

# Self-Determination: Exploration and Procedures When Working with Postsecondary Students with Disabilities

**Crystal D. Higgins**

Coordinator, Disability Careers Office  
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

## Abstract

Self-determination and self-advocacy skills are key for individuals with disabilities in order for them to maximize their potential and gain the accommodations needed to be successful in the workplace. This session provided participants access to *Self-Determination Training Modules*, which will enable them to develop and encourage these skills in the individuals with whom they work. The modules are useful for all individuals with disabilities, but are tailored specifically to postsecondary students who are deaf or hard of hearing. The presenter found a significant lack of training materials available to postsecondary students with disabilities focused on skills for self-determination. As a direct result of these findings, the presenter developed training modules, which address these critical needs. The presentation centered its focus on the three training modules:

- Module 1 - Self-Determination: Ownership and Responsibility,
- Module 2 – Self-Advocacy: Understood and Applied, and
- Module 3 – Self-Disclosure: Appropriate Choice.

These training modules attempt to ensure that postsecondary students with disabilities have the skills needed to make informed decisions and advocate for themselves with clarity and confidence. Successful training can lead to students with disabilities making better decisions related to career choices and increasing their own employability.

## Statement of the Problem

In the United States, a country of such economic prosperity, one minority group continues to struggle with employment. The largest minority group, people with disabilities, experiences barriers to employment, both internal and external. In fact, “the vast majority - 67.9% - of those with work disabilities are not even in the labor force, meaning that they are neither working nor actively looking for work” (Kaye, 1998). In addition, only a portion of all individuals with disabilities

will attend a postsecondary institution. According to the U.S. Bureau of the Census, of those with college degrees, an unemployment rate of more than 49% exists for people with disabilities; in contrast, college graduates without disabilities have an unemployment rate of less than 11%. (See Table 1). This manuscript will focus on the population of individuals with disabilities who are attending postsecondary institutions. It is important that service providers train these students with the necessary skills needed for positive employment outcomes.

## The Purpose

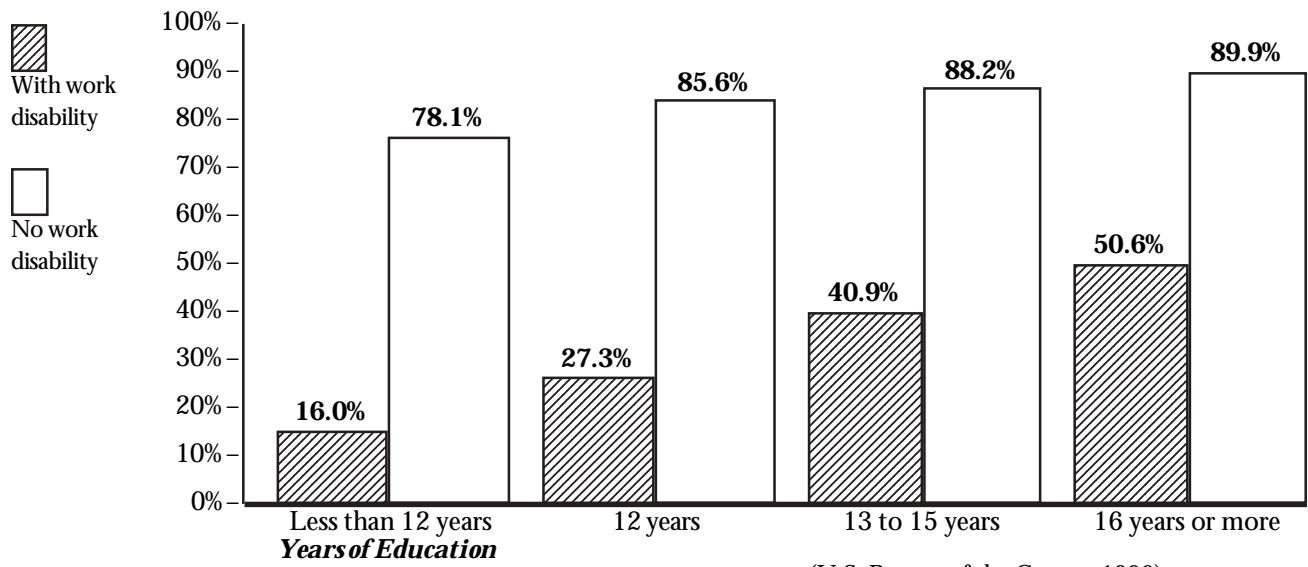
The purpose of this investigation was to examine current research and training materials dealing with self-determination, and to develop additional training materials for use with postsecondary students with disabilities and the service providers who work with this group of students. The training materials focus on issues of self-determination, defined as self-disclosure, self-advocacy, and informed choice. They will address the following research questions:

- What are the factors involved with self-determination?
- How can service providers address each of these factors?
- What specific methods can service providers implement with postsecondary students as they approach the work force?

Current research periodicals and other publications were examined. Information gathered was compiled into working training modules so they may be used in a practical setting serving postsecondary students with disabilities. Much of the current research focuses on all people with disabilities. However, the training modules presented in this research are to be used specifically with postsecondary students who are also individuals with disabilities.

A glossary has been included in *Appendix A*. The specific definitions were compiled from a variety of sources (Burgstahler & Smallman, 1999; Presidents Committee for the Employment of People with Disabilities, 2000; Skinner, 2000). For the purpose of this research, self-determination shall be defined as “the ability to identify and achieve goals based on a foundation of knowing and valuing oneself” (Field & Hoffman, 1994). In addition, self-advocacy “is about advocating – lawyering – for yourself; instead of some-

**Table 1. Percentage in labor force, by work disability status and years of education, 25-64 years.**



(U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1990)

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one else speaking for you” (Hall, 2000). Other important terms have been defined in the glossary for the benefit of the reader.

### Training Modules

The manual is organized in three modules. These modules can be used as a complete series of training over a specific period of time, or each module can be used independently as the need arises. The modules are intended to be one hour in length and can be used in a one-on-one or group setting. Activities can be modified for use with individuals or groups, and instruction will be given when such modifications are possible. An agenda for each module is also included; however, the trainer can modify the agenda to suit his/her particular needs. In addition, each module includes optional materials, which can be used as hand-outs, overheads, etc. Finally, a resource list can be found along with a glossary of terms in order that the trainer and student(s) will have support information throughout training process.

After an extensive review of the available literature, several conclusions can be made. First, the literature has a strong focus on individuals with developmental disabilities (Agran, Martin, Mithaug, Palmer, & Wehmeyer, 2000; Alper, Jayne, & Schloss, 1993; “Principles of Self-Determination,” 1999; Field & Hoffman, 1998; Field, Martin, Miller, Ward, & Wehmeyer, 1998; Wehmeyer, 1999). There is little mention of individuals with disabilities as a population in relation to self-determination skills. In addition, there has been increased attention to the subject of self-determination in recent years (Agran, Martin, Mithaug, Palmer, & Wehmeyer, 2000; Algert &

Stough, 1998; Burgstahler & Smallman, 1999; Field & Hoffman, 1998; Field, Martin, Miller, Ward, & Wehmeyer, 1998; Fussell, 2000a; Fussell, 2000b; Hall, 2000; Kennedy & Lewin, 2000; Larocco & Roberts, 2000; “Principles of Self-Determination,” 1999; “Self-Determination Principles,” 2000; Wehmeyer, 1999). Much of the literature has been written within the last several years as interest and demand has grown. Finally, we can conclude that there are training materials available for students with disabilities in a postsecondary setting; however, the materials available are neither extensive nor comprehensive in the area of self-determination (Aase, Anis, Aune, & Johnson, 1994; Aase & Smith, 1989; Burgstahler & Smallman, 1999; Larocco & Roberts, 2000; Peterson & Sherman, 1997). The training materials reviewed were found to address other needs of postsecondary students with disabilities, particularly career planning.

### Statement of Need

Due to the conclusions stated above, a statement of need can be clearly articulated. Because of the significant lack of training materials available to postsecondary students with disabilities focused on skills for self-determination, the need for comprehensive training modules has been identified. These training modules will attempt to ensure that postsecondary students with disabilities have the skills needed in order to make informed decisions and advocate for themselves with clarity and confidence. Successful training can lead to students with disabilities making better decisions related to career choices and increasing their own employability.

The available literature can be divided into three subsections: (a) self-determination (Agran, Martin, Mithaug, Palmer, & Wehmeyer, 2000; Field & Hoffman, 1998; Fussell, 2000a; Fussell, 2000b; Kennedy & Lewin, 2000; Wehmeyer, 1999), (b) self-advocacy (Algert & Stough, 1998; Drucker, 1999; Hall, 2000), and (c) training materials (Aase, Anis, Aune & Johnson, 1994; Aase & Smith, 1989; Burgstahler & Smallman, 1999; Larocco & Roberts, 2000; Peterson & Sherman, 1997). All materials reviewed are considered literature addressing the overall subject of self-determination. By far, there is more information available on self-determination than either of the other two sub-sections. However, the literature addressing self-determination has a heavy emphasis on people with developmental disabilities. The second sub-section has specific self-advocacy skills for anyone with a disability. It is important for all people with disabilities to acquire the needed self-advocacy skills in order that they may live productive lives while making decisions for themselves. These skills are especially important for those postsecondary students with disabilities. The current literature on self-advocacy skills will be adapted to meet the needs of students with disabilities. In addition, the training materials reviewed will be used to develop additional training modules. Additional modules are needed in order to address specific needs of postsecondary students with disabilities. Because of the current employment statistics, training materials designed for postsecondary students with disabilities are crucial to future success.

This is a working model to be used with students with disabilities at various postsecondary institutions. It is the author's intent that these materials be used with an individual student or a group of students. Because minimal resources were found, it is evident that additional research is needed in the area of self-determination skills specifically for postsecondary students with disabilities. Discussion is welcomed and the training modules are available by contacting the author.

## Appendix A: Glossary

**Accessible:** Easy to approach, enter, operate, participate in, or use safely, independently, and with dignity by a person with a disability (i.e., site, facility, work environment, service, or program).

**Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA):** A comprehensive civil rights law enacted in July 1990 that makes it unlawful to discriminate in private employment sector against a qualified individual with a disability. The ADA also outlaws discrimination against individuals with disabilities in state and local government services, employment, public accommodations, transportation, and telecommunications. The private sector employment provisions (Title I) became effective for employers with 25 or more employees on July

26, 1992, and on July 26, 1994, for employers of 15 or more employees. The public sector employment provisions (Title II) became effective on January 26, 1992.

**Disability:** A form of inability or limitation in performing roles or tasks expected of an individual in a social environment; a medical or mental diagnosis.

**Essential job functions:** The fundamental job duties of the employment position that the individual with a disability holds or desires. The term "essential functions" does not include marginal functions of the position.

**Functional limitation:** The level of function at which the disability is manifested (what a person cannot do functionally).

**Handicap:** The ultimate effects of the disability on the ability to work; often sociological/geographical and can be accommodated.

**Impairment:** A physiological, anatomical, or mental loss of function, other abnormality, or both.

**Individual with a disability:** A person who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more of that person's major life activities, has a record of such impairment, or who is regarded as having such an impairment.

**Major life activity:** Basic activities that the average person in the general population can perform with little or no difficulty, such as caring for oneself, performing manual tasks, walking, seeing, hearing, speaking, breathing, learning, and working.

**Qualified individual with a disability:** An individual with a disability who satisfies the requisite skill, experience, education, and other job-related requirements of the employment position such individual holds or desires, and who, with or without reasonable accommodation, can perform the essential functions of such position.

**Reasonable accommodation:** (1) Modifications or adjustments to a job application process that enables a qualified applicant with a disability to be considered for the positions such qualified applicant desires; (2) modifications or adjustments to the work environment, or to the manner or circumstances under which the position held or desired is customarily performed, that enables qualified individuals with disabilities to perform the essential functions of that position; or (3) modifications or adjustments that enable a covered entity's employee with a disability to enjoy equal benefits and privileges of employment as are enjoyed by its other similarly situated employees without disabilities.

**Undue hardship:** With respect to the provision of an accommodation, significant difficulty or expense incurred by a covered entity, when considered in light of certain factors. These factors include the nature and cost of the accommodation in relationship to the size, resources, nature, and structure of the employer's operation. Where the facility making the accommodation

is part of a larger entity, the structure and overall resources of the larger organization would be considered, as well as the financial and administrative relationship of the employing facility to the larger organization.

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