



# The Individual Accommodations Model (IAM): Accommodating Students with Disabilities in Postsecondary Settings

## Executive Summary

Students with disabilities comprise approximately nine percent of the total college population in the United States (US Department of Education National Center on Education Statistics [USDE/NCES], 2003; Horn, Peter & Rooney, 2002; USDE/NCES, 2000). Although this number has tripled since 1978 (Rothstein, n.d.), students with disabilities are still less likely to go to college than students without disabilities. Within two years after obtaining a high school diploma or GED, 72% of students without disabilities go on to college, while only 63% of students with disabilities seek postsecondary education (National Center for the Study of Postsecondary Supports [NCEPES], 2002; Horn & Berkold, 1999). Despite legislation requiring postsecondary settings to accommodate persons with disabilities, these statistics continue to illustrate the disproportionality of fewer students with disabilities participating in postsecondary education. Furthermore, students with disabilities are also less likely to persist in postsecondary education than their peers without disabilities.

The Individual Accommodations Model (IAM) was developed in response to the question of how to increase the recruitment, retention and completion of students with disabilities in post-secondary settings. Faculty, staff, students and administrators from community and technical colleges in California, Kansas and Minnesota participated in the development of the IAM. Project staff asked 15 colleges to participate based on diversity of size—ranging from more than 23,000 students to 1,000 students—ethnicity, and location. Through the use of site visits data collection forms, and questionnaires, project staff collected a variety of data in order to make a determination about the current status of disability support services at the participating colleges. IAM project staff visited all 15 colleges—9 in Round One and 6 Round Two—and spoke with disability support services personnel, faculty, staff, administrators and students with disabilities. The analysis of data collected from the questionnaires, student panels and discussions provided a basis for developing the IAM while ensuring that issues from all constituency groups were considered. Three reports containing the findings from these panel meetings and questionnaires were developed (see Lancaster, Mellard & Hoffman, 2001a; Lancaster, Mellard & Hoffman, 2001b; Berry & Mellard, 2002).

In order to successfully measure an increase in recruitment, retention and completion, current and reliable data are needed. Frequently during the course of this project, records and/or counts of students with disabilities were either conducted by a manual count or from the memory of the DSS Director. Furthermore, information on students with disabilities was kept in separate databases from those that kept data on all students (e.g. grades, drop/add, etc.); thus the counts were difficult to use in a manner that could benefit students or be used in the DSS offices' strategic planning efforts. Although this finding emerged it is most important to note that within the confines of the community college, issues related to increasing retention

and completion rates for students with disabilities are not problems to be overcome by just one office. The Disability Support Services (DSS) office and the services they provide cannot solve the problems alone.

Separate materials for students, faculty, Disability Support Services (DSS) staff and administrators were developed as part of the IAM. All IAM materials are available for download and use in printable PDF and accessible HTML versions. Materials for college students with disabilities and their parents or guardians are located at <http://das.kucrl.org/iam/studentmat.html>; faculty materials are located at <http://das.kucrl.org/iam/instrmat.html>; and materials for DSS offices and college administrators are located at: <http://das.kucrl.org/iam/college&dssmat.html>.

In fall 2001 and spring 2002, project staff developed the IAM Staff Development Modules. The Staff Development Modules were intended to provide colleges with a method for presenting all of the IAM components in the most effective manner on their campuses. Each module utilizes the IAM materials relevant to a specific topic and audience. The four modules consist of CD-ROM's that contain a PowerPoint presentation with captioned video segments, an introduction for presenters, a sample agenda, a script, and evaluation forms. These modules provide college staff with most of the materials necessary for conducting staff development activities on a particular topic. The Staff Development Modules are in these topical areas: (a) Self-Advocacy, (b) Helping Everyone Feel Included in the College Environment, (c) Disclosure and Confidentiality, and (d) Providing Effective and Appropriate Accommodations. More information regarding the modules can be found at <http://das.kucrl.org/iam/modules.html>.

Ideally a combination of multiple components and efforts are needed to increase recruitment, completion and retention rates for students with disabilities. A model like the IAM, although an effective starting point, is only one piece of the puzzle. Individual efforts on campuses and in communities that combine advocacy, disability awareness and education, effective transition, accessible facilities and transportation will have a larger long-term impact. Colleges are not separate from the issues that face the communities in which they are located. We suggest that colleges should have a great interest in placing themselves within the larger community and work with disability advocates and leaders within that community to include students with disabilities and provide them with equal access.

For more information about the IAM and to read the complete project final report please go to the IAM website at <http://das.kucrl.org/iam.html>.

Daryl F. Mellard, Ph.D.  
Principal Investigator

Noelle K. Kurth  
Project Coordinator

**University of Kansas Center for Research on Learning  
Division of Adult Studies**

517 Joseph R. Pearson Hall, 1122 West Campus Road, Lawrence, KS 66045  
(785) 864-4780  
<http://das.kucrl.org>

---

## REFERENCES

- Berry, G.C. & Mellard, D.F. (with Petersen, E.) (2002). *Current Status on Accommodating Students with Disabilities in Selected Community and Technical Colleges (Fall 1999-Spring 2001)*. Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Center for Research on Learning. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED470385).
- Horn, L., & Berkold, J. (1999). *Students with disabilities in postsecondary education: A profile of preparation, participation, and outcomes, (Statistical Analysis Report No. NCES 1999-187)*. Washington, DC: US Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics.
- Horn, L., Peter, K., & Rooney, K. (2002). *Profile of undergraduates in U.S. postsecondary institutions: 1999-2000, (Statistical Analysis Report No. NCES 2002-168)*. Washington, DC: US Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics.
- Lancaster, S.J.C., Mellard, D.F., & Hoffman, L. (2001a). *Current Status on Accommodating Students with Disabilities in Selected Community and Technical Colleges*. Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Center for Research on Learning. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED452618).
- Lancaster, S.J.C., Mellard, D.F., & Hoffman, L. (2001b). *Experiences of Students with Disabilities in Selected Community and Technical Colleges*. Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Center for Research on Learning. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED452617).
- National Center for the Study of Postsecondary Educational Supports. (July, 2002). *Preparation for and Support of Youth with Disabilities in Postsecondary Education and Employment: Implications for Policy, Priorities, and Practice*. Proceedings and Briefing Book from the National Summit, Washington, D.C.
- Rothstein, L. (n.d.). *Students with Disabilities and Higher Education: A Disconnect in Expectations and Realities*. Washington, D.C.: HEALTH Resource Center.
- US Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2000). *National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS:2000)*. Washington, DC: Author.
- US Department of Education, National Center on Education Statistics. (2003). *Digest of Education Statistics*. NCES 2003-060. Washington, DC: Author.