
Guest Editors' Note

Special Issue: High Stakes Tests and Postsecondary Students with Learning Disabilities

This special issue of *Learning Disabilities: A Multidisciplinary Journal* deals with the important theme of High Stakes Tests and Postsecondary Students with Learning Disabilities. As the number of students with learning disabilities attend college and other postsecondary schools increases, the topic of high stakes testing is becoming urgent. Many thanks are due to the guest reviewers who helped me with the preparation of this issue of the journal: Charles Hughes, PhD, the Pennsylvania State University, Margaret Koshland-Crane, EdD, Notre Dame deNamur University, Deborah Merchant, PhD, Keene State University, Chris O-Dell, MA, University of California, Davis, David Parker, PhD, Washington University in St. Louis.

Overview of Articles in this Issue

This special issue of *Learning Disabilities: A Multidisciplinary Journal* contains important articles on High Stakes Tests and Postsecondary Students with Learning Disabilities. The issue has the following articles:

The Documentation-Accommodation Connections: Bridging the Gaps by Christy Lendman.

This article identifies those factors that influence the acquisition of test accommodations and offers possible solutions for bridging the gaps. As students with disabilities attend postsecondary education and request accommodations on high-stakes exams, documentation of their disability and how it impacts their learning is even more important. This overarching reality is a result of several factors: legal protections for individuals with disabilities, changes in the service delivery system between secondary and postsecondary schools, and the goals and missions of the test agencies which administer specific tests.

Extended Test Time, Read Aloud and Student Characteristics: A Summary of Empirical Findings by Jennifer H. Lindstrom and Elizabeth D. Tuckwiller

The purpose of this article is to provide an overview of issues surrounding accommodations as they relate to transition to postsecondary education, participation in high-stakes assessments, and geographic and socio-economic variables among students with learning disabilities. Important legal and policy changes in recent years have made postsecondary education an increasingly viable option for students with learning disabilities. These include substantive changes in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA- 2004) in the area of transition planning, research examining the importance of a college degree on future adult outcomes for individuals with learning disabilities, and significant increases in the number of students requesting and receiving accommodations on high-stakes tests as well as in the postsecondary setting.

Reading Fluency and Students with Learning Disabilities: The Relationship to Test Accommodations by Jack Davis, Catherine Christo, and Darren Husted.

A review of the literature focusing on reading fluency intervention studies that utilized empirical research methodology is presented. After a thorough review of the research, the authors found seven studies which met their criteria. The reviews include those studies. Effect sizes were computed for all outcome data so that comparisons of effectiveness could be made. The discussion highlights important commonalities and differences among the studies, as well as highlighting the need for more empirically sound research in this area, especially as the impacts the need for accommodations for high stakes testing. Extended time on high stakes testing is the most sought out accommodation for individuals with learning disabilities. This accommodation is necessary for many individuals with learning disabilities for a variety of reasons, but often for individuals who have ongoing difficulties with reading fluency. For many students with reading-based learning disabilities, the need for extended time exists because of the difficulty in training individuals to read fluently. Reading fluency training is considered

an evidence based procedure necessary for the development of reading skills by the National Reading Panel. However, most of the evidence on which this finding is based consists of single subject, evaluative, and other non-empirical studies.

Postsecondary Students with High Abilities and Reading Disabilities: Case Analyses and Commentary by Nancy Mather and Michael E. Gerner

Three cases of students in different stages of postsecondary education who possess high abilities and talents, but also struggle with aspects of reading performance are discussed. Six cautions and considerations are considered. Exceptionally bright and capable students with learning disabilities, often referred to as being twice exceptional, may fail to meet learning disabilities criteria if a strict psychometric approach is taken. To make an accurate diagnosis, an evaluator must consider their special circumstances, unique abilities, educational histories, and outstanding areas of competence.

Psychological Disorders and Functional Limitations by John T. Brentar.

Psychological disorders lead to functional limitations that can impact a student's performance in school. These students are eligible for accommodations if they can demonstrate that a specific disability exists and that it substantially limits one or more major life activity. The most common functional limitations reported by this population manifest as difficulties with attention, stamina, and physical symptoms and can be related to the symptoms of the psychological disorders or their treatments (e.g., medication side effects). Accommodations can be provided that modify how a student can respond to the test, how the test information is presented, the test's setting, and timing and scheduling aspects of the test. The specific accommodations are directly related to the functional limitations supported by the student's documentation that are applicable to psychological disorders.

Defining Accessibility of High Stakes Tests for Postsecondary College Students with Learning Disabilities in an Era of Technology by Manju Banerjee and Noel Gregg.

This article discusses the growing use of technology in postsecondary schools. The purpose of this article is to encourage professionals to reexamine the issues surrounding accessibility on high-stakes tests for postsecondary college students with learning disabilities in an era of technology.

Enduring and Unresolved Issues in the Test Accommodation Decision Process for Individuals with Learning Disabilities: Test Validity and Documentation of Learning Disabilities by Nicole S. Ofiesh and Joan M. Bisagno.

Given the high number of requests for test accommodations and the myriad of test accommodations available test agencies give considerable attention to the process involved in the provision of test accommodations for high stakes tests. The decision to provide an accommodation to an individual with learning disabilities is based largely on the information contained in the psychoeducational evaluation that an individual provides in order to support the request. It is simply not feasible for personnel at test agencies to personally meet or collect data on every individual who makes a request for an accommodation as a psychologist or educational diagnostician does. Thus decisions regarding the reasonable nature of a request are made based on the fundamental aspects of the American's with Disabilities Act (ADA) using an individual's psychoeducational documentation as the primary source for this information. These aspects include (a) a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more life activities; (b) documentation of such impairment through a diagnosis or statement of disability; and, (c) being regarded as having such impairment whether or not the impairment substantially limits major life activities.

We hope you find the articles on this issue on High Stakes Tests and Postsecondary Students with Learning Disabilities stimulating.

Nicole S. Ofiesh
Guest Editor