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Students with Physical Disabilities - Reflections on their Experiences with Work Preparation Programs, Services and Accommodations in a Higher Education Institution

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FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

Miami, Florida

STUDENTS WITH PHYSICAL DISABILITIES – REFLECTIONS OF THEIR
EXPERIENCES WITH WORK PREPARATION PROGRAMS, SERVICES AND
ACCOMMODATIONS IN A HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

in

HIGHER EDUCATION

by

Claudia Castillo

2016

To: Dean Michael R. Heithaus
College of Arts, Sciences and Education

This dissertation, written by Claudia Castillo and entitled Students with Physical Disabilities - Reflections of their Experiences with Work Preparation Programs, Services and Accommodations in a Higher Education Institution, having been approved in respect to style and intellectual content, is referred to you for judgment.

We have read this dissertation and recommend that it be approved.

Eric Dwyer

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Randall S. Upchurch, Co-Major Professor

Benjamin Baez, Co-Major Professor

Date of Defense: May 26, 2016

The dissertation of Claudia Castillo is approved.

Dean Michael R. Heithaus
College of Arts, Sciences and Education

Andrés G. Gil
Vice President for Research and Economic Development
and Dean of the University Graduate School

Florida International University, 2016

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DEDICATION

This academic journey is dedicated to my grandmother, Maria Antonieta de Gaitan, who with only a second grade education, instilled in all her children and grandchildren the importance of education. She always told us that education was the treasure nobody could take away and the key that would allow us to open many doors. She was a beacon of light, an incredible source of knowledge and her life was a constant example of hard work and determination. She gave her children and grandchildren the most valuable gift she had: an unquenchable thirst for knowledge. She knew about almost everything and was always interested in learning more. She used to tell us that education would give us what she didn't have: the opportunity to use our brains to earn a good living instead of doing back-breaking work to merely subsist. Mamá, thank you for giving us all you had. To the women in the Gaitan family, especially my mother and aunts, Lily and Marina: your dedication, diligence and ability to work tirelessly to achieve each and every one of your goals taught your children that there was no barrier we couldn't conquer and no task we couldn't finish. You empowered all your girls to achieve everything we dreamed of and taught your boys to be good and responsible men. To the men of the family: Thank you for being great models of responsibility, civility and kindness. Thank you all for all your everlasting examples of love.

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

STUDENTS WITH PHYSICAL DISABILITIES – REFLECTIONS OF THEIR
EXPERIENCES WITH WORK PREPARATION PROGRAMS, SERVICES AND
ACCOMMODATIONS IN A HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION

by

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Florida International University, 2016

Miami, Florida

Professor Benjamin Baez, Co-chair

Professor Randall S. Upchurch, Co-chair

For a variety of reasons, college students with disabilities encounter stressors beyond those of students who do not have disabilities. One of the more salient examples is that students with disabilities are required to disclose that they have a disability and to communicate with faculty and staff in order to receive academic accommodations, as afforded to them under sub-part E of Section 504 of the Education and Rehabilitation Act of 1974. Therefore, postsecondary institutions are required to make appropriate accommodations available to students with disabilities, but they are not required to proactively seek them out.

The purpose of this study was to learn about the needs that students with physical disabilities have concerning their successful transition into professional careers. This was

accomplished by analyzing how five current senior students with disabilities reflected on their experiences, particularly in terms of using work preparation programs and/or accommodations necessary for them to participate in employment recruitment activities provided by the university's career services office. The intent of those services was to transition disabled students from the university environment into the workforce.

The findings showed that the students perceived they did not receive a lot of information regarding the services available, and they also expressed that the university should have done more in transitioning them into their professional life. The basic premise is that higher education professionals, key support staff, and administrators who provide work preparation programs, career, transition and accommodation services to disabled students are in a position to help remove informational barriers, facilitate the use of services and accommodations, and to actively encourage students with disabilities to enter the workforce upon graduation. The results of this study may inspire university personnel to find creative ways to get students involved and motivated to seek services available to them, to be best self-advocates to students needing their services, and to understand the transition challenges that exist between academic life and entry into the workforce. By being more aware and sensitive about the needs of students with disabilities, the professionals who work with them might be better positioned to help them experience a successful and more supported transition into a competitive employment and independent life after college.

Keywords: career development, disability, invisible disabilities, institutions of higher learning, stigma, students with disabilities, work preparation, workforce transition.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION TO STUDY

Background

There is ample evidence that students struggle to adjust as they transition to college. An alarming concern is that most students leave their institutions during and immediately after their first year (DeBerard, Spielmans, & Julka, 2004). Therefore, it is important to examine the period of transition into college in order to know how to better support students during this challenging time. The outcome of such reflection and analysis is expected to provide insight into the opportunities and mechanisms essential for successful completion of a college degree program.

In reference to the current study, students with physical disabilities experience an additional transition phenomenon that is unique to them, and thus fall outside the scope of traditional student support initiatives. Driven by federal laws governing the provision of accommodations to students with disabilities, there is a responsibility shift for college seeking disabled students, which requires them to take the lead in requesting and utilizing accommodations that afford them equal access to their educational programs as well as employment preparation programs. It is the researcher's contention that through a better understanding of students with disabilities perspectives on challenges that come with the transition to the workforce, higher education institutions can better support and encourage students with physical disabilities to increase the use of career readiness, accommodations, employment preparation and accommodations available in their higher

education institutions; doing so may ultimately improve their higher education experience in general.

Students with documented physical disabilities are afforded reasonable accommodations to ensure equal access to educational opportunities (Madaus & Shaw, 2004). However, in order to receive these accommodations, they are required to disclose the fact that they have a disability with faculty and staff in order to receive accommodations, as afforded to them under Subpart E of Section 504 of the Education and Rehabilitation Act of 1974 (Section 504) and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). While higher education institutions are required to make accommodations available to students, these higher education institutions are not required to proactively seek out students with disabilities and offer accommodations and or services. Rather, university students with disabilities are responsible for requesting accommodations each time they would like to utilize them, and they must follow their institutions' procedures for doing so.

Statement of the Problem

Students with physical disabilities (from here forward referred to as SWPDs) confront a wide range of barriers during their transition from college to the workforce. The underlying theme associated with this problem is that understanding existing and potential barriers can assist an institution in deploying programs for students in need of such assistance in transitioning from the university environment into the workforce.

The researcher selected college students with physical disabilities who were in their senior year for the purpose of compiling their perceptions of career readiness

information, work preparation programs, services and accommodations as offered by Florida International University (FIU).

Study Framework

As noted earlier, the researcher intended to use the findings of this study to suggest a more useful support system for disabled students. Understanding the barriers that SWPDs confront in their transition to work life helps to inform the institution about the types of support services that could be offered. In this researcher's experience as a university career services provider, communication with career services office staff and prospective employers was identified to be a major barrier to students' utilization of accommodations. Many employers, although familiar with the legal implications of Section 504, may not see the need to provide alternative job opportunities for SWPDs, which adds to the difficulty these students may experience in discussing accommodations with potential employers (Bolt et al. 2011). In essence, this study also shows the relationship between services and programs available to SWPDs and the information and education provided to the students regarding said services.

Driven by federal laws governing the provision of accommodations to students with disabilities, the responsibility shifts from the institution to the university students, requiring the students to self-advocate in requesting and utilizing accommodations beyond what was required of secondary education providers. However, students are not necessarily well prepared, equipped, or informed about their responsibility to effectively manage the need to self-advocate once they reach higher education institutions. SWPDs may also encounter additional attitudinal barriers in their quest to receive

accommodations (Adams & Proctor, 2010). These added responsibilities and barriers might result in a difficult transition for SWPDs from college program into the workforce, adversely affecting retention, social and emotional adjustments, and academic success.

According to the 1978 Cooperative Institutional Research Program Freshman Survey, less than 3% of college students self-identified as having disabilities, while in 2008, The National Center for Education Statistics reported that the figure rose to 11% (Madaus, 2011). However, students with disabilities also experience a higher attrition rate than their peers without disabilities (Bolt, Decker, Lloyd, & Morlock, 2011). As the number of SWPDs on campus increases, it is important to explore more deeply these students' experiences, identify the challenges associated with workforce transition, and then study those challenges and identify how to help students overcome them, persist to graduation and enter the workforce as contributing individuals to society.

Another compelling trend is the number of enrolled college students who report having a disability is increasing (Adams & Proctor, 2010). Findings from the 2006 Longitudinal Transition Study showed that from 1987 to 2003 the percentage of individuals with disabilities who attended college rose from 17% to 32% (Wagner, Newman, Cameto, Levine, & Garza, 2006). Wagner, Newman, Carmeto, Levine, and Marder (2007) reported that by 2005 44% of students with disabilities were enrolling in a higher education institution. Again, recent legislation has focused on preparing youth with disabilities for enrollment in postsecondary education institutions, with the assumption that college attendance will improve employment prospects (Wilson, Hoffman, & McLaughlin, 2009).

As the overall population of SWPDs increases, institutions must be prepared to assist them through the transition from college into the workforce. Students who share personal characteristics with populations that do not have long histories of success in education may be considered at risk for failure in college (Schreiner, Noel, Anderson, & Cantwell, 2011). Researchers have also noted that SWPDs experience a higher attrition rate than their peers without disabilities (Bolt et al., 2011), likely due to the presence of an impairment that limits their life activities and affects persistence to graduation (Adams & Proctor, 2010). In their longitudinal study, Berkner, Curraro-Alamin, McCormick, and Bobbit (1996) found that students with disabilities experienced a graduation rate ten percent lower than their peers without disabilities. This is concerning finding because SWPDs who do not achieve higher educational goals have dimmer employment prospects and are more likely to live at the poverty level (Barnard-Brak, Davis, Tate, & Sulak, 2009).

While socioeconomic status may be important to the individual, society as a whole is also affected when segments of the population are not able to independently sustain themselves. According to Murray et al. (as cited in Barnard-Brak et al., 2009), 56% of students with disabilities had *not* graduated from a higher education institution within ten years after high school, as compared to just 32% of students without disabilities. This study also indicated that once students with disabilities enrolled in college, they experienced lower graduation rates than those who did not have disabilities. Nevertheless, many students with disabilities increased their chances for meaningful employment with the attainment of a college degree (Stodden, Conway, & Chang, 2003).

Madaus (2006) found that college graduates who have disabilities have the same employment rates and average earnings as the general population in the United States. This researcher noted that when individuals with disabilities were able to independently sustain themselves, they became active and productive members of society.

SWPDs transitioning from college into the workforce experience many challenges, including those associated with “interviews, professional presentations, accessibility to applications, and relationships with career services staff and employers” (Clark, 2005). In addition, these students have the challenge of securing whatever accommodations are necessary to allow them full and equal access to their institutions’ career and disability services and activities, (Madaus & Shaw, 2004). This lack of access presents an additional layer of difficulty for SWPDs, many of whom are just beginning to learn how to interact effectively with career and disability services staff (Marshak, Van Wieran, Raeke Ferrell, Swiss, & Dugan, 2010; Garrison-Wade & Lehmann, 2009). Because colleges, both physically and programmatically, rarely operate in a manner that automatically allows equal access to services and programs for all students, SWPDs must advocate for themselves in obtaining this access from their institutions (Lombardi & Murray, 2011).

Because SWPDs are expected to take the lead in receiving accommodations, more controlled studies are needed to determine how to manage this shift to self-advocacy in place at institutions of higher learning. As noted previously, this change provides an additional transition stressor that is unique to SWPDs and thus falls outside the scope of the traditional student support initiatives that have been heavily studied up to the conduct

of this present study. In addition to the typical feelings of stress related to the transition into work life, SWPDs must cope with the added responsibilities and demands associated with obtaining necessary accommodations to which they are legally entitled. Barnard-Brak et al. (2009) describe the “transfer of responsibility” (p. 190) that occurs when college students with disabilities are suddenly responsible for requesting accommodations related to their disabilities. A high school student with disabilities is not required to have any part of the process of receiving services related to a disability (Gil, 2007). However, should a SWPDs wish to receive adequate accommodations to gain equal access to employment related to their educational programs, they are required to self-identify to the university disability services office as having a documented disability that restricts one or more major life activities (Gil, 2007)

In summary, the intention of this researcher was to learn more about specific factors that contribute to a difficult workforce transition for SWPDs as mediated by the legal requirements of students with physical disabilities at the secondary and postsecondary levels and the self-advocacy that is required in a university setting.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to learn about the needs that students with physical disabilities have for a successful transition into the workforce. This was accomplished by analyzing how five college students with physical disabilities reflected on their transition from college into the workforce, particularly in terms of using work preparation programs and/or accommodations needed to participate in employment recruitment activities offered by the career services office at their higher education institution.

Research Question

The purpose of this research study was to explore the unique perspectives of university students with disabilities regarding their experiences in relation to the utilization of work preparation programs, services and/or accommodations as afforded to them by federal law. The main research question that guided this inquiry was:

R₁: What are the reflections of students with physical disabilities regarding their experiences requesting and utilizing career preparation programs, services and accommodations provided by FIU's career services office to aid in their upcoming transition into the workforce after graduation?

Operational Definitions

American with Disabilities Act (ADA)

American with Disabilities Act (ADA). Title I of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 prohibits private employers, state and local governments, employment agencies and labor unions from discriminating against qualified individuals with disabilities in job application procedures, hiring, firing, advancement, compensation, job training, and other terms, conditions, and privileges of employment (<http://www.ADA.Gov.US> Department of Labor <https://www.dol.gov/>).

An Individual with a Disability

An individual with a disability is a person who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities; has a record of such impairment; or is regarded by others as having such impairment. This determination is

done either by the ADA <http://www.ada.gov/q&aeng02.htm>) or by the US Department of Labor <https://www.dol.gov/>.

A Qualified Individual with a Disability

A qualified individual with a disability is a person who meets legitimate skill, experience, education, or other requirements of an employment position that s/he holds or seeks, and who can perform the essential functions of the position with or without reasonable accommodation. Requiring the ability to perform "essential" functions assures that an individual with a disability will not be considered unqualified simply because of inability to perform marginal or incidental job functions. If the individual is qualified to perform essential job functions except for limitations caused by a disability, the employer must consider whether the individual could perform these functions with a reasonable accommodation. If a written job description has been prepared in advance of advertising or interviewing applicants for a job, this will be considered as evidence, although not conclusive evidence, of the essential functions of the job (<http://www.ada.gov/q&aeng02.htm>).

CSWPDS

College student with physical disabilities

CSO

Career Services Office

Disability

The impairment of earning capacity; the loss of physical function resulting in

diminished efficiency; the inability to work (West's Encyclopedia of American Law, 2008).

Disability according to the ADA

The ADA defines a person with a disability as a person who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activity. This includes people who have a record of such an impairment, even if they do not currently have a disability. It also includes individuals who do not have a disability but are regarded as having a disability. The ADA also makes it unlawful to discriminate against a person based on that person's association with a person with a disability (<https://adata.org/faq/what-definition-disability-under-ada>).

Disability according to the World Health Organization

Disabilities is an umbrella term, covering impairments, activity limitations, and participation restrictions. An impairment is a problem in body function or structure; an activity limitation is a difficulty encountered by an individual in executing a task or action; while a participation restriction is a problem experienced by an individual in involvement in life situations. Disability is thus not just a health problem. It is a complex phenomenon, reflecting the interaction between features of a person's body and features of the society in which he or she lives. Overcoming the difficulties faced by people with disabilities requires interventions to remove environmental and social barriers <http://www.who.int/topics/disabilities/en/>.

Discrimination

Discrimination is to treat individuals or a group of people differently because of race, religion, gender, age, disability, physical demeanor, nationality, and sexual orientation (US Department of Labor, <https://www.dol.gov/>).

DRC

Disability resources center

Essential functions

Essential functions are defined as requirements of a job that are needed to perform that job at a satisfactory level (US Department of Labor, <https://www.dol.gov/>)

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is a law that guarantees all children in the United States have the right to a free appropriate public education. It was previously known as the Education for All Handicapped Children Act and may also be referred to as IDEIA (Smith, 2005).

Intangible Resources

Intangible resources are those that are mostly invisible, difficult to quantify, not easy to duplicate, and that tend to appreciate over time with purposeful use (Becker, Huselid, & Ulrich, 2001; Saint-Onge & Wallace, 2003).

International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF)

The International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health, known more commonly as ICF, is a classification of health and health-related domains. As the functioning and disability of an individual occurs in a context, ICF also includes a list of

environmental factors. ICF is the World Health Organization (WHO) framework for measuring health and disability at both individual and population levels. ICF was officially endorsed by all 191 WHO Member States in the Fifty-fourth World Health Assembly on 22 May 2001(resolution WHA 54. 21) as the international standard to describe and measure health and disability (<http://www.who.int/classifications/icf/en/>).

Invisible Disability

Invisible disability, or hidden disability, are defined as disabilities that are not immediately apparent. Some people with visual or auditory disabilities, who do not wear glasses or hearing aids, or discreet hearing aids, may not be obviously disabled. Some people who have vision loss may wear contacts. Although the disability creates a challenge for the person who has it, the reality of the disability can be difficult for others to recognize or acknowledge. Others may not understand the cause of the problem, if they cannot see evidence of it in a visible way (<http://www.disabled-world.com/disability/types/invisible>).

Professional Development

Professional development includes, but is not limited to “[giving] teachers, principals, and administrators the knowledge and skills to provide students with the opportunity to meet challenging State academic content standards and student academic achievement standards” (No Child Left Behind Act, 2001, p. 539).

Reasonable Accommodations

Reasonable accommodations are adjustments or modifications provided by an employer to enable people with disabilities to enjoy equal employment opportunities.

Accommodations vary depending upon the needs of the individual applicant or employee. Reasonable accommodation may include, but is not limited to (a) making existing facilities used by employees readily accessible to and usable by persons with disabilities; (b) Job restructuring, modifying work schedules, reassignment to a vacant position; (c) Acquiring or modifying equipment or devices, adjusting or modifying examinations, training materials, or policies, and providing qualified readers or interpreters (<http://www.ADA.Gov>. US Department of Labor <https://www.dol.gov/>).

Resources

A resource is anything transacted in an interpersonal situation (Gergen et al., 1980, p. 78). Resources can be tangible or intangible. They are special assets, skills, and capabilities (Collis & Montgomery, 1998, p. 72).

Self-Advocacy

The act or condition of representing oneself, either generally in society or in formal proceedings, such as a court (Collins English Dictionary - Complete & Unabridged 10th Edition)

Self-Determination

Self-determination as defined Field, Martin, Miller, Ward, and Wehmeyer, (1998) as a combination of skills, knowledge, and beliefs that enable a person to engage in goal-directed, self-regulated, and autonomous behavior.

Special Education

Special education: As it relates to IDEA 2004, special education is the supports

and services offered to students with disabilities through their 21st birthday in public school settings (IDEA, 2004).

SWPDs

Students with physical disabilities

Transition

Transition describes the process of preparing students with disabilities for life beyond high school into adulthood (Mazzotti et al., 2009).

Transition Planning

Transition planning is a comprehensive student centered planning resulting from collaboration among the student, parents, and school staff that defines the appropriate curricular and community based instructional path necessary to meet the student's postsecondary goals. A transition plan is based on the individual student's needs, strengths, preferences, and interests. It includes instruction, related services, community experience, employment instruction, adult living skills, and when appropriate, daily living skills (IDEA, 2004). The necessary services are then aligned with the annual Individual Education Plan goals (Mazzotti et al., 2009).

Transition Services

Transition services are a coordinated set of activities for a student with a disability that is designed to facilitate a student's movement from school to post-school activities, including postsecondary or vocational education, integrated or supported employment, adult services, independent living, and community participation (Mazzotti et al., 2009).

Types of Disabilities

Types of disabilities includes various physical and mental impairments that can hamper or reduce a person's ability to carry out his day to day activities. These impairments can be termed as disability of the person to do his or her day to day activities as previously types (www.disabled-world.com/disability/). "Disability" can be broken down into a number of broad sub-categories, which include the following:

Mobility and physical impairments. This category of disability includes people with varying types of physical disabilities including a) upper limb(s) disability, b) lower limb(s) disability, c) manual dexterity, d) disability in co-ordination with different organs of the body, e) disability in mobility can be either an in-born or acquired with age problem. It could also be the effect of a disease. People who have a broken bone also fall into this category of disability.

Spinal cord disability. Spinal cord injury (SCI) can sometimes lead to lifelong disabilities. This kind of injury mostly occurs due to severe accidents. The injury can be either complete or incomplete. In an incomplete injury, the messages conveyed by the spinal cord is not completely lost. Whereas a complete injury results in a total dis-functioning of the sensory organs. In some cases, a spinal cord disability can be a birth defect.

Head injuries - brain disability. A disability in the brain occurs due to an injury to the brain. The magnitude of the brain injury can range from mild, moderate and severe. There are two types of brain injuries: a) Acquired Brain Injury (ABI): ABI is not a hereditary type defect but is the degeneration that occurs after birth. The causes of such

cases of injury are many and are mainly because of external forces applied to the body parts; and b) Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI): TBI results in emotional dysfunction and behavioral disturbance.

Vision Disability. There are hundreds of thousands of people that suffer from minor to various serious vision disability or impairments. These injuries can also result in a person experiencing serious problems or diseases (e. g. blindness and ocular trauma). Examples of common vision impairment include scratched cornea, scratches on the sclera, diabetes related eye conditions, dry eyes and corneal graft.

Hearing disability. Hearing disabilities may result in people who are completely or partially deaf, (Deaf is the politically correct term people in the hearing impaired community use to refer to those individuals living with hearing impairment). People who are partially deaf often use hearing aids to assist with their hearing. Deafness can be evident at birth or occur later in life from several biologic causes, for example Meningitis can damage the auditory nerve or the cochlea.

Cognitive or learning disabilities. Cognitive Disabilities include impairments present in people who are suffering from dyslexia and various other learning difficulties and includes speech disorders.

Psychological Disorders. Include:

- Affective Disorders: Disorders of mood or feeling states either short or long term.
- Mental Health Impairment is the term used to describe people who have experienced psychiatric problems or illness such as:

- Personality Disorders - Defined as deeply inadequate patterns of behavior and thought of sufficient severity to cause significant impairment to day-to-day activities.
- Schizophrenia: A mental disorder characterized by disturbances of thinking, mood, and behavior.

Invisible Disabilities

Are disabilities that are not immediately apparent to other people. It is estimated that 10% of people in the U. S. have a medical condition considered a type of invisible disability (<http://www.disabled-world.com/disability/types/>).

Undue Hardship

Undue hardship is defined as an action requiring significant difficulty or expense when considered in light of factors such as an employer's size, financial resources, and the nature and structure of its operation. An employer is not required to lower quality or production standards to make an accommodation; nor is an employer obligated to provide personal use items such as glasses or hearing aids (<http://www.ADA.gov>. US Department of Labor <https://www.dol.gov/>).

Delimitations of the Study

The scope of this study was limited to the SWPDs' reflections of their perceptions of their experiences with services available to them to assist them in the pursuit of employment. Data collection methods were restricted to semi-structured interviews. All the subjects interviewed were college seniors, identified as SWPDs who were

registered with the Disabilities Resources Center (DRC) and had accessed services provided by the Career Services Office (CSO).

For this study, the researcher decided to work with students with physical disabilities only because most of the challenges and difficulties the researcher observed happened more often and were bigger for students with physical disabilities than for students with non-visible disabilities. According to the researcher, the main difference in these two cases, was how the students' disabilities were viewed by job recruiters. She observed firsthand many instances where a SWPD was overlooked by a recruiter, even if the student was qualified for the job, but because of the visibility of the disability, the student was invisible to the company representative.

Given the nature of the researcher's experience and the opportunity to work with so many students for so many years, she opted to take the opportunity to work with students with physical disabilities, as in her mind, they did not have the same opportunities to be seen as regular people, while students with non-visible disabilities can be seen as normal. The opportunity to undertake this study was not only ideal, but a much desired opportunity to keep doing work that may benefit a larger group of students who are limited by their disabilities rather than by their qualifications when pursuing employment. The researcher's work experience in a higher education institution has allowed the researcher to have an informed perspective on the laws governing the provision of accommodation to students with disabilities at the higher education level, as well as a working knowledge of how accommodations are administered. In addition, along with her years of experience working as a practitioner in career development

services at the site where the proposed research took place, the different positions she held over the years, provided her with knowledge of the practices governing student placement in various fields, as well as some of the challenges experienced by college students with disabilities transitioning into the workforce. These experiences influenced her beliefs about the role of higher education institutions, their employees, and their students, as well as her expectations for each of these stakeholders' involvement in the process of disability and career services and accommodations.

Significance of Study

Students with physical disabilities face many challenges in their transition from college into the workforce. Higher education institutions are required by law to provide accommodations including work preparation programs, services and accommodations that meet the needs of students with disabilities, while not required to seek students to utilize said services. The participants' reflections on their experiences with university services may help identify and possibly generate solutions of how the identified barriers may be overcome. Building awareness and cooperation on available resources within the university's offices and the students may be the link that allows for greater success in the students with disabilities' transition into the workforce.

This study analyzed the reflections of SWPDs enrolled at FIU concerning their experiences with career development and disability resources center services with particular application to students' transition into work life. The results of the study produced evidence and data for possible changes, which if implemented could account

for increasing the number of SWPDs hired to work upon graduation, a higher success rate and in the very least, and a seamless career transition.

Furthermore, this study added to the existing literature a deeper understanding of the perceptions held by SWPDs regarding the work preparation programs, services, and/or accommodations for their transition from college into the workforce.

As a scholar-practitioner, it was this researcher's goal that this work would result in improved communication between the institution's career services and disability resources center, SWPDs, and potential employers. Further, this study may inform readers about workforce transition-related practices at the postsecondary level with a greater awareness of the perceptions of students with disabilities about their experiences with career services during college. Given the different legal mandates at each level, higher education policies regarding documentation of disability requirements could be examined and modified accordingly. The findings could also yield results by improving staff and faculty training at the higher education level, dissemination of information for better practices and provide information about resources available to potential employers who could hire SWPDs. Finally, orientation programs for SWPDs could be developed to strategically address their unique workforce transition needs at the higher education level.

By utilizing qualitative methods in this study, this researcher gained more insight into the social, emotional, and practical adjustment of SWPDs who are looking to transition into the workforce. The findings may benefit postsecondary career and disability services professionals to effectively support their students with disabilities and to proactively address potential workforce transition concerns. Further, professionals at

both the career and disability resources centers at FIU may utilize this study to collaborate and develop approaches and programs that will better prepare SWPDs for their transition into the workforce and for the challenges associated with preparing for employment and the possibility of requesting and utilizing accommodations at the recruitment and placement levels.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to DeBerard, Spielmans, & Julka (2004) there is ample evidence demonstrating that students in general struggle to adjust as they transition into the workforce, and that students with disabilities encounter greater challenges. Most students leave their institutions during and immediately after their first year enrolled (DeBerard, et. al). Therefore, it is important to start this review of literature by examining the period of transition to college to better understand how to support students during this challenging time in order to be able to prepare them for the next step: transitioning into the workforce. Students with disabilities experience an additional transition phenomenon that is unique to them, and thus falls outside the scope of traditional first-year student support initiatives.

Driven by federal laws governing the provision of accommodations to students with disabilities, responsibility shifts from the institution to the college student, requiring them to take the lead in requesting and utilizing accommodations that afford them equal access to academic and employment preparation programs. Through an understanding of students' perspectives on the challenges that come with the transition to the workforce, higher educational institutions can help support students with physical disabilities by helping them increase the use of academic accommodations, employment preparation programs and improve their higher education experience in general. These conclusions were attained by analyzing how college students with physical disabilities reflected on their transition from college into the workforce, particularly in terms of using work

preparation programs and/or accommodations needed to participate in employment recruitment activities offered by the career services office at their higher education institution in an effort to add to the literature on career readiness and students with disabilities pursuing a successful transition into the workforce.

This study specifically analyzed the experiences that SWPDs enrolled at FIU had with career development services in preparation for their work life. This review of literature focused on the available literature regarding several factors related to career readiness practice including legal considerations, common barriers to SWPDs seeking employment, and workforce transition planning for practitioners in FIU.

History of Legislation on Behalf of Persons with Disabilities

Planning for the future for students with disabilities can be more difficult and may require extensive planning than it takes the typical young adult (Kim & Turnbull, 2004, p. 53). According to the American with Disabilities act, 25th Anniversary Census Report of 2015 (<https://www.census.gov/newsroom/facts-for-features/2015/cb15-ff10.html>.) nearly 56.7 million people in the United States have some level of disability, roughly 18 % of the population. In 2013, 11.8 million of 16 to 64 year-olds reported a medical condition that made it difficult to find and or keep a job. Thirty-three percent of people 25 to 64 years of age have a non-severe disability and are college graduates. This compares to 43 % of individuals with no disability and 22 % of people with a severe disability (<http://disableinaction.org>).

A significant challenge for SWPDs transitioning into the workforce is that the laws governing the provision of accommodations and support services are different in

college than they are in high school. For example, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), which mandates services for children ages 3 to 21, has no authority in higher education. Rather, once a student is in college, the provision of accommodations is governed by Section 504, Subpart E of the Rehabilitation Act of 1974 (Section 504) and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) (Bolt et al., 2011; Garrison-Wade & Lehmann, 2009). Section 504 requires that higher institutions make academic adjustments to ensure students' equal access to programs (Gil, 2007). These adjustments, often referred to as accommodations, may include auxiliary aids or modifications to course policies and procedures.

As Madaus and Shaw (2004) explained, the IDEA law entitles one to an education, while Section 504 and the ADA are “civil rights” laws that guarantees equal access to education through the prohibition of discrimination (p. 13). Once students with disabilities graduate from high school, they are not guaranteed admission into college and, if admitted, they must maintain the academic and behavioral standards required of all students at their higher education institution (Shaw, 2009). College SWPDS have a greater share of the burden of individual responsibility than they did in high school for accessing accommodations (Garrison-Wade, 2012). Barnard-Brak et al. (2009) described the “transfer of responsibility” (p. 190) that takes place when in college students are quite suddenly responsible for requesting accommodations related to their disabilities. As Garrison-Wade & Lehmann (2009) said, students must transition from being “recipients” of services in high school, to becoming “proactive self-advocates” (p. 420) who ask for what they need and follow the necessary procedures to arrange the details.

College students who wish to receive accommodations to gain equal access to their educational programs are required to self-identify to their universities' disability resources centers as having a documented disability that restricts one or more major life activities (DaDeppo, 2009; Gil, 2007). If they fail to adequately self-advocate, students with disabilities can find themselves in a difficult transition situation (Hadley, 2006). Under Section 504, a college student is responsible for securing and providing appropriate documentation of their disability, even if it means paying for a physician's visit or for psychoeducational testing (Shaw, 2009). This is the first step a student with a disability must take in order to receive accommodations. If students do not self-disclose as having a disability and request accommodations, then a higher institution is under no legal obligation to provide accommodations. This in itself can be a barrier for students because that level of responsibility and self-advocacy was not required of them in high school, thus they are not accustomed or are aware of what is required of them in college.

In their study of accommodation use by postsecondary students with mental illnesses, Salzer, Wick, and Rogers (2008) found that 58 % of college students did not utilize accommodations, because they were not aware that those were available to them. Further, obtaining documentation verifying their disabilities can pose a challenge for new college students. Under the IDEA, regular testing and reevaluations of disability are not required (Madaus & Shaw, 2004). Rather, the law permits an Individual Education Plan (IEP) team to decide if updated documentation of a disability is needed.

According to the Association on Higher Education and Disability's (AHEAD) (2012) most recent guidelines regarding documentation practices, "requiring extensive medical and scientific evidence perpetuates a deviance model of disability, undervalues the individuals' history and experience with disability and is inappropriate and burdensome under the revised statute and regulations". Thus, AHEAD advocates for higher education disability resources centers suggest that providers consider students' narratives about their history of accommodations and how their disabilities have impacted them, in addition to reviewing older documentation to determine the need for accommodations for students who do not have more recent medical or psychological documentation. However, until practices change to reflect these recommendations, students entering college without current and appropriate documentation of their disabilities may be unable to access and utilize accommodations.

For many students with physical disabilities, the documentation requirements at the higher education level include complete psychoeducational testing. Also, many disability resources centers providers state that testing cannot be more than three years old, since intellectual functioning can change as one nears adulthood (Madaus & Shaw, 2004). Under IDEA, if a parent would like his or her child tested for a disability, the school district must typically incur the cost of providing the tests. However, at the higher education level, the cost of testing falls upon the student. Madaus and Shaw (2004) expressed concerns that this could be cost-prohibitive for college students who do not have current documentation of their disability, thereby "disenfranchising" students from low-income families from receiving accommodations (p. 82).

Once students do secure the required documentation of a disability, it must be provided to the college disability resources centers personnel. Each student must then request and attend an individual meeting with disability resources centers to determine the accommodations that will be provided. The types of accommodations available to students in high school can be vastly different than what a higher education institution is required to provide (Bolt et al., 2011). For example, a high school student diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder may be provided, at the school district's expense, an aid to teach him or her social skills. However, once that student reaches college, a personal aid is not generally considered to be a reasonable accommodation under Section 504 and the American with Disabilities Act (ADA). This change creates a challenge for parents and students who are unaware that they are now responsible for identifying and paying for this type of support (Morrison, Sansosti, & Hadley, 2009). As with documentation requirements, this scenario calls into question whether the expense of providing one's own support systems and strategies is disenfranchising for low-income college students.

According to Stodden et al., (2003), colleges provide accommodations largely "based upon a minimalist interpretation of the concept of reasonableness" (p. 31). This is in sharp contrast to the promise of the free and appropriate education guaranteed under the IDEA, and thus the disparity between the types of accommodations that are provided at each level of schooling (Bolt et al., 2011; Madaus & Shaw, 2004; Stodden et al., 2003). It is important for disability resources center providers to understand the reasons why a college student with a disability may not seek assistance and utilize accommodations (Adams & Proctor, 2010). Due to the nature of the IDEA, Section 504 and the ADA,

students with disabilities must advocate for themselves in college more than had been necessary in high school. Their lack of awareness about this change, coupled with underdeveloped self-advocacy skills, contributes to the challenges that come with this change. Thus the need for studies which like the current, seek to address the reflections of experiences that SWPD have regarding available accommodations and perceived ones.

Common Barriers to Requesting and Accessing Accommodations

According to Lundberg (2003), students who are considered at high risk for academic and social difficulties do not often proactively seek help from or interact with faculty. Further, a review of the literature conducted by Enright, Conyers, and Szymanski (1996) suggested that “two factors [were] most critical to the integration of students with disabilities: (a) the ease of social interactions with peers and (b) the receptiveness of university members to accommodate their needs” (p. 106). Morrison et al. (2009) indicated that college students learn to trust their own voice and intuition as being valid as they develop into adulthood. Until students reach that point, it may be difficult for them to express themselves to those in positions of influence over them, including professors and university staff.

Additionally, disability resources centers personnel have reported that it is more difficult to reach out to and support students with certain disabilities. This may be partially due to the fact that faculty members are less likely to refer these students to disability resources centers offices in order to receive accommodations, while students with an obvious physical impairment and accommodation need may be referred for assistance quite early in their college careers (Collins and Mowbray, 2005).

Students' concerns that there is a stigma associated with having a disability compound the communication barrier with university personnel regarding accommodations (Bolt et al., 2011; Fier & Brzezinski, 2010), as well as students' overall campus experiences (Salzer, 2012). Trammell (2009) defined the stigma of disability as "the social, academic, and psychological consequences of disclosing a disability" (p. 106). Hartley (2010) reported that the "pervasive social stigma" associated with disability contributes to the difficulty of requesting accommodations from their institutions (p. 299). Staff may doubt the need for accommodations, or even the purpose of Section 504 and ADA in providing equal access to higher education for students with disabilities.

In fact, many students with disabilities will intentionally avoid the use of disability resources centers in college in an attempt to distance themselves from the stigma they experienced in high school (Marshak et al., 2010). Salzer et al., (2008) found that the majority of students with mental illness whom they surveyed were fearful of negative reactions and discrimination from classmates and university staff members as they sought to utilize accommodations. Students have reported a lack of awareness of available services, as well as feelings of embarrassment in relation to inquiring about such services (Garrison-Wade, 2012).

Stigma associated with disability can be understood in terms of how one views society and disability. Danforth (2008) and Lekan (2009) described two dichotomous views of disability: the *medical concept of disability* and the *social model of disability*. Those who ascribe to the *medical concept* view disability as a deficit within the individual, which makes that person *less than* the majority of individuals in society.

Conversely, the *social model* describes disability as being in existence only as a social construct that is a creation of our society. Shah (2010) explained that traits in our society create the definition of disability and apply it to certain people. As Jane Mercer (as cited in Danforth, 2008) stated, “Persons have no names and belong to no class until we put them in one” (p. 57). The focus of the *medical* perspective is on how to change those who have disabilities, while the focus of the *social* model is on how to change society to meet the needs of everyone. One could argue that federal legislation such as the ADA and Section 504 are predicated on this latter notion of disability because accommodations and adjustments are intended to create equal access for all persons. This researcher adopted Lekan’s (2009) position that society has a responsibility to adapt the environment to meet everyone’s needs, rather than requiring individuals with disabilities to do all of the adapting. However, research has shown that much of society still ascribes to the *medical* perspective of disability (Jacobs & Lauber, 2011; Peters, Wolbers, & Dimling, 2008; Rieser, 2006), and thus stigma is assigned to individuals with disabilities as they seek accommodations.

For many college SWPDs, communication with university staff appears to be a major barrier to the utilization of accommodations (Bento, 1996). Many career services personnel may be unfamiliar with the legal implications of Section 504 and ADA, which adds to the difficulty that SWPDs may experience in discussing accommodations with them (Bolt et al., 2011). In one qualitative study examining staff decision-making about accommodations, Bento (1996) found the presence of an “informational barrier” (p. 495) noting that the staff she interviewed did not have a full understanding of disabilities, nor

of the applicable laws. In their survey of university disability resources centers offices, Collins and Mowbray (2005) found that these staff members reported that staff in other departments lacked the understanding of how to work with students with disabilities. Thus, SWPDs may experience negative staff attitudes when there is a perception that accommodations are not legitimately needed (Bolt et al., 2011). Also, in contrast to high school, college students have less frequent personal interactions with many college staff members (Adreon & Durocher, 2007). As a result, it may be more difficult for students to develop the level of comfort desired for communicating about disability and their need for accommodations.

In addition, students with disabilities have also reported that negative interactions with insensitive college staff contributed to their overall unease when discussing their needs (Garrison-Wade & Lehmann, 2009). Hong, Haefner, and Slekar (2011) found that staff and faculty were reluctant to view learners as consumers or customers. This may exacerbate negative attitudes about providing additional accommodations to students, which requires more time, service, and personal attention from college employees. The quality and efficiency of support offered through disability resources centers offices is also important for students with disabilities (Garrison-Wade & Lehmann, 2009) as students reported that the amount of paperwork and complicated procedures required to secure accommodations was a barrier (Lindstrom, Downey-McCarthy, Kerewsky & Flannery, 2009). According to Tramell (2009), regardless of who is involved, as disabilities become less stigmatized in our society, communication will improve and accommodations will be more effective in providing equal access to higher education.

A student's developmental readiness for work life can be another barrier to the utilization of accommodations. Because students are required to initiate and take an active role in the accommodations process, they must develop their self-determination and self-advocacy skills. Field, Martin, Miller, Ward, and Wehmeyer (as cited in Adams & Proctor, 2010) described self-determination as the ability to "engage in goal-directed, self-regulated, autonomous behavior" (p. 169). Further, self-advocacy skills include the ability to understand one's strengths, one's weaknesses, and one's rights as a citizen, along with the ability to communicate effectively about such matters (Adams & Proctor). Typically, parents and teachers are no longer heavily monitoring students in college, so students must become more adept at self-regulation (Fier & Brzezinski, 2010; Gil, 2007).

Students with disabilities are more likely to report that they do not feel like they fit in with their peers in college (Adams & Proctor, 2010). This is significant because as Astin's (1985) and Tinto's (2001) works argued, student involvement with and integration into the campus community increases a student's chance of achieving success. This integration and connection with other people is further impeded for students with disabilities because they often have less free time for socialization, largely as a result of the additional time it may take for tasks such as personal care, homework, or navigating around campus (Hadley, 2011). Also, students with disabilities reported an overall lack of confidence in their academic and social abilities, which is based on prior negative experiences (Lindstrom et al., 2009) that hinders the use of self-advocacy skills.

While the need for self-determination and self-advocacy skills at the higher education level is clear, research shows that in general, students have not been learning

and practicing these skills at the secondary level. In particular, secondary educators may not include activities that will build the self-determination skills of students with disabilities during transition planning (Thoma & Getzel, 2005). As previously described, the nature of the IDEA does not require high school students to become actively involved in the process of determining accommodations nor do they have to get involved in meaningful ways (Morningstar et al., 2010; DaDeppo, 2009). Madaus and Shaw (2004) questioned whether secondary education providers have a true understanding of what students need at the higher education level in terms of advocating for themselves and securing accommodations. Li et al. (2009) posited that special educators are not receiving adequate training in workforce transition issues, which may be the result of a national focus on academic content area knowledge. The current study, by analyzing the reflections of students' experiences with university personnel in the pursuit of work preparation programs, services and accommodations, serves to provide a valuable way to identify what the students think their needs are and whether those needs are being met.

Students with Disabilities and Gaps in Services

A paucity in the literature exists that analyzes the effectiveness of services focused on SWPDs at the college level and their transition into the workforce. A review of the literature revealed a notable gap in services provided to SWPDs and the information provided to these students for them to access any services available to them. There is also a lack of evidence of success indicators associated with any of those services provided by higher education institutions. Consequently, the literature related to the topic is limited therefore providing the need for this study. On the point of need for

higher education career transition services, Rocco (2011) noted that medical advances might change what used to be in the past, death sentences for individuals who would live with disabilities. This means that issues such as environmental degradation, an increase in chronic diseases; war, and terrorism, are major causes of impairments; however, through better medicine at home and battlefields, people with certified disabilities, are determined to be part of society and are demanding access to opportunities for education and training, work and leisure, (p. 3). Therefore, as more individuals with disabilities seek to better their socio-economic condition, higher education will play a critical part in providing access to professional career opportunities. As such, higher education career and disability resources centers need to focus on transitioning students with disabilities into the workforce. Such services need to have significant personal and social value; not only for the individuals with disabilities who want to enter the workforce, but also for their families, the communities where they live, and society at large.

Over the past few decades, poor post-school outcomes of students with disabilities have been consistently documented in the special education literature (Test et al., 2009). Specifically, the rate of higher education, independent living, and employment for SWPDs after high school graduation is less than expected as compared to their peers without disabilities (Blackorby & Wagner, 1996; Chambers, Rabren & Dunn, 2009). The poor post-school outcomes in special education are evident across the range of disability categories, including students with low incidence types of disabilities such as a severe disabling condition with an expected incidence rate of less than one percent of the total statewide enrollment in kindergarten through grade 12, such as: blindness, deafness,

complex health issues, etc., as well as those with higher-incidence disabilities or mild disabilities that include a range of abilities and disabilities that are mild to severe in intensity. Higher incidence abilities include learning disabilities, mild or moderate intellectual disabilities, communication disorders, and emotional or behavioral disorders. Some disabilities are life-long while others are temporary. Ninety-four percent of students with disabilities have a high-incidence disability (Salend, 2005).

Growing enrollments of SWPDs in higher education (Newman, Wagner, Cameto, Knokey and Shaver, 2010; Snyder and Dillow, 2010), along with recent key legislation such as the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Amendments Act of 2008 and the 2008 Higher Education Opportunity Act 1, have generated considerable interest in research on accessibility of higher education for students with disabilities.

Cavin, Alper, Sinclair, and Sitlington (2001) found that poor post-school outcomes have been consistently documented for students with disabilities. Unfortunately, SWPDs continue to exit high school with underdeveloped transition plans which yielded undesirable results (Cavin et al., 2001). Therefore, the same students who graduate high school underprepared for adult life, become college students with disabilities who are also ill-prepared for their next transition: entering the workforce. The National Center on Secondary Education and Transition (NCSET, 2004) reported that young adults with disabilities were exiting high school unprepared for adult life. The NCSET stated that student needs should be met through coordinated planning among important post-school transition teams: general educators, special educators, community inter-agencies, parents, and students with disabilities.

Conceptual Framework of Transition Services

In an effort to inform the reader about the importance of transition services, the researcher included this segment in transition planning in the review of literature. As explained in previous sections, there is no transition planning in place for a SWPDs leaving high school and entering college. The information provided in this section is designed to facilitate the readers' understanding of the SWPDs transition situation as they enter college. As described by the Center for Change in Transition Services (2007), there are six main components in developing an IEP for students with disabilities: age appropriate transition assessments, measurable higher education goals, transition services, courses of study, coordination of services with adult agencies, and development of annual IEP goals. These six components, fulfill indicator 13 in the IDEA of 2004 (34 C.F.R. 300.43) which is used to determine the effectiveness of transition services. Unless all transition components are fulfilled, the desired transition outcome might not be met for students with disabilities.

Sitlington (2008) found that a needs' assessment may include the deficit areas where specialized instruction is needed. These deficient areas are typically academic, but may also include socialization, peer or adult interaction, behaviors, and daily living skills. In addition to higher education goals, Hogansen, Powers, Geenen, Gis-Kashiwabara, and Powers (2008) advised that an employment goal should be written to include what the team anticipates the student might be doing for employment after graduation from college. Suggested employment goals may include finding employment after a college degree is received within the student's area of study or securing employment in a field

that does not require a specific degree. According to Rutkowskia, Daston, VanKuiken, and Riehle (2006), transition services available to students with disabilities include instruction, related services, community experience, employment skills, adult living skills, and if appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills.

Transition Services in Higher Education

Students with disabilities do not fare as well as their peers without disabilities in areas such as employment, higher education, and independent living (Mellard & Landcaster, 2003), despite services and supports available in school and upon leaving school. Best practices in the area of transition, developed to compensate for these challenges, include vocational training, parent involvement in transition planning, interagency collaboration, and paid work experience during the school day (Carter, & Lunsford, 2005).

According to Mellard and Landcaster (2003), community experiences are more meaningful to SWPDs than traditional school services. If school districts provide avenues for students with disabilities to participate in their schools and communities, they will have better social skills, be more integrated in their community, and be more likely to be employed. Transition practices currently attempt to promote success in spite of a number of challenges that SWPDs confront. These challenges include a lesser likelihood to attend higher education institutions when compared to students without disabilities (Einsenman, 2003), a higher dropout rate than for students without disabilities (Blackorby, Edgar, & Kortering, 1991) and underemployment (Blackorby, Edgar, &

Kortering, Johnson, 2008), along with higher probability of staying home after graduation, (Benz, Lindstrom, & Yovanoff, 2000).

Transition services are not limited to students pursuing one post-school opportunity. According to Madaus and Shaw (2006), transition may include college, other post-school training, employment, and community life. Transition plans must be broad enough to cover all of these possibilities, yet specific enough to provide meaningful information. Decisions about what to include in the transition plan are made based on the student's academic and functional performance. Therefore, plans must include recommendations on how to help the student meet higher education goals in all transition areas, since employment is not the only element of a successful transition (Bezanson, 2004). Madaus and Shaw (2006) added that part of transition planning involves planning for or selecting higher education coursework. Early planning will ensure students have adequately thought out the coursework necessary to fulfill their post-high school goals. This early planning should have long-term implications to secure access and success in higher education and employment (Madaus & Shaw; Rabren, Hall, & Brown, 2003).

Most of the research found described several specific strategies for preparing students with disabilities for the transition out of high school, some research discussed the transition to college, but no research was found about transitioning from college into the workforce, especially any research that included the teaching of self-advocacy skills through role-playing (DaDeppo, 2009). This lack of research does not provide any background that allows for university staff to understand students with disabilities and

how both are affected by them, while providing meaningful practice and support for the students (Adams and Proctor, 2010).

Summary of Chapter II

Through a review of the literature, the researcher, gained an understanding of the considerations associated with the transition from high school to college for students with disabilities. Much of the change that students encounter is associated with the legal differences between services in high school and accommodations in college. There is a paucity of literature describing whether students and their families are fully aware of these differences as students seek to transition from one level to the next. Furthermore, for students with disabilities who gain information about accommodations and disability resources centers, sometimes there is a lack of understanding about where and how they can receive assistance.

Several other gaps in the literature emerged as well. Research is needed to determine if students are developmentally ready to enter the workforce and advocate for themselves on a level that is required by Section 504 and the ADA. While the literature has shown that students with disabilities perceive the presence of a social stigma related to disability, there has been little research into individual students' experiences and sense-making of this phenomenon. Also, career and disability resources centers personnel play an important role in these students' experiences in college. Thus, further research into how students perceive their interactions with these particular staff members throughout accommodations and programs to facilitate the transition into work life is needed. This may allow practitioners at both the secondary and higher education levels

to develop strategies for informing, preparing, and supporting students with disabilities throughout the transition from college into the workforce. With improvement in this area, they have the potential to enhance developmental, academic, and career outcomes for students with disabilities, while upholding the spirit of equal access laws such as Section 504 and the ADA.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODS

The purpose of this study was to learn about the needs that students with physical disabilities have for a successful transition into the workforce. This was accomplished by analyzing how college students with physical disabilities reflected on their transition from college into the workforce, particularly in terms of using work preparation programs and/or accommodations needed to participate in employment recruitment activities offered by the career services office at their higher education institution.

By means of qualitative inquiry the researcher asked students to reflect upon their experiences in requesting and utilizing career preparation programs, services and accommodations as provided by the university career services office. In addressing this question the researcher reviewed the participants' lived experiences while learning about their needs, perceptions, and realities specific to their university experience of which services were designed to ease student transition into the workforce upon graduation.

The Qualitative Research Tradition

This study was grounded in the qualitative research tradition, which emphasizes the importance of naturalistic inquiry. It involves looking at individuals' experiences in the natural setting in which they are found. Instead of one undiluted reality, qualitative research acknowledges the existence of multiple-constructed realities and regards interaction between said realities as important (Ponterotto, 2005). It proceeds from the perspective that time and context-neutral generalizations are neither desirable nor possible, that research is value-bound, and that it is impossible to differentiate fully

between causes and effects. Unlike quantitative research, which is deductive in orientation, qualitative researchers believe that logic flows from the specific to the general: explanations are generated inductively from the data. In its purest form qualitative research also holds that the knower and the known cannot be separated because the subjective knower is the only source of reality and the investigator is an integral part of any investigation (Creswell, 2012).

Research Design

The current study was conducted from the constructivism-interpretivism paradigm (Ponterotto, 2005). This paradigm assumes that there are multiple subjective, but valid, realities constructed in the minds of the participants and researchers. In other words, reality is constructed by the research participant through his or her lived experience, and that reality is unique in perspective. For the purposes of this study, the researcher intended to interpret the participants' responses in order to construct meaningful recommendations and alignment of services for the higher education institution to be able to help the students with disabilities have a more successful career transition. This was a good fit with a phenomenological approach in the research design, because of the focus on and appreciation for the individual perspective on each unique experience. This creates a dynamic relationship with personal interactions allowing for reciprocal sharing of information.

According to Creswell (2012), qualitative research is a good fit for addressing research questions calls for the exploration of a problem or issue. Using a qualitative approach for this study allowed the researcher to explore deeply the complexities of the

transition into the workforce for SWPDs, permitting some unexpected themes to emerge regarding these students' interactions with career and disability resources centers staff.

The research question in the current study guided the researcher in exploring the sense-making of the participants lived experiences in relation to workforce transition. According to Alexander (2006), the purpose of qualitative research is to understand the meaning of human experiences, rather than attempting to define causal relationships. Thus, a qualitative approach allows the researcher to appropriately address the research question.

Phenomenological Analysis

In this study, the participants had all experienced the shared phenomena of transitioning into the workforce and attempted to utilize university work preparation programs, services and/or accommodations as students with disabilities. The researcher conducted this study utilizing a phenomenological analysis approach, which “offers insight into a particular perspective on a phenomenon” (Handley & Hutchinson, 2013, p. 188).

Smith (2011) described the three-pronged nature of the approach to research as phenomenological in nature in that it intends to examine individuals' experiences and their sense-making of those experiences. The approach was also hermeneutical in that it allowed for the interpretation of the participants' reflections. Further, it was an ideographic undertaking, because it called for a highly in-depth analysis of individual cases. The goal of this research was to better understand each student's unique view of their transition from college into the workforce in terms of utilizing work preparation

programs, services and/or accommodations. Phenomenological analysis is intended to help a researcher explore “how people make sense of their major life experiences” (Smith, Larkin, & Flowers, 2009, p. 1), so this approach was a solid fit for the study of events involved in the transition into work life.

The Role of the Researcher

Qualitative research proceeds from the assumption that the researcher cannot be clinically detached from her work and said work reflects parts of who she is. This is the concept of reflexivity: the active acknowledgement that the researcher’s social identity, background, actions, and decisions will impact on the meaning and context of the experience under investigation. However, the researcher must strive to reflect accurately the voice of participants or observe them in their naturalistic environments. Arzubiaga (2008) suggests that the research records should be made to reflect the potential impact of the researcher on the data.

For this study, the researcher adopted the position of passive participant, acting as a listener. The researcher’s background and education played an important factor from the beginning. According to Kincheloe & Steinberg (1998), positionality provides a context for understanding that one’s experiences and personal characteristics affect one’s construction of reality, or worldview. For example, in addition to having over 17 years of experience as highlighted in her vita (see Vitae appendix) focusing on college student career development and higher education administration, the researcher holds a Master’s degree in Human Resource Development and Adult Education, and taught as an adjunct instructor for over 10 years. Her master’s degree in human resources development and

adult education made it possible for her to work in a higher education environment, and her experience in human resources gave her a clear understanding of both the students' and employers' needs when participating in career placement and recruitment activities.

For the researcher, working with SWPDs was not new, just sometimes more challenging given the needs that each student she individually worked with had with regards to finding an internship and/or employment. Most of the challenges and difficulties the researcher observed happened more often and were bigger for students with physical disabilities than for students with non-visible disabilities. For example, a student with a hearing impediment was not invited to interview with a marketing company, while a student with attention deficit hyperactive disorder (ADHD) was invited to interview even though this student could not finish, on a timely manner, the test given by the recruiter. A student on a wheelchair could not find a job with an events company, while a student with emotional disabilities was able to get hired by the same company. According to the researcher, the main difference in these two cases, was how the students' disabilities were viewed by the recruiters.

She observed firsthand many instances where a SWPD was overlooked by a recruiter, even if the student was qualified for the job, but because of the visibility of the disability, the student was invisible to the company representative. Given the nature of the researcher's experience and the opportunity to work with so many students for so many years, she opted to take the opportunity to work with students with physical disabilities, as in her mind, they did not have the same opportunities to be seen as regular people, while students with non-visible disabilities can be seen as normal. The

opportunity to undertake this study was not only ideal, but a much desired opportunity to keep doing work that may benefit a larger group of students who are limited by their disabilities rather than by their qualifications when pursuing employment. Her work experience in a higher education institution has allowed the researcher to have an informed perspective on the laws governing the provision of accommodation to students with disabilities at the higher education level, as well as a working knowledge of how accommodations are administered.

In addition, along with her years of experience working as a practitioner in career development services at the site where the proposed research took place, the different positions she held over the years, provided her with knowledge of the practices governing student placement in various fields, as well as some of the challenges experienced by college students with disabilities transitioning into the workforce. These experiences influenced her beliefs about the role of higher education institutions, their employees, and their students, as well as her expectations for each of these stakeholders' involvement in the process of disability and career services and accommodations.

Professionally, the researcher first became interested in the field of higher education career and disability resources centers when she worked in a continuing education program while earning her Master's degree. Prior to that, she had no specific experience in the field of career and disability resources centers. Personally, she has an invisible disability which did not require specific and/or special work preparation programs that would have impacted her interest in the field. However, being disabled herself, allowed the researcher to be not only aware of what disabled students experience,

but her personal situation has through the years, provided her with personal knowledge and the ability to understand and empathize with situations of others in the same group.

Based on Briscoe's (2005) definition of those who are members of an oppressed group, people with disabilities can be considered as the *other*. Due to the invisible, physical nature of her own disability, the researcher conducted this study as someone who does not hold a membership with the *other* whose experiences are being explored, but is rather able to understand and has lived experiences similar to those of the study participants. The purpose of the proposed research was to learn more about the lived experiences of the participants. Ultimately, the researcher's ideological positionality was to study the experiences of SWPDs in order to promote equity and end oppression. The researcher expected that each participant would have a unique experience that was shaped by a variety of factors, one of which was a physical disability. Discourse occurred in a fashion that did not subordinate the participants in relation to the researcher. The researcher wanted to accurately represent the participants' experiences as the *other* (Briscoe, 2005), so in order to do that, she asked each of them to review the interview data prior to analysis and to make changes to it as they felt necessary.

Some beliefs and biases that the researcher held about transition and students with disabilities were acknowledged. For example, the researcher believed that SWPDs were only defined that way because of the existing educational structures and that pedagogy did not best utilize their strengths or ways of thinking and doing. As such, when students were accepted into college, the institution had a responsibility to provide them with support and accommodations. An additional viewpoint the researcher held was that,

while it was ultimately the student's responsibility to request and take advantage of these supports, secondary and higher education institutions had a responsibility to prepare students to become and participate in these processes as self-advocates. During work life transition, the difficulty rests in helping the student move from a system that provides much greater support (high school) into a system that encourages the student to develop into an adult who is able to self-advocate (college). Having stated the above biases and personal assumptions, the researcher was dedicated to conduct her research with an open mind about the direction in which it would take her and the possibilities it may presented.

Fennel and Arnot (2008) describe that researchers must, "unpick their own learnings" (p. 233). This is accomplished through self-awareness, questioning, and reflection that must take place throughout the research process. These processes are also necessary in the course of a phenomenological study, which is double-hermeneutical in nature in that sense-making is occurring by both the researcher and the participants (Smith et al., 2009).

In order to keep her beliefs and biases under check, the researcher enlisted the help of an expert in the career services field and an expert in the students' services area. The researcher conducted a triangulation between two of her peers and herself in order to get honest feedback and worked with one of her dissertation committee members in order to get feedback and to keep her biases under check in order to conduct research that would not lean towards one side or the other, meaning to keep impartial when listening to the participants to be able to report the reflections on the experiences they shared.

Research Question

The purpose of this research study was to explore the unique perspectives of college students with disabilities regarding their experiences in relation to the utilization of work preparation programs, services and/or accommodations as afforded to them by federal law. The research question that guided this inquiry was:

R₁ What are the reflections of students with physical disabilities regarding their experiences requesting and utilizing career preparation programs, services and accommodations provided by their university's career services office to aid in their upcoming transition into the workforce after graduation?

The research question allowed for exploration of the reflections of their lived experiences of college students who physical disabilities, specifically in terms of how they made sense of their transition to the workforce as a student in need of work life preparation programs and/or accommodations. The research participants utilized career and disability offices' services and their experiences utilizing work preparation programs and accommodations were explored.

The research question allowed the researcher to take a deeper look at what information the participants had received at the higher education institution regarding existing work preparation programs and services to meet their needs. Further, this question guided an inquiry into how students made sense of the information they had received. The interview protocol or questionnaire (Appendix F) allowed the participants to describe freely any and all related information as to how they made sense of their interactions with university staff members and the requirement of self-disclose as having

a disability to their university in order to receive accommodations. Themes related to stigma and self-disclosure and nature of their disability were explored. The interview questions allowed the researcher to explore the experiences of the participants in terms of their interactions with staff members at their university's career services office as they sought to utilize existing work preparation programs, services and/or accommodations.

Some of the interview questions (Appendix F) allowed the researcher to identify the results the participants expected to obtain from the use of existing work preparation programs, services and/or accommodations. The review of the literature highlighted that the transition from college and the utilization of existing work preparation programs, services and/or accommodations can be a challenging process for students with disabilities. Collectively, the research question and the interview questions guided the researcher in her exploration of the sense-making of the participants who have experienced this transition into the workforce phenomenon.

Study Context

Study Site

The chosen research site, Florida International University (FIU), is a public university located in the southeastern United States. FIU has about 58,000 students enrolled and identifies itself as Miami's first and only public research university, offering bachelors, masters, and doctoral degrees. FIU's mission: Florida International University is an urban, multi-campus, public research university serving its students and the diverse population of South Florida. We are committed to high-quality teaching, state-of-the-art

research and creative activity, and collaborative engagement with our local and global communities (<http://www.fiu.edu/about-us/vision-mission/index.html>).

Two of the main student resources centers that FIU offers to students are the Disabilities Resources Center and the Career Services Office. Each one of these offices are located at both the Modesto Maidique and the Biscayne campus, the two main campuses of the university.

The Disability Resources Center's (DRC) mission: The DRC's aim is to guide and support students with disabilities throughout their college experience, from transitioning into FIU to graduating from our university, the DRC's goal is to assist in helping you become successful. Serving as the one-stop-shop for your disability service needs, the DRC provides the resources to facilitate a smooth transition to university life. By providing one-on-one consultation throughout your academic journey our DRC staff is a specialized resource for you. The DRC website is just one of the many resources available so that students with disabilities can access all that FIU has to offer throughout our diverse academic community. More information can be found at: <http://studentaffairs.fiu.edu/student-success/disability-resource-center>.

Career Services Office's (CSO) mission: The CSO's highly trained staff is dedicated to helping you make your career dreams a reality. The CSO offers help with resume writing and critique, practice interviews, career transition and assessments, company information sessions and on campus interviews, professional development opportunities, for example: Dress for success, etiquette dinners, coaching opportunities, salary negotiation workshops, networking events, and other special events. More

information above can be found at: [http://studentaffairs \(fiu.edu/student-success/career-services\)](http://studentaffairs(fiu.edu/student-success/career-services))).

Participant Selection

Once the approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) (Appendix A) was received by the major professor and chair of the researcher's dissertation committee, the chair gave the researcher permission to start the study. The researcher proceeded to purposively recruited a homogeneous group of ten participants, based on the guidelines for conducting a phenomenological study provided by Smith et al., (2009), which indicate that the parameters of 'homogeneous' may vary from study to study. With phenomenological analysis, the goal is to develop a homogeneous group of participants "to whom the research question will be meaningful" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 57). Rather than focusing on basic demographic characteristics, the researcher recruited participants who experienced the phenomenon in a similar way.

All of the participants experienced existing information, services and career development and preparation programs from the career and disability resources centers office in order to help them transition into the workforce. The goal was that the student participants were homogenous in that they have lived a common experience (Smith et al., 2009). The recruitment process was a very challenging one. The researcher initially contacted the DRC's directors via email (Appendix B), met with representatives of the Disability Resources Center in order to enlist the DRC's help in recruiting participants. The DRC's representative promoted participation in the study by emailing the students registered in the center, posting information posters about the study with contact

information and details about the study (Appendix C) including information about a \$25 gift card to the campus bookstore to be given as a token of appreciation to all the students who participated and completed the study. The researcher provided the DRC with an information release form (Appendix D) in order to give to interested students who were interested in being contacted by the researcher directly. In order to participate in this study, participants were required to meet the following criteria:

- a. Must be registered at the university disability resources centers and provided documentation of disability to be eligible to receive accommodations.
- b. Must have disabilities that are physical in nature.
- c. Would have sought help to find employment from the career services office.
- d. Must be in their senior year of college, so that they have experienced the need to start the transition into work life, as well as having had the opportunity to engage in the process of requesting or utilizing work preparation programs, services and/or accommodations to pursue employment before finishing school and in order to have a job after graduation.

There was not a high response rate from the students contacted via email nor from those who visited the center, so the researcher proceeded to personally visit both DRC centers, one at the Modesto Maidique Campus and one at the Biscayne Bay Campus and stood inside and outside of the center and talked to any students who stopped by and or went by those centers. Although some of the students who talked to the researcher were interested in participating in the study, the large majority of them were not qualified to participate as they did not meet the study criteria.

After five weeks of daily visits to the DRC centers, the researcher was able to talk to 41 students; 22 of the 41 were interested in the study and six of the 22 students ended up being recruited as they met the criteria to participate in the study. More information about the study participants will be provided in Chapter IV. All six students were originally consented to participate using the IRB approved consent form (Appendix E). One student cancelled her participation before the first interview took place. The interviewing process was then started with the five participants who remained in the group. The researcher started the process with the idea of establishing rapport from the first interaction. Following Seidman's interviewing recommendations (2013), there were three interactions in total between the researcher and the student participants. The first interaction was a short conversation at the DRC to determine whether the interested students met the study criteria. After each student was qualified to participate, he/she was notified in advance about the time and location of the second interview and the researcher confirmed with each student that he or she was comfortable with the arrangements.

Prior to each semi-structured interview, participants were reminded of the research protocol, what they consented to, and their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. Once each participant was qualified, two more interviews (per participant) were planned to be completed. The second interview took place within a couple of days after the first meeting. The researcher attempted to help the participants feel at ease by asking about their stories and sharing her own disability. They went over information on the informed consent form which helped the students understand what the study was all

about and got them comfortable enough to talk freely about how their disability affected their job search, and the nature of the program, service, or accommodation experienced in the university and in particular the office of career services. The third interview took place two weeks after the second one was completed and the transcripts for it were available.

Each interview was transcribed by www.transcriptionpuppy.com an Internet based transcription services company. The third and last interview was an opportunity for the participants to look at the transcripts and make any changes and remove anything that was discussed during the first interview. The participants were also able to elaborate or expand on areas they felt needed more information. At the conclusion of the third interview, the researcher provided each participant a \$25 gift card for the bookstore at any of the FIU campuses, which they seemed happy to receive. The researcher met with each of the participants for at least 75 minutes during each of the three interviews for a total of 3 hours and 45 minutes per person.

The researcher originally wanted to work with at least 10 qualified participants; however, the students' response to participate in the study was very small, both via email and in person. It is important to mention that according to Seidman (2013) it is not unusual to have a relatively small number of participants in a study that requires multiple interactions. Therefore, the researcher decided to work with the six participants who met the inclusion criteria to be part of the study. Having this small number of students in the group provided the research an opportunity for multiple interactions with each of the participants. In addition, according to Crouch and McKensie (2006), a small sample will

facilitate the researcher's close association with the respondents, and enhance the validity of fine-grained, in-depth inquiry in naturalistic settings.

The appropriate documentation of approval of the study (Appendix A), as well as information about the purpose of the study (Appendix E) were provided to the disability resources centers offices. These offices acted as 'gatekeepers' for the study, as the staff provided support for recruitment and access to potential participants (Creswell, 2012). Their participation and role as gatekeeper was particularly important, because information about students with disabilities is typically held in strict confidence (Morningstar et al., 2010). Further, students must self-identify in this office as having a physical disability in order to be eligible to receive accommodations and the DRC had all the records of the students participating in the study.

All communication and interactions with the participants was conducted in a manner that maintained strict confidentiality and protection of their privacy. The researcher used only the contact information provided by the participants. For the participants' convenience all interviews were scheduled at a conference room in the disability resources centers office on the campus chosen by the participant.

The recruitment strategy and criteria for inclusion allowed the researcher to appropriately address her research question. The sample made by five participants allowed the researcher to fully explore the rich nature of the data obtained in a phenomenological study. Further, the sample criteria allowed the researcher to isolate participants who had experienced the same phenomenon with some similarity. For example, including only senior level students acknowledges how the transition into work

life and the utilization of work preparation programs, services and/or accommodations were experienced by students who were in a similar developmental stage in life.

Protection of Human Subjects

The protection of human subjects participating in research studies was a critically important consideration for the researcher. Several steps were taken to provide that a legal and ethical study was conducted with respect to working with human subjects. This researcher conducted a phenomenological study, which involved the personal interviewing of college SWPDs who met the criteria for the study. Paramount to all other efforts and concerns, the researcher followed FIU's (2015) protocol for human subject research protection and its Institutional Review Board.

In this study, it was very important to consider the fact that the participant population may have concerns about privacy, stigma, and sharing their stories as people with disabilities. While the researcher conducted her study at the institution where she is studying, out of respect for these concerns and in keeping with the spirit of FIU's guidelines for the protection of human subjects, she recruited participants with whom she did not have a personal or closely professional relationship. This stimulated the students' ability to be candid and helped eliminate concerns about coercion and undue influence.

The researcher created a participant recruitment protocol for the gatekeeper at the institution (Creswell, 2012) to follow, which allowed them to reach out to students without any appearance of coercion. This protocol consisted of a short description about what the study was about and requested that the interested student signed his/her name authorizing the staff of the university to release their name and contact information to the

researcher. The researcher was able to confirm that the DRC staff used the consent form as they gave her a copy of the two students who signed it. These consent forms made it clear to the students that there was no risk involved, and that students were free to withdraw their participation from the study at any point without any repercussion. The researcher had a plan in place for connecting participants with their institution's career, disability resources centers and/or counseling services offices, in case issues emerge related to disability or interactions with others on campus. The researcher wanted the participants to know they were supported beyond the scope of the study.

Personal interviews gave the participants the opportunity to share their experiences and their stories in a safe, non-threatening environment. Should participants have shared concerns for which the researcher thought they might need additional help, there was a plan in place to connect them with campus support systems. The researcher shared clear information with her participants about the measures she took to protect their privacy. Pseudonyms were used to de-identify each participant and to keep the name of the gatekeeper (Creswell, 2012) at the institution private. All data, both paper and electronic, was kept locked and secured, and was destroyed once it was no longer needed. The researcher made every effort to inform her participants that she was not going to disclose any identifiable information about them to their institution. Since the interview questions might have elicited concerns, or criticism, about the participants' institution, staff, or career and disability resources centers offices, this protection was important for the participants. The researcher wanted the students to feel at ease and comfortable knowing that their needs would not be affected by their participation in the study.

Further, any consent forms included the necessary language to inform student participants of the possible review of documentation that may have include their medical or psychological records.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data Collection

The researcher used Seidman's interview techniques (2006) and the recommendation for three interviews, which were completed as one short-introductory meeting and two semi-structured interviews to last 60 minutes for questions and answers specific to the study. In addition to the interview, the researcher asked the participant to plan on spending some extra time, no more than 30 minutes, for debriefing, planning for next meeting and in reviewing other issues or questions the participant had.

In a semi-structured interview, prepared questions are posed to the participants, but the researcher also has the option of adding additional questions for clarification, depth, and the exploration of themes (Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Seidman, 2006). This interviewing technique is also a good philosophical fit for a phenomenological analysis study, because the act of shaping the interview as it is happening is an example of the double hermeneutical nature of phenomenological analysis (Smith & Osborn, 2008) wherein the researcher is engaged in sense-making even as he or she is studying the sense-making of their participants. The participants' responses during personal interviews are reflections of their own sense-making processes (Smith et al., 2009).

The researcher prepared a list of questions to be used during the interviews (Appendix F) and had the freedom to make changes and add questions as the interviews progressed (Smith et al., 2009), for example, some of the participants talked about their interaction with the DRC staff without being prompted to; therefore, there was no need to ask about it. Interviews were conducted with the use of a small, digital, handheld device to audio record each one, which was later transcribed, reviewed, coded (as noted in the data analysis section below) and analyzed. Participants were informed of the recording protocol in the consent documents provided to them at the beginning of the study and were reminded at the beginning of each interview that they would be recorded.

All participants had a student file in the disability resources centers office, because the researcher only recruited students who had registered with that office. The student files were both paper and electronic as those were the formats used by the institution at the time of the study. These files contained the medical or psychological documentation provided by the student to the university to verify their disability and accommodation needs. These files also contained notes about the students' use of accommodations and interactions with the disability resources centers office as available. Because of confidentiality laws, the researcher could not see the files herself and relied on the DRC staff to confirm that the student was actually registered in the office. She had to rely on the students' reflections on their experiences in college related to their disability and receiving accommodations to gain access to their insights. For example, the majority of the students did not feel comfortable seeking assistance from the CSO because they did not want to be seen as "special cases" who needed extra and/or special attention.

The data gathered in this study was collected in both electronic and paper form. Audio data were downloaded onto a password-protected computer in the researcher's home. A back-up file was created on a flash drive, which was stored in a locked cabinet in the researcher's home. Data in paper form, including interview notes and signed consent forms, were also locked in this cabinet for secure keeping. Paper data were scanned, stored in the researcher's password-protected computer, and backed up into a flash drive. During the data collection process and until the data were destroyed, it was accessible only to the researcher. The data were de-identified in order to protect the confidentiality and privacy of the participants, and the identification key was stored separately from the interviews data in a password-protected electronic folder. Finally, all data were destroyed within a reasonable timeframe after the conclusion of the study.

Data Analysis

Once the data were collected for the study the researcher listened to the recordings multiple times. Interview data were analyzed using an inductive and iterative process, as recommended by Smith et al., (2009), during which the researcher was actively engaged with the data at multiple passes. Smith (2011) describes the importance of this iterative and dynamic process by explaining that "gems" may be found in the data. These "gems" are small pieces of information that hint at greater significance upon first reading, and further analysis of these "gems" ultimately provides great insight into participants' sense-making. This process allowed the researcher to deeply analyze the thick, rich data shared by the participants. First the researcher sent the audio files to www.transcriptionpuppy.com to get them transcribed. Then she listened to the files

herself to corroborate some of the details she had written during the interview. This process allowed her to start the coding process. Even though she did not do the transcription herself due to time constraints, going over the files while she waited for the transcribed information, allowed her to remember the participants' faces and body language as they were during the interview.

For example, one of the participants seemed to be very dissatisfied with the way the University as a whole handles the needs of SWPDs regarding access to more information. "I blame the university [FIU] for not proactively finding better ways to communicate with students regarding other resources outside the DRC to get SWPDs the assistance they should know they need", stated Paula, a study participant.

The researcher continued the analysis by listening to audio recorded interviews, and by reading the interview transcriptions, multiple times. These actions allowed her to conduct a deep process, and begin to make sense of the data. Throughout the listening and reading process, the researcher made note of some of her own first impressions of the data in an attempt to bracket them off for later analysis. It was also an opportunity to start noticing recurring or similar situations among the participants' experiences which later on became themes of the study.

The next step of data analysis was the process of coding or commenting on the interview data. Codes utilized in qualitative data analysis are defined by Miles and Huberman (1994) as "tags or labels for assigning units of meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during a study" (p. 56). The purpose of assigning codes or coding is to help the researcher effectively analyze large amounts of raw, textual data,

engaging in sense-making and discovering connections among the emergent themes (Miles & Huberman, 1994). For example, several recurring comments had to do with

The first cycle of coding was conducted using the in vivo method (Saldana, 2013). This close analysis allows the researcher to carefully and deliberately capture the true essence of the participant's perspective, which will be useful in a phenomenological study (Smith et al., 2009) as that is the primary purpose. For example, all of the participants shared comments about lack of information and communication received from the institution and they equated this lack to their own lack of knowledge and being a disadvantage for SWPDs. Other frequent comments were the desire to be independent and self-sufficient, a desire to be seen as "equal" to non-disabled students, a desire to be seen as individuals nor as their disability, a refusal to be seen as needy or "special" were frequent. One frequent theme mentioned by many of the participants was the issue of stigma. Stigma seemed to be frequently present in the view of participants who had experienced being stigmatized in the past and for whom it was a difficult issue to overcome.

Coding cycles were conducted in order to capture a meaningful description of the participant's experiences, relationships among the data, and emerging themes. Smith et al. (2009) described three types of comments or codes that may be useful in analyzing data in a phenomenological study. *Descriptive* comments focus on the explicit nature of what has been shared by the participants; for example, all of the participants were very familiar with the language of disabilities, accommodations, assistance, stigma, etc. *Linguistic* comments explore potential meaning of the specific language used by the

participants; for example, participants often mentioned wanting to be independent, which was interpreted by the researcher as wanting to be seen as able to take care of themselves.

Finally, *conceptual* comments allowed the researcher to consider potential meanings not explicitly stated by the participants; for example, when several participants mentioned “not wanted to be seen as ‘special’, this gave the researcher the view from the participants’ point about ‘not wanting to be singled out’ or be considered less than or less capable than their peers without disabilities. The researcher utilized these three types of codes as a method for interacting with and interpreting the data on multiple levels of meaning.

Once the researcher processed each participant’s interview data, she examined her notes in detail in order to identify emerging themes within each data set. This stage of analysis allowed the researcher to identify the psychological essence of the data (Smith et al., 2009, p. 92). At this point, the researcher was engaged in an interpretative, double hermeneutic process that required her to make sense of each participant’s sense-making with the goal of understanding the participants’ experiences. Once a chronological list of themes was developed, the researcher analyzed the data to search for connections among the themes. The researcher was able to go from coding to themes based on the repetitive nature of the terms used by the participants. For instance, while noticing the different codes, the participants’ use of language and certain words became thematic to the researcher and said themes gave way to findings (discussed in chapter five). These previously described processes and analysis were completed in full for each of the participant’s interview data. During the final stage of analysis, the researcher integrated

the themes in search of patterns across the participants' experiences that would give her a deeper understanding of the participants' realities.

Data Integrity

According to Newman and Benz (1998), when discussing issues of validity in qualitative research, the criteria of validity has no consensus, so the researcher wanted to use methods that would provide a clear process of showing a true value of the findings. In their text on formulating and conducting a phenomenological research study, Smith et al. (2009) offer up Yardley's assessment guidelines for qualitative research as a method for ensuring quality. *Sensitivity to context* was worked through the careful review of the data and close consideration of each participant's individual lived experiences by carefully listening, paying attention and showing empathy for their specific situations. Further, written descriptions of the data analysis included verbatim comments from the participants to support and clarify the researcher's interpretations.

The researcher established a strong rapport and sense of trust with the participants from the beginning and through the interview process. This rapport was established through incidental contacts needed for scheduling purposes, during the interviews by listening to their stories and sharing her own with the participants. This type of rapport made it easier for the participants to feel at ease, to be open and willing to share most personal, candid and specific examples from their experiences. The iterative nature of the data analysis process also provided the thoroughness of the study. *Transparency* was achieved by providing the participants with all the information about the study, what it was about, why it was being conducted, and how it may offer assistance not only to them

but to other SWPDs *and coherence* was as a phenomenological experience, where the researcher attempted a holistic approach to gather the participants lived experiences.

The researcher meticulously recorded and described each step of the research process, including the multiple iterations of data analysis that occurred. Ultimately, the researcher developed a work that has *impact and importance* by providing an analysis of the participants' experiences that may prove useful to researchers and practitioners in the field of career and disability resources centers. According to Aronson (1995) thematic analysis focuses on identifiable themes and patterns of living and according to Boyatzis (1998) thematic analysis helps researchers open their eyes to the richness of information around them, so the researcher saw thematic analysis as an effective procedure to classify the findings per each research question. For example, in Chapter 4, themes that related to the participants' feelings towards their own condition (stigma, personal bias, etc.) were separated from themes that emerged in relation to university staff, rules, administration responsibility, were put together as it relates to the students' view of who is responsible for doing what for them. These findings were then aggregated into meaningful conclusions in Chapter 5.

Following Russell's (2008) principle of the need for providing the participants with an opportunity to give non-traditional evaluative feedback, the researcher performed member checks by allowing each participant an opportunity to review the interview data for accuracy. This step was also taken in order to allow for member checking, according to Krefting (1991), it is an important process to keep the phenomenon under study in perspective. The researcher offered the transcribed data to the participants by email, on

paper, in person, or read to them in person. The multiple choice of delivery methods facilitated the participants' access to the materials and allowed to choose the one that made them comfortable with the process.

All of the participants had access to the interview transcripts ahead of time from the next interview so that they could have the opportunity to read and check the data produced from each interview. They were also informed that they could change, take out and/or expand on any areas they deemed it necessary. Much to the researchers' surprise, only one of the participants requested to have more details added to her first interview responses.

The researcher employed a peer review process during the study, using Russell's (2008) second principle of improved communication. A member of the doctoral committee played this role by reading the interview questions, suggesting changes to the questions and asking the researcher to explain what was expected from the participant regarding certain questions. Two of the researcher's peers in the doctoral program were willing to assist and hold the researcher accountable by reading the questions and the interviews transcripts to check that the researcher had not missed any important details. Also, the researcher strived to make her biases clear to the reader by explaining in Chapter 3 in the section of the "Role of the Researcher" not only her personal story, but also her motivation to work with the particular group of students she selected to work with. She wanted to present to the participants and to the reader a transparent process so that her motivation, desire and reasons to work on this study would be clear and without question.

Summary of Chapter III

Alexander (2006) argues that educational research endeavors naturally emerge from problems occurring in practice. Further, he indicates that understanding detailed examples of specific cases must precede more quantifiable generalizations about the problem. This conceptualization supports the researcher's line of exploration and research design. As SWPDs transition into work life, they must disclose their disabilities and advocate for themselves if they wish to receive needed accommodations at the higher education level. The purpose of this research was to explore how these students made sense of this process.

This study was qualitative in nature and was conducted as a Phenomenological Analysis as described by Smith et al., (2009). A homogeneous group of participants was chosen at one institution, and data were collected through semi-structured interviews. The data were coded and analyzed for themes, with each participant's story being considered individually. As described by Smith et al. (2009), once each participant's experiences were fully considered, the researcher engaged in the process of analyzing for similarities and differences across participants.

The research design described here was congruent with the overall purpose of the study, as well as the research question guiding the inquiry. The phenomenological analysis framework, which included individual interviewing as a data collection technique, allowed the researcher to explore the richness that was present in each participant's individual story. The goal was to gain a deep understanding of how these participants were making sense of the transition from college into the workforce and the

utilization of work preparation programs, services and/or accommodations. The research design enabled to researcher to achieve this research goal in a manner that protected and respected the participants as valuable human beings who had unique experiences to share.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

As discussed in all previous chapters, the purpose of this study was to investigate the reflections that university students with physical disabilities (CSWPDs) have about their experiences with work preparation programs, services and accommodations in a higher education institution as they transition from college programs into the workforce. There is a gap in the literature regarding this subject matter as well as in the services available for SWPDs being prepared to enter the workforce, this was one of the reasons that prompted the researcher to conduct a study that would help shed light into the needs of this particular student population and said knowledge might assist administrators and practitioners with the preparation of programs and services that will take better care of the SWPDs' needs.

Participants' Stories

The group of five students who participated in the study were either in the first or second semester of their senior academic year. As part of the process of protecting the participants' privacy and confidentiality as promised, their names have been changed and names that each one of the participants chose for themselves were used. In addition, because the particulars of the population under study were rather specific, the researcher was not at liberty of disclosing details about the participants' individual disabilities. The details about a disability that were mentioned in the study were the ones that the participant decided to talk about during any of the interviews.

As described in Chapter 3, the participants were given the opportunity to read the transcripts of each one of their interviews and were encouraged to add or remove any information that they did not want to see published. None of the participants removed any wording related to their disabilities. Every one of the participants shared parts of their personal story. They were all proud of being at the stage in life where they were during the time the study took place. They were satisfied with their academic achievements and delighted to have the opportunity to share their successes, trials, tribulations, and accomplishments. To provide context, Table 1 contains a list of the participants' pseudonyms, the type of visible disabilities they identified as having (the participants were not asked about specific disabilities), and the accommodations they typically utilized.

Before continuing with the participant analysis, it should be understood that for in order to be permitted to utilize accommodations, students are required to provide their professors and any other staff member (as needed) with accommodation letters at the beginning of each term. These letters verify for the professor and/or staff that the student is registered with the DRC, and the list of accommodations that must be provided to that particular student.

Table 1		
<i>Participant Information</i>		
Pseudonyms	Disability type	Accommodations used
Jean Michelle	Wheelchair bound, delayed reflexes <i>Physical visible disability</i>	Wheelchair accessible room, mock interview preparation, resume writing assistance, career counseling
Paula	ADHD, difficulty concentrating and hand tremor due to traumatic brain injury (TBI) caused by car accident	Mock interview preparation, low-distraction room for interviews, resume writing assistance
Karla	Minor paralysis due to Cerebral Palsy, delayed responses, ADD <i>Physical visible disability</i>	Mock interview preparation, low-distraction interview room, resume
Robert	Hearing/speech impediment, use of implanted device <i>Physical visible disability</i>	Low distraction interview room, mock interview preparation, access to online database for company information
Alexis	Head and leg primary tremors <i>Physical invisible disability</i>	Low- distraction interview room, mock interview preparation, resume writing assistance, career counseling

The Case of Jean Michelle

The first participant, Jean Michelle, female, communications major, wheelchair bound, physical visible disability, met with the researcher on Tuesdays, before one of her classes. She was full of energy, eager to participate in the study and share her story. Jean Michelle was the first person in her family to attend college. She did not have a problem sharing that the country she came from did not have the same rules for disabilities as the United States does. She had no experience with accommodations of any kind until she came to live and study in Miami. She remembered how difficult it had been for her growing up trying to be as independent and normal as possible, considering

that her disability limited her mobility and at times, her confidence. Jean Michelle shared how her mother was very supportive of her needs, but also very frank about how important was for Jean Michelle to be aware of the impact her disability would have in everything she did in life, but that should not stop Jean Michelle from pursuing any of the dreams she would have.

The Case of Paula

The second participant, Paula, female, mathematics major, living with difficulty concentrating and hand tremors due to traumatic brain injury caused by accident, physical non-visible disability, was shy at first, but once she felt comfortable, she was able to open up and share her story. Paula met the researcher on Monday mornings, after her first class. Paula did not seem bitter about the car accident that disabled her. She shared how fortunate she felt having survived the car accident. Paula's attitude about living with a disability and completing a college degree was that of being resilient, perseverant, and independent. She stated how she debated about coming back to school after the accident, but realized that not living up to her potential was not going to work for her. She always admired her older sister who graduated college and was always motivating her to make the most out of life regardless of difficult circumstances. Paula's sister died three years after the car accident and Paula felt she owed it to her and to herself to at least attempt to finish what she started. Paula said her family was supportive of her needs and understanding, but did not "baby" her; she was encouraged to do everything she could by herself, and college was not going to be any easier than any other task. Paula's desire to overcome her difficulties and complete her college degree was inspiring to the researcher.

The Case of Karla

Karla, female, political science major, living with minor paralysis due to Cerebral Palsy, physical visible disability, was the study's third participant. Karla met the researcher on Monday afternoons, before one of her classes. Karla was born with a mild form of Cerebral Palsy, a disability that limited her mobility and at times, delayed her responses, but her desire to live a life as normal as possible, was clear to the researcher. Karla's sense of humor and resourcefulness were two of the personality traits that made this participant memorable to the researcher. Karla's stated that her family were always supportive and involved in her life; however, they encouraged her learn to live with her disability rather than to let life pass her by. Karla's view of her circumstances was that of someone who lived to see another day regardless of the difficulties she may encountered. Her college experience was not only challenging, but a bit scary as she did not expect that she would made it this far. Karla said she was scared because she was not sure she could enter the workforce and make it there. College had more support than she thought, but she was sure this was not going to be the case at work. "Anyway", said Karla, "everything I lived so far is icing on the cake, I'll worry about work when I find one that is if I don't get discovered by Hollywood and my life is made into a movie." The researcher admired her ability to laugh and not let her circumstances bother her more than necessary.

The Case of Robert

Robert, male, information science major, living with a hearing/speech impediment and the use of implanted device, physical visible disability, was the first of the two male

participants in the study. A very strong-willed, independent, with an I don't need anyone's help attitude young man whom the researcher did not expect to complete the study, turned out to be a soft-spoken, conscientious and good natured student. Robert was born with a hearing impediment that delayed his ability to develop a normal speech pattern. He was able to receive an intracranial hearing device in his mid-teens and by then, he had formed a barrier between him and the rest of the world. He was helped by his family as much as they could, but being that his parents did not have formal education, it was difficult for them to provide Robert with all the help and information he could have used. He had received assistance up to the time he graduated high school, but was not well prepared for what he would encounter in college. His attitude was initially that of "I don't need anyone's help nor will I seek it", but eventually he realized that the DRC and CSO staff were not trying to tell him what to do, but were there to help him succeed. The researcher was glad that Robert decided to complete the study as his story was of triumph over life difficulties.

The Case of Alexis

Alexis, male, English major, living with head and leg primary tremors, occurring mainly during stressful situations, physical non-visible disability, was not born with the condition and up to the time of the study, doctors had not been able to determine the cause of his tremors. He was getting ready to start a series of clinical studies to try to find not only the cause for a possible cure to the tremors. Alexis started college after taking a year off after high school. He was not sure what he wanted to do with his life, he came from a poor immigrant family whose idea of success was leaving their native land

and making the American dream a reality. Alexis' parents were high school teachers in their homeland, his older sister was a registered nurse and his older brother a physician's assistant.

He remembered suffering from headaches from a very early age and according to him, his family was not overly concerned about this ailment then, but had grown overly protective now that he was in his 20's. Alexis' attitude was that of a cool and collected young man. He was happy about the fact that he could almost say his was a non-visible physical disability, as long as he kept his stress in check, the tremors would remain almost under control, giving him the possibility of concealing his disability. When the researcher asked him why was this important to him, Alexis replied: "because I think that people already see me as having a disability when I speak due to my heavy accent, but being able to not show the actual disability I have, makes me feel like people won't feel sorry about me twice." The researcher understood his situation very well as it was similar to her own, being that she lives with a non-visible physical disability as well.

The stories shared by the participants were rich in detail, moments of courage, difficulties as well as unspoken pride. The lives of these participants had not been easy, but they all found ways to make them better for themselves and their loved ones.

Themes Found in the Analysis of the Data

The analysis of the interview data yielded three major themes and seven corresponding nested themes. The major themes were: 1) Seeking to Fit In, 2) Desiring Credibility and 3) Letting Others In.

Theme #1: Seeking to Fit In

Students who are transitioning from college into the workforce often experience challenges with entering a new environment, developing networking and professional relationships, and making decisions for their life as a working adult. The first major theme that emerged in this study captured the participants' struggles as they made the transition from college into the workforce and from academic into professional life. Identity in this case refers to how each of the participants viewed themselves in the environments they inhabited at various stages of their lives, as well as how these experiences have shaped their expectations for any available support systems within said environments. The researcher found three specific areas which related to identity development. First, the participants' desire to be independent of others played a significant role in how they made decisions regarding the use of career services programs, services and accommodations offered by their higher education institution.

Second, the participants viewed college as a distinctly separate environment that had little to do with any other in terms of accommodations for students with disabilities. Finally, the participants had a desire to experience transitioning from college into the workforce in as much the same manner as possible as students without disabilities. Thus, the three nested themes discussed here are *seeking independence, transitioning between environments, and valuing sameness or being treated equally*.

Subtheme 1. 1: Seeking Independence

The participants viewed the transition from college into the workforce as a turning point in which their role and identity shifted from somewhat dependent youth into

independent adult. They articulated a strong desire to behave independently as they transitioned from college into the workforce. This presented a conflict unique to college SWPDs because, while the participants desired independence as soon to be college graduates, they viewed the use of career services' assistance and/or accommodations to find employment as a form of dependence.

For example, when asked about any expectations she had had about work preparation programs offered prior to entering her senior year in college, Jean Michelle indicated, "I didn't think I needed special assistance or accommodations to find a job. At first, I was thinking I could deal with the internship search on my own." Paula explained that she thought it would be a good idea to find an internship before finishing school so that she would be better prepared for a full-time job upon graduation. She stated that she did not choose to use career services until her second semester as a college senior, because "I was sure I could take care of it myself."

Karla stated: "I had the mindset that I was going into my senior year and I needed to be an independent college student who would soon be graduating." She further indicated her belief upon entering her senior year in college that she needed to "wean [herself] off of any assistance," as a young woman who, referring to the use of accommodations, would have to start thinking herself as a young professional. These participants expressed that they believed they could be successful finding an internship and/or a job while in college without the use any special assistance from the career services office (CSO), as they had not known what was available for them in such office.

The only accommodations Karla had used were academic not psychological or

even physical and she was concerned that any other staff in the university would treat her differently and stated that she “didn’t want my hand held during a job interview.” These comments indicated an aversion to being treated as a dependent person who needs individual guidance in order to accomplish things. Referring to getting accommodations as a senior-year college student, Robert stated that he was happy to be on his own and that, at that point, he “didn’t like any help.” Robert indicated that he did not feel he needed special assistance to enter the professional life of a college graduate and shared the following about his initial contact with the CSO:

“Yeah, the first time the advisor in the DRC told me about career services. I felt as if I was being sent to someone else, that I was a burden. They can help you find an internship or a part-time job if you prefer. And I was like, ‘No, I don’t.’ Still at that point, I very much liked to feel that I’m on my own. I didn’t want any help.”

Robert’s words illustrated a strong desire to do things for and by himself as well as an argument with anyone who tried to help, making him feel that he was not getting to handle things his way. His description also elicits the image of someone who does not like being told what to do, even if that someone may prove helpful to him. This was a depiction of someone attempting to manage independence from persons or entities whom he saw limiting his ability to do what he wanted to do.

Alexis’s understanding about his independence during the transition from college into the workforce is different from some of the other participants’ perspectives. When asked how he viewed his responsibilities in getting assistance finding a job as a college

senior as compared to any time when he needed any other accommodations (academic), Alexis stated:

“As a college senior, things were a whole lot different, since I’m more familiar with what the university offers as assistance for SWPDS and I needed to start making sure I was on top of things. Nobody can do things on my behalf, because I’m an adult, almost a college graduate.”

He was not necessarily *seeking* independence. Rather, he believed that he *had to* act according to his age, but also his status in life. Across participants, the transition from college into the workforce was viewed as one’s transition from academic youth to professional adulthood. The researcher understood that for the participants, accommodations of any kind, especially those provided by “disabilities’ offices” were part of their whole life experience, which should be relegated to the past as something they used but should now “outgrow.” These college students with physical disabilities felt they should leave behind accommodations as tools, as part of their college experience that was not to be taken with them as they moved into their professional life.

Subtheme 1. 2 - Moving Between Academic and Professional Environments

The participants appeared to make sense of college and the workforce as two very different and often unconnected environments. Some of the students stated that they were somewhat unaware of how their physical disabilities would impact their ability to execute some functions in a work or professional setting. This resulted in an initial feeling that, in college, they would have needed and used certain academic accommodations and services, but had not given it much thought as to getting assistance

taking their next step: finding a job or an internship.

Prior to becoming a college senior, Paula thought she wouldn't need extended time and low-distraction environments to complete a job application, as she had needed for class assignments and tests. She explained her mindset at that time by stating:

“Now that I'm a college senior I can't fool myself and think that I will receive the same treatment I got in school. I may not be able to take as much time as I want to complete a job application or take part in a job interview. If anything, it will be worse because, rather than being in a room by myself, I may be in a room with other applicants and everyone is talking and getting me nervous and everything is so stressful. I thought that I could do this by myself, but I am not sure I can.”

Paula's attitude changed when she realized that she needed to be able to do what most of her peers without disabilities could do when seeking employment.

In her mind, Jean Michelle thought she would not need any assistance as a college senior looking for employment because she had no idea what would make a difference for the things she could not do related to her disability. For example, it had been relatively simple to manage her absences in classes, since she did not need accommodations very often, and this was her only point of comparison between academic and professional life. Her mindset shifted after a classmate told her about the typical results for missing a day at an internship and how repeated absences would be a reason for dismissal from the job. This was very different from what Jean Michelle was used to experiencing when she had to be absent from class. Jean Michelle and the other participants in this study were not fully aware of how their physical disabilities might

impact their employability, and this prevented them from being able to make fully informed decisions about whether or not they would use the programs, services and accommodations available for them in the career services office at FIU.

Karla found that being able to manage her time and academic responsibilities was one of her greatest challenges during the first years of college. She had a routine and a set schedule in the beginning of her academic experience, and she expected it to be the same as she entered her senior year in college. Karla stated, “I figured it would be the same thing, but once I become a college senior, my schedule changed massively. It was very difficult to figure out how to manage my time and efforts.” Perhaps exacerbating this transition difficulty, Karla’s parents influenced her view of available support to SWPDS in college as something that she should “look to leave behind, to get used to doing more on her own.” Quoting her parents in regards to academic accommodations and/or services, Karla stated, “You’re not going to have these services in the work place, so you probably should get used to doing things by yourself.” This scenario demonstrated that Karla’s family members and a high school advisor whom she kept in touch with, influenced her knowledge of, and choices about, assistance available to her as a college senior.

Karla’s family and high school academic advisor had the opportunity to provide her with a transitional bridge from high school into college, by giving her guidance on how to receive assistance as a college student. However, the information they provided was incomplete leaving Karla lacking confidence in and awareness about more than

academic accommodations, such as career services and accommodations for her to use as she transitioned from the university into the workforce.

In terms of accommodations, several of the participants viewed the college environment as having very little to do with the work environment. They felt largely uninformed about the availability of programs, services and accommodations for career development while in college and how to go about receiving them. Further, the participants did not hold their disabilities resource center advisor responsible for educating them about receiving career development services and or accommodations in the university. Paula indicated:

“I was the only student that used academic accommodations in most of my classes and I don’t remember the faculty ever mentioning about or any representative from the career services office visiting my classes to inform us about any career development assistance their office could provide. My academic counselor seemed so busy all the time and our meetings were limited to the classes I needed to register for.”

So for her, career development and planning seemed like a long term goal that became something to think about as her academic career was coming to the end. When asked what she would have found helpful prior to entering her senior year, Paula stated:

“I think it would have been extremely helpful if anyone from school had taken the time to inform me about career services and how to go about getting them. This would have been helpful for me to not feel so lost now that I need to start looking for an internship.”

Ultimately, Paula viewed career services work programs, accommodations and services as a low priority for the staff at the disability resource center and for the advisors of her academic program, due to the lack of students who were perceived to need the information and to the overall workload of these staff members. Further, she perceived this as a deficiency in services the university provided and ultimately as a detriment to her.

Robert commented that his academic advisor was “great” but that she didn’t know much about “the next level.” He seemed to believe that it wouldn’t even be possible for the personnel in his academic program to prepare him, because “not everyone goes to work after finishing the university and the staff didn’t seem to be familiar with all career services processes available.” This comment demonstrated Robert’s lack of information about the different services among the offices within the institution, largely due to the fact that these offices are not necessarily connected to each other.

The participants appeared to embrace the notion that the university’s disabilities resource center was responsible for educating students about other programs, services and/or accommodations for SWPDs provided by other offices at FIU. This demonstrates the analogy that the disability resources center (DRC) and the career services office are two silos, near one another but wholly unconnected within the university. The DRC at FIU is responsible for academic accommodations matters and several other offices such as CSO is responsible for other matters that affect students in general. In response to a question about whether or not anyone in their academic program or in the DRC provided them with information about other non-academic accommodations, three participants gave a very quick “no” and a short laugh.

The very notion that academic advising and disabilities center personnel could have given them information about career services while they were in their senior year was viewed as something that would have been helpful, but it did not happen. Another participant's response to that question was to share her thoughts on how FIU provided information to her once she was accepted into the institution with regards to housing, health, and even recreational facilities and that information was very minimum and there was nothing personalized after she started school. She said that she did not receive any information regarding the DRC that she learned about the center when she looked on the university's website. This indicated that the participant held the college responsible for communicating with its students about disability resources centers and about other non-academic accommodations such as psychological assistance and resume writing to name a few. Ultimately, the participants did not view their higher education institution as able, but responsible, for informing and encouraging students with physical disabilities to utilize career services work preparation programs, services and accommodations to prepare them for their transition into the workforce.

Subtheme 1.3 - Valuing Sameness or Being Treated Equally

The participants' responses revealed that they do not see themselves as being very different from their peers who do not have physical disabilities, nor do they want others to see them differently. Rather, they wanted to experience life in much the same way as their peers without physical disabilities. Alexis described his initial feelings when diagnosed with a disability as a child, stating, "It did not feel good. There was always that kind of stigma that stayed with me as being the physically disabled kid." Being

treated differently from others, whether with positive or negative intentions, was not considered desirable. When asked about his decision to register with the DRC in order to receive academic accommodations, Alexis expressed the following:

“I didn’t want to make it seem like I’m using anyone because of my physical disability. I didn’t want to use it to my advantage in any way, I should probably say. Kind of prideful how I didn’t really want to make it seem like I’m taking advantage for that. So I didn’t particularly want to think that I would need help with anything as I looked for a job.”

His comments denote a desire to be seen independent and able to do what he could for himself, in addition, his personal pride was a very important thing for him to save.

The participants did not want to be given better treatment than anyone else and they did not want to be perceived as taking unfair advantage of anyone by utilizing accommodations of any kind. Karla gave a very specific example of what she felt like when needing to deal with academic accommodations and how having to go through the process was difficult, so she could not imagine going through a similar process in order to find employment. For example, she expressed that she was anxious about providing accommodation letters to her professors at the beginning of the semester in which she decided to start using academic accommodations as required by the DRC from any student in need of academic accommodations. When asked to explain what potential reactions from professors caused her apprehension about providing accommodation letters to them, Karla stated the following:

“I suppose they could have taken care of me, which would’ve bothered me just in terms of I didn’t want to be taken care of. I just wanted them to know this was something that I needed to give them and they needed to accommodate for. I didn’t need my hand held. So, I can’t begin to imagine what it would be like to go through something like this with a potential employer.”

While concerns about having her “hand held” evoked her desire for adult independence, her desire to avoid being taken care of also demonstrated that she did not want preferential treatment over other students.

The participants also appreciated the idea of being able to complete their employment search activities in as much the same manner as possible as students who did not have physical disabilities. When asked to describe his best experience interacting with employers in order to get selected for an internship while in college, Robert mentioned that he had no idea how he would go about it, because he had only seen the announcements for internship and career fairs in posters around school, but had not given it any thought as to how soon he would need to start this process. His experiences with the DRC had not been negative, meaning, he mostly found the assistance he needed even if he really did not feel comfortable visiting the center, but when his academic advisor mentioned that he soon needed to start thinking about a job or at least about an internship, he experienced anxiety because he did not want to have to visit any other office. This anxiety, he thought made him being most similar to his peers who do not have physical disabilities as he stated:

“I will be in the same building, at the same time when students without disabilities will be, applying for the same opportunities I will be applying for. Will I be treated the same as what normal students would be, will I be still completing the (job) application with students in my same major? I will still be in the same situation as my non-disabled peers, but will my experience be the same? It may be more like a normal job hunting environment, and I want to experience it the same way everyone else in the university does.”

The importance of sameness is evident in this quote, as Robert repeated the term *same* on six occasions while discussing different elements of the job application experience he would need to take part of. The participant was thinking about applying for employment in the same manner as the students without disabilities.

For Paula, her desire for accommodations was different. She explained that she would prefer for employers to provide her with application accommodations at the recruiter’s location, because then she would be close enough to the recruiter to ask a question if she had one. This demonstrated the value she placed on having access to the same support and assistance as the rest of her peers during employment applications.

The desire for sameness manifested itself as an initial reluctance to utilize academic accommodations for Karla. Explaining her choice not to use accommodations during first year in college, she stated:

“That was sort of what that year was, just ‘I’m going to be an average student.’

So, as I am a college senior now, I would expect to deal with the job hunting in the same way everyone else deals with: on their own. I do not want to make it

more obvious that I have a physical disability, so as much as possible, I will be completing the pursuit of a job like everyone else does, by attending a career fair and applying for a job.”

Karla’s desire was to function as she perceived a typical college student would, avoiding accommodations that would require her to do things differently than her peers. It was very difficult to obtain accommodations without experiencing some sense of *otherness*, and the participants’ responses indicated that it desirable to achieve *sameness or equality* as much as possible.

As students transition from academic youth to professional adulthood and from college into the workforce, they develop a sense of who they are and what their places are within their environments. The participants sought to achieve independence as they moved from the familiar environment of college to the foreign environment of work life and living on their own for the first time. The transition would be made more challenging, in part, because several participants did not have a strong understanding of how their disabilities would impact them in the new setting of a professional life. Further, they were not prepared with information about what their rights and responsibilities were going to be during their senior year in college in terms of receiving career services assistance and accommodations.

Also, while they ultimately determined that they needed career services assistance with work preparation programs and accommodations, and chose to self-identify to their institution as having disabilities, they still had a desire to experience the transition out of college in much the same way as their peers who did not have

disabilities. They desired equal access to employment opportunities, but avoided the notion of having an unfair advantage through special career development accommodations. The participants sought to be viewed as equal members of their university community, valued and respected by both potential employers and peers.

Theme # 2: Desiring Credibility

College seniors with physical disabilities who would utilize career services work preparation programs, services, and/or accommodations may have concerns about how this will reflect upon them as individuals. The second major theme in this study captures the participants' desire to be seen as credible individuals within the context of professional life. The participants sought a rational understanding of their physical disabilities as they also valued respect and trust from others. This was particularly prevalent in regard to working with the notion of receiving accommodations in their search for employment. The participants wanted to be seen as capable in the professional setting, but also trusted that they truly needed accommodations for legitimate reasons. The two nested themes that signify these specific areas of convergence across participants were *seeking understanding from others* and *receiving respect and trust from others*.

Subtheme 2. 1 -Seeking Understanding from Others

The participants expressed in different ways that it would be desirable for peers, university staff and potential employers if possible, to have an intellectual comprehension of issues related to their disabilities. Jean Michelle's own experiences have shaped her perceptions about how her peers who do not have disabilities might view her. She shared, "I'm always curious how they look at it because, now that I have [a physical

disability], I look at things differently. Having a physical disability helps me understand. I can now see from other people's points of view." She had a much greater awareness of the fact that there are many viewpoints different than one's own. Further, she desired for those around her to have that same understanding of her unique viewpoint as a person with a physical disability.

In response to a question regarding how he saw other people's attitudes about his disability, Alexis stated:

"I have a handicap decal for my disability, and there have been several instances where I've had several of my peers say, "Why do you have this?" It's pretty difficult explaining to them that my disability, even though physical, is invisible and so they might not see it all the time. That's the large part of why I do not want to use assistance. I just feel like there's a lot of my peers that just don't understand."

This scenario demonstrated the negative feelings that occurred for Alexis when someone questioned his need for an accommodation, of which he attributed to a lack of understanding about the nature of certain disabilities. Alexis's desire to not use assistance stemmed from these negative experiences and showed that this lack of understanding and perhaps competency on the part of staff members mattered to him.

Some of the participants found their experiences with university staff more difficult when the staff were not entirely familiar with the procedures for providing accommodations. They did not perceive any judgment from the staff, but they were not comfortable being in the position of essentially training that person on what to do in order

to accommodate them. Paula described her experiences with faculty and staff as generally positive, indicating that many of them had been working for the institution for a while and knew what to expect when she approached them about her accommodation needs. Interestingly, she said her best experience was with a staff member who was not familiar with accommodations processes. The way the advisor acted was what made the experience a positive one. After describing her interaction with this new staff, she stated:

“I think the best experience that I’ve had was actually with that advisor, because after I explained it to him, he asked a few questions just to more so understand it. I think, through that, he really understood what I specifically needed and was always very adamant about making sure he was doing everything right. I think that was really helpful.”

Even though this staff member did not start out with full understanding or knowledge of the procedures needed to facilitate the accommodations, the fact that he took the initiative to ask questions and ensure that everything was properly put into place gave Paula the sense that her disability and her needs were understood. Paula clearly appreciated that the advisor sought to learn more and to assist her. The advisor’s handling of the situation diminished the burden on the student to self-advocate, inform, and train the staff member about accommodation processes.

When asked about any other experiences she may have had with professors in order to receive academic accommodations, Karla shared:

“None of them have been poor, I suppose. I only have one professor from last year who was confused by the test proctoring center, because he’d never used it

before, which surprised me. He had to sit down and ask me questions about what needed to be filled out on the form and I was kind of like, “I’m not really sure.” I guess he normally provided a room in the building so that he could go and come in for questions if we had any. I requested to do it in the disability resources center’s testing center, and that’s where he was confused.”

Karla further explained that she had preferred to attend the career fairs when there were not too many students in the room, so that she was not easily distracted. This was related to her physical disability, so she advocated to be accommodated in the setting that was most helpful for her. Karla’s story showed that she perceived it as somewhat negative when she had to explain accommodations procedures to any staff members. So, having to do this with potential employers was a new experience for her, and it made her uncomfortable. All of the staff members with whom Karla interacted had been mostly knowledgeable about accommodations procedures, and this made it easier for her to engage in the process.

When asked about anything she perceived to be barriers to SWPDs getting accommodations, Karla shared as an example, concerns about drug abuse on campus and how it impacted others’ perceptions of her own use of medication. She felt that other students did not understand that her medication is not an advantage but rather something that allows her to function on the same level as a student who does not have a disability. “I know this may not be related to using career services programs, but it makes me think that the use of my medication may be seen as addiction in the job interview.” She

perceived that her use of accommodations was far from others being understanding and made this a more difficult and frustrating endeavor for her.

Paula experienced similar concerns about how others perceived her use of accommodations, for example, when her roommate found out that she took Adderall RX to better manage her ADD and help her concentrate, she immediately asked how could she (the roommate) be registered at the DRC so that she could also take the drug so that she could do better in her classes. The lack of understanding from others has resulted in peers assuming she had an unfair advantage. When asked whether or not she had experienced any type other attitudes from others about her disability, Paula stated:

“Not particularly about the disabilities. I get extra time on exams and sometimes when people don’t know the situation ...because I don’t introduce myself, “Hi, I’m Paula and I have TBI or traumatic brain injury, whatever.” I think sometimes when people would get upset that I had extra time on exams or whatnot [sic] that would be something. But nobody’s ever been like, “We aren’t going to like you or we’re going to judge you because you’re disabled.” As soon as they understand the situation, it makes more sense to them.”

Here, Paula believed that the lack of understanding about why she was receiving accommodations was due to others’ perceptions that she was receiving an unfair advantage. She did not perceive stigmatizing attitudes about disability itself, but attributed stigma to a lack of understanding. It is clear that she desired for others to have an understanding and awareness about her disabilities when she described her experience of registering with the DRC to receive accommodations. She stated:

“They actually understood all of the things that come with my disability, so there was no initial shock or initial, ‘Oh, explain to me what that is.’ The questions that I’m not a big fan of.” She valued the DRC as being *wise* about her disabilities, because she did not enjoy having to educate others about her needs.”

For Paula, feeling understood and not judged made a big difference in the way she perceived the university staff’s attitudes towards her and how she felt about assistance.

When asked about whether or not she has had any exceptionally positive experiences with university staff in order to receive accommodations, Jean Michelle shared the following:

“Yeah. I had a teacher for my Chemistry classes. She was always really sweet. She was like, “Anything that you need, we can do for you. I want to make sure everything is really clear.” She’d take the time to write a paragraph down [on the test scheduling form for the DRC] if she needed to make sure that the rules were clear. She got it done. That was really great.”

In both Karla’s and Jean Michelle’s stories, they valued their professors’ willingness to behave interdependently. Even though all the responsibility for getting accommodations was not placed on the students. Rather, these professors took an active role in order to provide that the students were receiving what they needed. Conversely, Paula described her worst experience with a professor as one in which the professor was not very helpful:

“He was very set in his ways and just wasn’t the most welcoming about getting the letter [describing her accommodations]. He’s one of the professors who was

very anti-laptops, very, “You have exactly five minutes to take this quiz,” etc.

When I gave him the initial paper, he sighed and, not rolled his eyes, but looked away and kind of made a face. Whenever I remind him when it’s a quiz day or an exam day, he just gives me a blank stare and just like, “Okay.” Like I’m inconveniencing him. That’s been the worst.”

In this instance, Paula did not perceive the presence of interdependence in which both she and the professor would give something as part of the relationship. Paula’s comments about this professor also provided insight into how non-verbal behaviors by staff influence how students make sense of these interactions. The professor in this situation never told Paula that he did not want to provide accommodations, he never refused to provide accommodations, and he did not make negative comments about her disabilities; however, his facial expressions, coupled with his general classroom policies, were perceived as non-verbal evidence that he did not like to provide accommodations because they were an inconvenience to him.

Robert also shared an experience he had when interacting with a professor in order to receive exam accommodations, which required the professor to directly accommodate him. Thus, sending Robert to the DRC was not an option. Robert stated:

“I would say that there was one professor that was almost kind of upset that I needed [exam accommodations]. I could definitely tell he wasn’t happy about it. He wasn’t like, “I’m just not going to do that.” He did it, but he wasn’t really happy.”

When asked to explain what made him think the professor was not happy, Robert stated, “Just mannerisms, just if they feel unhappy they get short with you. You know, just [makes a heavy sighing sound] blowing, that sort of attitude. I wasn’t happy either.” Robert share as example, the following interaction with this professor as the worst he had experienced on campus:

“I definitely remember the final exam, the paper version. He’d sit there and watch me to finish it. Because everybody else had already left the room, and this is before the testing center was built. The whole body language, just staring at me the whole extra 30 minutes, just checking his watch. It made me feel kind of judged. I was like, wow, I don’t like this either, but it is what it is.”

Again, a professor’s non-verbal reactions influenced one of the participant’s experiences. While Robert perceived that the professor did not like being inconvenienced, he also felt judged as if the use of accommodations was a negative reflection on him. Further, Robert’s comments indicating that he wasn’t happy either demonstrated a desire to be understood. Robert was not using accommodations because he wished to inconvenience the professor. He would have liked the professor to understand that the accommodation was a necessity and that he was no happier about needing it than the professor was about being required to provide it.

Subtheme 2. 2 - Wanting Respect and Trust from Others

Another subtheme found in the data were *wanting respect and trust from others*. While the participants wanted others to have an understanding of their disabilities and need for accommodations, they also hoped for the absence of judgment related to their

disabilities. They perceived this absence of judgment as respect and trust. Jean Michelle described the impression she initially held about using accommodations in college, citing concerns that others might perceive her negatively and think, “Oh, someone needs accommodations. What’s wrong with them?” When asked about her feelings regarding what other students think of her, she expressed concern about being pitied and perceived as defective, which revealed a desire to be respected as someone whole and capable. She indicated, “I guess [I was concerned] that they think something is wrong with me or that I can’t do things on my own and that I need help. ‘Oh, poor her. She has a disability.’”

In order to be permitted to utilize accommodations, students are required to provide their professors with accommodation letters at the beginning of each term. These letters verify for the professor that the student is registered with the DRC, and they list which accommodations must be provided to that particular student. The participants noted that the need to personally hand these letters to the professors for the first time caused them some apprehension.

Karla stated that, “I felt really anxious giving them the letters the first time, just, I suppose, in terms of how they would react to it.” She perceived that one particular professor was “questioning the realness” of her disability when she provided her accommodation letters. She explained, “It was sort of a how many of these accommodations do you actually need, do you really need the extra time?” She was not denied accommodations, but she felt the professor did not believe her need was legitimate. Karla ultimately chose not to utilize accommodations in that course, stating “I think that was one class I didn’t actually do the testing center for. I just sort of ignored

it.” Ignoring the utilization of her accommodations suggests an avoidance of further interaction with this professor since, to actually schedule exam accommodations, students were required to have the professors fill out an additional form for the DRC.

Based on her comments, it is possible that Karla felt more uncomfortable by the lack of trust she perceived from this professor, because this person held much of the power in their relationship. Students are required to interact with professors in order to schedule and receive accommodations, but that can clearly be a difficult endeavor when a professor, who is ultimately a student’s evaluator, expresses doubt about the integrity of that student’s accommodation needs.

The participants also experienced apprehension about what their professors thought of them as they chose to utilize accommodations. For the two participants who have them, the invisible nature of their disabilities (meaning that their disability is not easily physically seen) played a particularly important role in their sense-making of the experience of interacting with university staff in order to receive accommodations. Speaking about her disability and a previous negative experience she had with a professor, Paula stated, “If [my disability] were more visible, he might be less inclined to not believe me, I suppose. Somebody from the outside who doesn’t understand the situation might not necessarily believe that.” Her statement suggested that she had sensed a lack of trust about the legitimacy of her disability and the credibility of her need for accommodations.

Karla also stated that a professor would be more likely to believe that accommodations are needed for a student with a visible disability than for her. The

professor would have both visual and documented reasons as to why that person has a disability, where all I have is, “Here are some documents that say I have it. I’m not sure how to prove it, but that’s all I have.” Karla’s comments demonstrated that she had felt the need to justify the fact that she had a disability that legitimately required accommodations.

Alexis’s response indicated a divergent perspective about invisible disabilities and how they impact others’ perceptions. Alexis has a physical disability that is invisible in nature. He stated:

“Since my [disability] wasn’t physical until I was under stress, I didn’t really think of it any differently because, to me, even though my disability is determined to be mental (since doctors’ have not been able to find the cause of his tremors) but has physical manifestations and is a whole lot different than a physical disability you can see. I didn’t really perceive any judgment. For me, living with a physical/mental disability, I kind of feel like faculty feel that there’s something wrong with you. Having to take more time with testing or something. I’m not saying I that I know what they think. I just think there might be a stigma that goes to it.”

Alexis’s response indicated that SWPDs were perceived as more credible in the academic environment than those with mental disabilities. He believed that professors viewed students with mental/physical disabilities as more deficient than those with physical disabilities because of how their accommodation needs were situated within the academic context. Alexis sensed that being viewed as having the “right” mental

capabilities was of utmost value in the academic setting and, thus, mental disabilities diminished one's worth within that setting.

Several participants described their positive feelings about situations in which their professors trusted their need for accommodations. Jean Michelle explained that she appreciated the role of the DRC, because they helped legitimize her request for academic accommodations, she said:

“It’s really nice having this office here. It kind of makes it ... official, staff and faculty know. All right. They have something. Here’s the documentation, they don’t need to question it. It is really nice having that official label of the disability there. I only wished they were better connected to other offices such as career services, they would be better in guiding us to use other services we could benefit from. It feels like we don’t get all the assistance we could use.”

All of the participants had decided at some point to register with the DRC and to utilize the accommodations to which they were legally entitled. Along with that choice came the need to interact with university staff members about their status as people with disabilities. The participants with physical invisible disabilities desired to be believed as having legitimate disabilities and a legitimate need for accommodations, which they perceived to be a particular challenge due to the invisible nature of their disabilities.

While they had not experienced being denied their accommodations, they had perceived some isolated incidents of negative judgment from professors, due to non-verbal cues and body language. They had the most optimal experiences with others when they were trusted and respected. Also, the participants felt that wherever a true lack of

understanding about their disabilities and accommodation needs existed, they appreciated when others made an effort to learn and to engage in some of the tasks involved with the accommodations process along with them.

Theme # 3: Letting Others In

All of the participants in this study have had to make decisions about controlling information regarding their disabilities. Utilizing academic accommodations had required them to share some information about why they needed, and were entitled to, accommodations. The third major theme that emerged from this study captured the participants' desire to manage exactly what information about their disabilities was shared and with whom. Several of the participants indicated that it was desirable to be able to conceal the fact that they had a disability, and they had attempted to do so. However, all of the participants had, at some point, chosen to share information about their disabilities with the purpose of seeking help and becoming more interdependent. The two nested themes that signified these specific areas of convergence across participants were *desiring concealment* and *reluctantly embracing interdependence*.

Subtheme 3.1 - Desiring Concealment

Four of the five participants expressed that, at one point in time or another, they wanted to conceal the fact that they had been diagnosed with a disability. This was particularly of note, because students cannot completely conceal this information if they wish to receive academic accommodations in college. When asked about potential barriers to students with disabilities receiving accommodations in college, Karla recalled

that the DRC had an information table set up at the orientation session she attended the summer prior to her first year of college. She stated the following:

“I think it’s also hard for people to go up to the table at orientation, because it’s seen as a beacon, the [DRC]. I don’t think students are going to be like, “Yeah. Let me go over to the disability resources centers table so that others can think there’s something wrong with me.”

Her description of the table as a beacon indicated that going up to the table would be something noticeable to those around her. Being noticed as someone with a disability was not something she desired at that time. Rather, she believed that most students would share her desire to conceal such information at orientation.

When asked about how they, as students with invisible disabilities, felt their experiences in college might compare to someone who had a visible disability, the two participants with the physical, invisible disabilities indicated that they felt more fortunate because they had the option of concealing their disability. Alexis stated the following:

“I probably feel not as bad as they do because a lot of people can’t see my disability compared to those who have an obvious disability like a wheelchair or something else. There are times when I can kind of hide my disability, where they can’t do that. I do think it’s tougher for them.”

Alexis’ comments clearly demonstrate that disability is not something he wants to carry around like a batch and if at all possible, he will hide that he has it. Paula cited a desire to be able to conceal her disability from her peers, stating:

“It can be easier from a social point of view. It’s easier for me not to let fellow students and friends know that I have a physical, invisible disability. It’s obviously more difficult for someone who has a visible one than it is for me as long as I keep it controlled.”

At another point in the interview, Paula also shared that she was a relatively private person who did not like to share her problems with others. She told this story to explain why:

“I’ve told people that I have a traumatic brain injury (TBI) or that I have ADHD and they’ll be like, ‘Oh, can you sit still for five minutes? Or is that why your handshakes?’ After explaining what a TBI does to me other than a mild hand tremor, is more rational than physical, 30 or 40 times, it just gets old after a while.”

Paula had clearly been uncomfortable with being asked to display her disability, and she continued to value the ability to conceal at her discretion. Robert shared similar feelings about those with visible disabilities, stating, “I’d feel bad for them. Just because, you know, mine’s concealed. I only let people know about it if I want to.” Robert explained that his concerns about keeping his disability to himself changed over time as his environment changed. His concerns were alleviated in college, where it was easier to utilize accommodations relatively unnoticed. He stated:

“The social stigma isn’t really relevant here in college. Classes are big and no one really knows. No one really cares or notices if you’re here or there.”

The desire to be private still existed for Robert, which is why he favored the anonymity of college classes.”

The participants’ desire to conceal suggests that they felt the presence of a stigmatizing attitude in society about disabilities. Without any negative societal feelings about disability, there would be no other conceivable reason to hide this information.

Subtheme 3.2 - Reluctantly Embracing Interdependence

All of the participants reluctantly came to embrace interdependent relationships in order to utilize academic accommodations, rather than remaining completely independent. Some made this transition to interdependence very early in college, while others waited longer to make that choice. Two of the participants registered with the DRC at the very beginning of college, because they felt that their parents were requiring them to do so. Jean Michelle described her decision to register with the DRC:

“Actually, it was my mom’s idea. We were at orientation and she saw the [disability resources center] table, and she kind of dragged me over there. She was the one who kind of did the paperwork for that as I didn’t really think I needed accommodations. When I kind of read over what they had, I was like yeah, those are good to have just in case.”

For her, the decision to register with the DRC was made by her mother, not giving Jean Michelle much choice to do anything else.

Robert shared a similar experience when he first registered with the DRC, stating, “Yeah, the first time my mom pretty much brought me in kicking and screaming, doing the whole, ‘You need it.’ And I was like, ‘No, I don’t.’” Jean Michelle’s use of the term

dragged and Robert's use of the phrase *kicking and screaming* elicit the notion of a small child being forced to do something against his or her will. However, while Jean Michelle quite quickly determined that she would utilize accommodations, Robert indicated that, at that point, he "never intended to use them." He ultimately chose to utilize accommodations just a few times during his second year in his program. Later, he chose to fully utilize accommodations for most courses once he began his third year in the program at FIU.

These students sought independence and were both reluctant to register with the DRC for assistance. However, they both ultimately chose to embrace interdependence and accept the accommodations that were available to them because they understood this would ultimately benefit them.

All of the participants who chose to use accommodations cited specific reasons why they eventually made that choice. In all cases, it was an intentional choice made with academic motivations in mind. Jean Michelle explained her motivation for getting accommodations:

"It made sense to have excused absences [accommodation] or having to leave the classroom if I needed to. College is very different than high school, class- wise. If you miss a big test it's not like, "Oh, I can just make this up." It's, "No, you get a zero for that." So it was really important to get these accommodations."

Jean Michelle specifically cited the role of the DRC in her transition into successful college performance. When asked how the CSO helped regarding her transition into the workforce, she stated:

“They really did not help. I wish they had, at least inform me that there is a place where I could be helped if they couldn’t. It would have been easier knowing that the career services office was the place where I could get help or accommodations finding a job. I would like to do that on my own, but what if I was not able to find a job on my own? Then if I knew that there is an office where I could have the necessary work preparation programs or accommodations and that they would facilitate the process, this office [career services] would have been a useful ally in case something does not happen for me.”

She saw accommodations as a safety net that was provided by the DRC, in case the symptoms of her disability caused her to be absent from class. However, when it came to job placement she felt that she was let down as there was not connection for her between the DRC and the CSO. She embraced interdependence because she was willing to do her part to receive accommodations, *and* she was willing to accept help in the process. However, this made her concerned as she said: “I don’t know how anyone will help me find a job when I am so late learning about resources which should have been given to me a long time ago.”

At the time of the interview for this study, Robert was working on his second degree, but his first one at FIU. During his first degree program, he had no choice to use accommodations as he was in another country. Several of the classes were very hard, he said.” When Robert started his degree at FIU he chose to fully utilize his accommodations:

“I made sure to get them, because it was going to be nothing but math and science. That’s just based off why I use them, just when you’re doing Psychology class and Biology, it’s you know or you don’t, versus in Physics or Math, you have to work through the problems and some processing delays or whatnot. For me having attended a school that did not provide accommodations, all I knew was that it would be pretty rough, so anything I could do to maybe make it a little bit easier, I was willing to do.”

In making his decision to use accommodations, Robert relied on his understanding of how his disability impacted him in certain types of courses. His response to a question about the experiences of SWPDS provided insight into his motivation to more fully utilize accommodations. He stated: “For me it’s a want.” Robert believed he could earn that particular college degree without the use of accommodations, but he made a deliberate choice to be accommodated so that he would earn better grades and the resulting higher grade point average.

Two of the participants attempted at least one semester of college without the use of accommodations, and were motivated to begin utilizing them to raise their grades.

Paula stated the following about using accommodations for exams:

“I actually did not register until my second semester of freshman year. I was sure I could take care of it myself, but my grades did suffer from it. I really needed the extra time, the limited distractions, and so I went and registered second semester and my grades went right back up to the top. It’s really been a great tool for me.”

Paula was reluctant to use accommodations until she was motivated by a specific

need that mattered to her. In response to a question about what might have helped her transition more smoothly into college, Paula explained that if she knew someone with disabilities who was about to go to college, she would tell them to use accommodations from the very beginning. She recognized over time that the accommodations were a helpful tool available to students with disabilities.

Karla explained that getting accommodations in college was largely student-initiated, which made it “decently easy to sort of just put it on the side and not really worry about it.” She chose to register with the DRC when she started college, but she didn’t actually use accommodations until after she completed her first year. She stated:

“I failed a class and got a D. I don’t think I got any B’s in my second semester, so I realized something needed to be looked at and reorganized, and surprisingly, after that I basically did a 180.” She explained that her choice not to use accommodations “ended up being a mistake, because I do require help at least with how I learn.”

In addition to utilizing accommodations, Karla began to embrace interdependence in other ways:

“I just sort of started to spend a lot of time in the university’s learning center, in terms of they have a great sort of study area downstairs, and I started seeing they have academic coaches here, which was sort of the same thing as what I had in college, which is sort of to check in and look at my week coming up. It helped organize my thoughts and things that I need to do.”

At this point, Karla realized that some of the same types of assistance she found

useful in high school were also available to her in college. The fact that she was familiar with that type of support, coupled with her desire to earn better grades, was enough motivation for her to move from independence toward interdependence. Karla's response to a question about her perception of the role of the DRC provided insight into how she made sense of the interdependent relationship she had with them.

“Before I put much effort into it, they sort of seemed like they were just okay. ‘You’ve signed your forms, now you’re here, but there’s nothing more that we’re really going to take interest in, in terms of helping you. That’s on you.’ Which I suppose I understand, because we’re adults so it’s the whole “be an adult and figure it out.” But when I did start to take more of an interest in disability resources centers, I realized they were a lot more of, “Here’s this. This would probably be a good idea for you to look into if you want to.” I started looking at emails and so on and so forth. I feel a lot more relaxed when I walk in. They are perfectly happy to accommodate, and it feels more welcoming.”

Karla's perception of the role of the DRC shifted from strictly procedural to more relational, as she took more initiative in seeking assistance. Regarding the fact that students must initiate requests for test accommodations with their professors, Karla stated that it is “fair enough, because you have to show that you actually want to do it.” Karla came to understand that receiving accommodations must be an interactive and interdependent process. She further underscored the value of help-seeking by explaining that she “felt a lot more in control, I suppose, is the best way to put it. I feel a lot more aware of what’s going on for what I need to prepare at the beginning of each semester.”

Summary of Chapter IV

Students with physical, invisible disabilities have an opportunity to conceal the fact that they have disabilities, and the participants in this study clearly valued that. Their stories demonstrated the struggle that they went through to determine whether or not they should utilize accommodations. They had the option to conceal their status as people with disabilities, but they could not do so if they wished to utilize accommodations. The initial wish to be completely independent and to forgo assistance eventually shifted to a desire to behave interdependently and receive accommodations. This shift was highly driven by the participants' academic concerns, and in each case the decision was intentionally and carefully made. The participants perceived the DRC as helpful in its role of ensuring that students with disabilities were properly accommodated.

The purpose of this study was to investigate how senior college students with physical disabilities experienced the transition into the workforce, particularly in terms of requesting and utilizing work preparation programs, services and/or accommodations provided by the university. A close analysis of the interview data yielded several insights into how the participants had experienced, and made sense of, their own transition journeys. The participants initially desired independence as a hallmark of leaving college and entering the workforce as an adult, and this included a reluctance to utilize accommodations related to their disabilities. However, these participants ultimately would have chosen to use assistance available from the career services office because they viewed them as necessary to help them achieve their professional goals.

The participants perceived that the university nor their respective programs did not provide them with information about the transition to the workforce and the use of career services work preparation programs, services and/or accommodations. They did not receive general information about their rights and responsibilities in pursuing assistance from any office, nor were they provided with individualized information to help them understand how their disabilities might affect them with their pursuit of employment and what accommodation they would need. The participants perceived the support offices were responsible for, but ill-equipped to provide this information.

While most of the participants would have preferred to conceal the fact that they had disabilities, they understood the need to self-disclose this information to their university's DRC in order to receive accommodations. Overall, they all perceived the DRC as helpful to them in their pursuit of accommodations. The participants still sought to experience college in as typical a manner as possible, which sometimes resulted in a preference to receive their accommodations directly from their professors.

The participants' interactions with professors and other university staff members influenced their experiences with receiving accommodations. They identified as their best experiences those in which they felt their professors trusted and respected their need for accommodations. It was important to them that their professors believed that they had a legitimate disability and need for accommodations, which they perceived as a possible challenge due to the invisible nature of their disabilities. None of the participants had been denied accommodations by their professors, but they did recount some negative feelings when they perceived judgment from professors in the form of

non-verbal cues and body language. They also had concerns that abuse of accommodations by their peers could result in their own accommodation needs being doubted by professors.

The participants valued the professors' willingness to take time to understand their accommodation needs and how the faculty members did more than was minimally required in order to assist the participants to be properly accommodated. Ultimately, the participants wanted to be perceived as highly competent students who are equally capable of mastering the university environment.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

The purpose of this research study was to examine the reflections about the unique experiences of college students with physical disabilities as they prepared to transition into the workforce, particularly in terms of requesting and utilizing work preparation programs, services and/or accommodations available at their higher education institution. The researcher employed phenomenological interviewing, which enabled her to deeply explore the participants' sense-making of the phenomena they had experienced.

The three major themes that emerged through a close analysis of the data were 1) Seeking to fit in, 2) desiring credibility, and 3) Letting others in. This chapter begins with a discussion of the findings related to each superordinate theme and its position within current literature. The researcher then discusses the implications of these findings in the practical setting, with a focus on enhancing the workforce transition experience for students with physical disabilities. Suggestions for improving practice at both the secondary and postsecondary levels are included, as students are influenced at multiple points in the transition process. Finally, this chapter concludes with recommendations for future research on how the transition into the workforce might be experienced by students with physical and other disabilities who have different characteristics than the participants in this study.

Thematic Highlights

For the participants in this study, the phenomenon of transitioning into the workforce would have occurred in the senior year of college. At the time of their interviews, they were all senior college students who had been thinking about their future as soon to be professional adults. At the beginning of their academic career they had desired independence from accommodations as a hallmark of adulthood, yet several of them chose to register with the DRC at the behest of their parents. This demonstrated the identity shift and dissonance that was occurring within the participants as they transition from college into the workforce, as well as highlighting the uniqueness of the transition to professional life for SWPDs who must make the decision whether or not to utilize work preparation programs, services and/or accommodations.

The transition to the workforce and the dilemma about whether to utilize accommodations were influenced by the participants' stage in life and the development of their identity. In his work on identity development, Erik Erikson (1968) framed this stage of life as the leaving behind of youth and the beginning of adulthood. In particular, he described youth as a period during which people tackle questions about their own identity and their role in society. They eventually move away from earlier familial attachments and attempt to define their sense of self. As stated by each one of the study participants, they all wanted to become more independent and do things that would "match" their current life stage. Whether it was using accommodations, becoming more mature in their decision making, or using career services to plan and find employment, the young men and women in the study found themselves being more in charge of their decisions and

able to determine by themselves what they needed to do in order to move forward not only in college, but as they entered a new stage in life: the workforce.

According to Erikson (1968), one moves through various stages of identity development, and development itself occurs as one reaches psychological *crises*. *Crises* were described by Erikson as points at which one's social environment changes and a dissonance between one's internal being and one's social environment exists. The transition to work life can be viewed as a time of *crisis* for college seniors as they move from one environment to another and are expected to seek increasing independence. As students experience this *crisis*, they are developing a sense of who they are and what role they and others play within their social environment.

Marcia's (1966) work built upon Erikson's original notion of developmental stages, and he described four identity statuses to describe how those in late adolescence experience their *crises* stages. The participants in the study initially experienced the transition into the workforce situated in Marcia's *moratorium (crisis/no commitment)* status. According to Marcia, those experiencing the *moratorium (crisis/no commitment)* status are just beginning to genuinely question those who have had authority over them, but they have not fully realized, nor achieved, commitment to their own identities (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010). Some of the participants in the study were in disagreement with their parents and even college staff about their need for any accommodations and they wished to distance themselves from accommodations as history. Most of these now senior college students resisted utilizing academic accommodations when they entered college, and this was perhaps a reason why they did

not see the need to use the work preparation programs, services and/or accommodations offered by the CSO at FIU.

While students with physical disabilities were transitioning to the workforce were seeking independence, they were also concerned with how others viewed them as they moved from academia towards professional life or from youth to adulthood (Evans et al., 2010). This presented a unique challenge for SWPDs who, as a result of sharing traits with those of a historically oppressed group, might identify as having an *otherness*. Specific to disability and accommodations of any kind, the participants in this study desired sameness in that they wanted to experience their transition from college into the workforce in as much the same manner as their peers without disabilities. They wanted to blend in by being treated the way they perceived a typical student would be treated and by doing things in the same ways as everyone else.

This desire for sameness was initially a barrier to seeking the use of work preparation programs, services and/or accommodations by the participants, and the existing literature has shown that avoidance of utilizing needed accommodations may prolong the adaptation to college but also to other environments for SWPDs (Adams & Proctor, 2010). Several of the participants in the study ultimately chose to use accommodations only because they had experienced academic difficulties in college and subsequently saw a need for work preparation programs, services and accommodations in order to achieve their career goals. The participants came to prioritize their professional career goals above their desire for sameness.

While the participants' desire for sameness could be partly attributed to their psychosocial development, the role of the stigma of disability was also important. In his work on social stigma, Goffman (1963) explained that the obtrusiveness of a stigmatizing attribute influences how the stigmatized person is perceived. Subsequent researchers have found that college students with disabilities might delay using accommodations due to concerns about stigma (Bolt et al., 2011; Fier & Brzezinski, 2010; Marshak et al., 2010). In the study, the desire for sameness reflected the participants' concerns about social stigma, which initially manifested as a reluctance to use accommodations at all. Due to the physical nature of their invisible disabilities, two of the participants were *discreditable* in that they had the option of concealing their disabilities in order to control information about their status as people with a physical disability. Initially, all of the participants made the decision to disclose their disabilities and use academic accommodations and at the time of this study, once they were informed about career development services and accommodations, decided to use career services as well. It was clear to the participants that a lack of barriers during the utilization of accommodations was desired, and the participants felt that they could achieve this through sameness.

The participants in the study viewed college and the workforce as two silos that were relatively unconnected to one another. Further, they initially viewed their own roles within the two environments as unconnected. While in college, they felt that they received very little information about their rights and responsibilities in terms of receiving career development assistance and accommodations to enter the workforce and, upon reflection, most view that as the responsibility of their academic advisors and the

DRC in FIU. In some cases, the students were told that they would not have the same kind of assistance in the university as they had in high school, and that they would need to be completely independent. According to the students' interpretation of the statement above, they did not realize that they were supposed to be more actively involved in the pursuit of any needed accommodations. That was one of the changes for the participants that took place early in college, that although the institution does offer assistance, it is the student's responsibility to seek it. This lack of awareness influenced how the participants experienced the transition from college into the workforce in terms of their ability to self-advocate in order to receive career services accommodations.

According to Adams and Proctor (2010), self-advocacy skills include the ability to understand one's strengths, one's weaknesses, one's rights as a citizen, along with the ability to communicate effectively about such matters. According to the participants in the study, they were not provided with information about how their specific disabilities might impact their pursuit of employment activities while in college, which in turn hindered their ability to make fully informed decisions about utilizing work preparation programs, services, and/or accommodation available at the CSO. This finding is similar to past research, which has indicated that students were not receiving enough information in college (Li et al., 2009; Thoma & Getzel, 2005). Further, if students view college and the workforce as two unconnected environments, they are not likely to communicate the expectation of this type of work preparation in college.

The literature has supported three major differences in the laws governing accommodations for college, which could make the transition from one level to the next

difficult for students with disabilities. These differences are: 1) documentation requirements (Madaus & Shaw, 2004), 2) reasonableness of certain accommodations (Bolt et al., 2011), and 3) requirement for students to initiate and drive accommodations processes (Garrison-Wade & Lehmann, 2009).

Theme #1: Seeking to Fit In

The experiences of the participants in the study diverged from the existing literature on these particular legal differences. For example, documentation requirements and reasonableness of accommodations were not direct barriers to the utilization of accommodations in the study. None of the participants expressed that they had difficulty procuring the required documentation of their disabilities, nor any hesitancy at being required to provide such to their university's DRC. Further, the participants did not express any concerns about the types of academic accommodations they received in college, including concerns about not being able to get career services accommodation as they did not know they could have received it in college. Overall, they reported that their university's DRC was very helpful to them in providing academic accommodations.

This report supports the existing literature, which reported that the quality of the interactions between students and their DRCs can impact students' choices about use of accommodations (Garrison-Wade & Lehmann, 2009; Lindstrom et al., 2009). Once the participants in the study determined that they wanted to receive accommodations, they did not perceive the process as being overly cumbersome or difficult. However, the participants perceived the lack of career services information as a barrier to start their internship and/or employment search earlier than during their senior year.

The participants felt that they had been missing on the opportunities to start their professional transition due to the lack of information about the career development resources they could have used before this particular study. The fact that students were primarily responsible for requesting accommodations in college, and for following any related procedures, appeared to have been a barrier to the utilization of work programs, services and accommodations for the participants in this study. The participants considered this lack of information to have caused a major delay on their transition into the workforce. They felt that they failed to use work preparation programs and services early enough during at least their junior year in college as a result of being unaware that they had to request to do so.

They all expressed concerns that if they had been informed that they were required to initiate and drive the process, they would have done so earlier in order to learn how to navigate the search for employment. Most of the participants expressed an understanding that the responsibility should be theirs as adult college students, but they would have taken action sooner rather than later when the time to graduate is close to the time when they would like to start a job.

Conversely, the need for the participants to drive the process was not necessarily the root cause for the choice not to use accommodations; the need to know how to go about starting said process was. In addition, lack of awareness about how their disabilities might impact their success in a job search setting was a big barrier to the utilization of work preparation programs, services, and accommodations for the participants in this study. Previous research has found that being able to self-advocate for

one's needs is crucial in receiving accommodations in college (Hadley, 2006), and it is difficult to achieve this without a strong understanding of why one needs to advocate and for what one needs to advocate.

As senior college students who were moving into professional lives, the participants in this study experienced identity development in their transition to the workforce and ultimately their decision to utilize work preparation programs, services, and accommodations. They were largely reluctant to use accommodations early in college because they wanted to be independent adults, and they did not want to be perceived as different from their peers. As they were preparing to transition from college into the workforce, the participants viewed accommodations as leftovers from college and as a form of dependence. They initially avoided using accommodations in an effort to be independent adults who were viewed the same as their peers without disabilities. Most of the participants desired this sameness and, as SWPDs, they perceived that they could more effectively conceal their disabilities if they did not use accommodations.

While in college, the participants in this study received very little information to prepare them for utilizing work preparation programs, services and/or accommodations while in college. The participants were also not prepared with information about how their disabilities might impact their ability to participate in an employment search setting, nor how to advocate for their needs as persons with physical disabilities. They held their academic advisors, DRC and CSO in FIU responsible for providing this information.

The participants viewed college and the workforce as two unconnected environments, and they did not know what to expect in relation of how one influences the

other. The participants' psychosocial development, coupled with the perception of disability-related stigma, influenced how they viewed themselves as they transitioned from college into the workforce. They desired independence and sameness and, as they experienced the transition from college into the workforce, they were not aware how work preparation programs, services and/or accommodations might assist them in that new setting.

Theme #2: Desiring Credibility

Research has shown that relationships with peers and university staff receptiveness to provide accommodations both heavily influenced students' ability to integrate into college (Enright et al., 1996). The participants in the study sought to be perceived by their peers and university staff as capable individuals who had credibility as college students and people with legitimate disabilities and accommodation needs.

The study participants found it helpful when others had a rational understanding of their disability and accommodation needs, and they further appreciated when others sought to deepen their own understanding. Several of the participants actually noted some discomfort when they experienced a need to educate others about their disabilities or need for accommodations of any kind. This occurred with both peers, faculty, and university staff members. While the participants often felt no judgment from others, they did perceive a lack of understanding and knowledge about what they were experiencing as people with disabilities.

The participants sought rational understanding in several ways. They expressed a desire for others to understand what it was like to have a disability, which would lessen

misconceptions about their experiences and their needs. The participants thought that this was particularly important, because their disabilities were perhaps not easily understood. When others did not have a strong understanding of the participants' experiences, they felt the need to educate them. It was most uncomfortable when this had to occur with professors and staff during the process of arranging academic accommodations. This supports the researchers' findings that some university staff lack knowledge about disabilities and are unaware of the legal implications inherent in the provision of accommodations, making the utilization of accommodations more difficult for students (Bolt et al., 2011; Bento, 1996).

The findings of the study add to the literature a deeper understanding of how students experience the use of accommodations when encountering faculty and staff who do not possess adequate knowledge about disabilities and accommodations. Goffman (1963) described the *wise* in terms of social stigma and those who possess stigmatizing attributes. He explained that there are those who do not possess a certain stigmatizing attribute yet have an understanding of those who do. Several of the participants in this study perceived their university's DRC as one such *wise* entity. They perceived the DRC as a place they could go to provide documentation of their disability one time, so that they did not have to repeatedly explain their needs to every professor. Further, the participants appreciated that registering with the DRC was relatively easy, because they already had a strong general understanding of all types of disabilities and what related academic accommodations might be needed.

The participants in the study sought more than just a rational understanding of their disabilities. They also desired an affective understanding, manifested as trust in them and respect for them from others. This finding emerged most readily as the participants shared their perspectives on interacting with university staff members in order to receive accommodations.

The participants in this study all had physical disabilities; two of them physical, invisible disabilities and they cited concerns about being trusted because of this lack of visibility. This finding supports Dowrick et al.'s (2005) notion that staff's doubt about students' need for accommodations was most prevalent when the students' disabilities were not readily apparent. Whether or not doubt was actually present, both the current findings and previous research support the notion that students with invisible disabilities have concerns about being believed in terms of their disabilities and accommodation needs (Adams & Proctor, 2010; Marshak et al., 2010). The participants appreciated when university staff took an active role in the accommodations process in order to ensure that the students had everything they needed. These findings support existing research showing that university staff influence the college experiences of students with disabilities who are attempting to utilize accommodations of any kind.

Interestingly, some of the participants expressed concerns about being stigmatized by their peers who held misconceptions about people with disabilities in general. This may appear to be in contrast to previous researchers' notions that a power differential must be present in order for stigmatization to occur. Perhaps the participants' concerns about how others saw them allowed their peers to have influence or power over how they

felt. Goffman's (1963) description of the *wise* not only referred to those who were knowledgeable about one's stigmatizing attribute, but also to those who were sympathetic to one's situation. Here again, the university's DRC filled the role of the *wise* for the participants in this study. Providing documentation to that one entity was perceived as an opportunity to legitimize their need for accommodations in one simple step. As the generator of accommodation forms, the DRC was perceived as having credibility with university staff, which, in turn, made credible the participants' need for accommodations.

Two of the participants in the study had disabilities that were invisible, and these participants had concerns about being viewed as inferior in an academic setting. They perceived a connection between their type of disability and how it might be viewed by professors who valued students' ability to think critically and solve problems. The participants' perceptions reflect a concern that their professors promote the *medical concept of disability*, as described by Danforth (2008) and Lekan (2009). The *medical concept* frames disability as a deficit within the individual. If the participants believed that university staff simply saw disability as a social construct, then perhaps they would not have had concerns about encountering stigmatizing attitudes.

None of the participants in this study had been flatly denied accommodations by anyone at their institution. However, several participants shared stories about interactions with university staff that they perceived as negative. The participants' responses demonstrated the influence that professors' non-verbal communication had on them as they sought accommodations. According to Dynel (2011), people are always communicating, intentionally or not, and non-verbal signals are a key part of

communication. Several of the participants in this study perceived a lack of trust or respect related to their disabilities or accommodations as a result of non-verbal communication from professors. The participants' concerns about being stigmatized by professors and peers support Hartley's (2010) assertion that perceived stigma and faculty doubt about the legitimacy of the need for accommodations can make using accommodations more difficult for students. Overall, much of what the participants shared about their experiences were stories about interactions they had had with professors, which is congruent with Hong et al.'s (2011) assertion that faculty are at the center of the academic accommodations experience for students with disabilities.

Theme #3: Letting Others In

The participants in this study all had physical disabilities, but for two of them not readily apparent to others. As such, these two individuals had to make a choice about sharing information about their disabilities with others. The participants' decisions about controlling information manifested in two key ways. First, the two participants appreciated the fact that they had the option of concealing their disabilities, and they had desired to do so at one point or another. Second, they too reluctantly came to disclose their disabilities and embrace interdependence in order to utilize accommodations and reach their academic goals.

Limitation: The students who volunteered, may be more positive than they appear to be, but they were not at the time of the interviews. The researcher wanted to make the point that participants' voices were loud and clear and one example was the student's quote: "the university has not made preparations for us, students with disabilities because

we are not expected to graduate.” This is a clear example of how and why the SWPDs’ voice needs to be heard.

In congruence with the laws governing accommodations in college, the participants had to disclose their disabilities if they wanted to utilize the accommodations to which they were entitled (Barnard-Brak et al., 2009; DaDeppo, 2009; Gil, 2007). The need to disclose one’s disability is a barrier to using accommodations in college because students may have concerns about stigmatizing attitudes from their professors and their peers.

The participants were leaving behind the college environment, where they were not necessarily required to participate in the accommodations process. They clearly appreciated the fact that they had the option of concealing their disabilities in the college environment, so it was a challenging decision to take the step of self-disclosure. While the participants initially avoided using accommodations, in part because they wanted to be independent, they also believed that stigma existed and they wanted to avoid being stigmatized.

The participants in the study experienced a developmental shift as they transitioned from regular student to college senior. Upon transition, they embraced the notion that they needed to be autonomous and independent adults, and the use of accommodations would be a dependent act. However, after they experienced the first years of college, they began to shift toward accepting assistance and accommodations.

Chickering and Reisser (1993) used seven vectors to explain how students develop as they experience college. The vector *moving from autonomy toward*

interdependence recognizes that students initially desire independence as they transition from young adult to adulthood. However, they come to appreciate their own interconnectedness with those around them and begin to value an interdependence that allows them to assist others and to receive assistance from others.

Several of the participants initially felt forced by their parents to register with the university's DRC, so that they could utilize accommodations. However, they chose not to follow through and use accommodations initially because of concerns about stigma and a desire for autonomy. The participants were able to make this choice because using accommodations is highly student-driven in college. Then, as they progressed through their college classes, they determined that they needed to use accommodations in order to reach their academic goals. They began taking responsibility for their own goals, and to engage in self-directed behaviors in order to achieve them.

The participants became less concerned with how others would perceive them and with being completely independent, which Chickering and Reisser (1993) described as hallmarks of the vector, *moving from autonomy toward interdependence*. It was interesting to note that the participants with physical, invisible disabilities were more reluctant to utilize accommodations than were the participants with physical impairments, which could be related to the context in which they were operating. Perhaps the participants with physical, invisible disabilities had greater concerns about stigmatizing attitudes toward their particular differences and how they may be perceived in an academic environment.

It is important to recognize that these participants did not become dependent beings once they started utilizing accommodations. Rather, they engaged in an interactive process with the DRC. They wanted academic accommodations, but they embraced their role as initiators and drivers of the process. They accepted responsibility and the need to play an active role in receiving said accommodations. Chickering and Reisser (1993) backed the notion that college affects students' development. The environment and events that students encounter influence how and when students will develop. Overall, the participants in the study had positive impressions of their university's DRC and of most of their professors and other university staff. These positive interactions made it more tolerable for the participants to share information about themselves in an effort to receive academic accommodations. They also developed the traits of interdependence as they came to value their long-term academic goals over their ability to conceal their disabilities. Ultimately, the participants' choices about controlling information changed as they experienced college.

Recommendations for Practice

The available research on the work force transition for SWPDs includes recommended practices for disability resources centers providers at the secondary and higher education levels. Jenlink (2005) described the scholar-practitioner as transformative intellectual, explaining that someone in that role seeks to utilize theoretical findings to improve practice, always viewing current practices through new lenses. One of the goals that the researcher had for this study was to provide new insight into how students with disabilities experience college transition into the workforce by

utilizing work preparation programs, services and/or accommodations, so that the findings could influence current practices in disability and career development services.

The recommendations included here encompass practices at both the disabilities resource Center (DRC) and the career services office (CSO). Many stakeholders may benefit from the research findings, including students with disabilities, students' families, disability resources centers, career services offices, faculty members, and higher education administrators. The researchers' recommendations for practical implementation are:

- 1) Transition planning must take place as early as the middle school years, so that students with disabilities who are interested in attending college may be educated about the changes they will encounter in a higher education institution.
- 2) It is suggested that secondary educators be trained with an awareness of what will be expected of students with disabilities in college, as well as in methods for teaching students the skills needed to be successful at the higher education level, which may be accomplished through in-service trainings and professional development opportunities (Adams & Proctor, 2010; Morrison et al., 2009), collaboration and communication with higher education disability resources centers offices (Fier & Brzezinski, 2010; Garrison-Wade & Lehmann, 2009).
- 3) The participants perceived that they had received very little, if any, information about available career development, work preparation programs, services and/or accommodations. In order to increase the possibility that students with disabilities will choose to use all the accommodations to which they are legally entitled, it is

important for them to receive related information at multiple points in time. This will allow students to become informed as they develop throughout the process of progressing in college. The experience of college in general changes students, and practitioners must be willing to reach out to them at more than one point throughout that development process.

4) Students with disabilities and their families, would benefit from learning more about all types of college accommodations as early as possible while they are early in college. Essential information should include:

- a) Differences between receiving academic and workforce transition accommodations,
- b) Typical requirements for registering with a college DRC, and
- c) Information about each student's disability and how that disability might impact performance in job search settings.

5) Secondary educators have an opportunity to give student information as part of transition planning under the auspices of IDEA. While students entering college may not yet be receptive to using accommodations of any kind, early information will, at least, make them aware of assistance available to them at any stage of their academic career. To help the transition process, secondary educators may partner with higher education advisors to better inform students about differences to expect in college and how they may be impacted based on their disability (Fier & Brzezinski, 2010).

6) Students may also benefit from opportunities to practice some of the skills that will help them as college students, including time management, study strategies, and

organization skills (Fier & Brzezinski; Morningstar et al., 2010; Garrison-Wade & Lehmann, 2009). In their study of academically successful college students with disabilities, Anctil, Ishikawa, and Scott (2008) suggested that conflict resolution training that is specific to the process of requesting accommodations would be useful at the secondary level and further on.

7) There are general skills and information that can be discussed with all college students. A key area to address would be the concept of interdependence. While secondary educators and families may believe they are helping students by telling them that they must be highly independent in college, students may not understand that there is a great deal of assistance available to them at most higher education institutions. Teaching students about available, might encourage them to seek and utilize the accommodations and services available in many areas other than the traditional academic ones.

8) Collins and Mowbray (2005) discovered that university disability resources centers personnel found it particularly challenging to reach out and offer support to students with physical invisible disabilities. The two participants in this study with physical, invisible disabilities reported a desire to conceal their disabilities as much as possible, which made it more difficult to visit the DRC to request accommodations. According to all of the participants, the office reached out via an email as incoming first-year students and by having an information table at all orientation sessions.

9) The participants were barely aware of the existence of the DRC as they entered the university. By reaching out to all new students via email, the DRC may have

been able to make its existence and purpose known in a relatively unobtrusive manner, but only if the attempts to reach out had been multiple. Students reported in the research that they were completely unaware that many services, including accommodations available to them in college (Garrison-Wade, 2012), so contacting all students prior to entering college or at the very beginning of their academic career in some manner, would be a good standard practice for higher education institutions.

10) The findings of the study suggest that students may not be ready to utilize any kind of accommodations immediately upon entering college. However, once students experience college classes, they have additional context for understanding their needs and making informed decisions about whether or not to use accommodations. The DRCs must be prepared to disseminate information to students beyond orientation and students' first semesters. Multiple forms of communication may allow students access to information at a point where they are developmentally ready to receive it and respond to it. DRC may accomplish this through email notifications, representation at campus events, collaboration with other campus offices that assist academically and generally distressed students, and by encouraging professors to mention disability resources centers as well as other services in class and syllabi.

11) In addition to the DRCs involvement in the lives of students with disabilities, it would be advisable for the CSO to team with the DRCs in order to create a bridge between the two resources centers. It is understood that CSWPDS may not be interested in learning about finding a job during the first semesters, even first years

of college, but it would be good practice to get the students with disabilities aware of the career development programs available to them as they become more comfortable with their college experience.

12) It is necessary that the CSO and DRC create an environment where information is not only readily available, but so are counseling and guidance in anticipation of the future, may provide a significant difference in the way students with disabilities value the utilization of all types of accommodations.

13) To further assist with the transition process, career and disability resources centers staff can begin to have conversations with parents about how their roles will change at the higher education level (Fier & Brzezinski; Morningstar et al.; Shaw, 2009), this way they too are better prepared to handle the transition and become partners in preparing their students with disabilities for self-advocacy and ownership in the accommodations process. As Smith et al. (2002) stated, parents must not “promote [an] image of powerlessness and dependence on others” within their student (p. 503).

14) The literature also suggested practices that allow higher education disability and career service offices to support a more positive transition for students. The staff in these units must attempt to create a positive atmosphere that is warm, welcoming, and helpful. This would allow SWPDs to attach a more positive association to the utilization of accommodations (Barnard-Brak et al., 2009).

15) Students with disabilities also reported that networking and mentoring relationships were integral to their academic success in college (Garrison-Wade,

2012). This could entail relationships with peers, faculty, staff, potential employers and community members; facilitating interactions outside the classroom and the DRC locations.

16) Interpersonal communication is clearly important to students with disabilities who may attempt to use accommodations. The participants in this study desired respect, caring, and trust. These are qualities that DRC personnel must display to help students feel welcome and comfortable. Choosing to use accommodations is likely a difficult and purposeful decision, which can be made more bearable for students by personnel who are helpful and caring.

17) All university staff should be provided with information about different disabilities and how all types of accommodations' processes work at their institutions. This must occur with existing staff, as well as with all newly-hired staff members including faculty. In addition to a rational understanding of these facts, the goal should be to improve interpersonal interactions between faculty and students. Trainings should be developed and presented within the framework of the *social model of disability* (Lekan, 2009; Danforth, 2008) in order to create a culture that values equal access for all as a form of social justice.

18) The researcher suggests that the DRC alone cannot be responsible for advocating and providing training to staff. Rather, support for these initiatives must come from senior leadership in the academic affairs divisions in order to have the greatest influence. Education and training of new employees could be implemented during the hiring process as part of their orientation and signing of documents.

19) The literature advocated for the creation of professional development opportunities for faculty and staff so that campus communities become more aware of disability issues and laws (Garrison-Wade & Lehmann, 2009).

20) Gil (2007) suggested getting faculty involved in training that teaches them how to offer knowledge about disabilities to all their students, as well as how disabilities may affect all of the students in the classroom. Educating all the students in the classroom about different disabilities may create awareness and compassion, providing an environment that facilitates understanding and a desire to help each other.

21) Dowrick et al. (2005) also advocated for the education approach, stating that staff need to be better educated, but that they also need effective support to develop strategies that make assistance and accommodations accessible to all students with disabilities. Salzer (2012), however, reported that basic education and awareness for faculty and staff are not entirely effective at improving the lived experiences of students with disabilities, and that intentional and meaningful interaction among all parties is needed in order to genuinely decrease stigma. Therefore, not only faculty and staff could be educated at the time of hiring, but ongoing training should be made part of their job and professional development.

22) Finally, McCarthy (2007) suggested sharing statistics about the populations of students with disabilities on their campuses, so all students can gain a sense of community and shared experience.

Recommendations for Future Research

One of the limitations often cited in existing literature on college students with disabilities is that the perspectives of students who are choosing *not* to utilize accommodations are not represented. The study adds to the literature the perspectives of students not utilizing any kind of accommodations, because several of the participants were in that situation at one point during their early college years. Following is a more complete list of the researcher's recommendations for future research:

- 1) Future research should explore students' experiences prior to utilizing accommodations, as well as their decisions to use accommodations.
- 2) It would be valuable to identify students with disabilities who have chosen to not use accommodations at all, in order to better understand their choice. This may provide insight into the effectiveness of the information available to students regarding any available accommodations.
- 3) Additional research should be done to better understand the perspectives of the families of students with disabilities. A study that includes student participants *and* their family members and secondary educators would provide valuable insight about what students are experiencing prior to entering college. Also, the participants in the study appeared to have some differences based on their specific types of disability. As such, the findings suggest that further research focusing on students with specific types of disabilities is warranted.
- 4) Replicating this study with different student populations and at varying types of institutions would also add to the literature. The psychosocial developmental

stages of the participants in the study were found to be a significant influence on their experiences with their early college experience, utilization of academic accommodations and work preparation programs, services and/or accommodations specific to this purpose.

- 5) Further research is needed on the experiences of older learners with disabilities and their decisions about using all kinds of accommodations, as their psychosocial development is likely to be different.
- 6) Research should be done on how secondary educators could be trained for them to be aware of what will be expected of students with disabilities in college, as well as in what methods for teaching students the skills needed to be successful at the higher education level.
- 7) Another population that may have different experiences is returning combat veterans. Veteran populations are increasing in college campuses, and a significant number of them may have invisible disabilities, such as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (Barnard-Brak, Bagby, Jones, & Sulak, 2011).
- 8) Further research can also be conducted to examine the transition and accommodation experiences of students of varying demographics, such as gender, race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. It would be particularly interesting to examine how documentation requirements are perceived by students who may experience different cultural views on mental health care or those who find evaluation or treatment to be cost-prohibitive.

- 9) Additional research could also explore if students experience transition and accommodations differently at different types of institutions, such as public, private, large, small, community colleges or those with religious affiliations.
- 10) Research should be done regarding the results of collaboration and communication between secondary counselors and higher education disability resources centers offices (Fier & Brzezinski, 2010; Garrison-Wade & Lehmann, 2009) to determine what type of special education preparation programs (Li et al., 2009) are needed to help students about to enter college.
- 11) To further assist with the transition process, research could be done for career and disability resources centers staff to find ways to begin to have conversations with parents about how their roles will change at the higher education level (Fier & Brzezinski; Morningstar et al.; Shaw, 2009), so that they are better prepared to handle their students' transition from high school to college and become partners in preparing their students with disabilities for self-advocacy and ownership in the accommodations process.
- 12) Research should be done on how university disability and career services staff could attempt to create a positive atmosphere that is warm, welcoming, and helpful. This may allow students with physical disabilities to attach a more positive association to the utilization of accommodations (Barnard-Brak et al., 2009).

Summary Chapter V

The purpose of this study was to analyze the reflections that college students with disabilities had about their experience with work preparation programs, services and/or accommodations in a higher education institution. The researcher found that students' desire for independence, experience in the academic setting and knowledge about available services influenced their decisions about using accommodations. The perceived presence of stigma also mediated how students experienced interactions with university staff, professors and peers as they sought understanding, trust, and respect from those around them. Further, the participants' attitudes about using accommodations shifted as they experienced college and began to make decisions with academic goals in mind. In essence, their priorities shifted over time, which influenced their decisions about the use of accommodations.

The researcher believes that the most significant contribution of her findings is that of giving students with physical disabilities a voice to share their experiences with their use of work preparation programs, services and/or accommodations as they transition from college into the workforce. Not everything that matters can be quantified, but experiences and perceptions can become realities for those who have been asked to share their reflections with the world. This research adds to the literature a deeper understanding of how students with physical disabilities make sense of their experiences. This study also contributes to the current literature on college student development by providing insight into the unique experiences of students with disabilities and their perceptions about their world and its surroundings. It is clear that barriers to the use of

all types of accommodations still exist; therefore, additional research is needed and dedicated practitioners have the opportunity to improve the college experience for students with physical disabilities in preparation for a successful professional life.

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APPENDICES
Appendix A – IRB Approval from FIU



Office of Research Integrity
Research Compliance, MARC 270

MEMORANDUM

To: Dr. Benjamin Baez
CC: File
From: Maria Melendez-Vargas, MIBA, IRB Coordinator 
Date: September 10, 2015
Protocol Title: "STUDENTS WITH PHYSICAL DISABILITIES EXPERIENCES OF WORK PREPARATION PROGRAMS, SERVICES AND ACCOMODATIONS IN A HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION"

The Social and Behavioral Institutional Review Board of Florida International University has approved your study for the use of human subjects via the **Expedited Review** process. Your study was found to be in compliance with this institution's Federal Wide Assurance (00000060).

IRB Protocol Approval #:	IRB-15-0315	IRB Approval Date:	09/07/15
TOPAZ Reference #:	103835	IRB Expiration Date:	09/07/16

As a requirement of IRB Approval you are required to:

- 1) Submit an IRB Amendment Form for all proposed additions or changes in the procedures involving human subjects. All additions and changes must be reviewed and approved by the IRB prior to implementation.
- 2) Promptly submit an IRB Event Report Form for every serious or unusual or unanticipated adverse event, problems with the rights or welfare of the human subjects, and/or deviations from the approved protocol.
- 3) Utilize copies of the date stamped consent document(s) for obtaining consent from subjects (unless waived by the IRB). Signed consent documents must be retained for at least three years after the completion of the study.
- 4) **Receive annual review and re-approval of your study prior to your IRB expiration date.** Submit the IRB Renewal Form at least 30 days in advance of the study's expiration date.
- 5) Submit an IRB Project Completion Report Form when the study is finished or discontinued.

Special Conditions: N/A

For further information, you may visit the IRB website at <http://research.fiu.edu/irb>.

Appendix B – Request for Administrative Support (Email)

The screenshot shows a web browser window with a Google Mail interface. The browser tabs include 'Inbox (4) - castillc7@gmail.c' and 'Meeting request - ccast X'. The address bar shows 'mail.google.com/mail/u/1/#search/Amanda.Niguidula%40fiu.edu/14f65072263a8d56'. The email header shows the sender as 'Amanda.Niguidula@fiu.edu' and the recipient as 'Claudia'. The email subject is 'Meeting request'. The email body contains the following text:

Meeting request

Claudia Castillo <ccast012@fiu.edu> 8/25/15

to Amanda.Niguidu.

Good morning Ms. Niguidula,

My name is Claudia Castillo and I am a doctoral student at FIU's College of Education. You may not remember me, as we meet about three years ago when I was at the beginning of my program and I interviewed you and your Assistant Director for a class project regarding contemporary issues in Higher Education. Today, I'm contacting you again to ask for help. I am getting ready to start my dissertation study and my topic is on the perspective students with physical disabilities have on work preparation, services and accommodations provided by FIU in order for them to successfully enter the workforce. I would like to meet with you and go over my project and how students with physical disabilities can be part of this study. Please let me know if it is possible for us to meet and when is a convenient time for you. I am very excited about this study as I think many students would benefit from the results of the research. Please feel free to contact me either via email or by phone at [786-271-8996](tel:786-271-8996). I look forward to hearing from you.

Respectfully,

Claudia

The interface also shows a sidebar with 'COMPOSE', 'Inbox', 'Sent Mail', 'Drafts', and 'More labels'. A search bar is visible with the text 'Search people...' and a list of contacts including 'adis.beesting', 'Amie Garrett Gray...', 'Andres Cantillo', 'Benjamin Baez', and 'Caprila Almeida'.

Appendix C – Recruitment Email for Students

Student Recruitment Email

Dear ***** students:

My name is Claudia Castillo and I am a doctoral student at the College of Education at Florida International University (FIU). Your Disability Resources Office (DRC) has graciously agreed to help me recruit several students to participate in a doctoral research study for my dissertation titled:

Students with physical disabilities: their reflections on their experiences of work preparation programs, services and accommodations in a higher education institution: A perspective for Administrators

I am recruiting participants who meet the following criteria:

- a) Must be registered with the university disability services office, having provided documentation to determine that they are eligible to receive accommodations
- b) Have a disability that is physical in nature
- c) Have participated in work preparation programs, services and or accommodations at the Career Services Office at FIU
- d) Must be a college senior, preferably having completed at least one semester as a senior

Students who agree to participate will be asked to do the following:

- a) Talk to me by telephone or email me to confirm their interest in participating and to set up the in- person interviews
- b) Meet with me one-on-one at any of the FIU campuses for a confidential 60 minute interview about their experiences as a college student with a physical disability procuring career transition assistance from the career services office.
- c) Read an emailed copy of the interview transcription (a word-for-word account of what was said in the interview), and then let me know if he/she would like to add or clarify anything
- d) Meet with me one-on-one at any of the FIU campuses for a second confidential, 60 minute interview to go over the transcripts of the first interview and to add new information.
- e) Read an emailed copy of the interview transcription (a word-for-word account of what was said in the interview), and then let me know if he/she would like to add or clarify anything

Your participation in this study is voluntary, and you will be free to withdraw from it at any time. Students who participate and complete the interviews will receive a \$25 gift card as a token of appreciation.

If you meet all of the above criteria, and wish to participate in this research study, please stop by the Disability Resources Center in PC 220 or WUC 161 to sign an information disclosure consent form allowing the DRC to provide me with your name and contact information. Thank you for your time!

Claudia Castillo, MS HRD/AE
EdD Candidate
Higher Education Administration

Appendix E – Informed Consent Form

FIU IRB Approval:	9/7/2013
FIU IRB Expiration:	9/7/2015
FIU IRB Number:	IRB-13-0313



ADULT CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY STUDENTS WITH PHYSICAL DISABILITIES STUDENTS WITH PHYSICAL DISABILITIES EXPERIENCES OF WORK PREPARATION PROGRAMS, SERVICES AND ACCOMMODATIONS IN A HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

You are being asked to participate in a research study. The purpose of this study is to analyze the experiences that students with physical disabilities' have with regards to work preparation programs, services and accommodations offered by the career services office at FIU in preparation for these students to enter the workforce.

NUMBER OF STUDY PARTICIPANTS

If you decide to participate, you will be one of five (5) people in this research study.

DURATION OF THE STUDY

Your participation will require at least three hours and no more than four, divided as follows:

1. One hour interview with the researcher at the beginning of the academic semester, to talk about your experience in any work preparation program, service or accommodation offered by the career services office.
2. One (no longer than 2) hour meeting with the researcher two weeks after the completion of the first interview to go over the transcription of the first interview.
3. One hour meeting with the researcher two weeks after the completion of the second interview to go over the transcription of the second interview. At this time, the researcher will give you a token of appreciation for participating in the study.

PROCEDURES

If you agree to be in the study, we will ask you to follow these steps:

1. Talk to the researcher, at the campus most conveniently located for you, for a minimum of one hour regarding your experience(s) with work preparation programs, services and accommodations offered by the career services office has to available for students with physical disabilities.
2. Meet with the researcher to go over the transcripts of the first interview. Take this opportunity to add, change, or remove any comments you do not like or agree with.
3. Meet with the researcher one more time to go over the transcripts of the second interview and make any changes you find necessary before the end of the study.

Note: All meetings will be recorded using a voice recording device and you will be asked at the beginning of each meeting to verbally agree to be have the meeting recorded. In addition, the researcher may need to take handwritten notes for which you will be asked consent. These measures are needed for the researcher to be able to transcribe what was recorded with accuracy.

Appendix E – Informed Consent Form, page 2

FIU IRB Approval:	9/7/2015
FIU IRB Expiration:	9/7/2015
FIU IRB Number:	IRB-15-0315

Once the transcription is completed, you will be given the opportunity to read the contents of the interview presented to you in paper.

RISKS AND/OR DISCOMFORTS

There are no risks associated with your participation in this study. You may feel uncomfortable answering some of the researcher's questions; if this is the case, you can ask the researcher to change the question or to explain to you if you may answer it according to your level of comfort.

BENEFITS

The following benefits may be associated with your participation in this study:

- a. You may learn about your own expectations and how to make them work for you as you explore work preparation programs, services and accommodations available to you.
- b. You may learn about career development services you did not know were available.
- c. You may contribute to the education of other students with disabilities who may not be aware of services available to them as they prepare to enter the workforce.

ALTERNATIVES

There are no known alternatives available to you other than not taking part in this study. However, any significant new findings developed during the course of the research which may relate to your willingness to continue participation will be provided to you.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The records of this study will be kept private and will be protected to the fullest extent provided by law. In any sort of report we might publish, we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you as a subject. Research records will be stored securely and only the researcher will have access to those records. However, your records may be reviewed for audit purposes by authorized University agents who will be bound by the same provisions of confidentiality.

COMPENSATION & COSTS

You will receive a \$25 gift card for items available in any of the campuses' bookstores. Please understand that the gift card will be awarded at the completion of your full participation in the study. Participants who chose to withdraw before completing the study will not be granted a gift card. You will not be responsible for any costs to participate in this study.

RIGHT TO DECLINE OR WITHDRAW

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You are free to participate in the study or withdraw your consent at any time during the study. Your withdrawal or lack of participation will not affect any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. The investigator reserves the right to remove you without your consent at such time that they feel it is in the best interest of the study.

RESEARCHER CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have any questions about the purpose, procedures, or any other issues relating to this research study you may contact Claudia Castillo at 786-271-8996 or via email: ccast012@fiu.edu.

Appendix E – Informed Consent Form, page 3

FIU IRB Approval:	9/7/2015
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IRB CONTACT INFORMATION

If you would like to talk with someone about your rights of being a subject in this research study or about ethical issues with this research study, you may contact the FIU Office of Research Integrity by phone at 305-348-2494 or by email at ori@fiu.edu.

PARTICIPANT AGREEMENT

I have read the information in this consent form and agree to participate in this study. I have had a chance to ask any questions I have about this study, and they have been answered for me. I understand that I will be given copy of this form for my records upon request.

Signature of Participant

Date

Printed Name of Participant

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

Date

Appendix F – Interview Questionnaire

Appendix E – Study Interview Questionnaire

1. How did you experience being diagnosed with a physical disability?
Prompt: When did this occur? How did you feel when you were diagnosed? How have you managed your diagnosis as time progressed?
2. How and why did you decide to register with the disability resources center at the university?
3. What was your experience registering with the disability resources center?
Prompt: When did you do this? Who accompanied you? Did you have any concerns about self-identifying as having a disability?
4. What have been your experiences in interacting with the disabilities resources center staff when getting assistance to obtain accommodations?
Prompt: What kind of accommodations? Best experience? Worst experience?
5. What was your experience using accommodations for your disability as a college student at the disability resources center?
Prompt: What accommodations? How were they provided?
6. What did you perceive to be the role of the disability resources center at FIU in terms of providing you needed accommodations?
7. How and why did you register with the career services office at FIU?
8. How did you learn about the career services office and the services they provide to FIU students?
9. What was your experience registering with the Career Services Office?
Prompt: When did you do this? Who accompanied you? Did you have any concerns about self-identifying as having a disability?

Appendix F – Interview Questionnaire, page 2

10. What was your experience using accommodations for work preparation to procure employment before graduation?

Prompt: What accommodations? How were they provided?

11. Have you looked for an internship or employment opportunity? What role did you play in getting assistance to find it?

Prompt: What activities did you attend? Recruitment activities, talked to career services staff, etc.

12. Prior to seeking assistance from the career services office, what were you expecting in terms of work preparation programs, services and accommodations?

Prompt: What did you think you needed to do? Were you prepared? Who prepared you?

13. What did you perceive to be the role of the career services office at FIU in terms of you receiving career development accommodations?

14. What have been your experiences following the procedures to get assistance in pursuing internship and job seeking activities?

Prompt: Working with the career services office; scheduling mock interviews, etc.

15. What have been your experiences in interacting with staff at the career services office in order to get work preparation assistance?

Prompt: Best experience? Worst experience?

16. How did you feel when you requested assistance or accommodations pursuing a job before graduation?

Prompt: Extra preparation for an interview, etc.

17. Did you experience any type of barriers as a student with physical disabilities receiving career placement assistance?

Prompt: social, personal, emotional?

Appendix F – Interview Questionnaire, page 3

18. As someone diagnosed with a physical disability, how would you compare your experiences requesting and using work preparation programs, services and accommodations as to someone without a disability?
19. How would you describe your role from high school to college in terms of requesting accommodations to assist with your disability?
Prompt: Did your role change? Were you more involved? Less involved?
20. How do you think that your physical disability influences your transition into the workforce?
21. Reflecting back on your experiences, what could have helped you in your transition from college into the workforce, in terms of getting work preparation assistance and accommodations?
Prompt: approach by career counselors? Disability services staff? Fellow students?

VITAE

CLAUDIA CASTILLO

North Miami Beach, Florida

- 1994-1995 Bachelor of Science in Hospitality Management/Travel and Tourism
Florida International University, School of Hospitality Management
Miami, Florida
- 1999 Instructor, Supervisor, and Assessor Qualification Course
Simulation, Training, Assessment & Research (STAR) Center
Dania, Florida
- 1997-1999 Master of Science in Human Resources Development and Adult Education
Florida International University, College of Education, Miami, Florida
- 2009 Graduate Certificate in Hospitality Management
Florida International University, School of Hospitality Management
Miami, Florida
- 2011-2016 Doctorate Degree in Higher Education
Florida International University, College of Education, Miami, Florida
- 07/13-Present Consultant for Translation and Didactics Services
Ediciones Moya Gaitan
Tegucigalpa Honduras, Central America
- 01/03-06/13 Associate Director, Career Development Office
Florida International University, Chaplin School of Hospitality & Tourism
Management
Miami, Florida
- 05/00-05/11 Adjunct Instructor
Florida International University, School of Hospitality and Tourism
Management
Miami, Florida
- 2009-Present Member of the Association for Higher Education Access and Disability
- 05/09-08/09 Intensive Human Resources Internship
Marriott Biscayne Bay and Marriott International Airport
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- 2008-Present Member of the National Association of Student Personnel Administration
- 09/05-12/10 International Enrollment Manager
Florida International University, School of Hospitality and Tourism
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- 2003-Present Member of the International Council for Hotel, Restaurant and
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- 09/03-12/10 Assistant Director
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Miami, Florida
- 09/99-01/03 Program Coordinator, Career Development Office (CDO)
Florida International University, School of Hospitality and Tourism
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- 04/96-09/98 Visiting Assistant Director
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