to show programme effectiveness. One reason why programme evaluations are not conducted may be the lack of accepted standards of practice.

The development of standards for postsecondary special needs programmes has become a focus of a number of groups (e.g., Association of

Higher Education and Disability [AHEAD], 1996; CADSPPE, 1999; Chapman University, 1999; NEADS, 1999a; University of Alberta, 1993) and individual researchers (see, for example, Albert & Fairweather, 1990; Rose, 1991). Theoretically, standards of practice would provide a number of benefits to special needs programmes including, consistency of practice across institutions, minimal standards for acceptable practice, quality assurance, and a baseline for performance evaluation. While many regulated professions have adopted educational and practice standards (see, for example, Rogers, 2000), most post-secondary programmes do not follow standards developed outside of their individual institutions unless they are seeking accreditation from a professional association or regulatory body. One reason that inter-institutional standards for post-secondary education may not have been developed or followed in many programmes might be the lack of research into the effect of standards on educational programming. However, a few organizations have reported direct benefits resulting from instituting practice standards. Benefits included increased entry-level competencies, and guidelines for curriculum development and public/professional education (Rogers, 2000; Royal College of Radiologists Working Group, 1992).

Although CADSPPE (1999) has made recommendations to closely examine programme standards developed by AHEAD (1996), and NEADS (1999a) has made recommendations as to best practices in special needs programmes, studies of attitudes of service providers and students to these standards have not yet been conducted. The acknowledgment of standards by both service providers and clients represents a first step in developing guidelines for special needs programmes. We amalgamated suggestions for practice standards in postsecondary disability/special needs programmes and designed a survey to solicit the opinions of programme administrators and students across Ontario regarding these practices. While the analysis below shows that suggested standards of practice are broadly accepted in Ontario postsecondary institutions, the analysis also outlines significant differences between student opinion and the opinion of programme administrators. In addition, the analysis outlines shortfalls in some standards that make them difficult to implement.

METHOD

Participants

Postsecondary Administrators. Administrators in all Ontario postsecondary institutions, where special needs services were advertised through institutional web sites or the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training web site, were asked to participate in the practice standards survey. In total 40 postsecondary institutions advertised services (16 universities, 24 colleges). An attempt was made to contact each institution first by e-mail, then by fax. If no response was received a telephone call was made to the institution to find out if they had received our communications and if they intended to participate in the survey. At eight institutions e-mail and fax methods failed. These institutions were telephoned but the calls were either not connected or no method of leaving messages was available. Thus, it was confirmed that 32 postsecondary institutions received the survey and 24 administrators from 21 institutions (8 universities, 13 colleges) responded to the survey. This represents a 66% response rate from contacted institutions. In addition, the proportion of university to college responses was reflective of the distribution of programmes in Ontario. Of those responding schools, seven (22%) were large institutions (>10,000 full-time undergraduates).

Student Participants. Packets of student surveys were sent to all 21 institutions that participated in the administrator portion of the survey. Administrators were asked to distribute at least eight surveys to students in their programme (this number was limited due to time constraints on the part of the administrators). To protect confidentiality of both the students and programmes, each institution received an identifiable return envelope so that study investigators would know how many institutions participated but the envelope or surveys did not identify which institution returned surveys. In all 12 institutions participated in the survey process and 104 surveys were distributed. Sixty-two surveys were returned completed representing 60% of those distributed.

Design and Procedure

The content of the student and administrator best practices surveys were developed through review of many sources including a general literature review and specific practice suggestions made by:

- Programme Self Evaluation Project: Discussion Paper, Reed (2000)

- Success Indicators: Virtual Centre of Excellence (2000)

- The Association of Higher Education and Disability (1996)

- The Canadian Association of Disability Service Providers in Postsecondary Education (1999)

- The National Education Association of Disabled Students (1999 a & b)

- University of Alberta (1993)

The content of the administrator survey focused on nine areas including best practice in programme administration, admissions, assessment, human resources, programme development, transition and outreach, advising and counseling, professional development, and advocacy. Within each content area specific practices (as suggested by the sources listed above) were stated. Specific practices in each content area included advising, communication, advocacy, quality assurance, and accessibility of resources. For a list of specific practices by area see Tables 1, 2, 3, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12. To ensure that survey questions and suggested practices were understood, all developed survey questions were pre-tested on two programme administrators who were asked to suggest changes in wording and indicate their understanding of the questions. Any questions that were difficult to understand or needed wording changes were once again sent to both administrators.

The administrator survey was designed as both an e-mail back and fax back survey. The e-mail version was written in HTML code and e-mailed directly to participant programmes. The survey was designed such that it could be filled out online. The responses to each e-mail back survey were collected in a secure and protected database. Each survey was coded such that more than one survey being returned from the same

participant would be flagged (this never happened). The fax version was identical to the e-mail back version except that it functioned as a five-page paper and pencil survey that was faxed back to a toll free number.

Once pre-testing was complete, the administrator participant sample was asked to rate their level of agreement with each practice using a five point behaviourally anchored Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). Administrators also indicated how frequently (never, rarely, usually, always) their programme follows each practice. When administrators noted that they disagreed with or did not follow a practice (rarely, never) they were asked to explain why.

The student survey was designed as a four-page paper and pencil survey. The content of the student survey was identical to that of the administrator survey, except that areas where students would have limited knowledge were removed (i.e., human resources, professional development) and students were only asked to rate their level of agreement with each practice on the five point behaviourally anchored Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). When students disagreed with a practice they were asked to explain why. To ensure that survey questions and suggested practices were understood, all developed survey questions were pre-tested on 35 students in special needs programmes, who suggested changes in wording and indicated their understanding of the questions asked. These pilot students indicated that they understood all questions but some students needed clarification on task instructions. Based on these comments instructions were modified.

Once pre-testing was complete, programme administrators were asked to randomly distribute surveys to students. Each programme was asked to distribute a minimum of eight surveys. Programme administrators indicated to us that they had little time to distribute and collect surveys, thus a minimum of eight was chosen because administrators agreed that this number would not constitute a large increase in workload. Paper and pencil surveys were returned to the programme in a sealed envelope. The surveys once collected by the programme were forwarded to the first author via mail. An on-line version of the survey was also made available to programmes that wished to have the students complete the survey on-line (two programmes chose this option). For these programmes the

e-mail addresses of students that consented to participate were used to directly contact each student and send each student a survey. The on-line version of the survey was identical to the paper and pencil version. The on-line responses were returned to a secured and protected database and responses were coded such that more than one survey being returned from the same participant would be flagged (this never happened).

Data analysis

.. The qualitative data were analyzed from five perspectives. First, the overall agreement with suggested practices was assessed for administrator and student groups. This was accomplished by frequency/proportion counts of those who at least somewhat agree with a practice (rating 4 or 5) on the Likert scale. Second any practice that had less than 75% agreement was flagged. We considered any practice where agreement reached 75% or more as well accepted. A content analysis (by theme) was performed on comments made by those who disagreed with the flagged practices to ascertain reasons for lower acceptance. Third, overall *participation* of administrators/programmes with each practice was assessed via proportion and a content analysis (by theme) was performed on comments made by administrators to practices that received less than 75% participation. Note that proportions of overall administrators following each practice (since three programmes had two administrator participants) did not differ significantly from the proportions of programmes following each practice, thus overall administrator participation is presented in the result section. Fourth, administrators were asked to indicate minimum programme needs and minimum assessment criteria. Here, the proportion of administrators choosing each item/tool is reported. Fifth, for practices that were not well supported by either administrators or students, two analyses were conducted to show any significant differences in opinion. First, a confidence (.95) analysis about proportions was completed to determine significant differences between the proportion of administrators and the proportion of students supporting a practice. Second, a t-test was conducted to determine differences in ratings made by administrators and students. In addition, we examined possible differences in opinion between colleges and universities and between large

and small institutions. Here, we flagged questions where differences in agreement exceeded 30%. Thirty percent was used because in our lowest N category a minimum of 3 programmes would represent a proportion of greater than 30%. However, due to small sample size for differences between large and small institutions and between colleges and universities, the information provided is only descriptive.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Administrative Practices

Administrators were asked to assess thirteen possible best practices relating to programme administration (see Table 1). Administrators first indicated if they agreed with the practice, and second administrators indicated the frequency with which their programme follows each practice. Students also assessed their level of agreement with five of these practices.

As illustrated in Table 1, strong agreement was found among administrators and students with all administrative practices; except that only 59% of administrators supported budgets being reviewed by an independent assessor. Comments suggested that administrators were concerned about who this independent assessor might be. While students supported administrative practices, some students commented that they often do not feel comfortable asking for administrative information.

Three practices were not consistently followed by administrators (see Table 1). These practices included independent assessment of the budget (59% follow), participation in research activities (29% follow), and informing faculty and staff of programme goals (74% follow). Administrators felt an independent assessor likely would not understand the needs of the programme. In addition, administrators in large institutions less often agreed with and followed budgets being reviewed by an independent assessor and colleges less often followed this practice. Some administrators also noted that one barrier to providing information to faculty or staff is the low attendance from these groups at workshops and training sessions.

Table 1

Percent Agreeing With and Following Suggested Administrative Practices

Practice	*% Agree Administrators*	*% Agree Students*	*% Follow*
1. Special needs staff know and communicate emergency procedures to students.	96	75	79
2. The programme has formal processes to deal with student complaints and grievances.	86	78	78
3. The programme interprets and communicates legal and legislative mandates.	92	NA	87
4. The Special Needs Administrator advocates for programme funds.	96	NA	78
5. The special needs budget is annually reviewed by an independent assessor.	59	NA	59
6. The special needs programme administrator develops and administers a budget.	86	NA	87
7. The special needs programme participates in research activities (i.e., research projects).	75	NA	29
8. There is open communication between the special needs programme and government, community organizations and the institution.	100	NA	87
9. The programme maintains up-to-date data banks on community services, funding, legislation and institutional services.	96	77	83
10. Students, faculty and staff are made aware of programme goals.	96	89	74
11. Programme administrators and staff develop and assess programme goals.	100	NA	83
12. Policies and procedures are reviewed and evaluated annually.	92	NA	83
13. Special needs programmes have documented policies and procedures.	100	87	96

Table 2
Percent Agreeing With and Following Suggested Admissions Practices

Practice	*% Agree Administrators*	*% Agree Students*	*% Follow*
1. Referral to special needs can come from many sources (self, family, high school, faculty).	100	90	100
2. Postsecondary recruitment and admissions staff are knowledgeable of special needs i ssues and admission procedures.	100	74	79
3. Special Needs Staff participate in recruitment activities on and off campus.	75	NA	54
4. Students with special needs are actively recruited to the postsecondary institution.	67	46	52
5. Specialized admission procedures are in place for and advertised to students with special needs.	67	75	58

Admission Practices

Administrators were asked to assess five possible best practices relating to admissions. Students assessed four of these practices. The five practices are found in Table 2.

As illustrated in Table 2, strong agreement was found among administrators and students to the use of two admission practices, and less agreement was evident in three practices. Fewer than 75% of both administrators and students agreed that students with special needs should be actively recruited and there was no significant difference in the proportional agreement among administrators and students, ($p > .05$). However, students mean agreement rating (rating = 3.4, neutral) was significantly lower that administrators (rating = 4.0, agree, $t (83) = 2.05$, $p = .04$). In addition, fewer than 75% of administrators agreed that special admissions procedures should be in place for students with special needs and this proportion did not significantly differ from the proportion of students agreeing, $p>.05$, or the student level of agreement (ratings,

t (83) = 0.21, p = .84). Administrators were concerned about what a specialized admissions procedure would entail. Administrators and students felt that students should meet general entrance requirements for admissions. Some students suggested that special needs students should be part of the recruitment process. One student stated that students prefer to be judged on their grades and achievements rather than their disability. Finally, while 74% of students agreed (mean rating = 3.9, agree) with the practice that recruitment/ admissions staff should be knowledgeable about special needs admissions procedures, all administrators agreed that these staff should be knowledgeable (mean rating = 4.5, strongly agree) and these differences were significant in terms of proportion, (p < .05), and mean ratings (t (83) = 2.60, p = .01).

Three practices were not strongly followed by administrators (see Table 2). Two of the practices followed by fewer than 55% of administrators, involved recruitment activities. Administrators were concerned that recruitment activities would be time consuming and that recruitment is not appropriate if services at the postsecondary level are not available. In addition, universities less often reported being involved in recruitment activities than did colleges. Only 58% of administrators follow special admission procedures for students with special needs. One barrier noted by administrators to this practice was that no guidelines were available about what constitutes a special admission procedure (i.e., lower grades allowed, faster admissions processing, etc.)

Assessment Practices

Administrators were asked to assess nine possible best practices relating to assessment (see Table 3). Students assessed eight of these practices.

As shown in Table 3, both administrators and students did not strongly support assessment being conducted within three years prior to admissions (mean rating = 3.6 and 3.3, agree to neutral, respectively; proportional agreement < 59%) and reassessments taking place during postsecondary studies (both groups rating = 3.6, agree; proportional agreement < 57%). In addition, only 47% of administrators supported assessment updates for non-learning disabled students (mean rating = 3.3, neutral). Comments suggested that administrators believed that reassessment and assessment

Table 3

Percent Agreeing With and Following Suggested Assessment Practices

Practice	*% Agree Administrators*	*% Agree Students*	*% Follow*
1. Assessment updates are conducted for non-LD disabled users.	47	NA	42
2. Full service is available to students during the assessment process.	54	82	73
3. Reassessment is conducted during postsecondary studies.	54	56	62
4. A complete assessment must be conducted within three years prior to admissions.	58	44	65
5. Individual Education Plans are based on the assessment and with input from the student.	100	85	87
6. Assessments are held as confidential and only shared after written consent.	100	93	100
7. Assessment results are shared with the student.	100	92	96
8. Qualified practitioners should conduct and interpret assessments.	100	85	87
9. Assessment criteria should be standardized across all postsecondary institutions.	100	72	82

updates (even within three years prior to admissions) are not always required. Students felt that there are difficulties in obtaining assessments at the secondary level and strict assessment requirements could punish students academically and financially. Students further argued that some disabilities do not change and thus there is little value in reassessment.

Administrators did not strongly support full service during the assessment process (54% agree, mean rating = 3.3 neutral). Administrators felt that such support is difficult to provide due to staff shortages and funding. In contrast, students strongly supported full service during assessment (82% agree, mean rating = 4.2, agree) and the

differences between administrator and student ratings were significant, (t (82) = -4.15, p = .00008). Further, while all administrators supported the idea that assessment criterion should be standardized among postsecondary institutions (mean rating = 4.7, strongly agree), only 72% of students supported this practice (mean rating = 3.9, agree) and these differences were significant for proportion, p < .05 and for ratings t (82) = 3.76 , p = .0003. Some students felt that standardized criteria for assessment would limit students' choice and availability of service.

As illustrated in Table 3, administrators noted that four practices were followed by fewer than 75% of programmes (range between 42% to 73%). These practices involved initial and follow-up assessments and service provision during assessment. Administrators at colleges less often reported following these practices than did administrators at universities. Some administrators stated that one barrier to assessment practices is the lack of evidence that continued assessment is needed. Administrators felt that funding and staffing limitations preclude service during assessment.

Minimum Assessment Criteria

Learning Disabilities. Administrators were asked to state what items they considered necessary for minimum assessment for Learning Disabilities. Table 4 shows the percent of administrators choosing each item. Overall the majority (> 75%) felt cognitive abilities, education history, measures of academic achievement, measures of information processing, a diagnostic statement and other issues ruled out should be part of the assessment process. Further, administrators felt the assessments should be conducted by a qualified psychologist or supervised psychological associate.

General Disabilities. Administrators were asked to state what items they considered necessary for minimum diagnostic assessment for disabilities (shown in Table 5). Only two items were considered necessary for minimum assessment (supported by > 75%). These items included a diagnostic statement, and an assessment conducted by a qualified health provider. Some administrators mentioned that minimum criteria would

Table 4
Percent Administrators Choosing Each item for Minimum Assessment for Learning Disabilities

Item	*Percent Included*
Measures of Cognitive Ability (WAIT, WJPB, TOWS)	88
Educational History	83
Measures of Academic Achievement	83
Assessments are conducted by a registered clinical psychologist or supervised psychological associates	83
Measures of Information Processing	79
Diagnostic Statement	79
Other problems ruled out (i.e., biological, social)	75
Medical/Developmental History	71
Intellectual Ability in Average Range (FSI is 90 or better)	63
Discrepancies of 1.5 or more between aptitude and achievement/information processing	50

very much depend on the disability and that minimum criteria would change depending on the disability.

Human Resources Practices. Administrators were asked to assess five possible best practices relating to Human Resources. The five practices are found in Table 6. Students were not asked about human resources issues.

While more than 90% of administrators agree with all of the proposed human resource practices, only 65% of administrators claimed their programme formally and regularly evaluates staff (see Table 6). Administrators did not comment of the reasons for this lack of evaluation.

Minimum Staffing Requirements for Special Needs Programming. Administrators were asked to indicate the minimum requirements for staffing a special needs programme. Only three positions were deemed required by at least 75% of administrators. These positions included a learning strategist, a programme coordinator and a programme secretary (see Table 7).

Table 5

Percent Administrators Choosing Each item for Minimum Assessment for Disabilities

Item	*Percent Included*
Diagnostic Statement	83
Assessments are conducted by qualified health provider	83
Audiogram (if applicable)	50
CNIB registration (if applicable)	50
Educational History	42
Medical/Developmental History	38
Neuropsychological Assessment	38
Physical Assessment	21

Table 6

Percent Agreeing With and Following Suggested Human Resource Practices

Practice	*% Agree Administrators*	*% Agree Students*	*% Follow*
1. Special needs staff are regularly and formally evaluated.	96	NA	65
2. ˙ Volunteers are trained by special needs.	91	NA	95
3. New special needs staff are given job orientation sessions.	100	NA	92
4. Staff meet the needs of the special needs programme.	95	NA	95
5. Special needs staff have clear written job descriptions.	100	NA	91

Table 7

Percent Administrators Choosing Each item as Minimum Staff Requirements

Position	*Percent Included*
Learning Strategist	83
Programme Coordinator	75
Programme Secretary	75
Technology Interpreter	67
Peer Support/Volunteers	58
Academic Counselor	54
Clinical Counselor	54
Liaison/Promoter	25

Table 8

Percent Agreeing With and Following Suggested Program Development Practices

Practice	*% Agree Administrators*	*% Agree Students*	*% Follow*
1. Recommended accommodations are communicated with faculty.	100	93	96
2. Assistive technologies are integrated into general campus settings (i.e., labs)	95	69	43
3. All accommodations available are compiled and listed for staff and students	83	85	92
4. A staff member is designated to investigate and assist with technologies.	96	78	83
5. Assistive technologies are available	100	92	96
6. Accommodations are suggested based on documentation	100	84	100
7. Students are encouraged to seek services as accessed by non-disabled peers (i.e., academic skills).	96	92	96
8. Suggest accommodations are demonstrated and monitored by the special needs programme	96	86	87
9. The special needs programme arranges individual accommodations for students.	91	97	91

Programme Development Practices. Administrators were asked to assess nine possible best practices relating to Programme Development. Students also assessed these practices. The nine practices are found in Table 8.

As illustrated in Table 8, the majority of administrators and students agreed with all of the suggested programme development practices, although students less strongly supported the idea that assistive technologies should be integrated on campus (69% support, rating = 3.8, agree) than did administrators (95% support, mean rating = 4.5, strongly agree) and these differences were significant for both proportion, (p < .05) and ratings, (t (81) = 3.12, p = .002). Some students were not sure what these technologies were and thus felt they could not support integration without information. This lack of knowledge of technology by students is supported by the fact only 43% of the administrators stated that assistive technologies are integrated into the general campus. Administrators noted that their institutions are beginning to investigate possible integration of technology over their campuses. However, one barrier to technology integration noted by administrators is the lack of staff to support technology.

Transition and Outreach Practices. Administrators were asked to assess eight possible best practices relating to Transition and Outreach (see Table 9). Students assessed five of these practices.

As shown in Table 9, more than 75% of administrators agreed with all but two transition/outreach practices. Students did not show strong support for three practices. Both students and administrators did not strongly support programme communication with parents of students (< 58% support, mean ratings = 3.6 and 3.5, respectively). Administrators and students commented that their programme is an adult model and communication requires consent. Only 54% of administrators supported a promotion team representing special needs programmes (mean rating = 3.7, agree). Administrators stated that promotion is usually integrated with other postsecondary programmes. While administrators supported preparatory courses for postsecondary education (83% support, mean rating = 4.1), students were less supportive (61% support, mean rating = 3.7) but these differences were not significant. Some

Table 9
Percent Agreeing With and Following Suggested Transition and Outreach Practices

Practice	% Agree Administrators	% Agree Students	% Follow
1. Students are given special needs orientation sessions' prior to or at the start of the academic session.	96	84	71
2. The special needs programme communicates with and responds to student's parents.	57	52	71
3. Postsecondary preparation courses are offered to special needs secondary students.	83	61	17
4. Special needs programme promotion is coordinated with other postsecondary institutions.	78	NA	30
5. The special needs programme provides professional development for secondary teachers and guidance.	79	NA	30
6. The special needs programme has a promotion team.	54	NA	32
7. Secondary institutions are made aware of the special needs services.	100	69	88
8. Special needs programme brochures describe . the programme (i.e., goals, entrance requirements, services and contact information	100	75	96

students were unaware of what a preparatory course would entail. Interestingly, while 69% of students supported the practice that secondary schools be made aware of programmes (mean rating = 3.9), all administrators supported this practice (mean rating = 4.7). These differences in opinion between students and administrators were significant for both proportion, ($p < .05$) and ratings, (t (82) = 3.93, p = .0002). Comments suggested that students believed secondary schools are made aware of postsecondary programmes but that this information is not

passed on to the teachers or students. Students suggested that communication should be directed at students and their teachers rather than through the school (i.e., guidance).

Six practices were not strongly followed by administrators. These practices included offering preparatory courses, programme promotion and offering secondary professional development. Administrators at universities and at large institutions less often reported following these practices than did those at colleges and smaller institutions. Administrators discussed that staffing and funding limitations curtail transition activities. Administrators also stated that standards for transition practice have not been developed and thus the form of these activities (sessions, prep courses, transition mail-out practices) is not clear. In addition, administrators were concerned about promoting services that they may later (due to funding) not be able to provide.

Advising/Counseling Practices.

Administrators were asked to assess ten possible practices relating to advising and counseling (Table 10). Students assessed nine of these practices.

As illustrated in Table 10, administrators showed strong support for all practices except that only 74% of administrators supported the integration of academic skills sessions with other non-disabled students (this proportion does not differ significantly from students). Administrators were concerned that academic skills staff might not well understand the needs of students with disabilities. Students did not strongly support several practices. Only 69% of students support consulting with other departments regarding student need (mean rating = 4.0), while all administrators agreed with this practice (mean rating = 4.9) and these differences were significant for both proportion, (p<.05) and ratings, (t (83) = 5.03, p = .000003). In addition the practice of providing or revising a student handbook was not well supported by students (< 57% support, mean rating = 3.6), but supported by administrators (> 82% support, mean rating = 4.3) and these differences were significant for both proportion, (p < .05) and ratings, (t (83) = 2.99 [providing handbook], p = .004, t (83) = 2.70, p = .009 [revising handbook]). However, administrators at universities and at large institutions less often provided or revised a

Table 10
Percent Agreeing With and Following Suggested Advising and Counseling Practices

Practice	*% Agree Administrators*	*% Agree Students*	*% Follow*
1. Academic skills sessions for students with special needs are integrated with other postsecondary students.	74	80	82
2. Academic advising for special needs students are integrated with other postsecondary students.	88	79	91
3. Requests by students for learning strategy sessions, academic skill and counseling are dealt with promptly.	100	87	96
4. Meetings with students are arranged to fit the student's schedule.	96	95	100
5. Special needs programme staff consult with other campus departments regarding student need (i.e., health).	100	69	92
6. Qualified psychological counselors are available within the institution.	92	78	75
7. Programme staff are aware of issues that warrant professional counseling.	100	NA	96
8. Faculty and staff are given in-service training by special needs	96	64	67
9. The special needs student handbook is reviewed and updated annually.	83	52	48
10. Students with special needs receive a special needs student handbook.	88	56	65

handbook and this is consistent with the fact that many students mention they did not receive a handbook. This lack of familiarity with such a book may have resulted in poor support by students. Administrators confirmed this, as fewer than 66% of administrators provided and revised a student handbook. In addition, there was poor support by students for in-service training of faculty (64% support, mean rating = 3.8) but strong support by administrators (96% support, mean rating = 4.7). The differences in support for in-service between students and administrators was significant for both proportion, (p<.05) and ratings, (t (83) = 3.93, p = .0002). One student mentioned that their professors seemed to know how to teach students with special needs. The belief that professors are already trained about these issues might have lead to lower support for further training. Some administrators noted that they do not provide faculty training due to poor attendance at previous sessions (followed by 67%)

Professional Development Practices. Administrators were asked to assess five possible best practices relating to professional development. Students were not asked about professional development practices. The five practices are found in Table 11.

As illustrated in Table 11, administrators strongly supported all of the proposed professional development practices. However, two practices were not strongly followed by programmes. Practices not consistently followed included the development of internal workshops and training (followed by 64%) and the encouragement of staff to hold professional memberships (followed by 71%). Funding limitations and time constraints prevented programmes from developing internal workshops. Some administrators also stated that for some jobs (i.e,. learning strategist) there is no professional organization.

Advocacy Practices. Administrators were asked to assess eight possible practices relating to advocacy. Students also assessed each of these practices. The eight practices are found in Table 12.

While all advocacy practices were well supported by administrators, students did not strongly support two practices (see Table 12). First, students less strongly supported the practice of encouraging students to organize (52% support, mean rating = 3.7) than did administrators (83% support, mean rating = 4.1) and these differences were significant for both

Table 11
Percent Agreeing With and Following Professional Development Practices

Practice	*% Agree Administrators*	*% Agree Students*	*% Follow*
1. Internal training/workshops are developed for special needs staff.	95	NA	64
2. Special needs staff are encouraged to hold membership in professional organizations.	88	NA	71
3. Special needs staff are encouraged to participate in workshops, conferences and meetings.	100	NA	96
4. Special needs staff are informed of services, information and resources available through the programme, institution and community.	96	NA	92
5. All special needs staff meet regularly to discuss programme needs.	100	NA	92

Table 12
Percent Agreeing With and Following Suggested Advocacy Practices

Practice	*% Agree Administrators*	*% Agree Students*	*% Follow*
1. Career planning is available to students	100	85	88
2. Students are apprised of their rights and responsibilities	100	80	92
3. Special needs staff review and provide input to all institutional policy and planning that affects special needs students.	100	80	71
4. The special needs programme aids students in advocating their rights to administration, faculty, community and government.	100	77	96
5. Special needs students have peer supports available.	100	80	83
6. Special needs students are encouraged to organize (i.e., student council)	83	52	57
7. The special needs programme informs students of legislation and their legal rights.	100	69	100
8. Students are encouraged to advocate for services and resources.	100	85	96

proportion, (p < .05) and ratings, (t (83) = 2.12, p = .04). Additionally, the practice of informing students of legal rights was not well supported by students (69% support, mean rating 3.9), but strongly supported by administrators (100% support, mean rating 4.6, t (83) = 3.18, p = .002). Some students felt that these issues are not relevant to them (but see discussion).

Administrators stated that some practices were not consistently followed. According to administrators, only 71% of programmes review institutional policy. Those that do not review institution policy stated that they are given limited access to institutional policy decisions by their institution. Further, only 57% of administrators encourage students to organize. Some administrators believe that students do not have the skills needed to organize and that their programmes do not have the time to instill such skills.

Further Practices. Some administrators suggested further practices that could be adopted by programmes. These are listed in Table 13.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Overall, there was strong support from both administrators and students for most suggested practice standards. However, in some cases administrators and/or students disagreed with a practice and these practices are highlighted here.

Neither administrators nor students strongly support the idea that students with special needs should be targeted for recruitment. Their comments indicated that minimum university requirements should be met before admissions consideration. Aune (1998) pointed out that admissions offices have a great deal of difficulty determining whether students with learning disabilities are truly qualified for postsecondary education. In addition, Hill (1992) found that only about 30% of postsecondary institutions surveyed had policies regarding entrance for students with disabilities into their institutions. Lower support for targeted recruitment may reflect both institutional policy (or lack thereof) and unclear definitions of targeted admissions (i.e., specialized admissions does not mean accepting poorer quality students).

Table 13
Further Practices Suggested by Administrators

1. Programmes should have access to technological aids

2. Special needs offices should have advisory committees that liaise with the community.

3. Students should be represented on committees.

4. Special needs policies and procedures should be approved by the board of governors and incorporated into institutional directives.

5. Technologies should be available on a loan basis to students.

6. Courses (i.e., career planning) should be adapted to better fit the needs of special needs students.

7. Transition support should be available to students prior to and after post-secondary training.

8. Admission testing should be waived for special needs students.

9. Feedback on services provided should be gathered from both students and faculty.

10. Students are taught the limits of their disability and how to minimize its impact.

11. Special needs faculty should be added to and integrated with other campus programmes (i.e. career services have a quarter time special needs staff member).

Neither administrators nor students strongly support the idea of reassessment during secondary education and the necessity of assessment three years prior to admission. Both groups indicated that such assessment requirements are not always necessary and that strict assessment requirements can delay service. In addition, administrators did not strongly support the need for assessment updates for students with learning disabilities. Further, administrators but not students supported standardized assessments. One difficulty in assessing students with disabilities is the lack of a functional definition of some disabilities (Leitch, 1998). Currently, as pointed out by Stewart (1995), there is no

standard criterion for learning disabilities that has been identified and validated. However, experts, like the administrators in this study, argue that assessments should include some specific criteria, including norm-referenced tests (Chapman, 1999; Siegel, 1999; University of Alberta, 1993). Siegel (1993) outlines that one difficulty with the use of norm-referenced tests for assessment is deciding cut-off for disabilities. Some researchers (see Siegel, 1999) have argued that an arbitrary cut-off on a norm-referenced test could result in less access to service. Students in the current survey echo this concern.

Administrators did not strongly support that departments have pro-motion teams or that the programme budget to be assessed by an indepen-dent assessor. Administrators indicated that time and funding are barriers to these activities. Time and funding barriers were also reflected in prac-tices that administrators agreed with but did not regularly follow. Overall, practices that were supported and not followed were not followed due to time and funding constraints. For example, administrators saw services in the area of professional development (within and external to the institu-tion), recruitment and transition as important, however, current staffing levels allowed for little participation in these activities. Hill (1992) found that average caseload at the postsecondary level was sixty-five students per service provider. In addition, Hill found that only fifty to 66% of pro-gramme directors were full-time. Given the recent increase in number of students attending postsecondary education, caseloads likely have also increased. NEADS (1999a, 1999b) found service and funding limitations throughout Canada and argued that stronger sustainable government funding is needed to build and develop services in Canada.

A few practices were supported by administrators but not by students. Most of these practices revolved around issues of confidentiality and individualism. For example, while administrators agreed that the pro-gramme should consult with other departments about student needs, stu-dents less strongly felt this should be done. Students may have been in part concerned about the attitude of faculty and staff towards students with disabilities. Vogel et al. (1999) and McBurney (1995) found that most faculty have a positive attitude towards students with disabilities, however, a large proportion of faculty did not have adequate knowledge

of disabilities. Poor knowledge could lead to attitudinal barriers and mis-
conceptions (i.e., the student with learning disabilities can not handle
postsecondary programming, Aune, 1998).

Administrators but not students agreed with a number of promotional
and advocacy practices including having students organize, understand
legislation, take university prep courses, and receive handbooks. Students
also did not support faculty in-service and integrated technology. In part,
the lack of support for these issues among students may reflect concerns
over time commitments (time to learn legislation, sit on student organiza-
tions, sit in prep courses and read handbooks). Students may also have
been concerned that some of these practices would affect individualized
attention (i.e. read handbooks, rather than receive help). It is also possible
that students did not truly understand the value of these services.
Greenbaum et al. (1995) and NEADS (1999a) found that some students
seem to be unaware of services available to them on and off campus.
Aune (1998) argued that one of the greatest barriers in postsecondary
education for students is their lack of knowledge about services. This
may be in part due to poor co-ordination of service between postsec-
ondary and secondary institutions (Aune, 1998).

Students more strongly supported and agreed with providing full ser-
vice to students during assessment than did administrators. Students
were concerned that lack of service could directly affect the students'
ability to cope with postsecondary education. Overall, administrators
were concerned with funding and staffing limitations in providing such
service. Siegel (1999) argues that the timing of assessments is a concern
to both students and programmes. While having an assessment prior to
entrance to postsecondary studies is most desirable, assessments are
often not complete prior to admissions. Forcing a student to wait until
assessments are complete puts the student at both an academic and eco-
nomic disadvantage (Siegel, 1999).

While our survey involved only Ontario institutions, we believe the
results of this study are relevant to other regions of Canada and America.
First, the standards of practice suggested here were based on both
Canadian and American sources. Second, the barriers and concerns
about best practice raised by our survey participants such as institutional

barriers and funding are not unique to the Ontario. Third, as in other regions of Canada, institutional policy surrounding special needs programming varies among Ontario institutions thus opinion reflects a diverse experience.

Providing standards of practice for postsecondary special needs programming is important in today's climate. The unique contribution of this paper was to highlight strong agreement for most suggested practices among Ontario administrators and students. In addition, we have found that administrators and students are concerned about practices that would hinder confidentiality, reduce individualism, delay service and stretch the programme beyond its ability (due to funding, time limitations and staffing) to provide high quality service. Future research should focus on methods to address these concerns and methods to implement standard practices. Having accepted standards of practice in Ontario and beyond would provide programmes with a benchmark for evaluation and allow for consistent practices and language between programmes. ✤

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