

Postsecondary Program Outcomes: Employment, Compensation, and Living Arrangements of Program Completers in the Southeast

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Abstract

With the rising attendance of students with disabilities in higher education, the need to understand postsecondary outcomes is increasing. Postsecondary education programs for students with disabilities can greatly impact the success of their adult life. This study indicates that independent living and employment rates increase with attendance of postsecondary education, therefore, encouraging students with disabilities to pursue higher education.

Key Words: Postsecondary education, postsecondary outcomes, disabilities, independent living

1. Impact of Postsecondary Education

Postsecondary education is a key predictor of a successful employment outcome for youth without disabilities. Little research exists that addresses youth with intellectual disabilities regarding successful outcomes of postsecondary education. Postsecondary education is becoming an increasingly important prerequisite to independent adult living, yet many students with disabilities remain in special education programs on their high school campuses (De Los Santos et al., 2019). Postsecondary education improves employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities (Madaus, 2011). Although participation in postsecondary education is low for youth with significant disabilities, there has been a consistent effort to include youth aged 18 and older in age-appropriate educational settings (Zafft et al., 2004).

Students with intellectual disabilities are increasingly participating in postsecondary education. The National Core Indicators, historically used to determine developmental disability service system quality of life outcomes, provide a unique opportunity to assess the impact of higher education across life domains (Zafft et al., 2004). The nature of work in our society is undergoing an evolution, and postsecondary education is becoming a necessity for students following high school. The current structure cannot meet the demand for a qualified workforce, and disparities in employment for people with disabilities are well known.

Education pays in a variety of ways, and more education results in higher rates of employment, regardless of disability. Attending college can help people with disabilities secure a job (Madaus, 2011). Higher education programs have been serving people with intellectual disabilities for over 30 years, and the Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008 provides opportunities for universities to increase their programs for people with intellectual disabilities (De Los Santos et al., 2019). Universities and colleges are doing many activities to support and encourage employment after leaving their institution; these activities include job shadowing, internships, and job development and placement services. These supports could potentially help individuals with intellectual disabilities find employment after completing their studies (De Los Santos et al., 2019).

Higher education can positively impact life outcomes across a variety of domains, including health and exercise, the ability to help others, and volunteering (Madaus, 2011). The study indicates that while students are included in integrated and inclusive higher education settings, true inclusion may not be taking place. The Higher Education Opportunities Act of 2008 opened the door to college opportunities for students who were previously overwhelmingly excluded. However, there are still barriers that exist, and a variety of systems must be engaged to sustain meaningful programs (Butler et al., 2016).

2. Postsecondary Outcomes on Independent Living

The postsecondary program located in the southern United States is for individuals with intellectual disabilities. This article serves to provide outcomes for the students who attend this postsecondary program. Their success in terms of employment and independent living beyond their program completion is information parents need to know before making the financial and emotional sacrifice of sending their child with disabilities to a postsecondary program. Unfortunately, there is a lack of studies measuring the efficacy of postsecondary education programs

related to employment, wages, and independent living (J. Ryan et al., 2019). There is little information available on career selection or what services are associated with degree completion and employment (Herbert et al., 2014).

Successful postsecondary employment and furthering one's education are two areas important to students with disabilities as they exit the public education system. The results should indicate that characteristics of living independence and employment should correlate (Williamson et al., 2010). This research would be valuable to parents and caregivers of students with intellectual disabilities when planning the future of their child, as most programs are high in cost and scholarships are very competitive.

- 1) What is the postsecondary program completer's employment status?
- 2) What are the living arrangements of the postsecondary program student/completer?

3. Methodology

Participants

This study aims to investigate the success of postsecondary program completers by comparing the employment rates and level of independence after graduation.

A 20-question questionnaire was conducted on all the postsecondary program completers. A list of all graduates from the program and those enrolled will be collected and invited to participate in the study that will be planned in conjunction with the staff of the postsecondary programs. A total of 60 students participated in the study: Program completers (PC, $n = 20$), Currently enrolled (CE, $n = 20$), and not yet admitted (NYA, $n = 20$). These students represented the postsecondary program's former, current, and potential students (appx 75 total). The inclusion criteria were: (a) enrolled in and has attended the studied postsecondary program, (b) graduated from this studied postsecondary program, and (c) has plans to attend this postsecondary study program.

Instrument(s)

Two assessments were researcher developed that measured the teacher's knowledge of the students. Each assessment consisted of 20 single-choice response questions (multiple-choice format) and five open-ended questions. The two assessments were administered via email through Survey Monkey. Single-choice response questions were selected based on the following: (a) versatility in measuring all levels of cognitive ability, (b) highly reliable test scores, (c) scoring efficiency and accuracy, (d) objective measurements of student achievement, (e) a wide sampling of content/objectives (Davis, 2021). Open-ended questions were selected to discover any nuances previously not considered by the researcher and to offer a more in-depth insight from a postsecondary completers student's point of view.

Administration of Instrument

Once participants provided consent, they were able to complete the researcher's self-designed assessment via email. Students who participated took the survey with help from a family member or person who closely knew their lifestyle. For those that participated, the researcher provided a \$5 Amazon gift card. The duration for completing the assessment for each participant was approximately 45 minutes. Each participant was given a unique identification number instead of being asked to provide personally identifiable information of any kind. The anonymous assessments were sent via email to the researcher. All single-choice response questions were automatically scored, and the open-ended questions were scored by a researcher-based rubric developed from a system of coding the responses into categories and themes.

4. Results

The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS v.28) was used for all statistical analyses. A Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) was conducted. This analysis was chosen due to having two dependent variables, and the MANOVA tests two or more related dependent variables while controlling for the correlations among the dependent variables. Group: Students enrolled, graduated from, or considering the postsecondary program.

IV: Participants enrolled in postsecondary program

Program Completers (PC)

Currently enrolled (CE)

Not yet admitted (NYA)

DV: Independent living results

Living status

Employment status

A total of 20 students participated in the study to determine the living status and employment status of postsecondary completers, students, and potential students. Program completers (PC, $n = 20$), Currently enrolled (CE, $n = 20$), and not yet admitted (NYA, $n = 20$).

A one-way multivariate analysis of variance MANOVA was performed. Two measures of academic performance were assessed using the scores from the surveys. Preliminary assumption checking revealed that data was normally distributed, as assessed by the Shapiro-Wilk test ($p > .05$); there were no univariate or multivariate outliers, as assessed by boxplot and Mahalanobis distance ($p > .001$), respectively; there were linear relationships, as assessed by scatterplot; no multicollinearity ($r = .393, p = .002$); but there was no homogeneity of variance-covariance matrices, as assessed by Box's M test ($p = .003$). Students in CSU, UGH, and SRU scored higher in their CCSS assessment ($M = 75.6, SD = 8.2$; $M = 63.6, SD = 6.6$ and $M = 59.8, SD = 4.6$, respectively) than in their MPS exam ($M = 43.9, SD = 8.5$; $M = 40.8, SD = 8.2$ and $M = 30.8, SD = 7.7$, respectively). The differences between the students' responses on the combined dependent variables were statistically significant, $F(4, 112) = 17.675, p < .001$; Wilks' $\Lambda = .376$; partial $\eta^2 = .387$. Follow-up univariate ANOVAs showed that both CCSS scores ($F(2, 57) = 30.875, p < .001$; partial $\eta^2 = .520$) and MPS scores ($F(2, 57) = 14.295, p < .001$; partial $\eta^2 = .334$), were statistically significantly different between the students, using a Bonferroni adjusted α level of .025. Tukey posthoc tests showed that for program scores, program completers had statistically significantly higher mean scores than students from the currently and rolled ($p < .001$) or not yet admitted ($p < .001$), but not between CE and NYA ($p = .169$). For MPS, Tukey posthoc tests showed that NYA had statistically significantly lower mean scores than students from either PC ($p < .001$) or CE ($p = .001$).

Participants' overall average score among the universities was 66.32 on the survey, with the expected average score of 67.5 and 52.5, respectively. Overall, the program completer had participants score higher on both CE and NYA (reference Table 1. and Table 2.) as compared to those currently enrolled and (3) not yet admitted.

5. Discussion

The results of this current study corroborated the results found in previous studies. Previous Completers (PC) scored above the acceptable minimum, while Currently Enrolled (CE) and Not Yet Admitted (NYA) did not meet the acceptable overall minimum, indicating that postsecondary program completers are living more independently and have a higher employment rate. This information is beneficial for parents and caregivers who want to send their students to a college program that prepares them for successful independent living. The data shows that those who are not program completers are living less independently.

6. Limitations

The number of postsecondary program completers currently is approximately 30, and there are approximately 45 currently enrolled. This is a smaller sample size of completers, and the importance of certain questions or lack of information may skew results. I will make it clear that assistance in answering the questions is allowed if the person assisting has access to accurate information. This could also be a limitation if someone helps them answer the questionnaire yet doesn't have the correct information.

7. Recommendations

Longitudinal data would be beneficial for parents, students, and those working with the programs and creating curriculum. A five-year and ten-year study of the student outcomes and their overall quality of life is needed. The postsecondary programs have not been around long enough to have studies of long-term outcomes reported.

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Appendices

Table 1. Teacher Knowledge at Each University Mean Score

	University	Mean	Std. Dev.	Acceptable Minimum	N
CCSS-M Score	CSU***	75.60	8.23		20
	UGH**	63.60	6.63		20
	SRU**	59.80	4.60		20
	Total	66.32	9.44	67.5	60
MPS Score	CSU*	43.90	8.47		20
	UGH*	40.75	8.16		20
	SRU*	30.75	7.72		20
	Total	38.47	9.78	52.5	60

*** Above the minimum required score for PC; ** Did not meet the minimum required score for CE; * Did not meet the minimum required score for NYA

Table 2. Students living situations Actual Percentage Score (out of 100%)

	ACCESS	%	Acceptable Minimum %	N
Living Independence	Home with parents***		84%	20
	Live alone but with financial support**		71%	20
	Live alone without financial support***		66%	20
	Total	74%	75%	60
Employment	Not employed*	63%		20
	Employed parttime*	58%		20
	Employed full time *	44%		20
	Total	55%	75%	60

*** Above the minimum required score for PC; ** Did not meet the minimum required score for CE; * Did not meet the minimum required score for NYA