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# Introduction

*Life transitions are about change, and about movement, and about becoming something other than what you are at this very moment.*

—Kochhar-Bryant and Bassett, 2002

**I**n the past two decades, students with disabilities have made greater progress than ever before in gaining access to postsecondary education. Individuals with disabilities, including those with significant disabilities, are successful in careers as teachers, doctors, lawyers, politicians, business leaders, computer specialists, and technical workers in a variety of industries. How has this happened? It is our belief that this trend has resulted from the combined efforts of (1) students who are setting higher goals for themselves and working to achieve them; (2) parents believing in and supporting those goals; (3) teachers, counselors, and related professionals who appreciate students' abilities and are willing to collaborate to assist them in the transition process; and (4) the advocacy of postsecondary support personnel and employers dedicated to opening doors for such students and providing supports. Shifts in attitudes and practices of secondary and postsecondary personnel are increasing the likelihood that competent and promising students are not denied an advanced education and the opportunity to pursue their career ambitions.

## **NATIONAL FOCUS ON POSTSECONDARY TRANSITION**

Americans have recognized the power of education to transform the lives of all people and strengthen their ability to fully participate in their communities. Rapid changes in the employment market have made a

postsecondary education essential for career advancement and success in many fields and industries. The past several decades have witnessed a growing national investment in youth development to help students access education and employment preparation programs and increase their social and economic independence. Interest in transition to postsecondary education is greater than it has ever been in the past, both in the United States and around the globe. For example, the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Vocational and Adult Education (OVAE) conducted a National Community College Symposium in June 2008 to examine research on promising practices and policy issues in several priority areas. These include research on (1) practices that facilitate student transitions across high schools, community colleges, and two- and four-year institutions, as well as linkages between community colleges and the workforce; (2) identification of innovative approaches to improving student access and persistence in postsecondary education; (3) nonacademic barriers to access of underrepresented groups as well as counseling and related support services; and (4) approaches that address students' remediation and developmental education needs (U.S. Department of Education, 2008).

Successful transition from secondary school is becoming recognized as a *chief indicator of the effectiveness* of our educational system for preparing youth and young adults for employment, postsecondary education, and adult independence (Baer, et al., 2003; Madaus & Shaw, 2004; Wagner, Newman, Cameto, & Levine, 2005).

## **POSTSECONDARY OPTIONS FOR YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES**

The point of transition from high school to the postsecondary world is a challenging crossroads for all young people. They have to make choices about what college they will attend, what they will study, where they will live, whether they will work while they study, and how they will pay for their living expenses. If they choose to enter employment directly, they may be concerned about the kind of job for which they should interview, whether they have the skills and the stamina to work the long hours, how they will save and budget their earnings, and how they will juggle all of life's demands.

## **FACING MANY QUESTIONS ABOUT POSTSECONDARY CHOICES**

During the time of transition to college life, individuals with disabilities have the same choices to make as their nondisabled peers but have on their

plate many additional considerations that add uncertainty and stress. They may ask:

- What colleges have the support services, accommodations, and assistive technology I need, and will the Disability Support Services office need proof of my disability?
- Will I get into a dorm with my disability, and will I make friends in my classes?
- Will professors help accommodate me if I cannot finish the tests on time because of my reading disability, or will they be suspicious of my motives?
- Will there be counselors if I run into difficulty and need help?
- Will the campus be accessible for my wheelchair?
- Will people accept me as an equal in my new job?

Because these additional uncertainties place extraordinary demands on the young adult, supportive services are often (though not always) needed to help in the transition and adjustment to the college or work setting.

For most students, participation in postsecondary education is not limited to being physically present in a lecture hall. It is the possibility to ask questions, to discuss ideas with classmates, to have a critical conversation with professors about papers, to reflect upon readings, to explore the library, to have access to information in accessible formats at the same time as their nondisabled classmates, to work on a research project, to have coffee with friends, to participate at campus social and cultural events, and to really take part in the college experience (National Council on Disability, 2003a).

Many postsecondary options for youth with disabilities exist in the United States. *Four-year colleges and universities* offer Bachelor of Arts or Bachelor of Science degrees. Some also offer graduate and professional degrees. *Community colleges* are public, two-year colleges that typically serve people in the surrounding communities and offer academic, technical, and continuing-education courses. The programs often lead to a license, a certificate, or Associate of Arts or Science degrees. Community colleges often operate under an *open admissions* policy, and admissions requirements may vary. Some community colleges offer programs for individuals with cognitive disabilities, autism, and other disabilities and are focused on developing functional and employment skills.

*Vocational and technical colleges* offer a variety of options, including associate degrees, certificates, and work apprenticeships. Associate degree programs prepare students for technical occupations (e.g., accounting, dental hygienist, computer programmer). Technical diploma programs meet the needs of businesses and industry and provide employees with

required certification for employment (e.g., automotive maintenance, accounting assistant, information technology, carpenter's assistant, pharmacy technician). *Apprenticeships* are typically geared toward those interested in working in industrial or service trades (e.g., carpentry, plumbing, machining). *Military service* can also help young people achieve their career goals; however, the military branches are not required to accommodate individuals on the basis of disability (Brown, 2000; HEATH Resource Center, 2005). Finally, *employment* in competitive jobs or supported work settings are common postsecondary goals for many youth, even if they plan eventually to enter into a two- or four-year college.

## Employment After High School

Different types of employment opportunities are available for young men and women with significant disabilities, including competitive, supported, and sheltered employment.

**Competitive employment.** *Competitive employment* means a “mainstream” full-time or part-time job with competitive wages and responsibilities. Typically, competitive employment means that no long-term support is provided to the employee to help him or her learn the job or continue to perform the job. The absence of ongoing or long-term support distinguishes competitive employment from both *supported employment* and *segregated employment* (described below). All sorts of jobs are considered competitive employment—restaurant service worker, mechanic, teacher, secretary, factory worker, file clerk, or computer programmer. The amount of education or training a person needs will vary depending on the type of job.

**Supported employment.** Supported employment programs assist young people with the most significant disabilities to become and remain successfully and competitively employed in integrated workplace settings. Supported employment is designed for people who are not ready for competitive employment, or for whom competitive employment has been interrupted or is intermittent because of the disability. It is also designed for those who, because of the severity of their disability, need intensive or extended support services in order to work competitively (U.S. Department of Labor, 2005). Supported employment models include the following:

1. *Individual Placement.* Consumers/employees obtain employment independently and then contact the supported employment providers to get assistance or support, as needed.
2. *Agency Supported.* A rehabilitation or community services agency places the consumer in a job and provides or coordinates the ongoing support services needed to help assist him or her to retain the job.

3. *Entrepreneurial*. The consumer/employee is supported by the rehabilitation or community services agency to get the services and supports needed to successfully run his or her own business.

*Supportive services* in an employment setting may include job development and placement; intensive job-site training; facilitation of natural supports; special skills training; supplementary assessment; contact with employers, parents, family members and advocacy organizations; teaching compensatory workplace strategies. *Job development* means locating jobs for people with disabilities through networking with employers, businesses, and community leaders. The use of Business Advisory Councils is an excellent way to develop contacts that lead to employment for people with disabilities. An *Employment Specialist/Consultant (Job Coach)* is typically employed by a job training and placement organization serving people with disabilities who matches clients with jobs, provides necessary supports during the initial employment period, and then facilitates the transition to natural workplace supports while reducing his or her role.

***Sheltered (Enclave) Employment.*** When employment is *sheltered*, individuals with disabilities work in a separate, self-contained center unit and are not integrated with nondisabled workers. This type of employment is generally supported by federal or state funds. The type of training that workers receive varies among programs, as does the type of work. Typical tasks include sewing, packing boxes, putting together packages or envelopes for mailing, or collating. In the past, segregated employment was thought to be the only option available for individuals with significant cognitive disabilities or autism. Today, many individuals with severe disabilities can work in community settings when provided with adequate support.

## PURPOSE OF THE BOOK

This book is designed for secondary general and special education teachers, transition coordinators, counselors, postsecondary professionals, families, advocates, and anyone concerned with the successful transition of youth from high school into postsecondary education. It provides guidance to professionals who are preparing students for transition from high school to make informed choices and decisions regarding their future educational and career goals. The authors respond to the questions:

- Who is the student in transition to postsecondary settings?
- What changes for the student as he or she moves from the secondary to the postsecondary world?
- Why are self-determination and self-advocacy skills essential for successful transition to postsecondary?

- What should students know about documenting disability and seeking accommodations in the postsecondary setting?
- How can professionals help students plan for transition?
- How can families support students in transition?
- What is the role of community agencies in supporting transition to postsecondary?
- What can we learn from students about what helps them most as they navigate transition to postsecondary education?

Chapter 1, “Who Is the Student in Transition to Postsecondary?” introduces readers to the young people who are in the process of transition to postsecondary settings and the developmental tasks they face. It provides an overview of current national trends in the participation of youth with disabilities in postsecondary education and the elements of successful transition. The chapter discusses what we know about barriers to transition and the roles of students and families and professionals in supporting successful transition.

Chapter 2, “What Changes as the Student Moves from the Secondary to the Postsecondary World?” explores the laws affecting the education and support for students, how they change as students move beyond the secondary years, and how they protect and support the young adult in the postsecondary setting. The chapter presents the changes in programming and services for the student as he or she moves from the secondary to postsecondary world. We explore the questions that students need to ask about postsecondary institutions. Transition planning is presented as a unifying framework for coordinated services and support.

Chapter 3, “Self-Determination and Self-Advocacy Skills Essential for Successful Transition to Postsecondary,” defines self-determination and self-advocacy skills and explains why they are essential for successful transition to postsecondary settings. Case illustrations—and the voices of students—are provided to illustrate who is the “self-determined youth,” what do they know, and what can they do? The chapter explores how professionals can facilitate self-determination skills.

Chapter 4, “Guided Pathways: Colleges and Universities,” presents the experiences of students in transition to postsecondary education through descriptions of ‘guided pathways’ in which we follow a student from the secondary world into a college setting. The description includes the stages of educational decision making and how students make postsecondary choices, how students plan in *high school* to achieve their postsecondary goals, how students prepare in their *final year* for transition to college, what professionals need to know to help students make *successful transition*, and the families’ role in supporting transition for their child. Issues related to two- and four-year colleges include courses of study,

integrating transition planning into the academic curriculum, transition assessment, and how high stakes testing affects career decision making. Case examples are presented to illustrate the concepts and strategies.

Chapter 5, “Guided Pathways: Career-Technical Education,” presents the experiences of students in transition to career and technical education through descriptions of “guided pathways” in which we follow students from the secondary world into a career–technical school. The description includes the ranges of options for career-technical training; what professionals do and what students do; the stages of educational decision making and how students make postsecondary choices, how students plan in *high school* to achieve their postsecondary goals, how students prepare in their *final year* for transition to career-technical education, what professionals need to know to help students make *successful transition*, and the families’ role in supporting transition of their child. Case examples are presented to illustrate the concepts and strategies.

Chapter 6, “Focus on the Year After High School” examines preparation of students for the postsecondary setting. It presents the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) requirements and their importance in transition. Disability documentation requirements in two- and four-year colleges and in vocational rehabilitation agencies are discussed, as well as their importance for the student. The enrollment and admissions process for students with disabilities is presented along with services that enable students to remain successful in postsecondary education, including accommodations, use of technology, study skills and strategies for learning, and services of the campus disability support offices. Case examples are presented to illustrate the concepts and strategies.

Chapter 7, “Role of Community Agencies in Supporting the Transition to Postsecondary Education,” discusses the central role of coordinated services in planning and transition to postsecondary education. It presents the variety of agencies required under law to collaborate, including vocational rehabilitation services. Financial supports for transition to employment for students who plan to work while they study are discussed, including the Ticket to Work and the Plan to Achieve Self-Support, or PASS, plan. Case examples illustrate how agencies can work together to support postsecondary planning and success.

Chapter 8, “Student Voices,” presents the perspectives of students and explains why it is important for professionals to listen to them. Students speak about what was useful and helpful in the secondary planning processes, the final year transition stage, their first year after high school, and their first years in college. Nontraditional students speak about returning to high school to complete transition goals.

Chapter 9, “Considerations for Students with Specific Disabilities,” uses a case approach to present transition considerations associated with different

disabilities and support needs, including intellectual disabilities, learning disabilities, sensory disabilities, physical and chronic health disabilities, and culturally and linguistically diverse students. Such considerations include life demands of students, special accommodations, strategies for obtaining specialized supports, family issues, and cultural issues.

**Box 0.1****Circle of Support at the University of Hawai'i**

Fasy ('Faz-ee') grew up in a small island country in the Pacific Ocean. He became paralyzed as a teenager when he fell from a cliff and suffered a serious spinal injury. Unable to walk, he learned to use a wheelchair. Neither the schools nor other government services provided much in special services for people like Fasy. However, with his determination and academic capabilities, he earned entry to the University of Hawai'i at Manoa. A number of support services were available to him there. Due to the seriousness of his disability, Fasy required assistance to get around campus and take care of his basic needs, but extensive aide services were not available. Fortunately, in keeping with the family orientation of his Pacific Island culture, some of his family members were able to come to Hawai'i specifically to support him to reach his postsecondary education goals. During much of his academic career, one or two of his brothers were always at his side, and when they were not available, other family members assisted him. With the support of his family, Fasy earned his bachelor's degree and then two master's degrees, one in history and the other in Pacific Islands Studies. The challenges presented by his disability as well as cultural and language differences resulted in his taking several extra years to complete his studies. However, his own efforts, the supports provided by his family, and supports provided by the university, were successful, and now, in his late 30s, he is the director of one of the four campuses of his country's national university.

This case study illustrates how a cultural strength (individuals giving priority to the success of the family as a whole) can be built upon to support a CLD student with disabilities to achieve postsecondary educational success. What is notable in this case is the ready and coordinated participation of the entire family. This 'collectivist' orientation contrasts with the 'individualistic' orientation of mainstream American society, and should be taken into account when addressing the support needs of persons with disabilities from collectivist cultural backgrounds (Leake & Cholymay, 2002, by permission).