EXPEREINCES OF FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES
WHO HAD A FACULTY MENTOR

A THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE
MASTER OF ARTS

BY

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ABSTRACT

THESIS: Experiences of First-Year Students with Disabilities Who Had a Faculty Mentor

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The transition from high school to college is difficult for students and they need to learn to navigate the transition in order to be successful and stay in school. This process is especially challenging for many students with disabilities who may face additional difficulties due to their disability. The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of how having a faculty mentorship influences the collegiate experience of students with disabilities.

This study was grounded in qualitative, hermeneutic phenomenology methodology. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with students with disabilities who had a faculty mentor during their first semester of college. Data analysis was conducted based on thematic analysis (Van Manen, 1990), and predominant themes were discovered.

The researcher concluded faculty mentorship does affect the collegiate experience of students with disabilities in considerable ways. Students met significant challenges adjusting to the collegiate life. Faculty mentorship assisted some of these students during their transition from high school to college. Based on these themes, specific conclusions were drawn regarding students with disabilities transition and the postsecondary
accommodation process. Suggestions were presented for university administrators, faculty, and staff, all of which work with students with disabilities.
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Chapter one presents a brief synopsis of the study which examined the experiences of students with disabilities who had a faculty mentor in their first year of college. This chapter introduces both the study and its significance. Also included in this section is a statement of purpose, research questions, definition of terms, and the organization of the project.

Introduction to the Study

The transition from high school to college has long been known to be difficult for students. Students need to learn to navigate the transition in order to be successful and stay in school. This process is especially challenging for many students with disabilities who may face additional difficulties due to their disability. Although significant research has been conducted on the importance of student-faculty interaction, faculty mentoring, and the transition to college (Getzel, 2005; Halawah 2006; Madaus, 2005; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1977, 1978, 1979; Tinto, 1987, 1993), more research is needed with respect to the unique challenges these students face as they transition to college. The intent of this study was to gain a better understanding if having a faculty mentorship influences the collegiate experience of students with disabilities.

According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (2009), since 2003 the number of students with disabilities enrolled in postsecondary education has hovered
around 11 percent with 2,154,000 in 2003 and 2,266,000 in 2008. Students with disabilities often enter college unprepared (Getzel, 2005). Mentorship programs increase the likelihood of success for students with disabilities entering college (Stumbo, Blegen, & Lindahl-Lewis, 2008). It is important for faculty and staff members to understand the unique needs of students with disabilities and how to help them succeed.

Tinto (1988, 1993) maintained college students undergo three stages of transition as they adjust and become assimilated into college life. These three stages are separation, transition, and incorporation. The degree of successful transition was directly related to the ability of a student to leave his or her former community and become a part of the college communities. Tinto’s theory had many implications for students with disabilities since they experience a dramatic change when starting college.

By interviewing and studying the experiences of students with disabilities who participated in a faculty-student mentorship program, an understanding of their unique struggles was gained. Conclusions were also drawn from these experiences that can aid the staff at colleges and universities in meeting the needs of such students.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study was to better understand how students with disabilities who had a faculty mentor transitioned from high school and home into their first year of college. Their experiences were studied to identify what factors, if any, helped students. Findings from this study may help faculty and staff in meeting the developmental needs of these students.
Research Questions

This study addressed the following research questions.

What transitional issues did college students with disabilities encounter when transitioning to their first year of college?

What were the experiences of students with disabilities who had a faculty mentor in their first year of college?

Significance of the Study

The goal of this study was to examine the transitional issues experienced by students with disabilities who had a faculty mentor in their first year of college. The transition from high school to college can be a confusing and overwhelming experience for many students, especially those with disabilities. While students with disabilities experience many of the same transitional experiences as other students, they also experience some unique issues. Many students with disabilities are used to altered academic standards and are as a result less prepared when they come to college (Madaus, 2005) and more dependent on educators. In order for students with disabilities to successfully transition it is important for colleges and universities to provide resources and accommodations. According to Skinner and Lindstrom (2003), educators play an important role in helping students with learning disabilities have a more successful transition to college. Students who have successfully integrated into the existing social and academic systems are less likely to leave college (Tinto, 1987, 1993). If faculty and staff can further their understanding of the obstacles students with disabilities face, these students could be provided with more support.
Definition of Terms

The following term is defined for this study.

Faculty Mentorship Program – A program designed to assist with the transition to college for first-year students with disabilities. It includes a faculty, student mentorship program, opportunities for faculty development, and additional tutoring with the Learning Center.

Organization of the Project

This study is organized into five chapters. Chapter Two is a review of related literature concerning the transitional issues encountered by college students and the research regarding students with disabilities in college and faculty-student out-of-class communication. Chapter Three includes a description of both the design and methodology. Chapter Four presents the major findings of the study and implications. Chapter Five relates these findings to the research questions and includes a summary, conclusions, limitations, and recommendations for further research. A list of references and appendices are included at the end of the paper.
CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Summary of the Project

This study focused on the transitional issues of first-year college students with disabilities. Specifically, the study examined the experiences of students with disabilities who had a faculty mentor. The following literature review is organized into five sections. The first section is an introduction of Tinto’s theory related to persistence and transition of college students. This is followed by a summary of literature written concerning the transition from high school to college and an overview of research on students with disabilities in college. Finally, research regarding faculty-student out-of-class communication and a description of research regarding the benefits of faculty mentorship programs were examined.

College Transition and Persistence

Arnold Van Gennep (1909/1960), known for his research regarding obtaining membership in a group, found individuals and groups transitioned group membership from birth to death by means of various rites of passage. Individuals experience a transitional phase whenever they encounter major life transitions. He identified three stages, separation, transition, and incorporation. Individuals need to move through the stages to become integrated into a new setting, such as college and university.
communities. Educator and sociologist Vincent Tinto (1988, 1993) used the rites of passage model created by Van Gennep to develop a theory of individual departure for students transitioning from high school to college. According to Tinto, as students move through the three stages of passage they become integrated into the academic and social systems at a college or university. During this transitional period students depart from their family and high school community and begin to make the transition to a new identity as a college student.

Colleges are made up of both academic and social systems, each with its own characteristic formal and informal structure and set of student, staff, and faculty communities. The former, the academic, concerns itself almost entirely with the formal education of students. . . . The latter, the social system of the college, centers about the daily and personal needs of the various members of the institution, especially the students. (Tinto, 1993, p. 106)

However, it is important to note that membership in one system does not inherently imply integration in the other. The absence of integration arises from a lack of institutional fit and isolation, happening when students do not fit into at least one of the multiple communities within the university community. It is important for students to become integrated into both the academic and social university community.

The first stage, separation, requires the student to distance himself or herself from membership in past communities (Tinto 1988, 1993). Most commonly this includes family members and friends from their hometown. In order for students to explore their own values and beliefs and learn the cultural norms at college, they need distance from former communities. This can be a challenge for both students and members in their
former communities. Students who come from communities drastically different from the college community may face a more difficult separation. These external forces can help or hinder a student’s transition depending on his or her amount and type of support.

The second stage of passage, transition, happens during and after separation (Tinto, 1988, 1993), bridging the old and the new. It occurs before full adoption of new norms and values and after students have started to detach from old communities. Students learn the norms and patterns of behavior for the college community they enter. They may search for connections (norms, values, relationships) between their old and new environments. When the differences between the old and the new environments are extreme, adjustment may be more difficult.

Though most students are able to cope with the problems of transition, many voluntarily withdraw from college very early in their first academic year, less from inability to become incorporated in the social and academic communities of the college than the stresses that such transition commonly induces. (Tinto, 1993, p. 98)

Disadvantaged students faced compounded challenges during transition. “In the ‘typical’ institution, this means that disadvantaged students, persons of minority origins, older students, and the physically handicapped are more likely to experience such problems than are other students” (p. 97). Colleges and universities need to find ways to make all students feel welcome. “The educational communities we construct must be inclusive, rather than exclusive. They must allow, indeed encourage, the active involvement of all students as equal members” (p. 207). Some students are able to handle the stress of the
transition while others are not. The ability/inability to cope with the stress is associated to the students’ means of coping.

During stage three, incorporation, the student moves toward becoming incorporated into the communities of the college by adopting the social norms (Tinto, 1988, 1993). Institutions should establish an environment that, “enables all individuals, not just some, to find a niche in one of more the many social and intellectual communities of the institution” (Tinto, 1993, p. 205). Unlike transitions into traditional societies, the student rarely goes through a formal ceremony or ritual whereby incorporation is ratified. “Most new students are left to make their own way through the maze of institutional life” (p. 99). The process of integration involved both academic and social transitions.

Departure may occur when students do not become integrated into the social and academic communities (Tinto, 1988, 1993). Several researchers have validated the utility of the Tinto model in predicting college student attrition (Christie & Dinham, 1991; Cotton & Wilson, 2006; Fusani, 1994; McKay & Estrella, 2008). When individuals do not move through the rites of passage, they stay connected to former communities and do not adjust to college life. All students, especially minority students, need support in order to be successful. “Academic climates that discourage and discriminate, however subtly, are also climates that give rise to student failure and departure” (Christie & Dinham, 1991, p. 74).

Tinto’s work was expanded by other researchers (Christie & Dinham, 1991; Tierney, 1992). Christie and Dinham (1991) examined the influence of institutional and external factors on social integration and ultimately incorporation. Their results
“extended and amplified” (p. 433) upon Tinto’s model by demonstrating the role of external experiences was substantial.

Tinto’s model has received some criticism. Tierney (1992) proposed Tinto’s model of transition was potentially harmful, especially when applied to minority students. The primary reason for this was Tinto’s theory indicated students are initiated and incorporated into a culture different than their own. Van Gennep (1909/1960) wrote about the rites of passage within the same culture, not among multiple cultures. Tierney outlined the reasons why Tinto’s model was insufficient. First, Tinto borrowed the anthropological term ritual but did not use the term as it relates to one culture. Second, in Tinto’s model students had the choice to go through the ritual of social and academic integration into college or depart the institution. However, when one considers rituals in traditional cultures the “initiate neither chooses to participate nor leave the ritual” (Tierney, 1992, p. 609). Third, Tinto theorized integration at the individual level rather than the collective level. Despite the criticism of Tinto’s model, specifically the transferability from anthropology, the model does explain student’s transition from high school to college.

**Students with Disabilities in College**

The transition from high school to college can be a confusing and over-whelming experience for any student, but especially for students with disabilities. While students with disabilities experience many of the same transitional experiences as all other students, they also experience some unique issues. Often, students with disabilities enter college “unprepared for the demands of postsecondary education” (Getzel, 2005, p. 70). In high school academics are modified and students receive additional assistance, but
these accommodation practices do not carry over to college. Despite the known challenges, little research has been conducted related to transition services leading to college enrollment for students with disabilities (Wilson, Hoffmann, & McLaughlin, 2009).

In order for students with disabilities to successfully transition it is important for colleges and universities to provide appropriate resources and accommodations. “Simply placing students with disabilities in classrooms with peers who do not have disabilities does not guarantee full access to the curriculum” (Burgstahler & Crawford, 2007, p. 98). Educators must assure that these students have resources they need to be successful such as tutors and testing accommodations. Tinto (1988, 1993) indicated disadvantaged students, including those with physical disabilities, are more likely to experience difficulty during the transition stage.

The transition issues are, in part, attributed to the change in how students are accommodated in high school as compared to college. While students with disabilities are going through typical transitional experiences, they must additionally learn how accommodations unfold at the postsecondary level (Simpson & Spencer, 2009). This is due to the stark contrast in the laws governing secondary and postsecondary education for students with disabilities. “At the college level, significant changes occur in the legal rights of students, and there is a sharp reversal of parental and student responsibility” (Madaus, 2005 p. 32). In secondary education the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act guaranteed students with disabilities access to public education (IDEA, 1997). Schools must create an individualized education program and ensure the student is making satisfactory process. The onus is on the school to test students they assume may
have a disability and provide the services needed free of charge. At the postsecondary level students need to become self-advocates and understand their rights under the law as nearly all of the responsibility is transferred from the school and parent to the student. In college students must be the one to initiate provide documentation for their disability and request accommodations. This can be an added stress for students as they are navigating their first year of college. Colleges and universities are governed by two civil rights mandates, section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990. Students must be “otherwise qualified” in order to be admitted to a college or university as their disability plays no role in the admission decision. The emphasis is on equal access and reasonable accommodations rather than modifying standards.

**Cognitive and Learning Disabilities**

Due to the academic and social rigors of postsecondary education, cognitive and learning disabilities provide another layer of difficulty to students transitioning from high school to college. “Making changes and adjusting to new situations have been shown to be especially difficult for students with learning disabilities” (Dalke & Schmitt, 1987, p. 176). Many students with disabilities in high school are accustomed to altered academic standards and are, as a result, less prepared when they come to college (Madaus, 2005). Specifically, students may struggle with academic content, organization, time management, and study skills (Aderon & Durocher, 2007).

In the transition from high school to college many changes occur, which compound to make this already difficult transition more challenging for students with disabilities: (a) teacher-student contact decreases drastically, (b) academic competition
becomes greater, (c) there is a change in personal support network, and (d) students move from an environment wherein they are provided a high degree of individual attention to a setting wherein they are expected to achieve on their own (Dalke & Schmitt, 1987). Colleges and universities should strive to find ways to meet students’ academic and social needs by educating them about services available at the institution.

Educators play an important role in helping students with learning disabilities have a more successful transition to college (Skinner & Lindstrom, 2003). The following strategies were suggested: (a) teach students about their disability and compensatory strategies, (b) teach students to self-advocate, (c) teach students about the law, (d) encourage students to seek assistance during their freshman year, (e) facilitate a support network, (f) encourage participation in college preparation programs. If taught these skills early in their college career, students with disabilities may have an easier transition to college.

**Faculty-Student Out-of-Class Communication**

For several decades researchers have addressed issues related to faculty-student interaction outside of the classroom. This is an important topic because research has found “meaningful interactions between students and their teachers are essential to high-quality learning experiences” (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt, & Associates, 2005, p. 207). Noel and Levitz (1991) found, “students learn best when involved, and that the best way to involve students in learning and in college is to maximize the amount of personal contact between faculty members and students” (as cited in Powell, 1994). The importance of personal relationships between faculty members and students should not be underestimated. There is a positive relationship between faculty-student contact
(Pascarella & Terenzini, 1977, 1978, 1979). When students had this type of contact they reported satisfaction with their college experience. Students were also more likely to persist at the institution and achieve academically. Other researchers have found students benefit from faculty interaction outside of the classroom (Endo & Harpel, 1982; Fusani, 1994; Martin, Myers, & Mottet, 1999).

Halawah (2006) found, “close personal relationships between staff and students plays a major part in fostering the intellectual development of students” (¶ 22). The researcher concluded academic integration is also significantly correlated with personal development. Students who tend to communicate with faculty more often do so for relational reasons and to a lesser extent for participating and sycophantic reasons (Martin et al., 1999).

Fusani (1994) conducted a quantitative study to explore students’ and instructors’ perceptions of out-of-class communication. “The student-faculty relationship extends well beyond the specified contact hours and the roles of lecturer and audience member” (p. 251). However, only 23% of the students surveyed had ever visited or informally talked with their instructor, and 50% had two or fewer contacts. The results indicated a positive relationship between perceived instructor immediacy and student-initiated out-of-class communication.

Researchers recognize that quality of out-of-class interactions is important. Pascarella and Terenzini (1979) found two significant findings related to this topic. First, the quality of student-faculty informal interactions may be as important as the frequency with which the interactions occur. Second, the frequency and quality of informal interactions with faculty may have a different influence in college persistence for
different types of students. In regards to quantity of time spent on out-of-class interactions “time spent does not measure the gravity of a conversation” (Fusani, 1994, p. 248). Other researchers confirmed Terenzini and Pascarella’s (1977, 1978, 1979) work that the frequency and quality of student-faculty interaction had positive impacts on academic and social integration (Endo & Harpel, 1982; McKay & Estrella, 2008).

Faculty members need to demonstrate an active interest in out-of-class student interaction (Claxton & Murrell, 1987; Cotton & Wilson, 2006; Halawah, 2006). Interaction between faculty members and students is important both in and out of the classroom. “Involvement in the classroom leads students to seek out contact with faculty. In this fashion, colleges can be seen as consisting not merely of multiple communities, but of overlapping and sometimes nested academic and social communities” (Tinto, 1993, pp. 132-133). Classroom involvement leads students to seek relationships with faculty and classmates outside of class. In this manner, colleges can be seen as having overlapping and sometimes nested academic and social communities, each affecting the other in important ways.

Informal interaction between faculty members and students is important. “Faculty should not discount the benefit of informal, social interactions with students; such contact appears to provide an important foundation for student effort from which students can begin to pursue more academically oriented interactions” (Cotton & Wilson, 2006, p. 515). Faculty members play an important role in helping students manage their problems. “By providing support, [faculty members] can help to improve students’ overall academic performance” (Jones, 2008, p. 383).
Regardless of the benefits, sometimes students choose not to interact with faculty. Several studies have indicated lack of student-faculty interaction lead to increased attrition rates (Campbell & Campbell, 1997; Cotton & Wilson, 2006). Tinto (1988, 1993) examined the causes and treatments of student attrition. After synthesizing research on multiple causes of student drop out, he proposed student departure serves as a barometer of the social and intellectual health of college students. “Some degree of social and intellectual integration and therefore membership in academic and social communities must exist as a condition for continued persistence” (Tinto, 1993, p 120). More specifically, he reported a central factor in students’ attrition was the quality of student-faculty interaction and the students’ integration into the school culture. “The absence of student-faculty interactions and/or unrewarding interactions outside the classroom may lead to academic boredom and thus to voluntary withdrawal or to lower levels of academic performance” (p. 118). He concluded that institutions with low student-faculty contact correlated to low rates of student retention.

Tinto’s work was confirmed by Pascarella and Terenzini (1977, 1978, 1979) who conducted a series of studies on freshmen persistence. In each case they used a six-dimension measure of student-faculty contact to predict freshman year persistence/voluntary withdrawal decisions. They found voluntary freshman withdrawal was related to: (1) total frequency of student-faculty informal, nonclassroom contact, and (2) frequency of interactions with faculty to discuss intellectual matters.

**Faculty Mentorship Programs**

Faculty mentorship provides an additional layer of academic integration for students. In order for students to fully assimilate into the college community, it is
important for students to develop a strong affiliation both inside and outside of the class. Researchers have uncovered surprisingly little research on mentoring college students (Brown, Takahshi, & Roberts, 2010; Crisp & Cruz, 2009; Jacobi, 1991). Additionally, researchers often do not work from a common definition of mentoring. More than 50 definitions with varying scope and breadth were identified (Crisp & Cruz, 2009). In large part, the research that does exist lacks a sound theoretical basis. Future research needs to focus on rigorous methodologies that can produce externally valid findings and can be generalized to broad student groups. There is also a need for studies that focus on specific subgroups of students.

Researchers have been able to identify specific benefits to mentoring college students. Nora and Crisp (2007) explored the dimensions associated with mentoring that assisted students in adjusting to college life and becoming fully engaged in and out of the classroom. A sample of 200 students attending a two-year institution was surveyed about their mentoring experiences. The results indicated three factors which contributed to adjustment and engagement: educational/career goal-setting and appraisal, emotional and psychological support, and academic subject knowledge aimed at advancing a student’s knowledge relevant to their chosen field. Mentors can engage mentees in discussions to explore ideas they have not considered related to the student’s goals, provide encouragement and act as a support system, and provide students with specific knowledge related to their field of interest.

A notable study by Campbell and Campbell (1997) found that participation in faculty mentorship resulted in initial gains in academic performance and retention. Additionally, the researchers examined whether matching students with mentors based on
sex or ethnicity mattered. The qualitative study involved 339 undergraduate students. Academic achievement was measured by grade point average and the number of credits earned. Students who participated in the mentorship program had slightly higher grades and completed more credits per semester in their first few years. Mentored students were also nearly twice as likely to graduate and one-and-one half as likely to pursue graduate education at the same institution. Matching students with mentors based on sex had no advantage to the mentee. Interestingly, when mentors and students were of the same ethnic group students’ performance measures were higher. In general the research indicated a positive impact of mentoring programs on student success. “A well-designed student-faculty mentor program can result in initial gains in academic performance and retention. However, such gains can dissipate by the time of graduation, especially if students are not matched with mentors on ethnic identity” (p. 146). The results of this study indicate the possible benefit of matching students with mentors. Campbell and Campbell (2007) examined the long-term effects of mentoring relationships. After conducting a longitudinal study over the course of 11 years, the authors concluded, “a well-designed student-faculty mentor program can result in initial gains in academic performance and retention” (p. 146). Having a mentor may be even more important for students with disabilities, especially if the mentors have a disability themselves (Burgstahler & Crawford, 2007).

**Mentoring Students with Disabilities**

While formal faculty-student mentorships for students with disabilities are nearly nonexistent in postsecondary education, mentoring relationships do exist for youth with disabilities. Mentorships for individuals with disabilities are especially advocated for
during times of transition, such as from high school to college (U.S. Department of Labor, 2005). These types of programs are intended to improve the probability of student success.

Improving students’ chances for success in higher education is important and faculty mentorship may be a key component. “Mentorships are one example of an intervention aimed at decreasing risk factors and increasing the likelihood of success for persons with disabilities” (Stumbo et al., 2008). Intentional mentoring programs for students with disabilities can help ensure these students are academically prepared (Burgstahler & Crawford, 2007) because they help students become acclimated to college and provide them a personal connection on campus.

In another study Burgstahler and Cronheim (2001) explored whether Internet-based mentoring alleviated some of the barriers to traditional face-to-face mentoring for students with disabilities. Forty-nine students participated in the program. The students had a variety of disabilities: hearing, mobility, vision, and learning disabilities. Over a two-year period the researchers collected data from e-mail messages between mentor and mentee, written surveys, and focus groups. The results of the study indicated Internet-based mentoring can be used for mentoring students with disabilities. It allowed students access to a variety of mentors and a rich collection of informational resources. The Internet also helped some participants overcome disability-related barriers present in other forms of communication. The researchers concluded, “peer and mentor support can help students with disabilities reach their social, academic, and career potential” (p. 72).
Summary

Tinto’s theory of transition expanded on Van Gennup’s rites of passage by applying them to the issues experienced by students transitioning from high school to postsecondary education (Tinto, 1988, 1993). During college, students move through the various stages, although not always in a sequential order, and sometimes through multiple stages at the same time. Incorporation occurred as students acquired the value norms associated with the college or university communities.

In recent years research has shown faculty relationships, especially mentoring relationships, aid a student during the transition process (Cotton & Wilson, 2006; Halawah, 2006; McKay & Estrella, 2008). Campbell and Campbell (1997) identified participation in a faculty mentorship program during the first year helped students transition to college and resulted in a higher grade point average and more credits completed.

Little research has been done on how faculty mentorship aids in the transition to college for students with disabilities. Based on the research available, students need to transition from high school and family groups to the college communities in order to become academically and socially integrated (Tinto, 1988, 1993). Faculty mentorship may be the link to assisting students with disabilities during this process.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Chapter Three outlines the methodology used in this study to examine the role of a faculty mentor in the success of students with disabilities in their first year in college. This chapter contains a statement of purpose, research questions, and design of the study, including the research method, setting, population, sample, data collection procedures, and a summary.

**Statement of Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to better understand how students with disabilities who had a faculty mentor transitioned from high school and home into their first year of college. Their experiences were studied to identify what factors, if any, helped students. Findings from this study may help faculty and staff in meeting the developmental needs of these students.

**Research Questions**

This study addressed the following research questions.

What transitional issues did college students with disabilities encounter when transitioning to their first year of college?

What were the experiences of students with disabilities who had a faculty mentor in their first year of college?
Design of Study

Research Methodology

This study was grounded in qualitative methodology. This type of methodology was chosen because it “seeks to answer questions that stress how social experience is created and given meaning” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 10). Patton (1987) argued qualitative methodology may be used to explore and evaluate mentoring within higher education. “Qualitative methods permit the evaluator to study selected issues . . . in depth and detail; the fact that data collection is not constrained by predetermined categories of analysis contributes to the depth and detail of qualitative data” (p. 9). This methodology was chosen because the researcher’s belief the issues faced by students with disabilities would be best understood through in-depth questioning and analysis of their individual experiences.

Further, phenomenology methodology was used to construct this study and analyze the data. Phenomenological studies aim to understand the “lived experiences” of a group of people (Creswell, 1994, p. 12). Similarly, Van Manen (1997) argued phenomenology is essentially the study of lived experience or the life world. More specifically, hermeneutic phenomenology was used to interpret the data. Hermeneutic phenomenology is interpretive and concentrated on meanings of lived experience and their effects on individual and social levels (Laverty, 2003). In this study, the lived experience was evident in the details, explanations, and stories the participants share.

Personal interviews were conducted to gain in-depth and detailed answers about participants’ experiences. A semi-structured interview protocol (Patton, 1990) was used to encourage storytelling and a nature flow of conversation. This allowed participants to
share stories and experiences and the researcher to as follow up questions to probe deeper in certain areas.

Setting

The institution in this study is a mid-size public institution in the Midwest which primarily serves undergraduate students with some graduate coexistence (The Carnegie Foundation, n. d.). Additionally, at least half of the enrolled undergraduate, degree-seeking students enrolled live on-campus, classifying it as a residential campus. The institution has selective admission standards. To protect the confidentiality of the students and institutions, the names of locations mentioned in the interviews were replaced with pseudonyms in the transcription process.

Population

Each student who participated in this study self-identified as a student with a disability and had a faculty mentor for at least one semester. Participants ranging from freshman to seniors comprised the population. No other identities, including gender, age, or disability type were used as eligibility criteria.

Sample Demographics

The first 12 students who agreed to participate in this study comprised the sample. Recruiting of participants continued until phenomenological saturation was reached. Seven students with physical disabilities and five students with cognitive disabilities participated in this study. Within the group of students with physical disabilities, five had mobility restrictions and used a wheelchair, one had a visual impairment and used a guide dog, and one had a non-apparent medical condition. Two participants were male and 10 were female. Most of the participants were Caucasian, one student was African
American. All 12 subjects were traditional age college students. The setting of the findings was limited to the single institution in this study, with the identity being protected by a pseudonym.

Though each subject came from the same institution, the demographic of each individual varied.

- Stephanie – Had a physical disability and used a wheelchair since being a child. She was a junior and lived on campus in the residence halls.
- Christen – Was a blind student who used a guide dog. She was in the second semester of her freshman year.
- Adam – Had muscular dystrophy and used a wheelchair since his sophomore year in college. He was in his fourth year of school and lived on campus.
- Faith – Had a chronic health condition and arthritis, which caused her to miss class frequently. She was in her second semester of college.
- Alex – Had a physical disability and used a wheelchair since being a child. He was a sophomore and lived on campus in the residence halls.
- Kayla – Had attention deficient disorder (ADD) and dyslexia. She was a graduate student, but also earned her baccalaureate degree at the same institution.
- Sue – Had a physical disability and used a wheelchair. She was a freshman and lived on campus. She attended private Catholic elementary and high schools.
- Lisa – Had a physical disability and used a wheelchair. She was a sophomore and lived on campus.
- Jessica – Had Asperger’s and dyslexia. She was a freshman and lived on campus.

She attended public school and the Dyslexia Institute of America and was diagnosed
with dyslexia in the eighth grade and Asperger’s during her senior year of high school.

- Alison – Had an undisclosed cognitive disability. She was a freshman and lived on campus.
- Rebecca – Had ADD. She was a sophomore and lived on campus.
- Leah – Had Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and a learning disability (has trouble spelling and hearing sounds). She was a freshman and lived on campus. She was diagnosed in first grade, but her parents never disclosed her disability to the school.

**Data Collection Procedures**

A semi-structured interview protocol was developed to facilitate the data collection process (Appendix A). An attempt was made to create a relaxed atmosphere during each interview. The first few minutes consisted of informal conversation that established a rapport with the subject. “Most interviews begin with small talk. . . . The purpose of this chit-chat serves to develop rapport: You search for common ground, for a topic that you have in common, for a place to begin building a relationship” (Bodgan & Biklen, 2007, p. 103). The research questions provided the organizational framework for the structure for this protocol. The protocol was divided into two major topics. These topics included transition/incorporation and the experiences of having a faculty mentor. Despite the structure provided by the questions, subjects were encouraged to share personal experiences and anecdotes.

A panel of experts skilled in both the topic and qualitative research methodology reviewed the proposed interview guide. The members of this panel included disability
services educators, three full-time faculty members, and two faculty mentors. A revised draft of the interview guide was prepared based on the suggestions of this panel. Following this revision, a pilot test was conducted in which the proposed interview guide was given to three students of the target population who responded to the call for participants, but were not involved in the study. Final revisions of the interview protocol were based on the recommendation of the pilot test.

Respondents were informed of their rights through an informed consent document (Appendix B) which was given to participants at the start of the meeting, but prior to the interview. The Institutional Review Board at Ball State University reviewed and approved the data collection process (Appendix C). Data were collected during the spring semester of 2011.

Data were collected through personal interviews with students who had a faculty mentor in their first year of college. A qualitative research technique known as purposive sampling was used to locate informants (Patton, 1990). The Director of the disability services forwarded an e-mail drafted by the researcher to the population (Appendix D). The e-mail clearly stated students were free to participate in the study, but participation would have no influence on disability services provided and would not be changed or limited. The first 12 students who agreed to participate in this study comprised the sample. Phenomenological saturation was reached after conducting 12 interviews.

Before any interviews were conducted, students were informed that participation in the study was completely voluntary and that their identity would remain confidential. The confidentiality of each research subject was protected through identifying him/her with a pseudonym, and any other identifying names and locations mentioned in the
interviews were also assigned pseudonyms during the transcription process. To further protect the confidentiality of each research subject interview transcriptions were not included as appendices. Direct quotations from each interview are referenced by using the participant’s pseudonym name.

Interviews had no set time limit; however, interview times were no shorter than 30 minutes and continued until all questions from the interview protocol were exhausted. Participants knew in advance the interviews would be audio recorded.

Data Analysis

After interviews were conducted, each interview was transcribed and verified. Verification of the transcriptions involved reviewing the transcripts against the audio tapes to ensure there are no errors. This process was done by the researcher, before coding.

After the data were collected, the process of thematic analysis was used to analyze the data (Van Manen, 1990). A theme is an idea, concept, behavior, interaction, incident, term, or phrase used within the data (Richards, 2005). Themes were identified by listening to the audio recordings of the interviews for unique or repetitive responses. From the themes codes were extrapolated to identify major categories which explained the experienced phenomenon. Finally, a narrative was constructed in relation to the original research questions and conclusions were drawn from this narrative. To assist with interpreting the data collected, the qualitative technique of memoing was used, as defined by Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2006). Memo writing assists the researcher elaborating on their data and code categories by helping them identify key themes, patterns, and concepts.
Once themes were identified a variety of techniques were used for verification. Creswell (2007) offered a variety of techniques which can be utilized for verifying themes, including member checking and thick rich descriptions. Participants were sent a complete set of transcripts and asked to verify for accuracy. This process helped to ensure participant’s experiences were accurately recorded. Thick rich descriptions were used to provide detail and context to the experiences of participants. Van Manen (1990) maintained thick rich descriptions allows for a more concrete understanding of the implications of the phenomenon. Moreover, thick rich descriptions allows for increased transferability into a variety of contexts.

**Summary**

This study examined the transition issues experienced by students with disabilities, at a midsized public university in the Midwest, who had a faculty mentor during their first year of college. Both the transitional issues and specific experiences were studied to better understand how students with disabilities experiences their first year of college. Data was gathered through personal interviews with 12 students who participated in the faculty mentor program. The data were collected during the spring semester 2011.
Chapter Four presents the findings from the study which examined the experiences of students with disabilities who had a faculty mentor. This chapter begins with a summary of the study, followed by a detailed presentation of the findings. The chapter concludes with a summary of the data.

Summary of the Project

This study examined the experiences of students with a disability who had a faculty mentor. Common experiences were studied to better understand the transition from high school to college and the role of faculty mentors. Data were gathered through personal interviews with 12 undergraduates who identified as having a disability and having participated for at least one semester in the faculty mentorship program offered through the university disability services office. Each subject was interviewed during the spring semester of 2011. Themes were extracted from the responses and systematically organized in regards to the research questions. First, relevant themes were detected across all 12 interviews. Second, these themes were organized and condensed into broader themes in regards to the two categories addressed by the research questions: transition to college and the role of faculty mentorship. Third, data were analyzed according to these broader themes.
Findings

Transition to College

The participants in this study encountered many specific experiences during their transition to college as a result of having a disability. The common experiences shared by the participants included academic transition, social transition, family, and accommodations. Additionally, students with a physical disability noted sense of community, getting around campus, and attendants.

**Academic Transition.** Eleven of the twelve participants indicated the academic transition from high school to college was difficult. While each student had a different disability and academic background, they were all able to share how their disability affected their academic integration.

For Leah, the transition from high school to college was not easy. Although her parents knew about her disability since she was in elementary school, they never disclosed it to her teachers out of fear she would be treated differently. While she attended regular classes all through primary and secondary school, she was not ready for college level academics. Leah (Transcript) said, “My high school did not really prepare me at all for college, to be honest.” While some students indicated a general feeling of unpreparedness, other students specifically cited how their disability affected feeling ready for college academics. Some students reported they felt insulated in high school. Rebecca (Transcript) explained how her ADD affected her academics, “The first semester was kind of rough. . . . I am really bad about doing big papers, because I cannot concentrate so I have trouble getting them done.”
Students with disabilities want to do well in school just like any other students. Sue felt she had to overcome additional pressures to be successful due to the prejudice her teachers and fellow students had regarding individuals with disabilities.

I think it made me more driven too. I know it made me more driven in high school because I was constantly having to prove myself to my teachers, and prove to all of the students of my class, that I was not dumb, and not stupid. I was in a chair, but I got there the same way they got there and was in their same classes they were because I am smart and can handle myself. I think it keeps me driven in a way. (Sue, Transcription)

Sue felt the accommodations received did not provide an academic advantage, but rather leveled the field.

Several students expressed they felt a need to prevail through their academics without any special accommodations. They wanted to attend the same classes and have the same expectations from teachers, rather than receive special treatment. Christen did not think her instructors should have to change their teaching style to accommodate her needs.

I do not bother [asking for accommodations] because I am not the only person in the class. If the other 99.99% of the people can see it, I do not see a point to making a change to teaching style. If it is that deep, I will make an appointment and I will talk to them during office hours or e-mail them. (Christen, Transcription)

Jessica even expressed aversion to teachers providing different standards based on her disability. She did not want to be treated differently in any way due to her disability.
He is hard on everyone else; he pushes because he knows that we can do it. My biggest pet peeve is when a teacher sees my disability and cuts my work in half, or even more. That to me is a sign I cannot do it. I can do it, maybe just not as fast as everyone else. (Jessica, Transcript)

These additional challenges make it difficult to adjust to the academic environment of college. While resources and support exist for these students, sometimes students with disabilities are not aware of these resources or choose not to use them due to a perceived stigma. In addition to academic challenges, students with disabilities may also struggle socially.

**Social Transition.** Making friends and feeling socially accepted is important for students coming to college. However, participants felt they were stigmatized and marginalized due to their disability among peers. As a result, some students with disabilities found the social transition from high school and home to college difficult.

Alex felt that he overcame the hurdle his disability could have placed in front of him and got involved anyways.

Having a disability, sometimes you just do not want to go out and do stuff, but I just pull myself through it. I always think of people who are out there who are way worse than I am that are getting out there, so that helps me get out there more. I just think about people that have more stuff to deal with. (Alex, Transcription)

While most students have some challenges related to transitioning from high school and home to college, these students felt they experienced additional challenges. However, many of them were able to overcome these challenges. Jessica (Transcription) shared
how her brother assisted her with the social transition to college, “he helped me more with my social skills. With Asperger’s, it is hard to have social skills, He helped me get started with the friends because I do not like being close to people.” Students with physical disabilities also face unique challenges related to getting around. Lisa (Transcript) explained, “You cannot do some things with people that other people can do. You cannot go to someone’s house off campus or just get in the car. It is harder.” These challenges can sometimes cause students with disabilities to feel isolated.

On the other hand, when students found companionship with other students with disabilities they felt they had a support system. This actually enhanced the social transition to college for many students, because they felt like a part of an in-group. Sue (Transcription) expressed, “I think what made it easier was that I knew we had a really good disability program here. I knew there were people here I could go to for questions.” Students with a physical disability feel an additional sense of community. Adam (Transcript) agreed by saying, “having other students in wheelchairs, in the same position as me, I felt good about that. We connected. . . . and having people understand that need was very good.” Students living on campus found community in the residence hall. Lisa (Transcript) explained, “Well I did not have any friends on my floor at Thompson. I was coming over to Wells to hang out with my friends there.” At the institution where the research was conducted Wells Hall has a large population of students with physical disabilities. The remaining students did not overtly express this helped with the social transition, but all of the students did convey they felt accepted in college. In general, students with disabilities struggled socially adjusting to college. Students with disabilities also had to get used to not having their family around.
**Family.** As the students adjusted to being in college, they also had to adjust to not being close to their families. The participants had various levels of parental involvement both in high school and at college. At times, students had a close relationship with family members and relied on them for help while others had their parents advocate on their behalf.

The hardest part for many students about leaving family members was becoming independent and having to do things on their own. Lisa (Transcript) shared, “I was not homesick, I just missed my mom more and everything she does for me.” Jessica (Transcript) told a similar story, “the hardest thing was leaving my brother. He has been there for my entire life and he is the one that took care of me a lot.” It was important for these students to learn how to be independent and take care of themselves. This level of dependence was often deep rooted from childhood.

Jessica credited her mom for making sure she got the accommodations she needed.

My mom took care of the education part of it. She was my advocate and told my teachers what was going to happen. I do not look like a child with a disability so teachers would not believe me. So mama bear, that is what they called her, would come in. (Jessica, Transcript)

Often the parent’s active role made it difficult for students to take the lead of their own education. In high school, students were used to their parents and teachers to make sure accommodations were in place, but once at college the students were completely responsible for this process. The student not only had to be proactive about getting accommodations, but they also had to serve as an advocate for themselves. Faith
explained her parents would help when teachers did not understand her illness and why she had to miss class more than other students and how she is now responsible to be her own advocate. “You cannot call your mom and have her call a teacher to talk about the illness. In high school my parents would have called them and cleared things up, but here I have to handle everything on my own” (Faith, Transcript). For many students with disabilities, family members played an important role in their life. Oftentimes parents and family members were highly involved in decisions at school. In high school family members provided regular support and even helped with the accommodation process, but in college students had to learn the accommodation process themselves.

**Accommodations.** A common transition issue for participants was becoming familiar with the accommodation process. The accommodation process was different from high school to college and the student now had to be responsible for requesting accommodations and disclosing their disability to faculty members. Students shared a variety of experiences about the challenges they faced and level of preparedness entering college.

The accommodation process in college is drastically different than in high school and many students did felt unprepared for the change.

I did not realize how much effort my parents and my teacher of record put into an IEP. . . . Now all of that has shifted on to my shoulders and I have to make sure that I am on top of being in communication with the students with disabilities office, but also with my professors. (Alison, Transcript)

Alison realized she was the only person that could take the initiative to ask for accommodations. It was also important for her to ask when she needed accommodations
and communicate to her teachers she had a disability. Alex also recognized the shift in responsibility when coming to college.

You have to do more of it yourself, because if you do not then you are not going to receive help. In K-12, someone was always there for you, they know what you need and your parents are always there. . . . it went from someone else handling it to you handling it. (Alex, Transcript)

Not only was he now responsible for getting accommodations, but the process was also different. In primary and secondary school the school was responsible for providing accommodations, but in college Alex had to be responsible for everything. Sue (Transcript) explained, “The IEP team and the parents and you work with the teachers [in high school]. . . . There is no middle-man like that here. Here, if I want something done I go and talk to the director of disability services.” Many students thought this change was completely foreign when they came to college. They were used to others being involved in the process and in college everything was dependent on them.

While the accommodation process is different in college and the burden to request accommodations is on the student, they felt the college has resources and staff to assist them. Adam shared a story about working with the director of disability services to receive accommodations.

The first time I visited here, I was with my parents and he came up to me and was asking questions. He was not really asking my parents questions, he was asking me questions and I had to answer them. I knew I was going to have to speak up for myself. . . . It showed me I was going to have to step up more. My parents were just here to guide me, but I was the one driving the boat. . . . He would not
physically do it, but he would help me with the information so that I could do what I need to in order to succeed. (Adam, Transcript)

Adam felt supported and reassured that while he was responsible for being his own advocate there were people on campus who supported him. Adam later went on to say, the director of the disability services staff was the most helpful person on campus during his transition.

The accommodation process forced students to be self-advocates. If students needed accommodations they were responsible to provide documentation of their disability and make a request to disability services. According to students, this process empowered them to disclose their disability to faculty members. Leah (Transcript) said, “You have to go and talk to your teachers and tell them what your disabilities are. You have to advocate for yourself.” The process of disclosing a disability and asking for accommodations was not easy for students, especially when they were new to college and unfamiliar with how to approach faculty members in the first place. Rebecca (Transcript) shared, “I get letters of accommodation for my disability so it is kind of a challenge going up to my teachers and telling them what [disability] I have and what [accommodations] I need.” Kayla shared even as a graduate student she still finds it difficult to talk with faculty members about her disability and the accommodations she needs. “Handing my professors the (accommodation) letter that I have a learning disability was a little intimidating, that I had to admit to a learning disability. To this day, it is still hard to . . . because it is stigmatized” (Kayla, Transcript). Kayla and Rebecca recognized the accommodations they received help them be successful, so they continue to advocate for themselves even though it is difficult.
The accommodation process in college was difficult for many students. They were not used to being in control of their education to the degree they experienced in college. It taught many students they needed to be self-advocates and ask for help if they needed it. Coming to college also provided many students with a new sense of community with other students with disabilities.

**Sense of Community.** Beyond the social transition some participants specifically cited finding a sense of community on campus. Sometimes, but not always, this was with other students with disabilities. In general, the large population of students with disabilities and services available to them at institution where the research was conducted may play an important role in creating a sense of community. It was important for students to find others who could relate to them.

Three of the five students in wheelchairs and one of the students with a learning disability felt the sense of community was important to their transition. It also helped with the students forming social bonds. Leah (Transcript) expressed, “Usually when you have a disability, you hang out with people that have a disability, because they understand you. It is hard to break that cycle because those are the people you connect with.” Many students found an instant connection with other students with disabilities and they found instant friendships. Even before coming to campus many of the students had heard about the reputation the university has for working with students with disabilities. In talking about her transition to college Sue (Transcript) said, “I think what made it easier was that I knew we had a really good disability program here. I knew there were people here I could go to for questions.” The sense of community at college helped some students feel welcome on campus. This was an important piece of their transition
to college. Being able to physically get around campus was another topic many students mentioned was important to their transition to college.

**Getting Around Campus.** A college campus can be difficult to navigate, especially for students with mobility and visual disabilities. In high school students are used to being in one building, while at college they have to travel across campus. This sometimes means architectural barriers and challenges with the weather. These extra challenges can make it difficult for students with physical disabilities to get around campus. Four of the five students in wheelchairs and the student who was blind mentioned campus accessibility played a significant role in their decision to attend the institution and their overall success at college.

Christen shared a story about how the adaptive technology coordinator, who is also blind and has a guide dog, took the time to show her where the veterinarian was and how to get around campus. “I think the easy part is just that [institution removed] is very accommodating. . . . Even the dining staff will ask if I need help. . . . That has been fantastic” (Christen, Transcript).

For students living on campus the accessibility features in the residence halls allowed for them to live independently. Lisa (Transcript) explained, “I lived in Wells Hall and had my own accessible bathroom, which was nice and the prox cards are nice to get inside places. It is a pretty accessible campus.” She went on to talk about how this was a major change from her parents’ house. “My house is not accessible. I cannot get a drink or food without help. I cannot shower or get off the couch without help. Coming here, I could sit on the furniture and had to get my own food.” As a result, she enjoyed
being on campus more than at her parents’ house because she was able to live independently in the residence halls.

Having a campus environment that was physically accessible was helpful for students with disabilities transitioning to college. They did not have to worry about where they were living or if they could get to class, instead they could focus on their classes and adjusting to college. For some students, part of this adjustment included using attendants.

**Attendants.** Four of the five students in wheelchairs shared that using nursing staff (attendants) was a new experience when transitioning to college. The students were used to having a family member help them with daily living tasks (i.e., bathing, toileting, getting dressed) and when they came to college they had to rely on hired attendants to help them. This was often a foreign experience, having someone they did not know in situations that are normally private. Additionally, they would have to adjust their schedules to when attendants were available to help them with getting out of bed, showering, and using the bathroom.

All of the students who talked about using attendants shared their frustration and how it added to the difficulty of transitioning to college. Stephanie (Transcript) revealed, “The attendants were the hardest part to get used to just because I am not used to having a set time to use the bathroom or... where I have to go and get in my bed.” Stephanie felt that having attendants help her with personal tasks was somewhat invasive. She also felt it was as an inconvenience and something that held her back from being completely independent. Coming to college was the first time Adam had ever has someone other than his parents take care of him. They knew what he was capable of and what type of help he needed, but this changed when he started having attendants take care of him.
Adam (Transcript) shared, “I had to tell them exactly what I needed and it was difficult because I was used to not saying a whole lot and it being done.” The experience of having to tell an attendant how to perform personal task was awkward for many students. Alex (Transcript) said, “It was different. They don’t know me very well because they are not my parents so it’s just explaining to people how to help me and stuff like that.”

Attendants helped some students with physical disabilities be independent at college. This was a new experience for students transitioning to college and was sometimes a frustrating process. This was a new experience for many students, who were previously used to family members taking care of them.

**Faculty Mentorship**

Regarding the role of having a faculty mentor, participants shared mainly positive characteristics as they related to their transition to college. The topics students discussed with their mentor varied greatly on the individual needs of the student and relationships between students and faculty mentors from general advice and information about campus resources to how to approach faculty members. Specific aspects of having a faculty mentor were discussed as well as how they affected the transition from high school to college.

**Advice.** Faculty mentors gave advice that was influential for students in the transition from high school to college and becoming familiar with college. Faculty mentors provided students with disabilities advice on a wide range of topics, depending on the needs of the student. While they did not always act on the advice, they felt it provided them with useful information on a variety of topics related to being successful at college.
Some of the faculty mentors took a holistic approach to their mentoring and tried to make sure students were successful in their transition to college. In talking about her mentor Stephanie (Transcript) explained, “He said I need to learn to balance myself. . . . He sat me down and told me there are three components to my life: school, friends, and self.” She came to college feeling prepared for the academic rigor of college, but needed some help with the social transition. Stephanie’s mentor also gave her advice about meeting people and gaining experience, “Work experience: he says that every time I see him! Now I am seeing why.” She has had a campus job for two years now and in that time she has meet others in her residence hall and made friends. Alison appreciated her faculty mentor talked with her about school and her personal life. “She gave me advice on a lot of things and again it wasn’t all academic. . . . It was cool that she could be both the friend and the authority figure. She gave a lot of advice, both academically and non” (Alison, Transcript). Allison, like many of the students, felt her mentor cared about her as an individual, not just a student.

Other students needed more help with the academic transition to college. Christen came to college feeling ready to make friends and be independent, so the conversations she had with her mentor centered on academics. Christen’s mentor encouraged her to be a self-advocate regarding her disability.

One of the most important things she said was do not be afraid to contact your professor. If something is not working for you, go to your professor early. Do not wait until the last minute. . . . Tell them what you need. (Christen, Transcript)
This conversation helped her to be confident in talking about her disability with faculty members. At first this was new to her, but over time and with the support of her faculty mentor she became more comfortable having these types of conversations.

Some students needed the support and coaching for areas they were unfamiliar with. Kayla shared a story about how her faculty mentor encouraged her to incorporate academics into her rugby involvement. As an advertising major she found a way to become a student leader on the team. By sophomore year she was the advertising and communications chair. “By my senior year I combined both my academic and social group and created a national ruggers helping others campaign. . . . He gave me that advice, I applied both social and academic advice and it turned out really well” (Kayla, Transcript). Her mentor’s advice helped to get her involved both academically and with extracurricular activities. She was proud to share the work she accomplished with the rugby team and how it may not have happened without the encouragement and advice from her mentor.

Students felt the advice their faculty mentor provided them with was helpful. Having a faculty mentor provided them a specific individual on campus they could go to when they had questions or needed help. Mentors provided advice and suggestions to students on a wide variety of areas, both academically and socially, which helped them to be successful. Mentors were also able to make their mentees aware of campus resources.

**Aware of Campus Resources.** As participants adjusting to life at college, their mentors made sure students were aware of campus resources. The campus resources mentors shared depended on the needs of the student. While students did not always seek out the campus resources their mentor talked to them about, participants felt being aware
of the campus resources was important and added another layer of comfort during their transition.

 Students acknowledged a variety of campus resources exist to aid them in the transition to college. In general, the participants reported their faculty mentor made sure they were aware of the campus resources they may benefit most from. Stephanie (Transcript) shared, “As knowing the resources and making those available to me, that was extremely helpful. If it was not for him... I would not have known where to get the help.” Sometimes the faculty mentor did not introduce new campus resources, but rather they reinforced how the resources could help in the transition. “He would tell me about campus movies and Late Nite. ... I already knew about those, but he kind of reinforced them.”

 Faculty mentors can also normalize using campus resources that may have a negative connotation. Sometimes students could benefit from campus resources that may have a negative stigma, such as the academic support center or counseling, but do not go because they are either not aware of the services or feel they have a negative reputation. Alison shared that when first coming to campus she was nervous to go to the writing support center for help with papers, but her mentor dispelled the stigma of going there. In our first meeting, she wanted to let me know that not just disabled kids go to the Learning Center or Writing Center. I was not singled out because I went there. It was more than just kids like me that go there. (Alison, Transcript)

Having a faculty mentor to encourage the use of campus resources was important for many students. While students did not always utilize the resources their faculty member
told them about, they liked to know resources were available to them. Establishing a relationship with their mentor also helped students to meet other faculty members.

**Getting to Know Faculty.** The students also mentioned the positive affect of getting to know faculty had on their transition. Participants had a unique opportunity to form a close relationship with a faculty member, typically in their major, and learn what a faculty-student relationship looks like. As a result, they often helped them form relationships with other faculty members.

When first coming to college, Jessica was nervous about approaching her faculty members, but through forming a relationship with her faculty mentor this process became easier. They talked about how to approach teachers and discuss her need for accommodations. Jessica (Transcript) stated, “I am not as nervous as I was before, so it is a lot easier to talk to my professors. Last semester was the first time I ever advocated for myself and that was not easy.” The mentorship program has left a lasting impression on Jessica and she is now comfortable approaching faculty members in general. Alison (Transcript) shared a similar experience regarding being comfortable talking to her teachers, “I feel like it has prepared me more to talk to my professors. I am not as scared as I would be if I were a normal student.” Students thought having a faculty mentor during their first year provided them with a unique vantage and understanding of the role of faculty-student relationships.

When possible, students are paired with a faculty member in their major or a closely related field, which provides an inlet to meeting other faculty in their major. Rebecca’s mentor taught in his major and was able to answer department specific information about the program and other faculty. Rebecca (Transcript) explained, “My
mentor was on faculty in the communication studies department, so she helped me know that I could talk to her about stuff, but that I could also talk to my teachers about stuff.”

Sometimes, as was the case with Lisa, students have their mentor as a teacher. Lisa (Transcript) said, “She helped me because I did not know any professors or anything and then second semester I had her as a teacher. It was nice because we were already friends.” Knowing someone in her major helped Lisa with her academic transition not only to college, but also into her major.

**Individual Support.** All 12 of the participants cited individual support from their faculty mentor as a contributing factor to a positive transition to college. While students had support from other areas as well, they viewed the faculty mentor as someone who cared about their success and was familiar with campus. They provided a wide range of support to students, including social and academic issues. Students felt they had someone on campus that cared about their success. They also went to their faculty mentor when they encountered problems and did not know where else to turn.

For Adam, having a faculty mentor meant he felt supported. Adam (Transcript) explained, “Even if I did not have a question, just the feeling of having someone that could help you was just awesome. It was like a worry I did not have to worry about anymore.” He had a close relationship with his mentor and often looked to him for help and advice. “On a scale of one to 10, it would be a nine or 10, definitely. He always helps me when I need it and I know I can contact him at any time.” Adam felt the mentor program allowed him to form a connection with someone familiar with the institution, which was important to him. Alex shared similar sentiments about having a faculty mentorship program for students with disabilities. “The idea of having a program for
students with disabilities transitioning from high school to college, to have a program if they needed help and guidance in the first year is a good idea” (Alex, Transcript).

The transition to being a self-advocate for themselves was difficult for some students and many appreciated the support their faculty mentor gave them. Prior to college, participants were used to family members and teachers advocating for their disability. Jessica felt her mentor taught her to stand up for herself.

He let me know that I might be different, but I am not less. The help I get is to even the playing field, not to put me above. He wanted me to know that being different is not a disability, it is an ability to see the world differently. . . . One of my biggest fears was advocating for myself here but I am not by myself, especially with him. He is there whenever I need him. (Jessica, Transcript)

This additional layer of support helped Jessica during her transition to college. She relied on her mentor as a resource and campus expert. Having a faculty mentor made her feel that someone on campus was looking out for what was best for her. Through coaching conversations Jessica learned how to talk disclose her disability to faculty members and ask for the accommodations she needed to be successful.

Students felt reassured to know their faculty mentor supported them if they encountered a difficult situation. Leah (Transcript) explained, “It is just nice to know that you have a mentor at your back and is there to understand and help you. Someone constantly has your back.” Most students viewed their mentor as a backup in the event that they needed help. Christen came to college feeling confident she would be able to handle the transition, but chose to have a faculty mentor just in case she needed help. Christen (Transcript) shared, “I wanted to have it available in case I might [need help]. It
is kind of like a trapeze artist, do not want to use the nets, but they still have them. . . . It is kind of the same philosophy.” Many students felt having a faculty mentor was an important part of their success in college. This relationship was even more important when students formed a close relationship with their faculty mentor.

**Mentor Relationship.** All of the students interviewed felt having an intimate relationship positively affected their transition. Students said that without a bond they did not feel the faculty mentor program would be successful. It was only through forming a close bond with their faculty mentor that students felt comfortable opening up to them. Additionally, students with a close relationship were likely to listen to the advice from their mentor and utilize the campus resources recommended.

Participants indicated getting to know their faculty mentor on a personal level was important to forming a close relationship. In speaking about her transition to college, Faith talked about how her faculty mentor was helpful. Faith (Transcript) explained, “My faculty mentor did help. I felt comfortable talking to him and did not feel like he was judging me while I was talking to him, which was good.” She indicated having a nonjudgmental person to talk to was helpful during her first semester of college. Kayla had a similar experience, but her mentor ended up being one of her teachers too, which strengthened their relationship. “I really liked having my professor as my mentor and knowing that I was always able to ask him questions, even if they were just life questions. It definitely helped with the transition” (Kayla, Transcription). Leah indicated, like other relationships, the faculty member and student need to have a close relationship in order to maximize the utility of the program. She felt the relationship she had with her mentor was similar to a friendship.
It is like having a part of the family in the school. You have to bond with them just like anyone else. It is like building a relationship, you have to start talking and have a friendship, having a teacher friend. (Leah, Transcript)

Jessica and her mentor also formed a close bond, so much so that they viewed each other as family. Jessica’s mentor invited her and his other two mentees over to his house for Thanksgiving. This bond was further strengthened when she got sick and was in the hospital during her second semester. “He and his girlfriend were there for me and came [to the hospital] because my parents could not her there. It is like a family still, like I have a family here too” (Jessica, Transcript). The close relationship Jessica formed with her mentor helped her far beyond the academic and social transition issues commonly faced by students coming to college. This relationship provided Jessica with a good support structure that helped her have a successful transition to college, but has continued through her time at school.

While it is not necessary for mentors to have a disability, some participants indicated it helped them form a closer bond with their mentor, because they were able to share common experiences regarding having a disability. Students appreciated being able to share common experiences and stories related to having a disability. “She is blind and I am in a wheelchair, so we talked about funny things that happen to us that do not happen to other people. . . . We had a good time and could relate” (Lisa, Transcription). Lisa felt that this allowed them to relate on a deeper level. Lisa’s mentor often talked to her about the challenges of having a physical disability, which added to their close relationship. One participant actually had a mentor with the same disability as him or her. Jessica was able to talk with her mentor regarding the specific struggles of having
dyslexia. “He also has dyslexia. He has some of the same disabilities as me, so he is a lot like me” (Jessica, Transcript). Jessica explained they would often have conversations about how to work through the disability and he would share personal stories with her.

On the other hand, students without close relationships to their faculty mentor were not successful or long-lasting. Stephanie said she would recommend the program to other students with disabilities, but felt having a close relationship was crucial. She recommended the program to a friend, but she the relationship did not last. “I actually did suggest the program to one of my friends and she did it, but she and her faculty mentor never really hit it off and it really was not a positive experience” (Stephanie, Transcript). It was important for students to establish a close bond with their faculty mentor. This relationship was especially important to students during their first year in college, but they relied less on their mentor as upper classmen.

**Decreasing Role of the Mentor.** While having a faculty mentor was an important factor in the transition from high school to college, many students found the mentor less useful the longer they were in school. After their freshman year many students indicated they did not need a faculty mentor and as a result the relationship was not as important to them.

As students became more accustom to college they began meeting with their mentor less. Stephanie indicated she met with her mentor six times her first year, three times her second year, and has not met with him during her third year. Alison shared a similar experience and said she felt able to handle things on her own. “I have not met with her as much this semester, but I think she has prepared me” (Alison, Transcript). While students may meet with their mentor less, but students still acknowledge their
mentor would help them if they needed. Faith’s (Transcript) mentor contacted her in the spring semester to ask if she needed help and she explained, “I did not feel like I needed to meet at the time, but that I appreciated that he was there.” Faculty mentorship helps students with disabilities transition to college, but the need for this type of relationship decreases as students become acclimated to the institution.

Summary

The students interviewed for this study discussed specific experiences of their transition to college, as well as the role of having a faculty mentor. Aspects of their transition from high school to college included academic transition, social transition, family, accommodations, sense of community, getting around campus, and attendants. Aspects within the role of the faculty mentorship program which were discussed were advice, aware of campus resources, getting to know faculty, individual support, mentor relationship, and the decreasing role of the mentor.
Chapter five presents a summary of the project, conclusions, limitations, and recommendations for future research.

Summary of the Project

This study examined the experiences of students with disabilities who had a faculty mentor in their first year of college. The theoretical construct for this study was embedded in literature regarding college transition and persistence and faculty mentorship programs. Data were gathered in the spring semester of 2011 through semi-structured interviews with 12 students who self-identified as students with disabilities and participated in a faculty mentor program for students with disabilities. Common themes were extracted from the responses, and the themes were organized and analyzed by the research questions.

Conclusions

The following conclusions were drawn from the study: students with disabilities encounter transition issues and students with disabilities find support through faculty mentorship. Each conclusion is supplemented by literature, discussion and suggestions.
Students with Disabilities Encounter Issues Transitioning

The transition from high school to college can be profound for some students with disabilities. Despite legal protections and campus resources, students with disabilities may face challenges with their academics and the accommodation process, which can make the transition difficult during the first year. Additionally, faculty and staff members who engage with students with disabilities cannot assume these students fully understand their own rights and responsibilities as an individual with a disability and the postsecondary accommodation process, which is different from the process in high school, upon entering college.

Students with disabilities have additional academic hurdles other students do not encounter and some use this energy to be productive and prove to themselves and others they are capable of being successful in college. The change in academics from high school to college is significant for many, but this is especially true for students with disabilities. Students may not feel prepared for the academic rigor of college due to their disability as the workload and expectations differ from high school. Student participation in faculty mentorship can result in gains in academic performance and retention (Campbell & Campbell, 1997). Eleven of the twelve students in this study indicated they experienced a difficult academic transition to college, as a result of their disability. It is important for students with disabilities to recognize they may face academic challenges and be proactive to seek help from faculty members and utilize academic support resources.

Tinto (1988, 1993) indicated disadvantaged students, including those with physical disabilities, are more likely to experience difficulty during the transition to
college. Educators need to be aware that students with disabilities come to college with unique backgrounds and are not always fully prepared for all aspects of the collegiate experience. Simply allowing students with disabilities in the classroom with their peers who do not have disabilities does not ensure equal access to the curriculum (Burgstahler & Crawford, 2007). Students with disabilities sometimes feel obligated to prove themselves as being equal to their faculty and fellow students. Unfortunately, a negative stigma exists for students with disabilities. This is, in part, due to our society’s cultural rigidity about individuals with disabilities. As a result, some of these students have negative perceptions about their disability, because they felt they were treated differently by others. This often leads to feeling they have to overcome their disability, rather than acknowledge it as a part of who they are. It is important for faculty, staff, and students without disabilities to understand the unique challenges faced by students with disabilities.

Previous literature has highlighted the importance of postsecondary institutions developing support systems and resources in order for students with disabilities to be successful; these students commonly struggle with academic course content, organization, time management, and study skills (Aderon & Durocher, 2007). The goal of faculty mentorship, specifically for students with disabilities, is to bridge the gap between their needs and the opportunities provided to all students. The results of this study highlight the important role faculty mentors play in helping participants overcome the academic hurdles associated with transitioning to college; this conclusion is consistent with the extant literature regarding faculty-student out-of-class communication. For several decades, researchers have found a positive relationship
stemming from faculty-student contact (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1977, 1978, 1979; Endo & Harpel, 1982; Fusani, 1994; Martin et al., 1999). This study reified the positive effect of faculty-student contact. Students repeatedly praised their faculty mentor for preparing them for their collegiate experience. This idea was also supported by Halawah (2006) who found, “close personal relationships between staff and students plays a major part in fostering the intellectual development of students” (¶ 22).

A primary concern faculty members often have is to ensure that academic integrity is not compromised when making accommodations for students with disabilities. Faculty members are rightfully concerned about maintaining an equal environment for students with and without disabilities. Inadvertently, such measures sometime lead to a difficult experience from the student perspective when faculty members make no efforts towards accommodations. Therefore, faculty members should acknowledge the individual needs of all of their students and strive to help them succeed. It is important for faculty mentors to help first-year students with disabilities prepare for the shift in academic expectations from high school to college.

University administrators and staff members should work to provide academic resources and support systems for students with disabilities. While administrators and staff members are not directly responsible for classroom instruction, as educators, they can provide individual support and inform students about campus resources. This type of support can come from the disability services staff, but they should not be limited to one office. All faculty and staff should be knowledgeable about the unique needs of students with disabilities and how to assist them. For further advancement, faculty mentors should receive proper training in assisting students with disabilities. This training needs
to include information about the postsecondary accommodation as well as campus resources.

Additionally, students with disabilities must adapt to the postsecondary accommodation process, which is often drastically different than what they experienced in high school; this is due in part to the stark contrast in the laws governing postsecondary education for students with disabilities. “At the college level, significant changes occur in the legal rights of students, and there is a sharp reversal of parent and student responsibility” (Madaus, 2005 p. 32). At the postsecondary level students need to understand their rights under the law as nearly all of the responsibility is transferred from the school and parent to the student. According to Alison and Alex this was a difficult transition. Faculty members should be aware of the accommodation process in case students who have not registered their disability with the university disclose it to them. Faculty members should also be aware of how to provide necessary accommodations to students when they present documentation of their disability.

The accommodation process in college encourages students to become a self-advocate. If students need accommodations, they are responsible for providing documentation of their disability and making the formal request. This process also empowers students to be responsible to disclose their disability to teachers. As a result, while students with disabilities are going through typical transitional issues, they must additionally learn how accommodations unfold at the postsecondary level (Simpson & Spencer, 2009).

Most participants in this study were unaware of how much responsibility was upon them in order to receive accommodations. In high school they were accustomed to
parents and teachers taking the lead and in college students have to take the initiative. The staff in the disability services office and faculty members expect students to be responsible for their disability and negotiate for reasonable accommodations, rather than the other way around. In college, students must disclose their disability to the disability services office, ask for accommodations, and serve as self-advocate. It is important for a paradigm and pragmatic shift in the accommodation process at the secondary level for students with disabilities. They need to learn how to manage their disability and the accommodations they will need both in college and in the work setting. Secondary school educators, family members, and students should work collaboratively to ensure the student is an integral part of the accommodation process and understands their disability.

It is important to acknowledge that nearly every faculty and staff member will engage with students with a disability in their job, whether there are aware of the disability or not. Despite the known challenges, little research has been conducted related to the transition services leading to college enrollment for students with disabilities (Wilson et al., 2009). Considering the drastic change in the accommodation process between high school and college, two specific suggestions are offered regarding how to help students with this process. First, all faculty and staff should become familiar with the accommodation process, sharing the responsibility of accommodation process with the disability services staff, as it should not be the sole responsibility of staff in the disability services office to assist these students. Second, faculty members and staff should receive formalized training on the accommodation process. This would allow them to better understand the process and how to better assist these students, based on their individual needs.
Students with Disabilities Find Support through Faculty Mentorship

Students with disabilities often experience many challenges during their collegiate experience. It is important for these students to feel individually supported as they adjust to college. For students with disabilities, faculty mentorship provides an added layer of support, which is often needed, especially during the transition from high school to college. Each individual in this study identified at the time of his/her interview their faculty mentor was crucial in their transition due to the individual support and help they provided.

During meetings between the mentor and mentee a wide variety of topics were commonly discussed, depending on the needs of the student, as evidence in the advice theme. Participants commonly agreed, mentors should attempt to take a holistic approach to working with their mentee, ensuring a smooth academic and social transition to college. Students appreciated when mentors would not only inquire about classroom experiences, but also inquire about their personal life, seen in the words of Stephanie and Kayla. As a source of knowledge and authority, faculty mentors should also encourage positive behaviors, such as attending class, building relationships with other faculty members, and being a self-advocate regarding their disability. Mentors may also serve as an academic resource, especially when students are matched with a faculty member in their major or a closely related field. Mentors can assist students in adjusting to college life and becoming fully engaged in and out of the classroom (Nora & Crisp, 2007). Mentors should also seek to draw direct connections and parallels to students’ academics and personal interests. Faculty mentors often have a unique relationship with their mentors and as a result can offer advice regarding part-time jobs, joining a student
organization, or being involved on campus. Students felt individually supported and often relied on their faculty mentor as a resource and campus expert.

Students shared that the conversations they had with their faculty mentor helped them to become acclimated with college and comfortable talking with other faculty members. Students described a faculty mentor as someone who cared about their success and were familiar with campus resources, often normalizing campus resources that may have a negative connotation (e.g., counseling and learning centers) due to the perception by students. Mentors were able to use their intimate knowledge about a student’s specific needs to personally refer them to specific campus resources.

Developing a close and sometimes personal bond with faculty mentors was crucial to the success of faculty mentor relationships. Students who indicated they had a positive experience were able to identify some type of personal interest or bond, such as a similar research interest, or something as inconsequential as liking the same sports team or hobby. Such a bond was the foundation for a closer relationship. Once students developed a connection to their faculty mentor, discussion of academic and transition issues easily followed. Furthermore, when students were paired with faculty members in their same or related academic discipline, as most were in this study, they can have in-depth conversations about personal and academic interests. Many students felt it was important for their faculty mentor to be able to navigate their academic program and have experience in the field they wanted to pursue. Students with close bonds often stayed in contact with their mentors long beyond their first semester or freshman year. Sometimes these relationships developed so deep, students referred to their mentor as an extension of their family. Deep seeded relationships taught students the benefits of student-faculty
interaction. Having a mentor may be especially beneficial for students with disabilities if the mentors have a disability themselves, although this was not an anticipated aspect of the program. While it is not necessary for a faculty mentor to share a similar disability, or a disability at all, it does provide a unique bond between the faculty member and student. Regardless of the type of bond, it is important the mentor and mentee establish a bond; otherwise the relationship is not likely to be strong or long-lasting.

In order to navigate the complexities of a college or university, it is important for students to develop strong relationships with faculty members; students should be encouraged by their faculty mentor to build formal relationships with other faculty members. Establishing a close connection with a faculty mentor aided students approaching other faculty members, as shared by Faith and Leah. This is especially important as students need to be able to have candid conversations about their disability and individual needs in the classroom. Once they learned how to interact with their faculty mentor, conversations with other faculty members were not as difficult for some students. It is important for students to continue to establish close bonds with faculty members, even after the first year and connection to their faculty mentor. This is confirmed by other researchers (Cotton & Wilson, 2006; Fusani, 1994), yet students still do not engage with faculty members outside of class as much as they could (Halawah, 2006).

Faculty, staff, and administrators should recognize the importance of providing individualized support to students with disabilities. Student’s identity is malleable, especially during their first year of college, and faculty mentors have the ability to shape mentees during this time. Previous studies have indicated, students with close
relationships to faculty were more likely to persist at the institution and achieve academically (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1977, 1978, 1979). In their series of studies on freshman persistence, Pascarella and Terenzini found withdrawal was related to: (1) total frequency of student-faculty informal, nonclassroom contact, and (2) frequency of interactions with faculty to discuss intellectual matters. Developing intimate relationships between students and faculty members in their discipline should be a top priority.

**Limitations**

This study was limited to the experiences and issues as discussed by 12 students who identified as students with disabilities at a single institution. Due to the inclusion criteria of the study, which stipulated students must have participated in the mentor program for at least one semester, students with negative experiences were not likely to be included as they may not have continued with the program for a full semester. It is important to acknowledge this led to primarily positive responses from participants. Additionally, the experiences and disabilities of these students were self-reported and one-sided.

**Recommendations**

Future studies should expand on the number of students that participated in the study and the institutions they attended. A comparative analysis would allow for differences to be noted between students with different types of disabilities and accommodations. Future research needs to capture both the positive and negative experiences of students with disabilities who had a faculty mentor. The decision was made use stipulate participates must have one full semester in the program to be included
in the study with the idea we wanted students who would be able to talk in detail about their experiences; however, it was not foreseen this inclusion criteria would possibly eliminate a number of students with negative experiences and did not continue with their mentor for a full semester from being eligible for this study.

Future researchers should also conduct a longitudinal study to better understand how the experiences of students with disabilities change over time, comparing the experiences of freshmen with those of seniors. Several students in this study mentioned the positive effect of having a mentor who also had a disability. It would be interesting to see if there is any difference between faculty mentors who do and do not have a disability themselves. Also, only the students themselves were interviewed in the study. For an alternate perspective, interviews could be conducted with family members, professors, and university administrators, providing further information regarding the collegiate experiences of these students.

By making any of the above modifications, researchers and administrators could obtain a richer understanding of the transitional issues encountered by students with disabilities as they begin college. This understanding would be helpful in building mentor programs and developing initiatives to help such students adjust and persist in college.

**Summary**

Based on the results of this study the following conclusions were drawn: students with disabilities encounter unique transition issues and students with disabilities find support through faculty mentorship. Each conclusion was supplemented by literature, discussion, and suggestions. Limitations and recommendations for future research were also discussed.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL
Interview Protocol

A. Introduction

Thank you for meeting with me today. This study is being conducted to better understand the first-year experiences of students with disabilities and how a faculty mentorship helps in the transition from high school to college. Because your personal experiences are so important in this study, I hope you will be as honest and open in your responses as possible. You are encouraged to provide personal experiences and stories throughout this interview, as this information will be used to better understand the transitional needs of students with disabilities.

Before beginning, I would like to inform you of your rights as a research participant. Your identity will remain completely confidential and will not be revealed in any published material and any other names mentioned during the course of the interview will also be labeled with pseudonyms. You may choose to refrain from answering any of the following questions and you reserve the right to withdraw from this study at any time and for any reason.

Additionally, your answers will be utilized in drawing conclusions for this study and they may be presented in published material. To ensure that I record your answers accurately, I would like to ask your permission to record this interview. The recording will remain solely in my possession, and no other person will know you participated in this study.

Do I have your permission to record this interview?

Have you been able to review the Informed Consent Form I provided to you earlier? Do you have any questions about this document?
I have prepared a list of questions to help guide our conversation, but please do not hesitate to share any stories or experiences you feel may be relevant. We will talk about your experiences as a student with a disability transitioning from high school to college, as well as the role of your faculty mentor in helping during your transition.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

B. Background Information

I would like to begin by reflecting on your experiences as a student with a disability coming to college.

1. Why did you decide to attend [institution removed]?

2. How was your first semester of college?
   Probe- What motivated you during your first year?

C. Transition/Incorporation

Next let’s talk about your transition to college life.

3. How did you do with your transition to college? What were the elements that made the transition easy and/or difficult?

4. What problems did you encounter during your first semester of college?

5. How did it feel to leave your family and friends from home and come to college?

6. What did you find most challenging about your first few weeks of college?

7. Has your disability influenced your separation from home and school? If so, how?

8. What were some of the new experiences you adjusted to during your first semester in college?
9. Who were some of the helpful people on-campus during your first semester? Why? How did they help you?

**D. Role of Your Faculty Mentor**

Now, I would like to specifically discuss your experience with your faculty mentor.

10. How often did you meet with your mentor during the first semester? How often did you meet with him or her during the second semester? Do you still stay in contact?

Probe- Who initiated the contact between the two of you – you or your mentor?

11. Can you remember what advice your mentor provided? What did you talk about?

One of the goals of the faculty mentors is to help students transition from high school to college.

12. Why did you decide to have a faculty mentor?

13. Do you feel like your mentor helped you transition to [institution removed]? If so, how?

Probe- Did you need that kind of help?

14. What campus resources did your mentor refer you to?

Probes- Have you used them? How have they helped you?

15. Would you suggest to other friends with disabilities that they have a faculty mentor?

Probe- Why or why not?

16. What kind of advice would you give other students with disabilities about having a faculty mentor?
E. Conclusion

17. Is there anything else you would like to share with me about your faculty mentor?

Thank you very much for taking time to discuss your experiences with me. This conversation will help me greatly in understanding the transition process for students with disabilities and the role of faulty mentorship.
APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT
**Study Title**  
Experiences of first-year students with disabilities who had a faculty mentor

**Study Purpose and Rationale**  
The purpose of this study is to better understand the first-year experiences of students with disabilities and how having a faculty mentor helps in the transition from high school to college. Their experiences will be studied to identify what factors, if any, helped students. Findings from this study may help faculty and staff members in meeting the developmental needs of these students.

**Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria**  
To be eligible to participate in this study, participants must be enrolled, identify as a student with a disability, and have a faculty mentor for at least one full semester.

**Participation Procedures and Duration**  
For this project, you will be asked to participate in an interview in which you will be asked a series of questions about your experience having a faculty mentor. The duration of the interview will be approximately 60 minutes.

**Audio or Video Tapes**  
For purposes of accuracy, with your permission, the interviews will be audio taped. Pseudonyms will be assigned before the recording process, so identifying names will not be recorded. The tapes will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher’s office, located at Ball State University, for one year and will then be erased.

**Data Confidentiality or Anonymity**  
All data will be maintained as confidential and no identifying information such as names will appear in any publication or presentation of the data.

**Storage of Data**  
Paper data will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher’s office for one year and will then be shredded. The data will also be entered into a software program and stored on the researcher’s password-protected computer for one year and then deleted. Only the researcher will have access to the data.

**Risks or Discomforts**  
There are no foreseeable risks in this study.

**Who to Contact Should You Experience Any Negative Effects from Participating in this Study**  
Should you feel it is necessary there are counseling services available to you through the Counseling Center at [institution removed].

**Benefits**
You may not gain any direct benefits from this study. However, by sharing your experiences, you will be helping faculty and student affairs professionals understand how to assist students with disabilities in their first year at college.

**Voluntary Participation**
Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you are free to withdraw your permission at anytime for any reason without penalty or prejudice from the investigator. Please feel free to ask any questions of the investigator before signing this form and at any time during the study.

**IRB Contact Information**
For one’s rights as a research subject, you may contact the following: Research Compliance, Sponsored Programs Office, Ball State University, Muncie, IN 47306, (765) 285-5070, irb@bsu.edu.
**Study Title**
Experiences of first-year students with disabilities who had a faculty mentor

************

**Consent**
I, __________________, agree to participate in this research project entitled, “Experiences of first-year students with disabilities who had a faculty mentor”. I have had the study explained to me and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I have read the description of this project and give my consent to participate. I understand that I will receive a copy of this informed consent form to keep for future reference.

To the best of my knowledge, I meet the inclusion/exclusion criteria for participation (described on the previous page) in this study.

__________________________________  ________________
Participant’s Signature               Date

**Researcher Contact Information**

Principal Investigator:              Faculty Supervisor:
Shawn M Patrick, Graduate Student    Dr. Roger Wessel
Educational Studies                  Educational Studies
Ball State University                Ball State University
Muncie, IN 47306                    Muncie, IN 47306
Telephone: (765) 285-5938            Telephone: (765) 285-5486
Email: smmpatrick2@bsu.edu            Email: rwessel@bsu.edu
APPENDIX C

IRB APPROVAL
Institutional Review Board

DATE: January 6, 2011

TO: Shawn Patrick

FROM: Ball State University IRB

RE: IRB protocol # 207412-1

TITLE: Experiences of First-Year Students with Disabilities who had a Faculty Mentor

SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project

ACTION: DETERMINATION OF EXEMPT STATUS

DECISION DATE: January 6, 2011

The Institutional Review Board reviewed your protocol on January 6, 2011 and has determined the procedures you have proposed are appropriate for exemption under the federal regulations. As such, there will be no further review of your protocol, and you are cleared to proceed with the procedures outlined in your protocol. As an exempt study, there is no requirement for continuing review. Your protocol will remain on file with the IRB as a matter of record.

Editorial notes:

1. Advisor to complete the CITI training before working on this protocol.

While your project does not require continuing review, it is the responsibility of the P.I. (and, if applicable, faculty supervisor) to inform the IRB if the procedures presented in this protocol are to be modified or if problems related to human research participants arise in connection with this project. Any procedural modifications must be evaluated by the IRB before being implemented, as some modifications may change the review status of this project. Please contact Jennifer Weaver Cotton at (765) 212-9011 or jmweavercott@bsu.edu if you are unsure whether your proposed modification requires review or have any questions. Proposed modifications should be addressed in writing and submitted electronically to the IRB (http://www.bsualb.edu/irb) for review. Please reference the above IRB protocol number in any communication to the IRB regarding this project.

Reminder: Even though your study is exempt from the relevant federal regulations of the Common Rule (45 CFR 46, subpart A), you and your research team are not exempt from ethical research practices and should therefore employ all protections for your participants and their data which are appropriate to your project.
APPENDIX D

E-MAIL REQUESTING STUDENT PARTICIPATION
From: Larry Markle
To: Prospective Study Subjects
Subject: Faculty Mentor

Dear [student],

A graduate student, Shawn Patrick, is gathering some information on students with a faculty mentor and I would like to you consider participating in his study. Please see Shawn’s message below.

Please realize participation will in no way impact your relationship with Disability Student Services or the services and accommodations you receive.

Sincerely,

Larry

Hello. My name is Shawn Patrick and I am a graduate student at Ball State. I am currently gathering information on students with a faculty mentor and I am looking for students to share their experiences with me. If you agree you will be asked to participate in an interview that will take approximately 60 minutes.

Once again, I hope you will consider taking part in this study. Please contact me directly at smpatrick2@bsu.edu (920-427-0678) to participate.

Sincerely,

Shawn Patrick