

AN ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION OF

Windy Franklin Martinez for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Education presented on April 11, 2013.

Title: Leadership Challenges for Disabled Students Programs and Services in the California Community Colleges: A Phenomenological Exploration of the Lived Experience of Mid Level Administrators.

Abstract approved:

Darlene F. Russ-Eft

The purposes of this phenomenological inquiry was to examine the challenges faced by administrative leaders of Disabled Student Programs and Services (DSPS) at California community colleges (CCC) from the perspectives of current practitioners. This study was undertaken for the following reasons: (a) the increasing number of students with disabilities accessing the CCC has implications for the colleges' abilities to serve this population effectively; (b) every CCC campus is mandated to employ a designated coordinator for DSPS, the leadership skills of whom can have a direct impact on the educational access and success of students with disabilities; and (c) the anticipated leadership crisis in DSPS administration due to the retirement of current coordinators leads to a need for information concerning skills needed by DSPS administrators.

The research design used an interpretive social science philosophical approach and phenomenological method. Two research questions guided the inquiry: (a) What are the leadership challenges experienced by DSPS mid-level administrators? (b) Which leadership knowledge and skills are needed to deal with the challenges? Six mid-level administrators of DSPS at a California community college were interviewed regarding: (a) the challenges they face leading their programs; and (b) the skills and knowledge needed to address these challenges. Data emerging from these interviews were analyzed resulting in the identification of several themes about the challenges these leaders faced and what skills and knowledge needed to effectively address those challenges.

The significance of this study is threefold. The first is to give voice to the lived experiences of a group of mid-level community college administrators who lead disability services programs. The second is to identify the specific challenges to leading these programs based on the insights gained from the review of the relevant literature and the perceptions of the practitioners interviewed. The third is to add to the currently limited scholarly literature regarding the challenges of leading disability support programs for college students from the perspective of the program leaders. Given these insights and literature related to the topic, the study's findings offered several implications for these student affairs professionals as well as the practice of leading DSPS on the CCC campus.

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Leadership Challenges for
Disabled Students Programs and Services in the
California Community Colleges:
A Phenomenological Exploration of the Lived Experience of Mid-Level Administrators

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Windy Franklin Martinez

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APPROVED:

Major professor, representing Education.

Dean of the College of Education

Dean of the Graduate School

I understand that my dissertation will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my dissertation to any reader upon request.

Windy Franklin Martinez, Author

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
Chapter One: Focus and Significance.....	1
Historical Framework for Disabled Student Services.....	2
Research Purpose and Questions	4
Research Significance.....	6
Increasing number of DSPTS Students.....	7
Importance of Administrative Leadership Skills in DSPTS	7
The Number of Anticipated Retirements of DSPTS Leaders	8
Enhancing My Professional Knowledge.....	9
Summary of Chapter One	10
Chapter Two: Review of the Literature	13
Approach to Review of Literature	13
Criteria for Inclusion and Exclusion of Research Literature	14
Organization of Literature Review	14
Clarification of Terms.....	15
Historical Framework for DSPTS in the CCCs.....	16
Leadership Challenges of DSPTS Administration.....	18
Challenges Facing Student Affairs Nationwide.....	18
Leadership Challenges Specific to the CCC and DSPTS Administration	20
Leadership Knowledge and Skills to Address Challenges	24
Professional Standards for DSS Coordinators	25
Program Standards for DSS	26
Summary of Chapter Two.....	30

TABLE OF CONTENTS (continued)

	<u>Page</u>
Chapter Three: The Phenomenological Method and the Design of the Study	35
Personal Disclosure of Researcher.....	35
Philosophical Approach: Interpretive Social Science.....	37
Purpose of Interpretive Social Science	37
Interpretive Social Science Approach.....	38
Assumptions about the Nature of Reality and Truth	40
Strengths and Weaknesses of the Interpretive Social Science Approach ...	41
Research Method: Phenomenology	42
Purpose of Phenomenology	43
Key Concepts	43
History of the Development of Phenomenology	46
Procedures.....	47
Sample Selection.....	47
Information Collection.....	49
Information Analysis	50
Strategies to Ensure Soundness	51
Coding Process.....	51
Auditing Process	52
Participant Input.....	53
Strategies to Protect Human Subjects.....	53
Summary of Chapter Three.....	54

TABLE OF CONTENTS (continued)

	<u>Page</u>
Chapter Four: Analysis of Interview Responses.....	57
Profiles of the Administrators Interviewed.....	57
Results of Analyses.....	58
Challenges of Leading DSPS.....	58
Lack of Fiscal Resources	59
Lack of Understanding.....	60
Other Challenges.....	61
Leadership Skills Needed to Address the Challenges.....	63
Managing Resources	63
Interpersonal Skills	65
Ability to Communicate and Advocate.....	65
Practical Knowledge Needed to be an Effective DSPS Leader	68
Familiarity with Disabilities, Relevant Laws, and Programs	69
Ability to Identify and Allocate Resources.....	70
Leadership Competencies	71
Salient Themes.....	72
Challenges of Leading DSPS.....	73
Lack of Fiscal Resources	73
Lack of Understanding.....	74
Other Challenges.....	75

TABLE OF CONTENTS (continued)

	<u>Page</u>
Leadership Skills Needed to Address Challenges	77
Managing Available Resources	77
Interpersonal Skills	78
Ability to Communicate and Advocate.....	78
Practical Knowledge Needed to be an Effective DSPS Leader	80
Familiarity with Disabilities, Relevant Laws, and Programs	80
Ability to Identify and Allocate Resources.....	81
Leadership Competencies	82
Summary of Chapter Four	83
Chapter Five: Conclusion	88
Research Findings.....	88
Limitations of the Study.....	89
Suggestions for Further Research	90
Questions for Community College Practice	92
Reflection.....	94
Final Thoughts	96
References.....	100
Appendices.....	109
Appendix A – Interview Checklist	110
Appendix B – Interview Protocol	111
Appendix C – Advice to Senior Administrators	115
Appendix D – Advice to Other DSPS Leaders	121

CHAPTER ONE: FOCUS AND SIGNIFICANCE

In the United States, community colleges are becoming the primary route to post-secondary education and training for people with disabilities. Rapidly changing demographics of this underrepresented student population, due mainly to the impact and implementation of federal and state disability laws, are making post-secondary education more accessible to people with disabilities (Hall & Belch, 2000). Currently, half of the 2.1 million students with disabilities entering college are opting for the public institutions (Wolanin & Steele, 2004) to obtain post-secondary academic or vocational training. Over five percent were enrolled in a California Community College (CCC) during the 2011-2012 academic year (California Community College Chancellor's Office Data Mart, n.d.).

In the CCC system, Disabled Students Programs and Services (DSPS) is a program designated to address the needs of this special population. The program, funded by the California Community College Chancellor's Office (CCCCO), provides a variety of specialized support services and instructional programs designed to increase academic access to students with disabilities. Furthermore, DSPS programs are funded based upon how many students are served and the type of disability being addressed, and the Chancellor's Office provides guidelines regarding implementation of DSPS requirements that will support the program's funding mechanism

To maintain compliance with Federal and state laws, and to receive DSPS funding, each campus must assign a DSPS coordinator "who has responsibility for the day-to-day operation of DSPS" (California Community College Chancellor's Office,

1997, p. 9). Several studies (Conway & Chang, 2003; Hall & Belch, 2001; Chelberg, Harbour, & Juarez, 1998; Strange, 2001; Taylor, 2005; Wilson, & Getzel, 2001) have illustrated providing such services and accommodations as integral to the success of many college students with disabilities. In turn, DSPS personnel become “a critical link between the university and (both) the programmatic and physical accommodations for the student” (Conway & Chang, 2003, p. 1). According to JoAnn Busenbark, a retired DSPS administrator with over 30 years of experience in the CCC system, “a good DSPS coordinator can make or break (a) program” (personal communication, January 23, 2007).

The DSPS coordinator’s role is vital to maintain the legal compliance of the district or the campus for which they work, as well as create an accessible environment for students with disabilities. However, the CCC system is anticipating a wave of retirements among DSPS coordinators and, if current trends continue, 50 % of current DSPS coordinators (55 positions) will retire from California’s system within the next five to 10 years (Jan Galvin, personal communication, January 4, 2007). Approximately half of these will be mid-level administrators. Coupled with increasing numbers of students with disabilities entering the CCC and the impending DSPS coordinator retirements in the CCC system, finding new DSPS leaders for the CCC will be difficult. Furthermore, given the precariousness of middle-management positions, especially in times of fiscal crisis, how can a campus or district attract, retain, or grow quality DSPS administrators?

Historical Framework of DSS

The United States is the pioneer of the earliest and most comprehensive legal actions and laws that protect the rights of persons with disabilities (Johnson, 2005). Parent advocacy groups in the 1970s pushed for a broad legal right to public education for their children with special needs, and with the passage of the Education of All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, more elementary and secondary students with disabilities were identified and served because of this mandate of a free appropriate public education for all K- 12 students. This act was later named the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (1990) and helped to prepare students with disabilities for the transition into postsecondary education or employment.

Two federal laws govern a U.S. college's response to students with disabilities: the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 (amended in 1998) and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, specifically Section 504 (reauthorized in 1992). Section 504 dictates that colleges receiving federal assistance make their campuses and curriculum accessible to qualified students with disabilities, whereas the ADA expands the law to include private entities. In accordance with the mandates of the ADA and Section 504, the post-secondary institutions are legally obligated to make their programs, services, and facilities accessible to students with disabilities. According to Shaw and Dukes (2001), along with the increasing numbers of students with disabilities comes the necessity to provide DSS professionals with information and assistance to ensure "equal access for college students with disabilities" (p. 1).

Fortunately, to meet the requirements of these laws and the needs of students with disabilities, U.S. colleges receiving federal money maintain Disability Support Services (DSS) offices on their sites that provide support services, specialized instruction, and educational accommodations. These program offerings are designed so college students with disabilities can participate in and access the same college programs and services as their non-disabled counterparts. Furthermore, DSS professionals verify the disability and prescribe academic accommodations to the student's specific disability related educational limitation.

In an effort to comply with federal mandates that supported the special needs of students with disabilities, the CCCCO established Disabled Students Programs and Services (DSPS) in 1976. According to Scott-Skillman et al. (1992), the passage of the state's Assembly Bill 77, known as the Lanterman Bill, provided additional categorical funding for academic support services to students with disabilities including, but not limited to, specialized instruction, disability assessment, and counseling. The intent of the California legislature was to make a community college education accessible to this special population and to prioritize funding to support the increased cost of serving students with special needs.

Research Purpose and Questions

This dissertation was concerned with the leadership challenges of the DSPS coordinator who holds mid-level administrative positions. Within the CCCs, the role of the DSPS "coordinator" may be assigned to faculty members or administrators. According to the titles listed in the most current roster of DSPS coordinators (Galvin

Group, 2011), over half of the 110 coordinators hold mid-level administrative titles including Dean, Associate Dean, Manager, or Director. I believe the challenges are different for DSPTS coordinators who are mid-level administrators than faculty coordinators or DSPTS administrators who have faculty retreat rights. It was the perspective of these midlevel administrators that I wanted to hear, perspectives I thought were important for senior CCC administrators to hear, especially those who have administrators coordinating DSPTS programs.

Thus, the purpose of this study was to explore the experience, or phenomena, of being a DSPTS mid-level administrator in the CCC system from the voice of current practitioners, because I believed their voices could illuminate some light on how to handle the responsibility for the accessibility of the academic environment, the legal compliance of the district or campus, and the advocacy for students with disabilities. Other objectives that guided this research included: providing information to current DSPTS administrators that may reflect or validate their occupational experiences, and offering a document that will give aspiring and new DSPTS administrators insight into the occupational demands of their position. Following up on that insight required me to ask the pertinent questions:

- What are the challenges experienced by DSPTS administrators in the CCCs?

This research question allowed the rich and personal stories of current practitioners to be told and then understood by the researcher. Specifically, I presented detailed accounts of what it is like to administer disability support services for the CCC. This study was exploratory in nature, as there appears

to be limited research conducted on the lived experience of the DSPP administrator.

- What knowledge and skills are needed to address the challenges? The answer to this question served to inform readers about the skills needed to be an effective leader in disability support services. It was important for administrative DSPP leaders to know what skills can help them do their jobs more effectively, as well as what facilitates their ability to lead a program.
- Which leadership skills are most important for a new DSPP manager, and what makes them important? This question served to identify leadership skills that are essential to creating an understanding of how we can best recruit, train, and support new DSPP administrators to be successful in leading their programs.

Research Significance

The significance of studying leadership challenges associated with administering DSPP is based on four points. First, the increasing number of students with disabilities accessing the CCC has implications for the colleges' abilities to serve this population effectively. Second, each of the 113 CCC campuses are mandated to employ a designated coordinator of disability support services which, depending upon the leadership skills of these coordinators, can have a direct impact on the educational access and success of students with disabilities. Third, there is an anticipated leadership crisis in DSPP administration due to the retirement of current coordinators from the community college system, many of whom began their careers when DSPP was mandated over 30

years ago. Fourth, answers to these research questions will strengthen my understanding as a current DSPS practitioner, a current leader in DSPS administration for the CCC, and an instructor of future disability support service providers.

The Increasing Number of DSPS Students

The focus of this research is the administration of DSPS at the CCC system, the largest higher education system in both the U.S. and the world with 113 campuses that enrolled over 2.7 million students in the fall of the 2011 academic year (CCC Data Mart, n.d.). Currently, the California system serves over 121,000 students who are registered through DSPS, an increase of over 36,000 students during the past 10 years (CCC Data Mart, n.d.). While the numbers of students with disabilities annually registering with DSPS accounts for a little more five percent of all those attending California community colleges, these students represent one in twelve of all students with disabilities enrolled in U.S. colleges, nationwide.

Of course, there are many factors related to the changing demographics, among them: more K-12 students who are accessing post-secondary education; disability laws which are guaranteeing access for people with disabilities; adult onset of disability or chronic illness forcing people to come back to college for vocational and or academic training; and the aging population of the United States. The increase in students has more than an effect on numbers; there is also an increase in the spectrum of disabilities being accommodated (Hall & Belch, 2000) and in the number (and complexity) of accommodations needed to serve students within this domain.

Importance of Administrative Leadership Skills in DSPTS

The student affairs profession is committed to creating an inclusive learning environment responsive to student differences and diversity (Javinar, 2000).

Consequently, these professional commitments have become values of the profession, and student affairs professionals have assumed leadership for creating these environments on college campuses. According to Hall and Belch (2000), values must be considered when working with students from underrepresented groups, specifically students with disabilities. DSPTS coordinators, responsible for managing a program designed to support underrepresented students (many of whom are at risk for dropping out of college), share these same values. While students with disabilities have legal rights to enroll in post-secondary institutions, when they arrive at the campus they often experience “various forms of discrimination or insensitivity and less than equal opportunities” (Hall & Belch, 2000, p. 12).

Public two-year institutions enroll more than half of all college students reporting a disability (Wolanin & Steele, 2004), thereby serving a larger proportion of students with disabilities than any other type of post-secondary educational segment (Shaw, 2006). Given the importance of student affairs in providing a supportive learning environment, with strong administrative and leadership skills, DSPTS managers can make the academic environment more accessible to students with disabilities, as well as more profitable for the district they serve.

The Large Number of Anticipated Retirements of DSPS Leaders

My focus was on the DSPS programs of the CCCs because they support one in 12 U.S. students with disabilities enrolled in college and the number of students being served is increasing every year by three to four percent (CCC Data Mart, n.d.). Demographics of these students are as diverse as their needs. The interpretation and implementation of the Chancellor's Office guidelines is key to a compliant and financially successful DSPS and is a primary charge for DSPS coordinators. Given the challenges that will affect these leaders in the CCC, including serving underprepared students, providing accountability in student services, using instructional technology, and supporting workforce development (Averill, 2006), unfortunately there remain few programs available to train new DSPS coordinators.

Worse yet, with all of these challenges, each of which has its own subset of further challenges, higher education in California must have a plan for succession of retiring leaders. California community college administrators are retiring in significant numbers, and replacing them will be difficult. According to Averill (2006) a "challenge will be with the current leadership of the community colleges to create the appeal to encourage entry into these challenging positions, to provide support systems for new leaders, and to maintain staff development as these changes take place (p. 8). Finding new leaders for DSPS administration, like other areas of community college, will be challenging but necessary to serve students with disabilities effectively while maintaining the legal, environmental, and historical access of the CCC.

Enhancing My Professional Knowledge

Research in these areas would expand my professional knowledge regarding the leadership challenges of DSPP administration that I employ in my current responsibilities as a DSPP coordinator at a CCC. It would also improve my skills as an instructor of graduate students training to become future disability service professionals at post-secondary institutions.

Because I have professional experience as a DSPP administrator for the CCCs, my experiences in this role profoundly influenced my choice of research topic. Far too many of the challenges I have encountered as a mid-level administrator in the community college model have been difficult, and, in some cases, surreal. The politics of the college campus, the administrative demands (supervision, budget management, program compliance), and the reality that there is no job security all remain difficult issues for me to grasp. I am indebted to the voices of other student affairs administrators that have helped me make sense of the skills needed to do my job effectively.

Their real life narratives via mentoring, anecdotal advice, and professional support have aided in my continued retention as a CCC administrator. Because of the positive influence of the practitioner's voice on my professional and leadership development in DSPP administration, my goal was to research the phenomena of being a DSPP administrator, a role that is still being defined 30 years after the implementation of the program in the CCC (Carol D'Alessio, personal communication, April 23, 2007). Yet there is an apparent gap in the use of research theory in the professional life of most practitioners (Hirsch, 2000). I want to bridge this gap by providing research based upon

the practitioner's voice, using my professional experiences as a tool providing useful and practical information to those who are new to DSPTS administration or who are considering entering the practice.

Summary

The community colleges are becoming the primary route to post-secondary education and vocational training for people with disabilities, an underrepresented student population with rapidly changing demographics and with legal rights to access higher education. Over five percent of these students were enrolled in the CCC system and accessed DSPTS services during the 2011-2012 academic year (CCC Data Mart, n.d). To maintain compliance with Federal and state laws, and to receive DSPTS funding, each campus must assign a DSPTS coordinator

Several studies (Chelberg, Harbour, & Juarez, 1998; Conway & Chang, 2003; Hall & Belch, 2000; Strange, 2001; Ward & Berry, 2004; Wilson & Getzel, 2001) have illustrated providing such services and accommodations are integral to the success of many college students with disabilities. The DSPTS coordinator's role is seen as vital to maintain the legal compliance of the district or the campus for which they work. Currently the CCC system is experiencing a wave of retirements among DSPTS coordinators, and it is anticipated 50 % of current DSPTS coordinators (55 positions) will retire from California's system within the next five years (Jan Galvin, personal communication, January 4, 2007). Half of these retirees will be mid-level administrators. The CCC system faces the challenge of increasing numbers of students with disabilities and the concurrent retirements of program administrators. Hiring new coordinators will

be difficult. Thus it is important that a campus or district find ways to attract, retain, and support effective DSPS administrators.

The primary purpose of this research was to address the leadership challenges of DSPS administrators, especially among those who have no faculty retreat rights. Given the precariousness of middle-management positions in times of fiscal crisis, this group of administrators may face challenges different than their tenured colleagues. A secondary purpose of this research was to explore the phenomena of being DSPS mid-level administrators in the CCC system by hearing the voice of current practitioners.

There are three questions I hoped to answer with this study:

- What are the challenges experienced by DSPS administrator in the CCCs?
- What knowledge and skills are needed to address the challenges?
- Which leadership skills are most important for a DSPS manager, and what makes them important?

Specific questions are provided in detailed in Chapter 3 which discusses the design of the study.

The significance of the research lies in addressing the challenges faced by colleges who are serving more students with disabilities yet have fewer mandated coordinators to manage programs. This combination of factors will have a direct impact on the ability of CCC campuses to effectively serve students with disabilities and may result the college (or its district) open to liability. The goal of this research was to speak directly to DSPS practitioners to identify leadership challenges, information which may illustrate how to effectively support new (and current) administrators. .

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of reviewing this literature was to gather and assess the available academic research relevant to the topic of leadership challenges for mid-level administrators of disability support services in higher education. The focus question guiding this literature review was what the current literature reveals about the leadership challenges of administering disability support services (DSS) in the California Community Colleges. A thorough review of the literature was made to identify meaningful themes, ideas, data analyses, and interpretations that contribute to the research.

Approach to Review of Literature

The literature review started with a search of the online databases at San Francisco State University and Oregon State University (OSU) libraries, focusing on qualitative and quantitative studies that addressed leadership challenges in higher education, leadership challenges in community colleges, leadership challenges in student affairs, and leadership challenges in DSS. The primary data sources were San Francisco State University Research Database and OSU Research Database. Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC), FirstSearch, Academic Search Premier, EBSCOhost, Dissertation Abstracts, Google Scholar, and Questia.com were also used as search tools. The primary search strategy included peer reviewed journals, dissertation abstracts, and references from selected reports and articles.

Criteria for Inclusion and Exclusion of Research Literature

In performing the review of literature, key themes, factors, and phenomena cited in post-secondary and academic organization sources were shown to be important. A number of key word search techniques were employed using the following key phrases including, but not limited to, disability support services; disabled students programs and services (DSPS); students with disabilities; leadership challenges; student affairs administration; postsecondary; community colleges; California community colleges; leadership development; student personnel services; accommodations; higher education administration; student support services; middle management; and educational access. The quantitative or qualitative nature of the articles reviewed was established from their abstracts, their methodology statements, and their content, while additional articles, abstracts, and books were identified from the bibliographies of these documents.

Articles, reports, and studies that were given less priority in this study focused primarily on the leadership challenges faced by K-12 educational administrators, post-secondary academic affairs administrators, leadership challenges in private industry, the leadership challenges in other arenas of higher education (i.e. technology, human resources, facilities maintenance). These documents were viewed to have less relevance to the main focus of this study which is leadership challenges of DSS administrators in higher education.

Organization of Literature Review

The review of literature is organized into three major areas of focus relating to the purpose of the study. First, the historical framework for DSPS will be provided. This

will give some background and context to the program and issues. Secondly, the challenges facing disability support services (DSS) in community colleges nationwide will be explored. The purpose of this section is to identify the challenges facing DSS administration across the nation and how these challenges are relevant to the CCCs. Thirdly, I discuss the literature that identifies the leadership skills that mid-level administrators in the community colleges need to address these challenges. Literature related to the program and professional standards for DSS administration will be discussed. Since program and professional standards can provide a framework for effective DSS best-practices as well as provide some insight as to the skills needed to be an effective practitioner. The three sections of the review are designed to establish what is already known in relation to this study's purpose and research questions. (Figure 1 shows a graphic representation of the literature review for the study.)

Clarification of Terms

In the literature reviewed, the researchers used different terms that mean the same to refer to programs designed to support students with disabilities: Office of Disability Services (OSD), Disability Support Services (DSS), and Disabled Student Programs and Services (DSPS). For the purpose of this literature review, "DSS" will be the generic term for all post-secondary programs, regardless of type of institution, while the term "DSPS" will be used to delineate the program specific to the CCC system.

The terms student affairs, student support services, or student services will be used interchangeably to define programs that support the non-instructional academic experience of students attending college. Programs and services housed under student

services include, but are not limited to, financial aid, residential housing, academic advising, admissions and records, student life, and programs for students with disabilities (Williams, 2002).

The literature review will include research regarding mid-level administrators and student affairs. For the purpose of both the study and literature review, I have chosen Johnsrud's (2004) definition of mid-level administrator:

...those individuals whose assignments carry responsibility for developing and implementing policy, coordinating resources and activities, supervising administrative units that support academic functions, and/or serving as liaisons to a variety of constituents such as faculty, students, business and industry, and government. (These positions) do not require faculty rank or tenure...(and) titles include directors, managers, coordinators, (associate dean, and dean). (p. 41).

Historical Framework for DSPTS in the CCCs

Starting in 1907, the state of California allowed secondary school districts to establish junior colleges to help the districts meet the needs for post-secondary education in their individual communities. In 1960, California's Master Plan for Higher Education (California State Department of Education Liaison Committee, 1960) recommended moving the junior colleges from the jurisdiction of individual secondary school districts to new, locally elected college boards, and by 1967, the California Community Colleges Board of Governors was established to oversee this new college system. It was during this time that the state supported the need for a separate department on each community college campus to serve the needs of students with disabilities.

Due to the increasing number of U.S. college students with disabilities, the federal government provided funds for training in 1970, but the funding was ended four years later. In 1973, the Rehabilitation Act was passed to address the needs of veterans returning from the Vietnam War, Section 504 of the Act ensuring equal access to programs and services offered by any entity receiving federal funds. In 1977, California legislature passed Assembly Bill (AB) 77, also known as the Lanterman Bill, establishing specific requirements and funding within the state's Education Code for the Handicapped Students Programs and Services in California Community Colleges, a title later changed to Disabled Students Programs & Services (Skinner-Martin, 2006).

Disabled Students Programs & Services (DSPS) provides support services, specialized instruction, and educational accommodations to college students with disabilities, enabling them to participate in and to benefit from the college experience as equally as their non-disabled peers. DSPS professionals (counselors, learning disabilities (LD) specialists, or DSPS coordinators) verify the student's disability (required for program eligibility), prescribing academic accommodations designed to best address the student's disability related educational limitations. Some of the services available through DSPS include test-taking facilitation, LD assessment, specialized counseling, interpreter services for hearing-impaired or deaf students, note taker services, reader services, mobility assistance, tutoring, registration assistance, special classes, and access to adaptive technologies (CCCCO Student Services Division, DSPS Title 5 Implementation Guidelines, 1997, p. 1).

Leadership Challenges of DSPS Administration

The purpose of this section is to identify the key challenges of managing a post-secondary program for students with disabilities. This section is divided into two subsections: (a) to examine the challenges facing student affairs as relevant to DSS, and (b) to examine the challenges specific to DSPS in the CCC. Hall and Belch (2000) argued that there are several challenges facing student affairs programs across the nation, especially in their work serving students with disabilities.

Challenges facing student affairs nationwide. As an underrepresented group on most college campuses, students with disabilities may not feel valued or acknowledged for the diversity they bring to the college campus (Aune, 2000; Shaw & Scott, 2003; Strange, 2001). Traditionally, most student affairs programs have to work with “structures that are disjointed and fragmented, often making it difficult to provide a coordinated, comprehensive response” (Hall & Belch, 2000, p. 10). Most often given a secondary status to academic affairs, student affairs programs and professionals are often limited by financial concerns, “solutions that fail to address long-term problems of policy and new practice” (Hall & Belch, p. 11). Also, student affairs administrators may have difficulties finding the time to devote to the professional development of DSS staff and to the collaboration necessary to improve the experiences of both students with disabilities and the faculty who serves them.

In a review of the literature regarding the challenges facing student services nationally, Williams (2002) identified three key challenges:

the increasing diversity of students, the call for a renewed focus on student learning and success, and the need to

demonstrate more clearly the benefits of the work of students services units for students and the institution (p. 67).

In other words, changing demographics, student service learning outcomes and assessment, and accountability are among the challenges facing all student services professionals.

Funding is also identified as a key challenge to student affairs (Dungy & Ellis, 2011; Sandeen & Barr, 2006; Schuh, 2003). As the cost of attending college increases and the funding resources from the state and federal sources decreases, the benefits of student services may not be viewed as valuable as instructional programs. Schuh's (2003) review also identified accountability and assessment as factors tied to the challenge of funding for student affairs programs.

Accountability has been a recurring challenge in all sectors of U.S higher education as institutions are being asked to design measurable student outcomes to prove colleges are doing what they are being funded to do. Shaw and Dukes (2005) asserted post-secondary programs that serve underrepresented groups are being more closely scrutinized as administrators expect all departments to "implement activities that clearly fulfill program objectives" (p. 10). Because of the costs for permanent staff, especially tenured faculty, many campuses find it difficult to maintain a certain level of student services, especially for non-mandated services (e.g., tutoring, counseling).

These challenges confronting student affairs are similar to the challenges faced by DSS programs across the nation. Shaw and Scott (2003) asserted "(t)he changing nature of postsecondary disability services has created a new and challenging environment for

service providers” (p. 2). Since the passage of the ADA in 1990, there are more students with a variety of disabilities requiring more complex accommodations. However, like other aspects of higher education student affairs programs, fewer resources are available to meet these needs, causing a greater potential for litigation and conflicts if students are unable to get what they need for access. According to Heyward (1998), DSS service provision has “evolved from being straightforward and student-oriented with minimal programmatic influence to being more complex and having substantial impact on faculty instruction and institutional policy” (p. 201). In spite of these challenges, DSS providers are expected to continue to provide mandated services which are cost-effective, appropriate, and reasonable (Shaw & Scott, 2003). In 2010, Burke, Friedl, and Rigler (2010) identified new challenges faced by colleges due to the ADA Amendments effective in 2009.

Leadership challenges specific to CCC and DSPS administration. The leadership challenges facing higher education nationally (Dungy & Ellis, 2011) are reflected in reports regarding the leadership challenges faced by higher education in California (de la Teja, 2011). Potential solutions to the nation’s issues will be reflected in the solutions proposed by California’s higher education leaders, especially those in the CCC. Shulock (2002) sought to identify the leadership challenges facing the CCCs when she interviewed 15 current community college leaders from California. According to the findings of this qualitative study, the leaders identified several challenges including, but not limited to, funding and growth, diversity, leadership recruitment and development, and accountability. The limitations of this study are the small number of participants and

the homogeneity of the group interviewed, each of whom were (are) CCC presidents. However, the study did consult practitioners, giving voice to the challenges they face in their line of work.

There has been recent research (and subsequent criticism) regarding how the CCCs go about the business of serving students, especially pertaining to degree completion rates and student success. In the report “Ensuring Access with Quality to California’s Community Colleges” Hayward, Jones, McGuinness, and Timar (2004) identified several challenges affecting student access to the CCCs, several of which are issues in other realms of higher education. This report relied on both quantitative and qualitative methods for gathering data and listed the CCC challenges as enrollment increases, shifting demographics, poor preparation of K-12 students, and state budgetary difficulties (p. vii). For the quantitative findings, the authors retrieved statistical data from several sources, including the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education (NCPPE), the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS), and the CCCCCO Data Mart.

In gathering data for this report, the authors visited several community colleges from various regions of the state, the majority of which were a part of a multi-campus district, and observed the campus culture while interviewing 27 CCC administrators regarding challenges and what their own campus does to help students succeed. They also interviewed members of the Chancellor’s Office and a member from the Student Aid Commission which provided a foundation for the reports’ findings and proposed solutions. The observations and how they impacted the authors’ data were documented

throughout the report, although a limitation of this report was that the sample of college participants consisted entirely of mid-level and senior CCC administrators. The small number of participants and the homogeneity of the group interviewed, each who were (are) CCC administrators, is a limitation of this study. However, the voice of the CCC administrative practitioner discussing the challenges facing the system within which they work was a strength of the study.

Hayward et al. (2004) found these issues will “challenge all sectors of California higher education, but their cumulative impact will fall most heavily on the community colleges” (p. vii). One of their recommendations was to increase the funding for student services in the CCCs, especially programs like DSPP which support access. To address these challenges, the leaders of the CCC system, specifically the system’s former Chancellor, Mark Drummond, and the CCC System Strategic Plan Steering Committee, introduced a strategic plan that identified strategic goals and specific strategies designed to meet those goals.

In a memorandum addressed to the chief and senior administrators in the system, Chancellor Drummond (2006) announced the implementation of a new program review process for all categorically funded programs, programs whose funding is allocated to them based on the special populations they serve, of which DSPP is one. The funding mechanism for DSPP annual allocations continues to be based upon the number of students served, the type and number of disabilities served (a weighted count), the number of special classes offered, and the college’s district contribution to the program. (Ideally, as a coordinator learns how the process works, one can strive to create programs

that can both generate funds and provide appropriate services.) The additional push towards accountability meant that DSPS coordinators had to address learning outcomes, assessments, strategic plans, and goals as part of the program review process. According to A. Ely (personal communication, November 28, 2006):

In times of fiscal constraints, categorically funded programs are the first ones eyed for cuts. The demand for program outcomes and accountability are issues these programs have to now deal with because legislators aren't sure how (these programs) contribute to student learning.

In fact, the state's funding of DSPS was reduced by 45% for the 2009 - 2010 academic year and has remained stagnant since, adding additional challenges for the program and campus administrators, particularly since the funding is not expected to be restored for a few years, if at all.

Addressing the challenges access, accountability, and funding present issues not only to the four-year public higher education systems (University of California [UC] and California State University [CSU]), but to the state's community college system as well. Challenges facing the nation's education system, including those in the K-12 system, continue to be encountered by leaders in the community college who will need to find appropriate (and accountable) ways to address them. DSPS administrators may need to create and implement strategic plans that are in line with the state's goals, the system's goals, and their campus goals. The closest most program leaders come to doing this is the SLO process as it relates to college accreditation.

The purpose of my research was much like the qualitative studies referenced in this section which was to hear from the voice of administrators regarding how those

challenges facing the CCC system will impact their work. My goal was to interpret and understand the challenges faced by current DSPS administrators, many of them affecting all levels of higher education nationally. Some challenges may be more related to DSPS administration in general, while others may be related to being a mid-level administrator in a California community college.

Leadership Knowledge and Skills to Address Challenges

The purpose of this section is to identify the leadership skills needed by mid-level administrators in community colleges and in student affairs. According to Hall and Belch (2000) many of the challenges faced by DSS practitioners and programs are among those endemic to student affairs programs. These challenges are often the same for mid-level administrators from either instructional or student affairs.

To examine the leadership challenges, this section will review DSS professional standards and DSS program standards, identifying those which are relevant to best program practices. These standards can help to provide a strong framework for effective practices as well as provide guidance for DSS administrative practitioners. Several studies (Conway & Chang, 2003; Madaus, 2000; Shaw & Dukes, 2001; Ward & Berry, 2004) have pointed out the challenging and ambiguous roles of DSS coordinators in higher education. The flagship organization for post-secondary disability professionals nationwide is the Association on Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD), and an AHEAD survey of over 1300 DSS coordinators indicated that over 80% of them needed information regarding best practices (Harbour, 2004). In response to concerns from its members regarding best practices, AHEAD adopted several professional guidelines

created to assist in the provision of quality DSS program services. These guidelines include professional standards, program standards, and a professional code of ethics.

Professional standards for DSS coordinators. Professional standards (Shaw, McGuire, & Madaus, 1997) have been developed to help identify the knowledge and skills needed by DSS providers, as well as to provide a better definition of the profession. Using the data gathered from the program standards data (2001 version), another Delphi study (Friend, 2001) was employed to further delineate the many tasks and job responsibilities associated with the following categories:

1. Administration: responsibilities related to the administration or management of the office serving students with disabilities.
2. Direct service: providing services directly to students or acting on behalf of students with members of the campus community.
3. Consultation / collaboration: working with campus or community personnel and agencies regarding students with disabilities or disability issues.
4. Institutional awareness: providing training and expertise regarding disability issues to members of the campus community.
5. Professional development: maintaining up-to-date professional knowledge and skill.

As was expected, these standards were in line with the AHEAD program standards and the list of essential tasks and functions outlined in the ADA coordinator study. A limitation of this study was it was developed through the Delphi method which relies on the opinions of experts to designate the functions and tasks of the administrator

of disability services in higher education. It also failed to obtain opinions of administrators of such services.

Program standards for DSS. According to Shaw and Dukes (2006) program standards assist in providing “a clear benchmark” for DSS personnel and their institutions to assess DSS programs. Program standards help to identify policies and procedures which need to be developed or revised, assisting DSS coordinators with establishing or eliminating processes which may hinder effectively serving students with disabilities. These standards identify the components considered to be essential to managing a college disability service program, “a critical step in the process of developing an empirically validated service delivery system” (p. 16). This is especially important in a time where of assessing student learning outcomes, strategic enrollment management. Program standards are also useful in creating trainings for current and future DSS personnel.

Shaw and Dukes (2001) developed program standards for AHEAD based on surveys of DSS professionals in higher education in an effort to assist the DSS profession by providing some direction and program support. However, in the years since the standards were published, criticism of the standards centered upon “conventional wisdom rather than of expert opinion. In addition, the field of postsecondary services for students with disabilities was evolving rapidly” (Shaw & Dukes, 2006, p. 15). To address this concern (and the unavoidable mandate that DSS programs provide outcomes-based services), Shaw and Dukes revisited the previous program standards to create newer versions in 2006.

A Delphi study was the methodology used to create the 2001 program standards with surveys as the primary source for gathering information (Dukes, 2001). The survey started with a review of the literature where themes were identified and items were designed to elicit information regarding DSS program administration. An expert panel of DSS providers then reviewed and rated the items using a Likert Scale, and the survey was sent to 15 DSS coordinators nationwide who reviewed the items to validate content. Once approved, the survey was sent, and 573 respondents completed and returned them.

The strength of this study was the contribution of over 1,000 DSS professionals in the creation and completion of the survey and the resultant standards. Also, the involvement of the DSS practitioner in creating these standards provided information from practitioner to practitioner, but with a quantitative foundation that lent validity to the process. Limitations included a lack of generalizability, due mainly to the lack of random sampling of participants used for the study.

The 2006 study sought to expand on the performance standards of the previous study, which were based on research started in 1997 (Shaw & Dukes, 2006). The information gathered from the follow-up study provided the following list of eight DSS program categories:

1. Consultation / collaboration;
2. Information dissemination;
3. Faculty / staff awareness;
4. Academic adjustments (formerly accommodations);
5. Counseling & self-determination;

6. Policies & procedures;
7. Program administration and evaluation;
8. Training & professional development (of DSS staff and non-DSS staff).

When the program standards were revised in 2005, the authors used a Delphi technique to refine standards and create accompanying performance indicators. The revision, which resulted in 28 program standards and 90 performance indicators across eight categories, identified “as essential, regardless of type of school (two- or four-year), funding source (public or private), location (United States or Canada), or admissions policy (open enrollment or competitive)” (Shaw & Dukes, 2006, p. 15).

The performance indicators of each standard were useful in providing clear direction regarding what was needed to implement each standard, offering a framework for program evaluation. DSS programs that fulfilled these performance indicators could state that their program was state-of-the-art, while a DSS program that did not have these standards in place could use this information to help bring their services up to par with industry guidelines.

Friend (2001) conducted another study using the Delphi technique seeking to identify the essential tasks and functions of ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) coordinators in public higher education. According to the New England ADA and Accessibility IT Center website (n.d.), the definition of an ADA coordinator is the person whose “role includes planning and coordinating compliance efforts, ensuring the administrative steps are completed, and receiving and investigating disability discrimination complaints.” ADA coordinators are found in a variety of settings

including private industry, government, and all sectors of education, and job responsibilities mirror those of DSS coordinators.

This study sought the opinion of known experts in the field of ADA compliance to validate the functions and tasks of the position. The results of the study identified and prioritized 10 functions comparable to the categories identified by Shaw and Dukes' (2006) study and are listed as follows:

1. Public and governmental relations;
2. Processing accommodations;
3. Complaint and grievance resolution;
4. Consultation / collaboration;
5. Professional development (of DSS staff);
6. Administrative;
7. Training / education (of non-DSS staff);
8. Facilities access;
9. Assistive Technology;
10. Information dissemination.

Unlike the AHEAD categories, performance standards, and performance indicators, Friend's (2001) findings are ranked and listed by importance. The AHEAD categories and their respective standards and indicators are thought to be equally important to the administration of DSS programs, indicating that the wide range of job duties of a DSS coordinator could also be a challenge faced by administrators in the field.

Summary

In response to the federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973, in 1977 the CCC established mandates and provided funding for programs to serve students with disabilities. These programs offer an array of services to make college accessible for students with disabilities. In California, the Chancellor's Office gives implementing guidelines regarding interpretation of the state regulations relative to DSPS administration. These guidelines provide programmatic guidance to college staff coordinating DSPS programs. These guidelines also help the colleges understand "their legal and fiscal responsibilities to DSPS and students with disabilities" (CCCCO, 1997, p. 2).

The literature review identified the leadership issues facing of DSPS administration and the leadership knowledge and skills needed to address the challenges. Leadership issues specific to the student affairs profession nationwide, including the increasing diversity of college students, funding resources, and accountability (Hall & Belch, 2000; Strange, 2001; Williams, 2002), were the same as those faced by the DSS nationwide (Schuh, 2003; Shaw & Dukes, 2005; Shaw & Scott, 2003). Leadership challenges which were specific to the CCC system and DSPS administration included, funding and growth (resources), diversity of students, and accountability (Drummond, 2006; Hayward, et al, 2004; Shulock, 2002), mirroring the same problems facing higher education and student affairs in the United States. However the recruitment and professional development of future leaders was an additional issue identified by current and former CCC presidents (Shulock, 2002).

Many studies (Conway & Chang, 2003; Madaus, 2000; Shaw & Dukes, 2001; Taylor, 2005) have pointed out the challenging and ambiguous roles of DSS coordinators in higher education. To address this issue, professional standards were developed to identify the knowledge and skills needed by DSS coordinators (Shaw, McGuire, & Madaus, 1997). A study of ADA coordinators (Friend, 2001), who often share the same responsibilities as DSS coordinators, identified skills, knowledge, and tasks (listed in order of importance) specific to administering college services for students with disabilities.

Program standards for DSS were developed to help DSS professionals create and sustain programs (Dukes, 2001; Shaw & Dukes, 2001, 2006) and to conduct research regarding the specific program categories for successful DSS program management. Program standards were developed by Shaw and Dukes (2001) based on a nationwide survey of disability service coordinators. Identifying the standards and tasks or functions is essential to effective DSS coordination assists in providing practitioners implement guidelines for establishing quality programs and services. Identifying the specific tasks and functions a practitioner may be expected to know or perform in the course of disability service programs management “was an avenue to creating professional development opportunities for the DSS coordinator” (personal communication, J. Holmes, December 30, 2011).

The methods of the research which concentrated on leadership challenges were qualitative and used the voice of the community college administrator to describe these problems. Limitations of these studies were that their findings cannot be extended to

wider populations with the same degree of certainty of quantitative analyses primarily because the sampling was not random and the research findings were not tested to discover whether they are statistically significant or not. Also, limitations of the previous studies included lack of generalizability due to the focus of the studies and the sampling. Studies regarding identification of professional and program standards used quantitative methods to identify these standards. Like the qualitative studies, limitations of the previous studies included lack of generalizability due to the focus of the studies and the sampling of participants. Another limitation of all the research was the lack of focus on DSPS administrators working within the CCC. This research, which focused on CCC administrators of DSPS, served to fill a gap in the knowledge available to address the leadership skills needed by this group of student affairs professionals.

The current study is framed in the context of disabilities services leadership in California community colleges and is delimited by the years of (1999 - 2011). The challenges facing student affairs is widely documented in generalities (Dungy & Ellis, 2011; Sandeen & Barr, 2006; Schuh, 2003). The phenomenon of leadership in disabilities services is a narrowly focused topic and thus has the opportunity for new research to be explored. The most recent study related to DSS practices by Shaw and Dukes (2006) chronicled the postsecondary disability program standards and performance indicators, as well as the minimum essentials needed for DSS offices. (It continues to be a staple of the guidelines used to inform DSS policy and practice.) In 2005, the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) listed the leadership competencies necessary to be an effective community college leader. Together these

studies have provided reference points to best practices of DSS and leadership competencies of student affairs professionals, both of which are relevant to the current leadership practices of DSPS administrators today. This study will continue to expand that body of knowledge by exploring the challenges of DSPS leadership and identifying the tools which help to address those challenges.

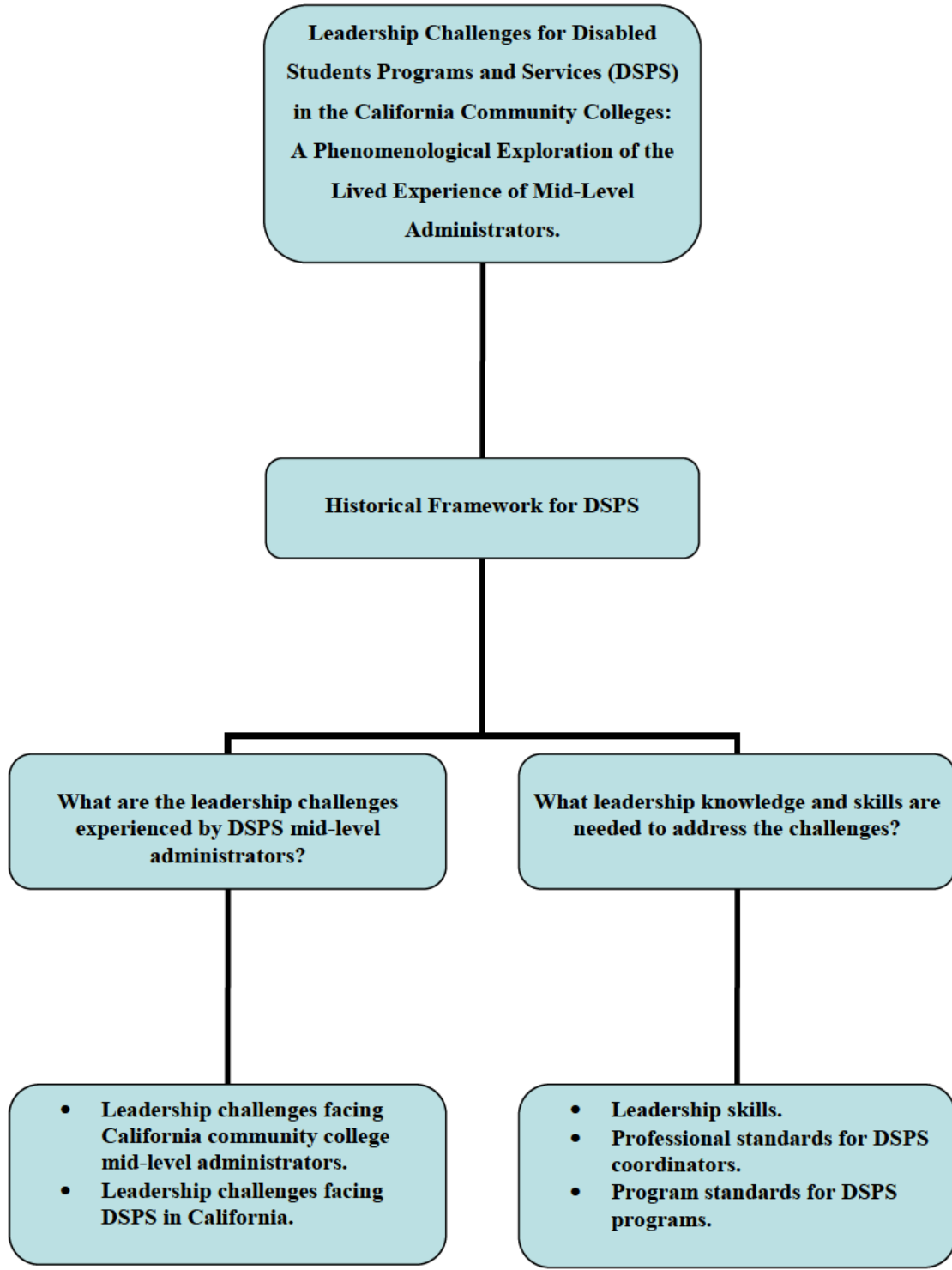


Figure 1. Literature Review Graphic

CHAPTER THREE: THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL METHOD AND THE DESIGN OF THE STUDY

This section of the research proposal describes the philosophical approach used for this study, personal reflections that led to the chosen philosophical approach, the research method that was used, the data needed, information regarding the selection of study participants, data collection and analysis procedures, and strategies to ensure soundness of the data and for the protection of human subjects.

The purpose of this study is to give voice to the mid-level administrative practitioners of programs that support students with disabilities in the California community colleges. The research provided information and insight into the experience of being such an administrator and identified the ways in which they assess and resolve the challenges of their chosen occupation through their practice. The intent in conducting research with selected DSPS mid-level administrators was to provide them with the opportunity to reflect on their experiences as leaders, to share their stories with others, and, ideally, to impart knowledge that will serve to inform professional practice in the field.

Personal Disclosure of Researcher

In performing interpretive research, the role of the researcher is to identify the experiences of a social reality that a specific group of individuals experiences. The researcher assumes that “multiple interpretations of human experience, or realities, are possible” (Neuman, 2003, p. 133). According to Neuman (2003), the interpretive researcher believes that all researchers “should reflect on, reexamine, and analyze” (p.

80) their personal perspectives and feelings, recognizing this to be a “part of the process of studying others” (p. 80). Keeping this in mind, I, the researcher, will provide some background about myself as researcher for readers to take into consideration as they attempt to generalize from the research data, findings, and recommendations.

My experience as a midlevel administrator of DSPPS in the CCC has contributed to the determination of my research approach and method of inquiry. A DSPPS administrator provides an academic environment that is programmatically and physically accessible to students with disabilities. Furthermore, this role requires leaders to be an advocate for the student while simultaneously maintaining their employer’s compliance with federal and state mandates regarding DSPPS administration.

My experience facing various administrative challenges has led me to my interest in the experience of other DSPPS administrators as a topic. It is the goal of this study and its findings to inform the practice of other DSPPS administrators; provide insights to senior level post-secondary administrators responsible for the recruitment, hiring, and retention of DSPPS administrators; and present ideas to assist in the development of post-secondary training programs for new or future DSPPS administrators. My professional experience as a provider of disability support services in the post-secondary setting (as an administrator and counseling faculty of DSPPS) influenced the review of the literature. This lived experience and common sense led to the selection from numerous sources of the possible challenges which may affect DSPPS administrators in the CCC.

My epistemology has also influenced the choice of research method and serves to determine the focus of the study’s research, the methodology of data collection, analysis,

and reporting, and the methods employed within the research design. According to White (2006), epistemology is the philosophy of the theory of knowledge, which concerns itself with questions regarding “the nature, scope, and sources of knowledge” (p. 2). Epistemology is also known as one’s worldview, or how human beings obtain knowledge of truths about the world, the reliability of that truth, and the conditions under which one knows something to be true.

For this study, my epistemological position can be formulated as follows: (a) data are contained within the perspectives of people that are current DSPS administrators at a CCC; and (b) because of this the researcher will engage with the participants in collecting the data.

Philosophical Approach: Interpretive Social Science

The philosophical approach used in this study was that of interpretive social science (ISS), an approach I believe leads to a better understanding of what it is like to be an administrator of DSPS at the CCC.

Purpose of Interpretive Social Science

Often the antithesis of positivism, the purpose of the ISS philosophical approach is to provide a type of social science inquiry that is more interested in context and the worldview of others as germane to that context. This approach theorizes that human behavior is based upon free will and that human behavior is an outcome of a person’s interpretation of the environment. This approach focuses on the values, meanings, and motivations of the persons being studied. Values are of particular importance in this approach, because values are seen as integral to human behavior and society, recognizing

that one group's values are not more important than another's.

As defined by Neuman (2003), the interpretive approach can be described as:

the systematic analysis of socially meaningful action through the direct detailed observation of people in natural setting in order to arrive at understandings and interpretations of how people create and maintain their social worlds. (p. 76)

Researchers who use this method are more interested in understanding the human experience as opposed to testing hypotheses regarding the human experience. According to Tamanaha (1996):

interpretivism consists of two propositions: (1) for most actions we act intentionally based on our ideas and beliefs; and (2) the meaning (the content) of these ideas and beliefs is "intersubjective"--that is, derived from and shared by others in our social group. (p. 164)

These two propositions support the thesis that reality, defined as the sum total of our meaningful actions, is socially constructed (Tamanaha, p. 167). Thus a requirement of studying social action is that the social scientist must interpret what they are studying.

The purpose of this approach to research was to describe the lived experiences of DSPS administrators working in the CCC, to understand the challenges faced by administrators leading a DSPS program, and to identify the skills necessary to be a successful administrator of DSPS.

Interpretive Social Science Approach

The ISS philosophical approach revolves around the relationship of the researcher to the participant(s) being studied, especially since the researcher has direct and personal

involvement with the participants through observation or interview. For interpretive researchers, a theory is true if it makes sense to those being studied and if the theory can allow others to understand the reality of those being studied (Neuman, 2003). The goal of the ISS researcher is to impart knowledge and an understanding of the way that those who are being studied view life. When their research enables others to enter the reality of those being studied, then the ISS researcher has reached his or her goal.

There is a strong link between social actions and the social context in which they happen, thus the action and the context cannot be separated. There is a construction of meanings developed through an individual's social interactions in a natural setting, and individuals use these meanings to interpret their social world or their social reality. Common sense is important to understanding how individuals view the world and assign meanings to their social actions. According to Neuman (2003), this is "critical...because it contains the meanings that people use when they engage in" the routines of daily living (p. 77).

Research results or findings are not value free, as this approach "sees values and meaning infused everywhere in everything" (Neuman, 2003, p. 80). Interpretive researchers are encouraged to examine, reflect, and analyze their own perspectives and values as they study the realities of others.

The intent of this study was to understand the social reality of DSPS administrators and the meanings they assign to the leadership challenges of their day-to-day duties. It was important to understand what DSPS administrators define as common sense and how that impacts the ways in which they conduct their work. Another goal

was to impart knowledge about the life of DSPS administrators to others who are responsible for the recruitment, training, and retention of future DSPS administrators. The final goal was that this research rings true to those DSPS administrators who are not involved in this study. As an experienced DSPS administrator, I had my own values, meanings, and feelings as they relate to the research topic; therefore I had to continuously reflect, analyze, and reexamine my reality as I studied the realities of others.

Assumptions about the Nature of Reality and Truth

The goal of ISS research is to discover how individuals construct meaning from their interactions within their natural settings. Social reality is based on a social group's definition of that reality. The social world (or social reality) is what people perceive it to be and is defined by social interactions, not by social structures. ISS researchers also believe human actions are meaningful only among those groups who share a system of meaning where that action is socially relevant. The interpretive researcher must observe the subjects interacting in their natural setting in order to develop an understanding of a social group's constructed meanings. According to Rayner (2000), the goal of this approach in research is to focus "on values, meanings, and motivations" (p. 2).

Unlike positivism, which assumes that the nature of reality is stable and reality has preexisting structures, ISS supports the assumption that reality is more fluid (and fragile) and is based upon a one's interpretation of his or her environmental situations. In ISS, the assumption is that people (groups or individuals) experience social and physical reality differently, constructing social meanings based upon these experiences. According to the Center for Advanced Research in Phenomenology (CARP, n.d.),

because there are so many different ways to categorize or define human social groups, ISS assumes that there are also many ways to interpret human reality (or realities).

Interpretive research defines the truth to be something that feels right or seems right to the group whose reality is being studied. What is considered truth in positivism is derived from theory, data, and analysis of facts; in ISS, the truth is considered applicable only if it makes sense to the group to which it is being assigned (Neuman, 2003). No matter how much or how long an interpretive researcher works with an individual or a group, he or she is still an outsider. Therefore, it is important that the recorded data are accurate and highly detailed, providing enough information to offer an insider's view of the reality being recorded.

Strength and Weaknesses of ISS Approach

According to Giroday (n.d.), ISS is “a knowledge paradigm that provides the broadest range of techniques for the broadest range of research;” thus a key strength of using the ISS approach is that the researcher can employ both quantitative and qualitative methods. Another strength of this ISS approach is that it allows for choosing research questions which are broad in scope, and unlike either the positivist or critical approaches, ISS provides the flexibility of using mixed methods to explore a research topic, enabling the researcher to revisit and refine the research question. Due to the variety of research method techniques available using ISS, the approach reigns as the preferred knowledge paradigm (Giroday, n.d.). Also, ISS theory can be causal or non-causal.

The primary challenge of the ISS approach is the lack of generalizability of the research findings due mainly to the specificity of the phenomena or group being studied.

Also, ISS is a relatively new research approach, coming into popularity in the past 30 years “as researchers dare to account for real world influences that...are part of the richness of interpretation” (Ham, 2002, p. 9). Researchers using the ISS approach must also be aware of researcher subjectivity and reductionism so that results are generalized appropriately. As the use of ISS research approaches becomes more common in different disciplines, especially those which are traditionally researched using positivistic methods, ISS strengths may well outnumber its challenges.

Research Method: Phenomenology

From within the various research methods typically associated with ISS, I chose the phenomenological research method for this study. It was a method in which the researcher is interested in studying an experience of a specific group, in this case, administrators of DSPS in the California community college. Like ISS, phenomenology views knowledge as being established through the meanings attached by participants experiencing the phenomena being studied. The researcher interacted with the participants in the study to obtain data; the inquiry changed both the researcher and the participant subject; and the knowledge obtained was dependent on the context and time in which it was acquired.

Maykut and Morehouse (1994, p. 12) identified several assertions of the phenomenological approach to research:

- 1) There are multiple realities. These realities are socio-psychological constructions forming an interconnected whole and can only be understood as such.

- 2) The relationship between the knower and the known are interdependent.
- 3) Values mediate and shape what is understood about the world.
- 4) There are no causal linkages as events shape each other; relationships can be multidirectional.
- 5) Generalization is limited; only tentative explanations for one time and place (or phenomena) are possible.
- 6) The phenomenologist contributes to knowledge by discovering or uncovering propositions.

Purpose of Phenomenology

Phenomenology studies the conscious experience from the first-person point of view. The aim of the researcher is to describe the phenomenon, along with relevant conditions of experience, as accurately as possible. The central structure of an experience is its intentionality, the way it is directed through its content or meaning toward a certain object in the world. In the early development of phenomenology, a distinction was drawn between phenomena (things as they appear in our experience) and noumena (things as they are in themselves) (Neuman, 2003, p. 75). Due to the descriptive, reflective, and evidential approaches to encounters and objects being encountered, the beginning of phenomenology is sometimes called descriptive phenomenology.

Key Concepts

According to Probert (2006, p. 15), the fundamental concepts of phenomenology are as follows:

- *Intentionality*: the concept that the reality of an experience is interwoven with one's consciousness of it.
- *Description*: the way to understand the reality of an experience is through its description, as articulated by those who experience it in their own words.
- *Reduction* or *Epoche*: the researcher must suspend all judgments about what is real, leaving his or her own presuppositions out of the process.
- *Essence*: data are coded into themes, then analyzed to uncover the central meaning or "essence" of the phenomenon, in other words to themes related to the experience being studied.

The aim of a phenomenological approach to ISS is to describe accurately the lived experiences of people. While not focused on generating theories or models of the phenomenon being studied, the outcomes of phenomenological research often provide some "ideas or insights resembling models or theories" (G. Copa, personal communication, May 25, 2007). The focus of the researcher is to describe as accurately as possible the phenomenon, while remaining true to the facts. The factuality of the social world is seen as an accomplishment by members of a society, and the methods of this accomplishment are the topic of phenomenological investigation.

The domain of phenomenology is to understand the range of experiences humans acquire after having lived through those experiences. A person or group of people can acquire a familiarity with a given type of experience, and phenomenology strives to understand this familiarity. According to the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy

website (2008), these experiences may be characterized through things such as “perception, imagination, thought, emotion, desire, volition, and action” (paragraph 13). Experience includes not only relatively passive experience such as seeing or listening, but also active experience like running or cooking a meal.

In phenomenological (and other interpretive) studies, researchers are concerned with the accuracy and comprehensiveness of their data as reliability is viewed as a fit between recorded data and what actually occurs in the natural setting being studied. Furthermore, emerging themes are frequently validated with participants as their meanings of that lived experience are central in phenomenological study. The lived experience is the foundation of social reality, which the phenomenologist views as an experienced reality rather than a natural reality. The phenomenologist, unlike a positivist, believes the researcher cannot be detached from his/her own beliefs, and the researcher should be mindful of this as he or she gathers data regarding the phenomena being studied.

According to Boeree (1998), the concepts of phenomenology are described as:

... (E)xperiences (which) have both an objective and a subjective component, and so understanding a phenomenon means understanding both. The objective pole of a phenomenon is called the intended object or noema (plural: noemata, adjective: noematic) and the subjective pole of a phenomenon is called the intending act or noesis (plural: noeses, adjective: noetic). Intending acts (intentionality) might include seeing, hearing, feeling, thinking, judging... and intended objects (are) the sights seen, the words heard, the feeling felt, the thoughts thought, the ideas judged, and so on. ... (I)ntended objects include not only objects in the traditional sense, but also feelings, thoughts, and ideas!... More practically, intentionality means being open

to all aspects of the phenomenon, not leaving out what belongs (paragraphs 24 – 27).

History of the Development of Phenomenology

Like ISS, phenomenology is based on the philosophies of German thinkers, some of whom are linked to both areas of thought. The foundations of ISS lie in the works of Max Weber and Wilhelm Dilthey (Neuman, 2003, p. 75), a German sociologist and a German philosopher, respectively. Georg Gadamer and Martin Heidegger were also strong influences upon the fields of both ISS and phenomenology. In addition to Gadamer and Heidegger, others are also important practitioners of phenomenology, including the founding fathers of phenomenology, Immanuel Kant and Edmund Husserl.

Immanuel Kant, a German philosopher, used the term phenomenology to distinguish between the study of objects and events (phenomena) as they appear in our experience and objects and events as they are in themselves (noumena). Georg Hegel used the term phenomenology to describe the science in which one comes to know the mind (as it is within itself) through the study of the ways in which the mind appears to us. Other phenomenologists include Martin Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Jean-Paul Sartre, each of whom added existentialism to the philosophy of phenomenology. Gadamer added hermeneutics to the approach based on Heidegger's work.

However, only Husserl employed phenomenology as both a descriptive method and as a human science movement. Husserl's branch of phenomenology is based on modes of reflection being at the heart of philosophic and human science thought, a discipline that strives to describe how the world is established and experienced through

our conscious acts. Husserl also developed transcendental or constitutive phenomenology, including the idea of the *Lebenswelt*, the lifeworld, the everyday world in which we live in the natural.

Procedures

Creswell (1998) suggested that researchers of qualitative studies know which procedural steps to take in order to conduct a systematic and transparent approach to collecting and recording data. Each step should be clearly identified and the process must be consistent each time.

Sample Selection

The data needed and the sample size were both particular to the specific questions being researched. Creswell (2005) suggested using purposive sampling to identify participants who will best help the researcher better understand the phenomenon being studied. In purposive sampling, the idea is to select a sample that meets a particular set of criteria that relates to the goal of the study. This type of sampling can be very useful for qualitative research where one needs to find or reach a targeted sample quickly, “and where sampling for proportionality is not the primary concern” (Trochim, 2006, paragraph 4). The goal of my study is to develop a detailed understanding of the leadership challenges of DSPS mid-level administrators at a CCC, therefore I purposively selected participants who met the criteria of this research.

For this study, a purposive sampling of a relatively homogenous group was conducted and the following criteria used to select the study’s participants. Each participant:

- a) was currently employed by the California community college system;
- b) was determined by his or her campus administration and the California State education code as the “individual who has responsibility for the day-to-day operation of DSPS” (CCCCO, 2003, p. 1);
- c) held the mid-level administrative title of Program Manager, Director, Associate Dean, or Dean as confirmed by the participant’s human resources department through basic research of the college’s staffing organization and without revealing a potential participant’s identity;
- d) was not a faculty member or midlevel administrator with faculty retreat rights.

Ideally, the data obtained from these participants would help others understand the phenomena of leading DSPS, while simultaneously providing helpful information to their fellow administrators and to those senior administrators who will hire, supervise, or train future DSPS managers. Review of the Chancellor’s Office list of provided a list of current DSPS Administrators, their corresponding job titles, and their contact information. Using their job titles as a filter, an invitation to participate in the study was sent electronically to those administrators who met the job title criteria. The data were collected from October to November during the fall 2011 quarter; six administrators completed the interview. Each participant was offered copies of his or her interview transcripts to review for accuracy, of which three chose to review their transcript and one added more data in a follow-up interview.

Information Collection: Participant Interviews

The specific phenomena this study focused on the leadership challenges of individuals who managed disability services at a community college in California. To facilitate the emergence of data and accurately capture the phenomena, the actual research questions were put to the participants. My central research questions were the following: (a) what are the leadership challenges experienced by DSPS administrator in the CCCs; (b) what leadership knowledge and skills are needed; and (c) which leadership skills are most important for a new DSPS manager, and what makes them important? Although the interview questions included the research questions, it important to be mindful that the study's findings may or may not identify all the leadership challenges of DSPS administrators nor the knowledge and skills necessary to address the challenges. This allowed me to ask the interview questions without looking for the answers.

In order to maintain consistency in the interviewing process, I created a checklist of steps identified by Creswell (2005) as a guide for structuring the interviewing process (see Appendix A), and given this information, I created a formal interview protocol (see Appendix B) to provide a basic script for the interview. Both the checklist and protocol were reviewed prior to each interview to focus the researcher, to ensure soundness, and to maintain consistency in the interviewing process. Each participant selected where the interview was to take place, which I believed allowed the participants to feel more comfortable speaking about the topic. All but two of the interviews took place in the participant's workplace.

Each participant agreed to the tape recording of the entire interview, and each interview was audio-taped using two digital tape recorders with external microphones. (One recorder was used as back-up in case of technical failure leading to failure to record.) I conducted one-on-one, unstructured, open-ended interviews with the selected participants in order to record the responses from one participant at a time. According to Creswell (2005), one-on-one interviews are “ideal for interviewing participants who are not hesitant to speak, are articulate, and who can share ideas comfortably” (p. 215). I remained sensitive, curious, and attentive, being aware of my own responses, particularly given my shared background as a former DSPP administrator. As an interpretive researcher, my duty was to ask, listen, record, and examine.

Information Analysis

Upon completion of the interview, a written transcript of the audiotapes was made using a voice transcription program. The transcripts were reviewed for typos and to ensure accuracy of the transcription, and the audio recordings were reviewed while the researcher read the transcript. Analysis of the interviews included coding the responses to find broad themes, themes which were then identified by reading each transcript in its entirety and making notes of ideas that come through in the texts.

Each transcript was reread to determine what the interviewee said or described about the lived experiences of DSPP administrators. The transcripts were then coded to describe pieces of the texts, and these codes reduced to fewer codes to assist in identifying major themes. As with all interpretive research, using this reduction of words or phrases to find themes falls in line with the phenomenological concept of reduction. It

was important to note the participants' tones and inflections when speaking to "reveal a whole range of meanings and feelings" (Probert, 2006, p. 8) about the phenomena being studied.

Strategies to Ensure Soundness

To ensure soundness of data collection, I employed qualitative analysis strategies based on consensual qualitative research (CQR). According to Hill et al. (2005):

(t)he essential components of CQR are the use of (a) open-ended questions in semi-structured data collection techniques (typically in interviews), which allow for the collection of consistent data across individuals as well as a more in-depth examination of individual experiences; (b) several judges throughout the data analysis process to foster multiple perspectives; (c) consensus to arrive at judgments about the meaning of the data; (d) at least one auditor to check the work of the primary team of judges and minimize the effects of groupthink in the primary team;...(p. 4).

This branch of research uses elements from phenomenology and grounded theory with an emphasis on the use of judges and consensus to create meaning in the data, using words instead of numbers to validate findings. Consensual qualitative research achieves agreement as these judges develop the common meanings, or themes, and identifying the major categories represented in each theme (Villabla et al., 2007, p. 506).

Coding process. "The task of coders (is) to create initial observations...and to note them on a coding form..." (Nelson et al, 2006, p. 240). Originally, I had recruited two coders who are both California community college leaders and had also successfully completed phenomenological dissertations. Unfortunately, neither of them was able to assist due to the estimated time commitment required to complete the task and the

challenges with which they are dealing with as college leaders. Thus I asked Dr. Jeffrey Holmes, a former student services leader and DSPS administrator for a CCC, who took on the role of working with me to create a coding process for the study.

Each taped interview, the accompanying protocol, and the transcript was organized by name of each participant. Their own transcribed interviews were offered to each participant to be reviewed, and any change or additional information provided by the participants was added to the transcript. After reviewing the transcripts, Dr. Holmes and I created major categories based on the answers and coded the responses into categories. The coding process involved color coding the transcripts to identify repeated words or phrases, and highlighting them based on commonality. The coded transcripts were sent to the auditors to ensure the coding process was consistent and could serve to illuminate the broader question(s) asked during the interviews.

Auditing process. According to Nelson et al (2006), “(t)he task of the auditor is to review the data in a fashion similar to the approach of the initial coders...” (p. 240). Auditing of the information was conducted by an independent reviewer (a leader in higher education with a doctorate) who provided another perspective to the information’s coding structure. For the purpose of this research, Dr. Gail Lorien and Dr. Janessa Price, neither of whom was involved in the primary coding of the data, audited the coding process and the findings, and made recommendations for changes to the categories if needed. By reviewing the coding process developed to identify major categories and examining the credibility of the process, the auditors, if needed, could offer “alternative ways of conceptualizing the data” (Hill et al, 2005, p. 13).

Participant input. This research emphasized the voice of the practitioner, thus it was important to include the participants in the review of the information and the findings of the coding team. Including these participating practitioners in the analysis of the responses ensured the coding analysis accurately reflected the experience of the interviewees. I also wanted to give the practitioners opportunities to provide additional information and to edit or remove “any quotations or information about which they (may feel) uncomfortable” (Nelson et al, 2006, p. 240). Participant input also served as a means to further protect the human subjects interviewed for this research.

Strategies to Protect Human Subjects

According to Gilchrist (2007), the phenomenological approach avoids using “methods for method’s sake with no step-by-step routine or specific analytic requirements, but it does call on the researcher to act reflectively, diligently, and consistently” (p. 89). As a requirement for the CCLP program, I successfully completed an online course from OSU (OSU) in The Protection of Human Research Subjects (CITI). The policies and procedures outlined by OSU’s Human Subjects were followed in collaboration with the Institutional Review Board (IRB) policies. Approval from the IRB was obtained before the study was started and included the use of IRB approved consent forms and interview protocols. Written consent from each participant was obtained, and each participant remained anonymous to readers as pseudonyms were used.

In addition to the aforementioned safeguards, I was mindful of engaging the interviewees in a way that built their trust in me, which was accomplished by acknowledging and addressing the discomfort some participants may have felt when

discussing the challenges they faced administering DSPS on their campuses. Given the candidness of their responses, I believe I was successful. Upon completion of the interviews, I shared my own reflections on the leadership challenges I have faced as a midlevel DSPS administrator and explained its linkage to my interest in the research topic.

I remained fully aware of the important role the interviewees held on their campuses and made sure the potential for negative impact on their professional and personal lives was minimized. Thus the information collection, response analysis, and subsequent publication of this study were handled with the utmost confidentiality, care, empathy, and sensitivity. The auditors were not privy to the identity of the participants as all of the reviewed materials used pseudonyms. In addition, the recordings were transcribed digitally, and all recordings, transcripts, and related notes have been secured in a locked cabinet to be destroyed three years after the completion of this study.

Summary

This section of the research described the philosophical approach, personal reflections that led to the chosen philosophical approach, the research method used, and the data needed to complete the study. This section also discussed the method of selection of the participants, the data collection and data analysis procedures, the strategies to ensure soundness of the data, and the plans for the protection of the participants.

The philosophical approach used in this study was interpretive social science (ISS), the purpose of which is to provide a type of social science inquiry that is interested

in the worldview of these leaders, a view based on a person's interpretation of the environment. The ISS approach also revolves around the relationship of the researcher to the participant(s) being studied, especially since the researcher has direct and personal involvement with the participants through observation or interview. In addition to imparting knowledge about the life of DSPP administrators to others, the importance of understanding what DSPP administrators define as leadership challenges and how they address them was integral to this research. Ideally, the findings presented information which holds true for those DSPP administrators who are not involved in this study.

While the ISS approach was well suited for the purpose and focus of this study, this approach has the primary challenge of lack of generalizability, primarily due to the specificity of the phenomena being studied. As a researcher using the ISS approach, I had to be aware of researcher subjectivity, especially since I am the primary researcher of this study and a former DSPP administrator. Throughout this process, it was important for me to remain conscious of my own values, meanings, and feelings as they relate to the studies topic, causing me to reflect, analyze, and reexamine my worldview as I studied the worldview of others.

The procedures for this study included a purposive sample of which a homogenous group of leaders was invited to participate. Using OSU's IRB approved consent forms and interview protocols, an interview consisting of six open-ended questions was given to each volunteer and simultaneously audio-recorded. Each administrator chose their own pseudonyms in order to provide confidentiality of their responses. The recordings were then transcribed using assistive technology (automatic

synchronized speech readers) and offered to each participant for review and input. To ensure soundness of data collection, I used consensual qualitative research (CQR) strategies. To this end, final versions of the transcripts were analyzed to find similar themes common throughout the transcripts. The themes were then coded to find major themes which speak to the phenomena of being a midlevel administrator of DSPS on a CCC campus. The identified themes and the coding process were audited by two leaders in education to check that the resultant themes befitted the process.

Strategies to protect the human research subjects were employed throughout the research gathering process using the policies and procedures outlined by OSU's IRB, from which approval was obtained before the study was completed. As the primary researcher, I remained cognizant of the fact that each DSPS practitioner held important roles on their campuses, thus the information collection and response analysis were handled with the utmost confidentiality, care, empathy, and sensitivity. All recordings, transcripts, and related notes have been secured to be destroyed three years after the completion of this study. Any subsequent publication of this study will be handled to make sure the potential for negative impact on the professional and personal lives of the participants is minimized.

CHAPTER FOUR: ANALYSIS OF INTERVIEW RESPONSES

This chapter presents the findings from the interviews with the administrators who elected to participate in this research. Major themes emerged from the responses of the interviewees, and while the themes pointed to a shared experience among the administrators, their individual experiences were not exactly the same.

Profiles of the Administrators Interviewed

Six midlevel DSPTS administrators employed at a CCC were interviewed, and all were mid-level administrators of DSP&S at a CCC. In order to maintain confidentiality, pseudonyms for each subject were used. Each participant was told that the only information released about them would be their number of years of professional experience managing a DSPTS.

Jazz – 9 years experience in DSPTS administration and the DSPTS serves approximately 1200 students with disabilities.

Surya – 13 years experience in DSPTS administration and DSPTS serves approximately 450 students with disabilities.

Lady Grace – 18 years experience in DSPTS administration and the DSPTS serves approximately 1300 students with disabilities.

Bat Masterson - 3 years experience in DSPTS administration and the DSPTS department serves approximately 875 students with disabilities.

Katherine – 7 years experience in DSPTS administration and the DSPTS department serves approximately 1300 students with disabilities.

Believer – 5 years experience in DSPS administration and the DSPS department serves approximately 300 students with disabilities.

Results of Analyses

The present study examined three research questions:

- What are the challenges experienced by DSPS administrators in the CCCs?
- What knowledge and skills are needed to address the challenges?
- Which leadership skills are most important for a DSPS manager, and what makes them important?

Table 1, found at the end of this chapter, presents each of these questions and shows the major themes related to each of the questions, along with participant quotes. Following presentation of the themes and the quotes, the themes are re-examined in light of previous research and literature.

Challenges of Leading DSPS

Leadership challenges can be defined as those situations or circumstances that demand a leader to address them in order to continue to be an effective leader. The question specific to this issue was asked of each of the interviewees and while there were several identified challenges, the lack of fiscal resources was the response common to all the participants. A lack of understanding by those outside of DSPS was the next common response, and lastly, providing an increasing number of accommodations with fewer resources.

Lack of Fiscal Resources

The lack of fiscal resources was the stated as the foremost challenge to leading a DSPS by each participant. “Budget. In my whole career, this is the most challenged I have ever been because of the dollar.” (Lady Grace). The budget cuts to the programs were seen to as impediments to serving the student in a timely manner as they caused elimination or reductions in programs while negatively impacting staffing and support services. Katherine’s [challenge] “is providing effective and timely accommodations to students with disabilities with the budget that we've been given. I think that summarizes it all -- everything.”

It's really hard to run a program when basically your budget is cut almost in half and the budget that you get ... does not meet the amount necessary to pay your ...[permanent] staff. People in budget positions higher up within the campus say you have to live within your budget and you turn around and say exactly how are we supposed to do that? (Bat).

This is especially difficult as the leaders continue to see an increase in the student population and the increasing needs of the students. Jazz, Surya, and Believer echoed similar sentiments. “There are the same or increasing expenses, but less money to work with” (Jazz). “We don't have a choice if people come through our doors or if we have to serve them” (Surya). Finally comes the comment:

The biggest challenge right now is the needs of the students are still just as prevalent. Nothing has changed. As a matter of fact [student need has] multiplied and the dollars aren't following. And so you have the responsibility to comply, not just with the Title IV regulations, but with ADA regulations and Section 504. [S]o you've got those responsibilities on you and the colleges have an obligation

to serve. And you can't not serve these individuals. So where do the dollars come from? (Believer)

Lack of Understanding

A lack of understanding regarding disability law and related education code was another challenge in that the DSPS practitioners faced.

The issue of understanding, or not understanding, among faculty, staff, and administration, and by that I mean, do they understand the needs of students with disabilities? Do they understand the concept of having a disability? Do they understand that we have federal and state mandates to provide services to students with disabilities? Because sometimes I've found that they really don't understand the nuances of the laws and what it means for the campus in terms of what we must provide. (Bat)

Jazz felt “a lack of understanding about abilities, disabilities, and the use of accommodations” was a challenge, because “[o]ften the faculty don’t understand and sometimes the students don’t understand the process of accommodations. And senior administrators don’t understand these issues as well.”

Surya stated that DSPS administrators

“...[h]ave to work within a system that doesn't have a lot of understanding about the compliance, state and federal mandates. Our higher ups are supervisors who recognize that they have to have a program of this nature. But how to run it effectively in terms of funding, staffing, how they interplay with different divisions in the college, I think, there's a real lack of understanding.

All the leaders found themselves constantly having to explain the mission and purpose of DSPS to faculty, staff, students, administrators, and community members who

did not understand the program. Also, the lack of understanding by these same constituents regarding abilities and disabilities seemed to lead to negative attitudes about accommodations and mandates.

Bat observed the lack of understanding coupled with lack of money had led to decisions being made by those who have no understanding regarding DSPS' mission and mandates.

[T]his is the analogy I use when budget decisions are made, it is based on financial analysis only. There is never an analysis over whether or not we're meeting our federal mandates. There is never an analysis over what risk exposure we will incur should we take the budget office's suggestions of cutting. And by that I ... mean the potential for lawsuits and OCR complaints. It's never a factor until it's brought up by me. (Bat).

Other Challenges

There were other challenges identified by some participants, but not expressed by all, as challenges. Being a mid-level administrator was seen by some as a challenge to leadership.

Middle management is particularly difficult because you have to have direction that comes from the top and then you have faculty that you oversee and students you must directly serve [a]nd so you're having to please everybody. Striking that balance between keeping an effective, happy workplace, staff, and faculty, ... as well as following administration's lead can be really challenging. (Surya)

For Jazz, the challenge was "being in the position of serving the students while making sure the college is compliant."

The majority of the practitioners reported to a senior manager who reported to a senior administrator. This lack of access to upper-level decision-makers negatively affected the timeliness with which DSPTS (and the campus) could address compliance issues. “[T]hey have me answer to another dean [a]nd that person...[doesn't] know DSPTS. So inevitably, I have to go the president when issues arise relative to access and being compliant with the law” (Surya).

Appropriate staffing was a challenge for some of the practitioners, because it was important to staff the program with people who can work with people with disabilities. The erosion of DSPTS fiscal support has lead to

[S]taffing DSPTS [and] getting knowledgeable people to staff the program. You have to have the ability to work with students who may have a number of disabilities and supports related to serving them. It takes patience to work well with students in DSPTS [a]nd it takes more than just staffing. [C]urrent employees also need access to regular training and we need to find ways to retain them. (Jazz)

Surya believed “fighting to keep adequate staffing levels in this climate right now is particularly challenging given the huge funding cuts that we've come up against.”

Lady Grace found keeping up with the pace of technology and integrating Universal Design Learning (UDL) concepts into both curriculum and instruction were challenges to leading DSPTS:

[K]eeping up with technology is ...the other [challenge]. [B]ecause it's so rapidly changing. [H]ow do you keep the pace to stay up with it? Ways to integrate universal design for learning and all of the faculty possibilities so that instruction can help all students is a challenge. But I see both technology and implementing UD in the instructional

environment as easy...compared to the budget piece of it.
(Lady Grace)

Above all, the issues related to budget, or the lack thereof, were the biggest challenges facing these leaders.

Leadership Skills Needed to Address the Challenges

The CCC system is facing changing institutional dynamics due to California's economic climate. One goal of this study was to gather answers regarding which leadership skills can assist DSPS practitioners with addressing these challenging times. The answers to this question varied for each leader.

Managing Resources

For Believer, Jazz, and Bat, knowing how to identify and use the resources a DSPS leader has available to them is an important leadership skill. These resources could be tangible (technology hardware, budget funds, DSPS offerings) or intangible (the legal mandates, the Chancellor's Office, support from colleagues). "[H]aving the ability to be able to manage the resources you have...[s]o as funds come in, I have to make decisions about things, what we're going to buy, how to prioritize, where the needs are" (Believer). Jazz added, "[M]ost importantly know your budget and in this day and age, know how to be creative with using what you've got to continue to provide a quality level of service". Knowing the budget and resources also meant having familiarity with the institution's budget processes and administrative tools. As Bat emphasized, "[y]ou have to know what tools to use...and you have to know when it's appropriate to use which tool."

Believer voiced the DSPS administrator has to be able to communicate the difference between what is required and what is desired (i.e. letter of the law versus spirit of the law). “Well, I tell my staff it's not that you get what you want, you get what you need...[a]nd [I help] faculty and staff and students distinguish between those two [things].”

Katherine used intuition and timing as resources to guide her strategies for managing the DSPS program. Timing appears to be integral to using intuition effectively.

I would say nowadays... is knowing intuitively when ...the timing is right [to ask] for certain things. intuition is -- is, one, a skill that we really need to tap into because that allows for -- when you have intuition and timing of things, that allows for you to be more successful at the end...[W]hat you want to do is convince, so the timing is imperative; and being intuitive when the timing is right [ensures] that [the issue is] addressed or [that issues] are brought up to the right people (Katherine).

Again, a resource could be any number of tools a DSPS practitioner may find available (on or off campus) to use to address challenges. Surya believed “doing your homework” is an important skill.

Knowing the ins and outs (of the DSPS program)...(and) (w)hat are the options (to address challenges) and bringing that to the table.... So by knowing your stuff, it instills confidence, I think, in the person or persons that are receiving your message. (Surya)

Interpersonal Skills

Interpersonal skills can be defined as those personal traits or attributes that could enhance a person's interactions in the workplace and interpersonal relationships with people in the workplace. Interesting enough, interpersonal skills and other personal qualities permeated the majority of the responses mentioned by the practitioners as being the most important leadership skills. "Patience, being a good listener, advocacy skills are the three leadership skills I feel are the most important. Those are the primary ones off the top of my head" (Bat). Jazz concurred with the following:

Be a good listener which helps when you're dealing with the concerns of your constituents. Also, the ability to ask for assistance from your supervisors, your colleagues, or your staff [is important]. If you don't have the answer, someone else might, like the Chancellor's Office.

Lady Grace added concerns. "You have to anticipate what your barriers are going to be; thinking proactively so that you can understand what objections people may have to what you're trying to do." Katherine believed DSPP leaders had to be flexible, objective, and innovative in order to address barriers. She stated:

Flexible in our day to day work as we respond to many different issues of a day as nothing is constant in our business of ensuring access to students' educational learning towards success. We experience new unexpected situations every day as our hand is in all things across campus life.

Ability to Communicate and Advocate

Having the ability to communicate and be an advocate for DSPP was another prominent theme, especially given the fact that disability services personnel work with

many facets of the campus. The role of DSPS is to provide access to the campus' programs and services, which often involves collaboration and communication with faculty, other student support programs, senior administration, and administrative departments such as Information Technology or Facilities Maintenance. Many DSPS students are participants in state agency programs and often require the advocacy and support of DSPS leaders to communicate with their sponsors. Community organizations for people with disabilities refer clients to the community college and may work with DSPS leaders about ways to better serve the community.

Given that laws related to disability access and compliance range from accessible facilities to academic accommodations to assistive technology, DSPS leaders often have to enforce decisions (or garner the support of senior administrators to enforce decisions) to protect both the student and the institution. Lady Grace emphasized:

[Y]ou have to be willing to communicate with people from all different backgrounds. You have to be willing to talk with physicians, psychiatrists, educators, therapists, parents, clients...[B]ecause [in] our environment, we're the one center on campus that touches every aspect of campus life, from facilities to discipline to policy implementation... HR to classroom to course scheduling to registration... [a]nd we have to be able to communicate with all individuals, whether it's the front line or it's behind the scenes with upper administration or even to your board of trustees. You have to be ready to talk with all of them.

For Surya, effective communication can help the practitioner advocate for what they need. “[H]ow you communicate and how your...support what you're asking for.” To this end, for her, being active in the campus community was important. “[B]eing involved where you can in terms of leadership...like curriculum committees, perhaps

safety communities,...the diversity committee. [G]etting your face out there and talking about what...DSPS represents” (Surya).

Both Surya and Bat believed the ability to advocate and be proactive were important to leading DSPS.

[W]hat I have found to be an important leadership skill is to show how really marketable what we do is to the rest of the college...So I think as a matter of survival, any good leader in this field really has to champion their program and show that it's not just this small group of people we serve. [DSPS leaders] have the vitality and the expertise to be marketable throughout the college [and]...a good leader rings the bells and...points to the good things that this [program] does provide for the college. (Surya)

“You have to be able to advocate because you need to advocate not just for the department or for money, but...sometimes for specific students and their needs as it relates to the whole program administration” (Bat). Day-to-day DSPS administration requires advocacy for both students and the campus, “...a sometimes fine line to walk when you have to do it simultaneously” (J. Holmes, personal communication, September 9, 2011). Also, DSPS leaders may have to advocate for the community when DSPS offerings are important tools in rehabilitation and health, specifically adaptive physical education (A.P.E.) where many programs have been reduced or eliminated to save money.

Katherine and Surya noted there were better ways to communicate program’s needs than using the programs mandates to enforce decisions.

You can have two different approaches to addressing a challenge. One [is] coming out with no regard to the playing field or what's going on politically [or] coming out

very strongly, where you may be in the right. But ... what you want to do is convince. (Katherine)

“[T]hey wanna know that you're not just saying the law says I'm gonna hit you over the head with the ruler book” (Surya). Given the lack of understanding from non-DSPS constituents about DSPS needs, a “the law is the rule” approach may not help leaders meet the needs of the program.

Gaining trust and getting buy-in from administrators and other campus constituencies was an opportunity for communication and advocacy skills to work together to garner support for DSPS.

On a campus, you have to get buy-in and establish a level of trust, so as a leader, in order to be able to implement even the best-laid plans, unless you are able to really get buy-in, establish that level of trust and show others that you know what it is that you're talking about, everything else. That buy-in is so critical. And that's true I think across the campus as well as within your own staff. (Lady Grace)

Katherine’s response included both communication and leadership, especially being a leader to DSPS staff. Communicating and advocating effectively for both student and the institution requires gaining the trust of the different groups of people needed to maintain student equity and institutional compliance.

Practical Knowledge Needed to be an Effective DSPS Leader

This study sought to hear the voices of the practitioner of DSPS administration and to learn the knowledge that guided their practice via practical experiences and observations rather than theory.

Familiarity with Disabilities, Relevant Laws, and Programs.

Bat and Jazz felt that being familiar with the relevant federal and state mandates was fundamental for effective DSPS leadership. Knowing these laws, what they mean, and how to comply with them was integral to having a good program. “Well, the things that come to mind first are to be familiar with the ADA, Title V, Sections 508 and 504” (Jazz). “What's really helped me...is my knowledge of the [laws] and compliance in higher education...It's definitely necessary to understand what these laws mean and where the backbone of [DSPS] mandates come from” (Bat). While Bat had experience in ADA coordination prior to managing a DSPS, Jazz learned the relevant mandates while on the job.

I wasn't familiar with these laws until I got into managing DSPS, but I learned what I needed to know and worked with helpful staff and faculty as I learned about the managing of the program. So familiarity with the laws and [the] Chancellor's Office [DSPS implementing guidelines] is helpful.

The majority of the administrators felt understanding disabilities and how to accommodate them was important for effective DSPS administration. Bat felt it was “really important to know your student populations (and) to have a basic understanding at the minimum of what types of disabilities your students have and what it means for them [in terms of access and support].” “You have to understand disabilities. You have to understand the differences in the disabilities, what are appropriate and necessary accommodations relative to that” (Believer). Furthermore, having this knowledge was helpful in defining what services and programs are provided, especially depending on the

needs of the students. Surya further supported this perspective, “You have to know not only what the law says, but the most effective and efficient way to accomplish accommodations and access.”

Disability knowledge and understanding all of the aspects of what comes into play with how to evaluate the disabilities, educational limitations, and then the nexus between educational limitations and how to provide an accommodation. And that's paramount to what we do (Lady Grace).

Ability to Identify and Allocate Resources

Four of the practitioners felt practical knowledge involved knowing how to use the resources of the campus to keep DSPPS working effectively. “[K]now your resources or know where they are because you will have to be able to, if not quote...the law or the leverages in the law [needed] to ...ensure equal access” (Believer). For Jazz, “[k]nowing your institution’s administrative and financial processes [are] important, everything from budget development, working with vendors and contractors, to the hiring of staff...”

Along these lines, Surya believed recordkeeping and documentation were “a practical and necessary part of what we do [in] tracking our students. [A]dequate and substantial record keeping really helps substantiate anything that you're asking for.” She also added “[g]etting as much information as you can is another practical skill that's necessary...[Doing] your homework in terms of costs and how to get things [implemented].”

Lady Grace reiterated the importance of having the background and knowledge of disability and program laws to find resources to support the program.

[W]hen I say resources, it's not just the fiscal ones... it's how you get the resources to do what you need to do, so that's the people and the personnel, the equipment, the facilities, in order to be able to put all of those resources together to make it happen for the student. So we have to have a pretty good understanding of how to get the resources (Lady Grace).

Given the historical and drastic changes to DSPTS funding in the past three years, Katherine felt the most important practical knowledge to be an effective DSPTS leader was budget management. “Practical knowledge I would say [is] budget, budget, budget. You got to know your budget. Yeah. That would be the big one.”

Leadership Competencies

Employing different leadership competencies was referenced by most of the administrators as important to effective DSPTS leadership. These skills included, but were not limited to, communication skills, educating others, and being a leader.

Communicating to others was seen as important to Jazz, Believer, and Katherine, and included being able to work with people with disabilities. Jazz believed “one must have a certain sensibility about working with people. The people we work with, students, faculty, or staff, often come from different walks of life and have differing views on things.”

For Believer, knowing “how to interact with [people with disabilities] based on [knowing the nature of] those disabilities so that you can...you can train [DSPTS staff]” to work with effectively with students. Believer found that DSPTS leaders must be able to do this as they have to:

educate faculty and staff...on how to best provide accommodations. [Faculty] is going to come to you with issues, frustrations, needs that they have and if you don't understand the disabilities then it's hard to help [the faculty] through it because we all really are here for the same thing, to help students succeed. And so how...we all [reach this] common ground is going to be critical (Believer).

Katherine felt knowing how to communicate and knowing how to lead people went together. “[Another] practical knowledge is how to still lead and provide hope for the people that you are leading, despite everything that's going on around us including providing them with hope.”

Surya felt advocacy was a leadership competency that was important to DSPS leadership. “I'm a strong advocate for social justice and...social justice is not just a coined term, but it's active. It's beyond an awareness of diversity. But it's actively working to promote disenfranchised groups.” She also believed in the role of the DSPS administrator as an educator. “[W]e teach students and we tend to think that teachings happen in the classroom...but students services absolutely models how you respond to each other, how you problem solve [and] how you empower yourself.”

Salient Themes

Nine themes arose from the insights provided from the interviews with these community college leaders and were grouped into three categories: challenges of leading DSPS, leadership skills needed to address challenges, and the practical knowledge needed to be an effective DSPS leader. While each theme is distinct from each other, the categories were designed to manage the amount of data found regarding each theme.

Challenges of Leading DSPS

The following paragraphs describe the subthemes under the challenges of DSPS leadership. These challenges are lack of fiscal resources, lack of understanding, and other challenges.

Lack of fiscal resources. The biggest challenge to leadership is the continuing lack of fiscal resources at a time where more students are accessing such services. “DSPS must continue to meet state compliance, but the integrity of the program may be affected by the loss of fiscal support” (H. Elias, personal communications, July 28, 2011). The challenge of the lack of fiscal resources for disability services and student affairs nationwide has been documented by many authors (Kiley, 2011; Pusser & Levin, 2009; SOURCE, 2011). The effect of budget cuts to the CCC system and DSPS specifically have been studied by the Academic Senate for California Community Colleges [ASCCC] (2009) and identified by MPR Associates, (2012), respectively. MPR, a private firm, analyzed how the cuts sustained by DSPS since the 2008-09 year, when the historic cuts first happened, have impacted students and services. “As a result of the funding reductions, many colleges reported having to reduce staffing, eliminate services, curtail hours of operation, or take other measures to cut costs” (MPR, 2012, p. v).

One interviewee found lack of funding to be the least challenging aspect of her job, because she had access to decision makers who trusted her opinions and proven experience with managing a DSPS program. Because of this, she believed the impact of DSPS budget setbacks has been felt minimally on her campus. However, based on the responses of the other participants, not many DSPS leaders have this support and felt

steps should be taken to address the barriers to making important decisions in a timely manner. Of the colleges visited by MPR, the majority of the DSPP coordinators believed “that they had cut what they could cut, and there was very little excess to trim” (2012, p. 12).

Lack of understanding. The lack of understanding from the campus community regarding DSS programs and mandates, from accommodations to accessible facilities, was a challenge identified by this study’s participants, a challenge most recently identified by several authors (Burke, et al., 2010; Guzman & Balcazar, 2010; Hall & Belch, 2000; Kraus, 2010). This lack of understanding of DSPP was a frustrating and consistent leadership challenge for the practitioners and had an impact on how the program served students, requiring these leaders to constantly educate others about the mission and mandates of DSPP.

Yet the lack of understanding was also seen by most of the leaders as an opportunity to use communication skills and creativity to teach others about the program and the students the program serves. This educating of the campus was important given the fact that DSPP often interacts and perhaps collaborates with other aspects of the college community. As Kraus (2010) stated,

Perhaps the role of service provider should not be limited to determining individual accommodations and facilitating campus access, but expanded to that of an ambassador for disability culture. We have the unique opportunity to reframe disability, push forward progressive ways of thinking, and challenge antiquated ideas. In our roles, we represent disability to our campuses and community (p. 28).

Other challenges. Being in a middle management position was cited by some DSPS leaders as another challenge to leading the program. Rosser (2000) believed the importance of the role of the midlevel administrator in higher education resided in “maintaining a balance between their supervisors’ directions and delegations and the needs and constraints of faculty, students, and public who require their support and services” (p. 7). Given DSPS’ role as a mandated department for student access and college responsibility, these leaders felt they often had to juggle between addressing student need and ensuring the college was compliant given funding reductions. In addition, not having the ability to immediately resolve pressing issues the made this challenge more pronounced.

However, the related challenges for these managers are that they have “fewer resources, manage more people, and are less engaged than all other employee groups” (Bersin.com, 2011). McDonald (2012) surveyed senior management regarding the challenges faced by middle managers and found many senior administrators were prioritizing professional development and the improvement of “middle management space” (p. 20). McClellan (2012) suggested midlevel administrators in higher education seek their own ways to supplement their professional practice.

Appropriate staffing was a challenge the majority of DSPS leaders mentioned as a challenge for DSPS. Many studies suggested that staffing of the disability services program is important (Bentley-Townlin, 2002; Hall & Belch, 2000; Strauss & Sales, 2010, Thorton & Downs, 2010) as some staff must have specialized skills (LD specialists, assistive technologists) and all staff must be competent in understanding

disabilities and how it affects the individuals they serve. A survey of 88 DSPP coordinators (MPR, 2012) found 35% of coordinators were concerned that “current staff did not meet the minimum qualifications for DSPP positions” and the lack of appropriate staff resulted in delay of approving accommodations and providing services (p. 23).

Ever emerging technology was another theme echoed by the DSPP practitioners as a challenge to effective leadership. Legal mandates related to alternate access to print materials and assistive technologies (screen readers, Braille readers) require colleges keep up with the demand for these services. DSPP leaders had to concern themselves with finding the resources for these technologies (hardware and software) as well as the personnel and training needed to adequately provide these services. According to MPR (2012), only 2% of DSPP programs surveyed eliminated assistive technology services due to funding cuts, and 57% of the coordinators felt this resulted in students not receiving technology training or access to technology in a timely manner (p. 33). In addition, alternate media provision, which requires technology to produce materials, is a mandated service and cannot be cut given federal and state disability laws. “With the increasing use of interactive technologies like iPads and iPhones, DSPP will need to make sure they create materials for use with these technologies. That can get expensive, too” (A. Abbott, personal communication, April 21, 2012).

Leadership Skills Needed to Address Challenges

The following paragraphs describe the subthemes under the leadership skills needed by DSPS administrators to address leadership challenges. These challenges are managing resources, interpersonal skills, and the ability to communicate and advocate for DSPS.

Managing available resources. Resources can be defined several ways. “[A]n available means afforded by the mind or one’s personal capabilities. [A] source of supply, support, or aid, especially one that can be readily drawn upon when needed. Capability of dealing with a situation or in [with] meeting difficulties” (Dictionary.com, n.d.) The voiced experiences of these practitioners pointed to the identification of and use of resources as being vital to being an effective DSPS leader. Shulock (2002), the AACC (2005), and the ASCCC (2009) identified resource management as a skill needed by today’s community college leader in general in order to effectively maintain program offerings. In fact, the ASCCC (2009) found that CCC administrators need to have more specialized skill in regards to budget and finance management (p. 28).

All of the practitioners cited knowing where to find resources and how to manage them was necessary to address DSPS challenges. As with the above definitions of the word resource, the administrators identified resources in a variety of ways: money, DSPS colleagues, staff, technology, collaborative relationships, the Chancellor’s Office, the law, supportive supervisors, knowing when to listen, and tools to implement program changes. The AACC (2005) outlined several examples of resource management and included those touched upon by this study’s participants: accountability in reporting;

implementing financial plans to support programs, services, and staff; and be creative in seeking alternative sources of funding to name a few. One leader found that showing strong resource management skills was also effective in garnering the trust of senior management for the decisions being made about DSPS.

Interpersonal skills. Barakat (2011) defined interpersonal skills as “those essential skills involved in dealing with and relating to other people, largely on a one- to-one basis” (p. 151). These skills involve understanding the self, empathy for others, and building relationships with others based on trust and respect. For the participants, interpersonal skills were just as important a resource to use when addressing leadership challenges. Several authors have pointed to the importance of interpersonal skills rather than technical skills as key to being an effective leader (Barakat, 2011; Levin, 2010; West 2007; Wheeler, 2005). West concluded:

The bottom line is that when it comes to being a good manager or leader, you must master the hard skills of your specific job as well as the soft skills of interpersonal relations. Interpersonal skills must be a focus of your leadership development (n.p.).

One DSPS administrator found being an effective communicator, showing leadership in the face of historical changes, and understanding the environment in which the needs of DSPS are being addressed are interpersonal skills she used to help overcome trying situations. Another practitioner felt that emotional intelligence was becoming increasingly important to being effective as a DSPS administrator.

Ability to communicate and advocate. Communication was identified time again by the leaders as a resource and a skill for educating others about the mission and

objectives of DSPS. The ability was to effectively communicate with people from all walks of life is a resource and a skill, because DSS touches nearly every aspect of the college and its many constituencies (Burke, et al, 2010). Strong communication skills were seen as an effective way to get others to understand what particular objective the DSPS practitioner was trying to accomplish, which could lead to expanded, new, and sustainable collaborations. By the same token, some leaders felt knowing how to listen to a diverse constituency informed their methods of educating non-DSPS populations about the program's missions and issues.

The ability to communicate the issues was as important as communicating ideas about potential solutions. Several authors (Salzberg, et al., 2002; Shaw, 2006; Walters, 2000; Wilson & Getzel, 2001; Wolanin & Steele, 2004) have reported that making disability specific training available to faculty, staff, and administrators can positively affect the accessibility of a college's programs and services. A 2010 CCC report found, "(DSPS staff) indicated that their outreach to faculty has resulted in much better collaboration between the academic and student services divisions" (p. 4). This same report suggested other ways to effectively communicate with the campus, including "faculty handbooks, ...workshops, disability awareness events, and on-line communiqués (p. 22)."

The majority of the DSPS practitioners cited the ability to advocate for DSPS and students with disabilities went hand in hand with good communication. Kraus (2010) found DSS practitioners should be both advocates and collaborators for their programs (p. 28), while Thornton and Downs (2010) found advocacy and collaborations key to

creating DSS programs with greater access for students (p. 79). The AACC (2005) also found the leadership competencies needed by community college leaders included both communication and advocacy, and Guzman and Balcazar (2010) concluded practitioners with more years experience used advocacy more often as a tool to lead DSS programs (p. 58).

Almost all of the respondents found reciting the laws relevant to DSPPS as being ineffective to getting the support they might need from their supervisors or senior management. However, building relationships from ongoing communication (and collaboration) made it easier for the DSPPS administrator to discern the best way to couch discussions so that challenges could be addressed more readily. Bentley-Townlin (2002) touched on this when she stated "...disability providers need to address (the) method by which non-disabled staff are educated about disability issues. This method must encompass more than (mandates) because the law doesn't guarantee changes in attitudes and stereotypes" (p. 210).

Practical Knowledge Needed to be an Effective DSPPS Leader

The following paragraphs describe the subthemes under the practical knowledge needed to be an effective DSPPS leader. These challenges are familiarity with disabilities, relevant laws, and DSPPS; the ability to identify and allocate resources, and leadership competencies.

Familiarity with disabilities, relevant laws, and DSPPS. Familiarity with laws regulating the provision of disability services was mentioned by all the practitioners as key to being an effective DSPPS leader. Shaw and Dukes (2001) listed knowledge of

disability mandates as a program standard for DSS, as did Shulock (2002) and Schuh (2003) when they reported the same knowledge as being tantamount to providing effective leadership on college campuses and within student affairs, respectively. Knowledge of the regulations, including education code, was helpful in creating accessible campuses and quality DSS programs (Thorton & Downs, 2010).

In 2010, 33% of DSPSs were struggling with several aspects of providing services among them: assessing student learning outcomes, APE's role in supporting academics, and managing student data (CCCCO, 2010). Each DSPS leader reported some of these same struggles and reported knowing how to meet DSPS needs by using familiarity with compliance laws (ADA, 504, Chancellor's Office implementing guidelines). This familiarity and their experience using the laws helped them to approach senior administration with strategies designed to effectively address DSPS challenges. Shaw (2006) recommended access to professional development and disability training opportunities to help DSS providers to maintain their skills in program administration.

Ability to identify and allocate resources. The CCC Student Success Task Force (2012) reported that given the current fiscal climate, especially for categorical programs like DSPS, the colleges should be "leveraging all available resources to help students succeed" (p. 10). This was a primary challenge identified by the DSPS leaders who found the reduced funding and the increasing enrollments of students with disabilities (CCCCO Data Mart, n.d.) made it difficult to remain compliant in providing access. According to MPR (2012), "DSPS programs have engaged in a number of

different efforts to reduce their budget and still provide services and accommodations to students” (p. 15).

As Aune also reported in 2000, the DSPS practitioners found the challenge of finding resources created opportunities to be creative and flexible in solving problems. Unlike other CCC categorical programs, DSPS cannot cap the number of students they serve, and there does not appear to be an increase in program funding from the state for the next few years (MPR, 2012). Given these facts, effective DSPS leaders will have to be skilled in working with the resources at hand.

In addition to the resources already mentioned, DSPS leaders found collaboration with other student services or state vocational rehabilitation could help share the costs of serving DSPS programs. According to the AACC (n.d.), “cooperative arrangements are increasing between community colleges and their local schools, community groups, rehabilitation agencies, and employers.” Community education courses for developmentally delayed learners and the WorkAbility III program are examples of these types of collaborations, “collaborations which serve the community while lessening the campus resources needed to support some of DSPS’ offerings” (J.Holmes, personal communication, August 7, 2011).

Leadership competencies. In 2005, the AACC provided a list of competencies for community college leaders, many of which were the same as those noted by the State of California’s 2011 Leadership Competency Model (California State Department of Human Resources, 2011). Among the competencies shared by these organizations’ literature were communication, interpersonal skills, resource management, collaboration,

building trust, and being a leader. Each of the DSPS leaders identified at least one of these competencies as necessary practical knowledge needed to address leadership challenges and be an effective practitioner. Hockaday and Puryear (n.d.) included vision and integrity as leadership competencies needed to be effective community college leaders in the new millennium.

“Unfortunately, it can be argued that neither the economic resources nor the leadership environment that currently exists allow community colleges to fully serve the people of California” (ASCCC, 2009, p. 28). While aspiring to maintain a balance between diminishing fiscal resources with growing DSPS demands can be overwhelming, one practitioner found the experience of being a DSPS administrator “is about communication, knowing the laws, collaboration, managing the resources, creating and sustaining access, educating others, and leading the DSPS staff.” (Katherine).

Summary

This chapter analyzed the responses of six current DSPS administrators interviewed regarding their lived experiences addressing the leadership challenges of DSPS administration. Among those challenges identified included lack of fiscal resources, lack of understanding from those outside of DSPS, and other challenges unique to DSPS management. These leaders were also asked what leadership skills and practical knowledge is needed DSPS practitioners to effectively address those challenges. Interpersonal skills, the ability to communicate and advocate, and managing resources were identified as the leadership skills needed. Familiarity with laws relevant to DSPS, the ability to identify and allocate resources, and leadership competencies were identified

as the practical knowledge needed to be an effective administrator. Each of the themes and subthemes was corroborated by the previous research and literature.

Table 1. Examples of Interviewee Statements for Each Theme*Challenges of Leading DSPS*

1. Lack of Fiscal Resources

“It's really hard to run a program when basically your budget is cut almost in half and the budget that you get from the state does not meet the amount necessary.”

“Number one is funding and expenses. There are the same or increasing expenses, but less money to work with.”

2. Lack of Understanding

“We have to work within a system that doesn't have a lot of understanding about the compliance (and) state and federal mandates.”

“(A) lack of understanding about abilities, disabilities, and the use of accommodations. Often the faculty don't understand and sometimes the students don't understand the process of accommodations. And senior administrators don't understand these issues as well.”

3. Other Challenges

“The biggest challenge right now is the needs of the students are still just as prevalent.”

“Middle management is particularly difficult because you have to have direction that comes from the top and then you have faculty that you oversee and students you must directly serve.”

“Fighting to keep adequate staffing levels in this climate right now is particularly challenging given the huge funding cuts.”

Leadership Skills Needed to Address Challenges

4. Managing Resources

“(Having) the ability to be able to manage the resources you have. That is critical.

“Knowing your institutions administrative and financial processes is important, everything from budget development, working with vendors and contractor (to), the hiring of staff.”

“(A)dequate and substantial recordkeeping really helps substantiate anything you're asking for.”

Table 1. Examples of Interviewee Statements for Each Theme (cont.)

5. Interpersonal Skills

“Be a good listener which helps when you’re dealing with the concerns of your constituents.”

“I would say we... are required to be flexible, objective, and innovative.”

“How to interact with...individuals...with...disabilities.”

6. Ability to Communicate and Advocate

“I think the most important(skill) is effective communication with all constituents – staff, student, parents, the community, faculty, and senior administrators.”

“You have to be able to advocate...because you need to advocate not just for the department or for money, but also for students and their needs.”

Practical Knowledge Needed to be an Effective DSPS Leader.

7. Familiarity with Disabilities, Relevant Laws, and DSPS

“What's really helped me...is my knowledge of the ADA and Section 504 and compliance in higher education. It's definitely necessary to understand what these laws mean.”

“You have to understand disabilities. You have to understand the differences in the disabilities, what are appropriate and necessary accommodations relative to that.”

“Disability knowledge, and understanding all of the aspects of what comes into play with how to evaluate the disabilities, educational limitations, and then the nexus in between.”

8. Ability to Identify and Allocate Resources

“Practical knowledge I would say (is) budget, budget, budget. You got to know your budget. And the other thing is to know your resources or know where they are.”

“[Know] how to get resources to support you. And when I say resources, it's not just the fiscal ones...it's the people and the personnel, the equipment, (and) the facilities.”

9. Leadership Competencies

“Know how to still lead and provide. Provide hope for the people that you are leading despite everything that's going on.”

“I need to...be always out there trying to build my allies.”

Table 1. Examples of Interviewee Statements for Each Theme (cont.)

“Diplomacy (a)ll the way around.”

“Probably the longer I'm in this business, the more credence I give to emotional intelligence.”

“(A)s a matter of survival, any good leader in this field really has to champion their program.”

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to contribute to the body of literature on the leadership challenges faced by DSPS administrators in the CCCs and to attempt to capture the experiences of these leaders. This chapter will discuss the findings of the study to include addressing limitations of the study, suggestions for further research, and questions for community college practice. This chapter includes the researcher's reflections and final thoughts on the study.

Research Findings

The research questions were threefold: (a) what challenges are experienced by DSPS administrators; (b) what leadership skills are most important for a DSPS manager; and (c) what knowledge and skills are needed to address leadership challenges. Thus this study examined the current practitioner's view on addressing these challenges in their roles as DSPS leaders.

The leaders in this study were asked to identify the challenges experienced by DSPS administrators in the CCCs. Disability support service practitioners who are seeking to understand the challenges of leading such a program may read this study as a means to inform their leadership knowledge, skills, and practice. The themes that arose from their lived experiences addressing challenges include (a) lack of fiscal resources; (b) lack of understanding from those outside of DSPS; and (c) other challenges, such as being a middle manager, balancing more student needs with fewer resources, and finding appropriate staff.

The voice of the DSPS practitioner was integral to the objective of this study, which was to learn which leadership skills were important to be effective in the role. The responses lead to the identification of the following skills used in the everyday practice of this study's participants: (a) managing available resources; (b) having (and using) interpersonal skills; and (c) having the ability to advocate for DSPS and communicate with others about the program.

The practical knowledge needed by DSPS leaders to address challenges was the third question asked of these administrators and important to the purpose of the research which was to provide tangible answers to current and future DSPS practitioners. Their responses to this question lead to three themes: (a) familiarity with disabilities, the laws relevant to disability and higher education, and understanding DSPS'; (b) having the ability to identify and allocate resources for DSPS; and (c) using leadership competencies to lead the program as well as collaborate with non-DSPS entities.

Limitations of the Study

There are several limitations of this study, the primary one being the lack of generalizability to other DSPS administrators in the same college system. A small group of targeted participants were studied at a certain point in time, and their experiences must be considered in that context. This limitation may result in the insights and the themes identified not being representative of the lived experiences or voices of all the midlevel administrators of DSPS. However, given the dearth of information available regarding the topic, this study may become a resource for research in the areas of student affairs leadership and disability services administration.

Other limitations are:

1. Lack of generalizability may extend to DSS leaders in other college systems, stateside or nationwide. Again, the insights and the themes identified do not represent the lived experiences or voices of all the midlevel administrators of DSS.
2. Research using an interpretive approach must also be mindful of researcher subjectivity and reductionism which helps lead to an appropriate generalization of results.
3. By focusing on leadership challenges, the perspective of the research may be limited. Insights about the rewards or successes of being a DSPPS practitioner were not explored in this study and may provide a skewed view on the experience of such practitioners

This research was not intended to reveal every aspect of the phenomenon leading DSPPS, but it did provide answers to what is helpful in addressing the challenges. However, this study could lead to the opportunities of doing further research regarding DSPPS leadership and practice. More importantly, additional research could inform the curriculum used to train these midlevel administrators as well as inform senior administrators they report to.

Suggestions for Further Research

One of the undoubted strengths of qualitative research is that it enables us to get up close to practice in a variety of ways. It can tell us what people believe about their practice, it can explore the results of what they actually do, and it can explore the gap between the two. This is often a

significant trigger for people to change their practice.
(Higgs & Cherry, 2009, p.11)

This study focused on DSS administration in California. It is important to examine these issues in other states as well as nationwide. Further qualitative studies along with quantitative studies could confirm and expand these findings. While the California Chancellor's Office does not have a definitive number, it appears up to two-thirds of DSPP leaders are full-time administrators (Galvin Group, 2011); research focused on formal educational programs dedicated to training future DSPP administrators would be of value those interested in pursuing the profession and those who will need to hire trained professionals. Further qualitative research could ask what makes a DSPP leader remain a leader given the challenges specific to DSPP leadership. This in turn could lead to quantitative research specifically identify and explore factors that support DSPP leaders' success which may be useful in positing theories of the positive facets of leading DSS.

I would like the opportunity to research the perspectives of the DSPP leaders who are in the faculty ranks of DSPP as well as the perspectives of the senior academic leaders who recruit, support, and retain DSS leaders. The voices of both of these groups may provide knowledge to their colleagues, many of whom will be faced with hiring DSS administrators.

The diversity of the ranks of DSPP administration at the CCCs mirrors that of the results of a national survey. To this end, researching the perspective of DSPP leaders in the minority (practitioners with disabilities, men, and people of color) could inform the

training of professionals. Does this limited diversity in administrators affect the creating of welcoming and diverse programs? Can their experiences inform the practice of leading DSPS that better support the increasingly diverse student population? Perhaps their insight can provide district administration with reasons to mirror the diversity of the student population by addressing diversity in its hiring practices.

I would also like to address the need for postsecondary training programs focused on the administration and leadership of DSS programs. My informal research led me to think about mixed method research on whether available academic preparation programs of future DSPS leaders is effective training from the perspective of the students who have graduated from those programs.

Questions for Community College Practice

“(D)eclining resources, retrenchment, reduction in force, and similar circumstances are going to confront the leaders of the (California) community college system for the next few years. To plan for the future, community college decision makers will need to determine which, if any, of the central purposes and missions of the community college are to be abandoned as a result of declining resources (Shenk, 1981, p.83)

Shenk’s (1981) description of the fiscal challenges facing the CCC system 30 years ago continues to be the same ones faced by the CCCs and DSPS today.

Community colleges are grappling with deciding which programs are central to the mission of the community college, and DSPS, while central to the community college’s tenet of educational access, is being challenged to show how it benefits a campus outside of just being a mandate.

For over 30 years, the funding for DSPS was consistent and to some extent protected from drastic cuts, allowing the entire institution to benefit from DSPS resources. According to CCC Vice Chancellor Erik Skinner (as cited in Yamagata-Noji, 2011) since 2008, “(o)verall state funding for categorical programs was reduced by over 40 percent, with cuts to most categorical programs ranging from 38% to 52%.” There is no timeline for when or if the funding for DSPS and other categorical programs will be restored. “The colleges and districts have to learn how to reallocate funding without categorical funds” (J. Holmes, personal communication, October 1, 2011).

Based on the finding of the present study, the question arises: to what extent must the DSPS administrator have a bigger vision for DSPS than the immediate purpose of being in compliance? Practitioners pointed to the variety of offerings DSPS had which could be a greater resource to the campus constituency, particularly as the program appears to interact with many facets of the campus. The practitioners provided various examples of self-sustaining services implemented between DSPS and other entities, and they discussed ideas where the program could be more economically viable for the campus while effectively serving the off-campus community.

Given the impact of DSPS budget cuts, practitioners identified knowledge of resources and how to manage them as being very important in DSPS leadership, which gives rise to another question: to what extent do DSPS administrators need additional professional development in the use of fiscal administrative software and tools? Affording midlevel practitioners access to professional opportunities related to budget development and management may help practitioners effectively administrate DSPS.

An important outcome of the findings of this research may be recommendations for professional education and training of DSPP practitioners. To what extent can leadership challenges be addressed with the availability of more post-secondary programs designed to train disability service leaders in the laws, guidelines, and budgetary practices necessary to create and sustain effective programs? Additionally, McClellan (2012) reported middle managers in student affairs are often responsible for developing and implementing department budgets, yet the literature regarding student affairs may imply that graduate preparation programs may not offer the opportunity to develop the requisite budget skills needed. To what extent must the CCCs provide opportunities to ensure DSPP leaders get this training? How can the few training programs in post-secondary disability services management (and the emerging ones) incorporate curriculum designed to teach effective fiscal practices?

Reflection

Reflection is a form of personal response to experiences, situations, events or new information. It is a 'processing' phase where thinking and learning take place. There is neither a right nor a wrong way of reflective thinking; there are just questions to explore" (The Learning Centre, n.d.).

While writing this dissertation I have experienced many changes in my professional life, since I began this research and up to its conclusion, and I have learned a lot about the people who do what I do. This journey was borne of the challenging situations I was experiencing as a mid-level DSPP administrator, and it showed in my writing. At my proposal defense, a member advised "it is important to acknowledge your role in the research. There were times that the proposal was an emotional plea...(T)hink

about minimizing personal view and investigation to focus on the results that will be important to others” (M. Arnold, personal communication, April 27, 2011).

One reason I performed this study was to understand the phenomenon of being a DSPS leader so the practitioners were asked to give advice to both their colleagues about being a DSPS leader and to senior administrators responsible for hiring, supervising, and retaining the DSPS administrator. (See Appendices C and D, respectively.) Their advice to other DSPS leaders was candid and reflective of their individual experiences of managing DSPS in the current environment. Their advice touched upon many of the skills and knowledge for effective leadership identified previously.

The practitioners advised senior management to be open to looking at new ideas and to be creative about how to support DSPS mandates. They felt if senior administrators create an environment of access, they could support DSPS while serving all students, the institution, and the community as a whole. Using their roles as educators, senior leaders can share with other administrators, staff, and faculty the DSPS objectives and mission.

Because of my personal reasons for choosing this topic, I was gently nudged into thinking more academically about my research, which in the end enabled me to find deeper insights about the phenomenon of being a DSPS leader in the CCCs. Revisiting my purpose allowed me to focus on the potential for this study to inform others who share my experience as well as contribute to the pool of knowledge regarding this population of community college leaders. Additionally, this process has affirmed my professional goals to teach future student affairs administrators and to research topics

related to leadership in other professions in higher education, specifically facilities maintenance. A happy consequence of this study is that I have created a scholarly, yet personal document that provides me an avenue to voice my experience without having to speak.

Final Thoughts

According to the CCC Chancellor's Office (2010), "it appears that of the 113 colleges, up to two-thirds have full-time administrative positions (p. 18)". The purpose of this phenomenological research was to hear the stories of the lived experiences of these leaders, stories that serve to facilitate the voice of DSPS practitioners. These voiced experiences revealed several similarities among the challenges facing DSPS: smaller budgets, fewer resources, and finding ways to effectively serve students. However, the resources and skills needed to address the challenges were similar, too, and included building partnerships with departments, reaching out to colleagues, and helping others to understand through education.

Additional findings of this study emerged from the literature review, the interviews, and the researcher's years of experience as a DSPS midlevel administrator in the CCC. Some of the findings are based on questions I had about my fellow DSPS administrators, one of which was the academic backgrounds of current leaders. Not surprisingly, the majority of the interviewees for this research had an educational foundation in rehabilitation counseling, special education, or disability law and compliance. One administrator interviewed became a DSPS administrator with a graduate degree and primary work experience outside of disability related arenas.

Opportunities on her campus opened up and her leadership in student services led her to becoming an experienced DSPS practitioner.

My interest and experience teaching future DSPS professionals led me to research academic programs in disability services administration. Disability studies and rehabilitation counseling programs are often identified as disciplines that can provide a good foundation in disability. However the course offerings may not prepare students for the intricacies of DSS administration and practice. Informal research on academic programs focused on post-secondary disability services administration, only two academic institutions, St. Ambrose University in Idaho and the University of Connecticut, offer graduate certificates with curriculum specific to administrating post-secondary DSS programs. Both programs require courses in disability law, working with adult students with disabilities, and assistive technologies. Only one provided a course in resource management, including financial analysis and human resource management, especially since understanding how to allocate DSPS funds was an important practical skill identified by the participants.

Given the dearth of academic offerings, it appears that many new DSPS leaders are learning on the job via practical experience. This implication points to the need for formal education opportunities in the field of DSS administration and the need to find qualified practitioners to teach them. Another implication of this finding gives credence to the advice given to senior administrators and direct supervisors that they play a major role in supporting the DSPS leader and the success of the program. Senior management may want to consider ways to develop these practitioners into effective leaders by being

mentors, coaching, and providing the DSPS administrator with opportunities for professional development.

The importance of identifying, hiring, and retaining qualified DSPS staff was a point that the majority of the DSPS practitioners made. In a report funded by the Chancellor's Office, "thirty-five percent of DSPS coordinators reported that they were also concerned that current staff do not meet the minimum qualifications for DSPS staffing established by the Board of Governors" (MPR Associates, 2012, p. vi). Budget cuts in community college funding have led to reductions in workforce and the elimination of programs. Senior administrators who are faced with filling available positions with current employees may not be mindful of "the skill sets needed by DSPS. (The campus administration) may just need a warm body to fill a hole in DSPS staffing" (J. Holmes, personal communication, October 1, 2011).

Shenk (1981) wrote "(t)he management of decline will be a difficult undertaking, and coupled with careful financial planning, (community college) managers will need to minimize their margin of error to steer their institutions through this fiscal crisis" (p. 86). This is especially true for seasoned DSPS managers who have had to survive the past four years of budget cuts and for those new professionals who will have to run effective and compliant programs with reduced fiscal resources. This is also true for the senior administrators who will be recruiting, hiring, and retaining these talented practitioners.

While creating opportunities for access and success for students with disabilities is considered a cornerstone of the DSPS practitioner, understanding the challenges of DSPS leadership and identifying strategies to address them will serve to not only increase

support for the program, but will better support the entire student body, the college, and the community-at-large.

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Appendices

Appendix A:
Interview Checklist

- Who will participate in the interview?
- Is the setting for the interview comfortable and quiet?
- If the interview is being audio-taped, has the equipment been prepared and tested before each interview?
- Was consent obtained from the participant to participate in the interview?
- Did the interviewer listen more and talk less during the interview?
- Did the interviewer avoid leading questions and ask open-ended questions?
- Did the interviewer withhold judgments and refrain from debating with participants about their views?
- Was the interviewer courteous and thanked the participant after concluding the interview?

Appendix B

Interview Protocol Introductory Protocol

To facilitate our note-taking during the interview, I would like to audio tape our conversations today. If you do not wish to be taped, handwritten notes will be used to capture the conversation. For your information, only researchers on the project will have access to the tapes, handwritten notes, and the transcriptions all of which will be stored securely in a locked cabinet off-campus and destroyed 3 years after the completion of this study. You will be identified by a pseudonym in the tapes, any notes, and in the transcriptions.

In addition, you must sign a consent form devised to meet Oregon State University's (OSU) Institutional Review Board's (IRB) human subject requirements. Essentially, this document states that: (1) all information will be held confidential, (2) your participation is voluntary and you may stop at any time if you feel uncomfortable, and (3) we do not intend to inflict any harm. If you agree to participate, please sign the consent form.

Thank you for your agreeing to participate.

I have planned this interview to last no longer than one hour. During this time, I have several questions that I would like to cover. If time begins to run short, it may be necessary to interrupt you in order to push ahead and complete this line of questioning.

Introduction

You have been selected to speak with me today because you have been identified as someone who has a great deal to share about the challenges faced by administrators for Disabled Students Programs & Services (DSPS) at a California Community College (CCC) on this campus. My research project as a whole focuses the challenges of DSPS administration from the perspective (or voice) of the current practitioner, with particular interest in understanding the leadership challenges faced by mid-level administrators in DSP&S, and the skills and knowledge needed to address these challenges. Our study does not aim to evaluate your skills, but rather, I am trying to learn more about your experiences dealing with these challenges, and hopefully to learn about the skills and knowledge you believe to be important for DSPS administrators.

Which leadership skills are most important in DSPS administration?

- What practical knowledge is needed to be an effective administrator of DSPS?
- Which leadership skills are most important to addressing the challenges of DSPS administration?
- What advice would you impart to other DSPS administrators about being a DSPS administrator?
- What advice would you impart to senior administrators about supporting the DSPS administrator?

That was the last question of the interview. Thank you again for your time.

E. Post Interview Comments and/or Observations:

Appendix C

Advice to Senior Administrators about Supporting the DSPTS Leader

The interviewer asked each DSPTS administrator what they would advise senior administrators about supporting them in their unique roles. This question was designed to elicit information that could be valuable to the senior CCC administrators responsible for recruiting, hiring and retaining DSPTS leaders. As anticipated, the interviewees provided valuable insight into factors which have supported them and could help to support other DSPTS leaders.

Create and Sustain an Environment of Access.

“[I]f senior administrators could have a core value of access for all students, it might be easier to get things addressed and to better support the DSPTS manager” (Jazz).

Many studies (Bentley-Townlin, 2002; Coway & Chang, 2003; Salzberg, Peterson, Debrand, Carsey, & Johnson, 2002; Shaw, 2006; Wolanin & Steele, 2004) have identified that creating an environment of access is an important variable in supporting the success of DSPTS and students with disabilities. The participants identified ways in which the senior manager could create such an environment.

Understanding the Laws Relevant to DSPTS Administration

Both Jazz and Bat advised that senior administrators learn about the state and legal requirements of DSPTS. Jazz stated, “The advice I would give to senior administrators is to become familiar with Title V and the ADA. Also, have a working knowledge of DSPTS mandates” (Jazz). For Jazz, senior administrators familiar with the program can serve as effective educators to non-DSPTS staff, faculty, and administrators.

“Give avenues to new faculty to learn about DSPTS and how they can work with DSPTS regarding accommodating students” (Jazz). Bat added:

I've been very fortunate in most of the senior administrators that I've worked with have been supportive and/or have been willing to learn and understand the nature of the laws surrounding what we do, but sometimes you encounter an administrator...who just doesn't have the background and doesn't understand that even good intentions...can have devastating impacts to a student with a disability if they feel that they're being discriminated against” (Bat).

Bat felt as if he had to guide senior administrators regarding the program’s mission and he would like administrators to know “the historical nature of where this office comes from and understand that there are significant legal ramifications to making sure that the office is able to function and offer what is mandated by law.”

Surya advised senior administrators be mindful of their behavior, language, and assumptions about abilities when discussing or working with programs for students with disabilities.

I think there's some etiquette probably that...people don't realize...I've had people in administrative positions [say]...‘You've been working with those people’. I'd like to think that they're very unconscious statements, but as a person with a disability, I've been offended in the past...I don't think that they're intentional deeds, but there's a lot of ignorance. ‘Those people’...are us. Disability is normal. That sounds funny but it's true, and so that's what I would tell my administrators. Step back and look. [DSPTS] students are your students (Surya).

Be Flexible and Open to New Ideas

Lady Grace and Surya advised senior administrators to keep an open mind when addressing the challenges facing DSPS. Effective collaboration with DSPS practitioners can lead to finding effective resolutions. Thus, Lady Grace said:

[Keep] an open mind to looking at the possibilities ...[W]hat I've learned through the years with upper level administrators, it doesn't matter how much you talk about what the legal mandates are or quote chapter and verse of [the laws], it's [more important] to [help] them to see that there is a possibility of making it happen...[W]hat may at first seem like totally impossible because of the money, there's a way to get around it and make it work (Lady Grace).

Lady Grace also believed that the current fiscal environment could lead to creative ideas and more effective ways to meet DSPS mandates and the institution's legal responsibilities. "But you have to be open-minded and flexible in order to allow that to happen" (Lady Grace)

Surya would ask senior management to more open-minded to looking at how DSPS can serve the entire campus and the community it serves.

[Y]es, we serve persons with disabilities, that's our primary focus, but what we do is marketable to the institution at large [from] your basic skill students, to persons attending adapted PE, to educational technology, library resources [and] interactive reading systems that benefit, yes, students with abilities as well as second language learners, literacy students and so forth. So look at the bigger picture and don't be afraid to have those conversations with your DSPS folks (Surya).

However when decisions by senior management is being made, Katherine's advice would be for senior administrators to look at "how a decision is going to address success...How is this [decision]...helping to maintain or improve success? Because I think when decisions are made...that has been lost."

Support the DSPTS Administrator Directly

According to Roper (2003), "among the most important roles student affairs professionals perform are facilitating student learning and development and supporting the educational mission of their institution" (p. 460). This sentiment was expressed by the experiences of the practitioners, especially those who found challenges in the duality of their administrative roles. Supporting the DSPTS leader helps to find solutions to the situations caused by the current fiscal environments and to overcome the barriers to effective leadership. Through consistent disability specific education of the campus constituents, including DSPTS staff, the entire institution can play a part in creating and maintaining an educational environment which is accessible and aware serving students with disabilities.

Trusting the DSPTS administrator to do the job they are hired them for is important to supporting these administrators. When senior administrators learn about the laws mandating DSPTS, practitioners are able to relay information needed to get the support and understanding necessary to help students and the campus. Understanding the challenges of and the ability to make decisions faced by midlevel leaders, especially when timeliness in addressing issues is vital to limiting liability, is a great support to DSPTS practitioners. Half of the practitioners interviewed wanted their supervisors to use them for their

knowledge and welcome the input of the DSPS leader to increase the understanding of those senior administrators in charge of making final regarding DSPS issues. Some programs and services are identified for reduction or elimination due solely to costs, yet these offerings often have a reason for being in place and not offering them could leave the college at risk for non-compliance and legal liability. Being flexible in finding resolutions to such challenges is an identified way senior administration can support the DSPS leader and the program.

Surya would advise the organizational structure of the institution allow DSPS leaders report to someone who can address issues more immediately. She suggests working directly with a VP or the President to work on impending or big picture issues, such as those affecting instruction, classroom safety, physical access, or technology.

“I’m a director and I report to a dean who...is skilled in their role, [but] they don't have...the power of the authority, if you will, to address some of these bigger picture issues. [I]t's imperative that you're able to get to someone who can make things happen, especially in our role, because time is of the essence. And if we were to be challenged with a civil rights complaint, one of the huge caveats that they'll look at is timeliness of what we do [to address and resolve complaints]” (Surya).

Believer would advise senior administrators to mentor or coach the DSPS leader, taking the time to explain institutional policies and procedures. She believed senior administrators should serve as guides and should model leadership. “If it were easy, everybody could do [DSPS administration]. But it's not and so [senior administrators] have to be sensitive to coaching...[b]ecause eventually we're all going to be gone, retired or whatever” (Believer). Her experience has been that DSPS directors and other

administrators do serve as coaches which may be why she found this to be an important aspect to supporting the DSPS leader.

[W]hen you see the talent in another person, guide them through. Help them through this process because when you find good people who really do understand disabilities and they really want to make a difference, and they really want to serve and support students in helping them realize their educational goals, guide them through (Believer).

Lady Grace wanted to remind senior managers “[t]hat [DSPS] administrators do have to keep up with current best practices...and that things are always constantly changing.” She would also like to see senior management keep current with best practices and start “engaging in dialog and taking advantage of the opinions and skills of the [DSPS] managers that work underneath you.” Access to professional development or continuing education opportunities would allow the DSPS manager to have information that can help the institution offer effective disability services designed to meet the needs of the students.

Appendix D

Advice to Other DSPS Administrators about Being a DSPS Administrator

The main objective of this study was to explore the phenomenon of being a DSPS midlevel administrator. Each respondent gave advice to others that touched upon many of the responses garnered from previous interview questions and was at the same time based on their lived experiences of being a DSPS leader.

Bat's advice focused on his experience with addressing the fiscal challenges facing DSPS and how his decisions regarding the budget was important to being an effective leader.

If you're not patient and you get irritated by people who constantly want to take things away from you, then maybe think of a different career choice. [L]et me preface that by saying a couple of things. First, the state was incredibly devious when they cut our budgets statewide by 45 percent...Just because they didn't opt to give us the money, it didn't relax any of the federal requirements...And so it becomes a...struggle on every campus for the DSPS administrator to work with the campus to show...what you're doing to address budget concerns and what you're doing to operate efficiently and smartly in terms of how you're spending your money...[I]f I had a reputation of spending without any reason, without minding what it is we're spending, if I didn't have good reasons for spending that money, I wouldn't have lasted long in this position. The campus wants to know...that if they're going to be spending money, it's going to be money well spent and necessary (Bat).

Getting support from other DSPS leaders was a theme consistent throughout Believer's responses to the research questions. Like Bat, she put much emphasis on how

the DSPTS should make program decisions, advising that these decisions be made after doing research on addressing specific challenges at hand.

Connect with your colleagues. Bridge those alliances because you're going to...call upon them when you don't understand something, when you don't know. And to realize that what you are going through, nine times out of ten it's something [and] somebody else has already been through it. So you don't need to reinvent the wheel. When in doubt, seek it out. Seek out the help of others. And [don't be] in a hurry to make [a] decision...[u]nless it's urgent and important...You know, take your time to do your research, take your time to think it through...[Y]ou must be analytical. If not, you're going to run into problems. So I would say know your resources (Believer).

Jazz was the only respondent to speak to the needs of the DSPTS leader to maintain their personal fortitude to doing the type of work they encounter in the profession.

The best advice I can share is to take care of yourself and your spirit. This is a job that is full of spirit and maybe the reason many of us go into the field. So you must take care of your spirit (Jazz).

She also advised finding support from other DSPTS leaders, maintaining control of the DSPTS budget, and continuing to work with students to inform their practice.

[P]articipate in your regional meetings to find others who can support you in addressing challenges. Our colleagues on other campuses may have solutions to the same problems we are facing on our campus. Make sure you control your budget and ask for help for financial issues you may not be able to address by yourself. And do your best to not be removed from your students – work with them, make sure they know you are a resource for them. Making decisions about students without staying in touch with the students can lead to decisions which may not serve them (Jazz).

Katherine's advice, like much of her responses to the interview questions, focused on understanding the budget, especially in light of the mandates DSPTS must follow to serve students with disabilities.

[I]t's critical that they understand budgets, and as a new person coming in, I would also share with them not only understanding their budget but understanding what is legally required for students with disabilities attending community colleges...I would say understanding that, especially coming in [to the profession during] this period right now...[T]hey should come to their own realization about the climate...of their [campus] environment and try to work through that process (Katherine).

Katherine also mentioned being a midlevel manager and how that affected her role as the DSPTS leader on her campus.

I would say as middle management, it's important that [you're] not only doing the work that needs to get done, but [you're] also...investing...in the people that make up your [DSPTS] team...You see...by investing our time with others, it shows collaboration but it also gives the person value for who they are in the institution, in your department, but also as a [part of the] community college. [A]nd that builds [teamwork and] that allows you to be effective as a leader in DSPTS at your college. That is very, very important (Katherine).

Lady Grace wanted to remind DSPTS leaders to be aware of the constituency with whom they are working, constituencies that can range from the community-at-large to senior administration to off-campus agencies.

I think...knowing your audience, and because it changes so rapidly on any given situation, challenge or task, you have to kind of revisit the basics of who's your audience, and have the faith in what you're doing as being important work. I think...in times where budgets are cut back, [DSPTS

is] devalued because of the cost factor and that there's an automatic tendency to try to cut corners fiscally.

She also advised DSPS leaders to remain strong in the face of adversity and embrace being flexible in addressing DSPS challenges, especially if others have to be convinced that non-traditional approaches may lead to success.

As a DSPS professional you have to maintain the faith in what you're doing as being critical, and maintain the tenacity to keep fighting through the challenges. Because believe me, we get beat down a lot...But when you're up against that barrier...you have to keep the faith to be able to... persevere...especially in these times. So having the faith and the conviction of what you're doing is the right thing, regardless of how many people tell you it's not doable. [Be] flexible...and [know] that people around you can help you in understanding many different possibilities. And that's the principle of universal design: how can we all work together for the benefit of the largest number of people? Thinking outside the box [in terms] of how to get things done together. Everybody plays a part, not just DSPS. (Lady Grace).

Surya, like Lady Grace, spoke to the devaluation of DSPS and the DSPS leader because both the program and the position are mandated by law.

Run for the hills! Okay, I'm kidding - sort of. It's never dull...[W]e're forever going to be teaching others if you're in this role. You don't arrive. It gets better and it can get better but let's face it...if the colleges didn't have mandates to serve populations of students with disabilities, I'm not sure that they would actively seek it. They see [the DSPS administrator] more as a necessary than a position that contributes to the overall institution (Surya).

She also spoke to the environment of managing DSPS and how years of experience are no weapon against facing or addressing new challenges.

The point being [is] it is never dull. It's never the same thing. I can tell you...I've been doing this about 12 years and there are times where I have to pick up the phone and I have to call my colleagues 'cause I don't know...I don't think you ever arrive at a place where you know it all...[S]ometimes you ...have to get on the horn to OCR or [to] some of [your DSPS colleagues]. So never assume that you've arrived in terms of knowledge and how best to meet the needs of persons with disabilities because...we're hired to help with academic accommodations and access.

Finally, she shared her thoughts on what kind of leader the DSPS manager can best address the leadership challenges facing the profession.

But I think the good...or the consummate DSPS professional moves beyond access and they look at empowerment and they teach, if not directly in a classroom. But you're modeling and you're setting up services in a manner that leads people to their own self-actualization. And, you know, that's tough (Surya)