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# School Counselors' Provision of Career and College Transition Services to Students in Special Education

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SCHOOL COUNSELORS' PROVISION OF CAREER AND COLLEGE  
TRANSITION SERVICES TO STUDENTS IN SPECIAL EDUCATION

by

Pamela K. Lee

A creative project submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree

of

MASTER OF EDUCATION

in

Special Education

Approved:

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Dr. Robert L. Morgan  
Major Professor

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UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY

Logan, Utah

2015

## ABSTRACT

School Counselors' Provision of Career and College Transition Services  
to Students in Special Education

by

Pamela K. Lee  
Master of Education

Utah State University 2015

Major Professor: Dr. Robert L. Morgan

Department: Special Education and Rehabilitation

School counselors provide career and college guidance services to secondary students to prepare them for transition to post-secondary education and employment. Successful post-secondary transition is a desired outcome for students in special education. This project surveyed 96 currently practicing secondary school counselors from two Northern Utah school districts. A survey questionnaire using rating scale items and open-ended questions was administered to assess the degree to which school counselors provide specific career and college guidance services to students in special education, counselors rating of preparedness to provide such services, counselor beliefs about providing these services, and what factors negatively or positively influenced school counselors in providing career and college transition services to students in special

education. The majority of participants reported providing services to 50% or more of the students in special education on their caseload for seven of the 10 identified college and career guidance activities., The majority of participants also reported providing services to 76% or more of the students in special education on their caseload for six of the 10 identified college and career guidance activities. There was not one of the identified college and career guidance activities for which the majority of participants reported provision to 91% or greater of students in special education. Less than 50% of participants reported being “very prepared” to provide each of the college and career guidance activities to students in special education. These results may have implications for increasing school counselors’ provision of career and college guidance services to students in special education. These results may also evidence a need for increasing school counselor education program content related to special education services and developing and providing in-service training to assist school counselors in being prepared to provide transition services to students with disabilities.

(46 pages)

SCHOOL COUNSELORS' PROVISION OF CAREER AND COLLEGE TRANSITION  
SERVICES TO STUDENTS IN SPECIAL EDUCATION

School counselors are providing services to an increasing number of students in special education (Nichter & Edmondson, 2005). The passage of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (Public Law 94-142, 1972), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act (Public Law 93-112), and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 20 U.S.C. § 1400 (2004), called for counseling services to be provided to students with disabilities. According to the National Education Association (n.d.), the number of students enrolled in special education programs has risen 30 percent over the last 10 years and 75% of students with disabilities spend all or some part of their school day in a general education classroom. Almost every general education classroom in the U.S. includes students with disabilities. These legislative mandates, and the rise in inclusion, have created greater school counselor involvement with students with disabilities yet little research has been done on the actual services that school counselors provide to students with disabilities (Milsom, 2002).

Providing academic, personal, and career guidance counseling for all students, including students with disabilities, is a responsibility of the school counselor (Milsom, 2002). School counselors are to promote and support the success of all students and must be prepared to provide the services and assistance students with disabilities need to reach their full potential (Nichter & Edmonson, 2005). As the world of work radically changes and economic situations remain uncertain, the need for school counselors to provide career guidance is critical (Schenck, Anctil, Smith, & Dahir, 2012) and may be even more essential for students with disabilities (Carter et al., 2009). The need for counselors

to provide career and college guidance counseling to students with disabilities is evidenced by measures of postsecondary transition outcomes for young adults with disabilities (The National Longitudinal Transition Study-2, 2009). Transition outcomes for students with disabilities continue to remain below those of young adults without disabilities (The National Longitudinal Transition Study-2, 2009). The National Longitudinal Transition Study-2, found that young adults with disabilities, two years after high school, were less likely than their peers to have enrolled in postsecondary education programs. A comparative 19% of youth with disabilities versus 40% of youth without disabilities had enrolled in postsecondary education. Students with disabilities were more likely to have attended a 2 year college (44%), or vocational, or technical program (32%) than to have attended a 4 year university (19%). Employment rates indicated that 41% of youth with disabilities were employed as compared to 63% of youth without disabilities (NLTS2: Newman, Wagner, Knokey, et al., 2011). Enhanced college and career guidance services for students with disabilities are needed and school counselors possess specific training and expertise in providing career guidance, as well as a comprehensive knowledge of college programs, vocational schools, and community resources, to improve post high school planning for students with disabilities (Milsom, Goodnough, & Akos, 2007).

Career development experiences during high school have been found to be critically important in improving post-school outcomes for students with disabilities. (Benz, Lindstrom, & Yovanoff, 2000) and while high schools may offer a variety of career development and vocational education activities, the extent to which students with

disabilities participate in these activities varies widely (Carter, Trainor, Cakirogu, Swedeen, & Owens, 2009).

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) supports the provision of counseling services for students with disabilities. IDEA requires the provision of related services, which includes counseling services, be made available for students with disabilities. Section 300.34 of IDEA (2004) defines counseling services as, “services provided by qualified social workers, psychologists, guidance counselors, or other qualified personnel.” IDEA also requires transition services as part of an Individual Educational Plan (IEP) for students in special education. An IEP is a written plan that addresses the current level of performance and establishes goals for students in special education. Beginning no later than age 16, the IEP must contain a transition plan with measurable postsecondary goals in the areas of training, education, employment and independent living if appropriate. (Authority: 20 U.S.C. 1414(d)(1)(A) and (d)(6) ).

In addition to IDEA, in the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, a blueprint for reform (U.S. Department of Education, 2010), President Obama stated that we must ensure that every student graduates from high school well prepared for college and a career. These legislative mandates make it clear that career and college guidance, and other transition services offered by school counselors, are critical related services and must be equally accessible to students in special education. The need for school counselors to provide career guidance to students in special education is also supported in the position papers of the American School Counseling Association.

The American School Counseling Association position paper on college/career planning states:



Professional school counselors recognize that each student possesses unique interests, abilities and goals, which will lead to various future opportunities. Collaborating with students, families, educational staff and the community the professional school counselor works to ensure all students develop an academic and career plan reflecting their interests, abilities, and goals and includes rigorous, relevant coursework and experiences appropriate for the student (American School Counseling Association Position Paper, 2013, p. 1).

While the American School Counseling Association Position Paper on college and career planning is directed to all students, the need to provide career guidance counseling specifically to students with disabilities is addressed in *The Professional School Counselor and Students with Disabilities* (American School Counseling Association, 2013). This position statement instructs that counselors should encourage and support the career development of all students regardless of challenges related to disabilities. Counselors are to advocate for students with disabilities in the community and to assist in developing academic and transition plans as part of the IEP when appropriate. Research (Test et al., 2009) has shown that the following college and career counseling services are some of the evidence-based practices that are school predictors of successful post-school outcomes for students with disabilities, providing career awareness information, participation in occupational courses, participation in paid employment/work experience, receiving vocational education, and involvement in work study. Milsom (2002), however, found that of all the services provided to students with disabilities by school counselors, transition planning was the activity least provided and the area in which counselors felt least prepared to provide assistance.

School counselors may not be providing career and college guidance services at the same level to students in special education as they are to students without disabilities. Research is needed to determine how often college and career guidance services are offered by school counselors to students in special education, to determine if school counselors feel prepared to provide such services, to assess counselors beliefs about providing such services, and to determine what factors positively or negatively influence school counselors in providing transition services to students in special education.

This study will examine the involvement of school counselors from two school districts in Utah in providing ten specific college and career guidance activities, based on Test et al.'s (2009) evidence based school predictors of successful post-school outcomes for students with disabilities, to students in special education on their caseload and their preparedness to do so.

### **Literature Review**

I searched PsychInfo EBSCO host and Academic Search Premier, using the following search terms: school counselor, school counseling, special education, special education students, career guidance, students with disabilities, transition, and transition services. I located 74 articles related to school counseling and students with disabilities. I excluded articles that were not specifically applicable to the provision of transition services to special education students by school counselors. I also excluded articles that were published prior to 2000, to focus my review on more current research. I furthered my literature search by using the reference sections of reviewed articles to access additional resources. The three reviewed articles were selected as they address the provision of career guidance and transition services to students with disabilities.

Nichter and Edmonson (2005) conducted a seven-item survey of 66 counselors, serving all grade levels, from 48 districts across Southeast Texas. The purpose of this study was to (a) identify schools that designated a special education counselor, (b) identify the services provided for special education students, (c) assess counselors' perceived preparedness to provide services, (d) rank experiences that contributed to preparedness, (e) determine what would assist counselors in feeling better prepared to counsel students with disabilities, (f) determine ideas for counseling educators to prepare counselors to provide services to special education students, and (g) provide ideas to administrators that would assist school counselors in providing services to special education students. The respondents reported individual counseling (92%) and teacher consultation (92%) as the services they most often provided to students with disabilities. In assessing what contributed to school counselors feeling prepared to work with students with disabilities, teaching experience (31%) was identified as most important, with undergraduate coursework identified as least important. Of the school counselors responding, 55% reported they felt prepared to provide counseling services for students in special education. The results of this study indicate that 45% of the counselors surveyed did not feel prepared to provide services to students in special education. The study did not specifically address career guidance counseling provided by school counselors, or preparedness of counselors to provide such services, to students in special education.

Unlike Nichter and Edmonson (2005), a study by Carter et al. (2009) was designed to specifically assess the career development and vocational education activities offered by high schools and the extent to which students with emotional behavioral

disorders or severe disabilities participated in these activities. Researchers sent the questionnaire to 34 high schools to be completed by school administrators, student service directors, school counselors, and other school staff including transition coordinators. These school officials averaged 10 years' experience at their school. Respondents were asked to indicate which of 20 different career development and vocational education opportunities were offered at their schools and to estimate the degree to which students with severe disabilities or emotional behavioral disorders participated in each activity. Over 50% of respondents reported that some or most of the students with severe disabilities participated in seven of the 20 identified career activities, and over 50% of respondents reported that few or none of the students with severe disabilities participated in the other 13 identified career activities. For students with emotional behavioral disorders, over 50% participation in 12 of the identified career development activities and below 50% participation in eight of the career development activities were reported. This study demonstrated that while most of the high schools surveyed offered a variety of career development and vocational education activities, participation in these activities by students with disabilities was limited. This study did not identify specifically the degree to which school counselors provide direct career guidance services to students with disabilities.

A survey by Milsom (2002) preceded the research of Nichter and Edmonson (2005) and assessed a large national sample of school counselors rather than a statewide sample. Milsom, unlike Nichter and Edmonson, included transition services as a counseling activity in her survey. Milsom examined the activities school counselors perform for students with disabilities, how prepared they felt to perform those activities,

the education they received to work with students with disabilities, and the relationship between the education they received and how prepared they felt to work with students with disabilities. A survey of a random sample of 400 school counselors from across the U.S. who were members of the American Counseling Association was conducted. Results indicated participants felt “somewhat prepared” overall to perform activities for students with disabilities with a mean 4.15 rating on a 6 point rating scale ranging from completely unprepared (1) to completely prepared (6). These results are similar to the study by Nichter and Edmonson where 55% of school counselors reported feeling prepared to work with students with disabilities. In Milsom’s study, school counselors reported feeling most prepared (*Mean* = 4.54) to provide individual and, or, group counseling to students with disabilities. Milsom found that school counselors reported being least prepared (*Mean* = 3.59) to assist students with disabilities in planning for transition to careers or to post-secondary education. School counselors reported that the service they most often performed for students with disabilities was individual/group counseling (82.8%). This is supported by the research of Nichter and Edmonson which indicated that individual counseling was the service most often provided by school counselors to students with disabilities. Less than half of the counselors reported providing transition services to students with disabilities and 32% of high school counselors reported that they did not assist students with disabilities with transition planning.

The reviewed literature affirms that students in special education need access to career guidance and transition services in high school to improve postsecondary career and educational outcomes. “Future researchers should query stakeholders about

prominent barriers to the participation of youth with disabilities in various career development activities” (Carter et al., 2009, p. 22). Additional research is needed on what school counselors perceive as their role in providing career guidance to students in special education. This study will address the following research questions: (a) how often are school counselors currently providing transition services to students in special education? (b) What specific transition services are school counselors providing to students in special education? (c) How prepared are school counselors to provide transition services to students in special education? (d) What are counselors’ beliefs about providing transition services to students in special education? (e) What do school counselors report as factors that negatively or positively influence them in providing transition services to students in special education? Research questions will be measured by responses to a survey questionnaire administered to secondary school counselors.

There is no mandate for school counselors to provide college and career guidance services to students in special education, and there is no established standard or level of accountability as to the provision of these services, though there is clear support for college and career guidance services to be provided to students with disabilities at some reasonable level as part of a counselors practice (American School Counseling Association, 2013).

## METHOD

### **Participants**

A convenience sample of 96 secondary school counselors from Weber and Davis School Districts participated in completing a survey questionnaire designed to assess their provision of college and career transition services to students in special education. Participants from Weber School District were counselors from nine junior high schools, four high schools, and one alternative high school. Davis School District participants were counselors from eight high schools, one alternative high school, and 16 junior high schools. Tables 1-4 present demographic data on participants. The participants were 32 males and 64 females, ranging in age from 31 - 70 years old, with 93.8% of respondents reporting Caucasian ethnicity, 1.04% reporting Hispanic/Latino, Black, or Asian /Pacific Islander and 3.12% reporting Other as ethnicity. As indicated by Table 4, 57.9% of the participants had been employed between 0-10 years as school counselors. Participants were certified school counselors who are currently providing counseling services to secondary students in Weber and Davis school districts. Participants were not special education teachers at the secondary level, transition specialists, career technical educators, school counselors who did not have students in special education on their caseload, or other specialists.

### **Setting**

The setting was a conference room located in the main offices of each of the participating school districts. Each conference room had chairs and tables available in the room for participants.

### **Dependent Variables and Response Measurement**

A survey instrument developed by the researcher assessed (a) the college and career guidance activities performed by school counselors for students in special education, (b) the extent to which they provide these services, (c) how prepared school counselors are to provide services to students in special education, (d) counselor beliefs about providing these services, and (e) what factors positively or negatively influenced school counselors in providing college and career guidance services to students in special education. The survey consisted of demographic information, caseload composition questions, rating scale response items, and open-ended questions. Participants provided information on demographics (e.g., age, gender, ethnicity, and years as a school counselor), the number of students on their caseload, and the number of students in special education on their caseload. Participants then rated the percentage of students in special education on their caseload for which they provide 10 specific college and career activities, and how prepared they were to provide each activity. Survey items for the college and career transition activities were developed by the researcher based on a review of the indicators of post high school success developed by Test et al. (2009). Participants' beliefs about providing career and college guidance activities to students in special education were assessed. Open-ended questions asked school counselors to provide short written responses about what factors positively influence their delivery of career and college guidance services to students in special education and what factors negatively influence them in providing career guidance services to students in special education.

## **Procedure**



The researcher administered all survey questionnaires to the participants manually. The following items were distributed to each participant.

1. A description of the study
2. An informed consent form
3. Survey instructions
4. A coded survey questionnaire

*Survey materials.* The study description consisted of a short narrative paragraph that explained the purpose of the study and the structure of the survey questionnaire. An informed consent form approved by Utah State University's Institutional Review Board was used to obtain informed consent. No coding on the survey identified the respondent, although surveys were color coded to identify the district of the counselor's affiliation. Written survey instructions informed participants how to complete the questionnaire. The survey questionnaire was a paper instrument with printed sections for survey purpose, participant instructions, demographic information, caseload questions, rating scale questions, and open-ended questions.

### **Survey Instrument and Administration**

The survey questionnaire was completed on site at the respective district offices for Weber and Davis school districts during the regularly scheduled district counselors' meeting for each of the two school districts. The researcher provided a brief verbal explanation of the purpose of the study, and instructions for completion of the questionnaire at the beginning of each survey session. The researcher also verbally reviewed the informed consent form and asked participants to sign the form prior to beginning the survey. The distribution of survey materials and verbal presentation of the

survey information by the researcher took approximately 10 min. Completion of the survey questionnaire by participants took approximately 15 min. Participants completed the survey questionnaire in writing and returned it to the researcher manually upon completion.

The survey instrument consisted of six sections of questions as described below.

1. Demographic information: data were collected on participants' gender, ethnicity, age, and years of experience as a secondary school counselor in the first four items on the survey.
2. Caseload composition: two questions requested the number of total students on each participants' caseload and the number of students on each participants caseload who are in special education.
3. Career guidance counseling: participants rated what percentage of their caseload of students in special education they provided 10 specific career guidance activities based on Test et al.'s (2009) school predictors of post school success for students with disabilities. The percentage of students in special education on their caseload for whom they conducted specific career guidance activities was rated on a 6-point rating scale ranging from 1 = less than 10% to 6 = over 90% provision of services to students in special education.
4. Participant preparedness: participants rated how prepared they were to provide each of the 10 identified career and college guidance services to students in special education using a 4 point rating scale, ranging from 1 = very unprepared to 4 = very prepared.

5. Beliefs: participants rated their agreement with five statements about provision of college and career guidance services to students in special education on a 4 point rating scale, ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 4 = strongly agree.
6. Factors that affect service delivery: The final two items on the questionnaire were open-ended questions, one question asked participants what factors negatively influenced them in providing college and career guidance services to students in special education and the second asked what factors positively influenced participants in providing college and career guidance services to students in special education.

### **Data Analysis**

The researcher analyzed data descriptively by presenting (a) frequencies of responses to demographic information, (b) frequencies of response and percentages on rating scores, and (c) themes identified from open-ended responses. Tables and figures were developed to show demographic information, frequencies and percentage ratings, and themes were reported from open-ended questions. Data was reviewed to identify median and mode for each of the identified college and career guidance activities.

## **RESULTS**

Table 5 presents data on number and percentage of school counselors who provide each of the college and career guidance activities for each percentage range of students in special education on their caseload. Median and modal range data will be reported for each college and career guidance activity as to the percentage of students in

special education on their caseload for whom counselors provide each activity. The median range for providing information on occupational courses in the school was 76-90%. The modal range for this activity was 91-100% with 35 respondents reporting this range of students were served. For assisting with placement in occupational courses in the school, the reported median was in the 76-90% range, and the modal range was 91-100%, with 31 respondents reporting this range of service provision. Providing career awareness information had a median in the 76-90% range, with the modal range selected by the majority of respondents ( $n=34$ ), also being in the 76-90% range. Providing trade, technical, vocational college information was reported with a median in the 76-90% range and modal range of 91-100% with 40 respondents reporting this range. Providing college admissions information had a median in the 76-90% range with modal range of 91-100% as reported by 27 respondents. Collectively, these data show that school counselors report providing each of these services frequently to students in special education because the modal score was the highest percent range and the median score was in the next highest percent range. The median for providing work-study information was in the 51-75% range with modal range of 0-10% reported by 30 respondents. Providing community job information had a reported median in the 26-50% range, and a modal range of 0-10%, with 30 respondents reporting this range of service provision. In these latter two cases, counselors' responses were dispersed widely with many indicating 0-10% of students in special education served. Providing a yearly Student Educational Occupational Planning (SEOP) meeting had a median in the 76-90% range, 91-100% was the modal range with 43 respondents reporting service to 91-100% of students in special education on their caseload for this career activity. Again, for these data, counselors

reported high rates of service. Assisting with work-study placement had a median in the 11-25% range, and a modal range of 0-10%, with 47 respondents reporting service in this range. Again, counselors appear less involved in work-study activities with students in special education. A median in the 0-10% range was reported for assisting with community job placement, with a modal range for this activity, similar to assisting with work study placement, in the 0-10% range as well. This majority of respondents ( $n=45$ ) reported providing assistance with community job placement to 0-10% of students in special education on their caseload. Counselors reported the lowest rate of service for this item.

Overall, participants reported providing higher percentage values on career guidance activities that were based on providing information to students and lower percentage values for career guidance activities that required direct assistance for placement of students in special education into work study, occupational courses, or employment settings.

Similar to research by Milsom (2002) and Nichter and Edmons (2005), less than 50% of participants reported being “very prepared” to provide each of the college and career guidance activities to students in special education (see Table 6). The career and college guidance activity with the highest percentage (46.8%) of participants who reported being “very prepared” was providing a yearly student educational occupational plan (SEOP). The median range for providing a yearly student educational occupational plan was “prepared”. The college and career activity for which the highest percentage of participants (37.1%) reported being “very unprepared” was assisting with work-study placement. The median for this activity was in the “unprepared” rating and the modal

range was in the “very unprepared” rating range with 33 respondents selecting “very unprepared”. It may be of note that the items for which respondents reported the lowest rating of preparedness also had the highest number of nonrespondents which may indicate selective responsiveness on those items.

On the rating items for counselor beliefs about providing college and career guidance activities, over 50% of participants “strongly disagreed” with four of the five belief statements, and over 92% of participants “disagreed” or “strongly disagreed” on these statements (see Table 7). For the fifth statement, “college and career services for students in special education are provided by the special education department/teachers, not school counselors,” 18.9% of participants ( $n=18$ ) “strongly disagreed”. This was also the belief statement with the highest level of agreement, with 26.35% of participants ( $n=25$ ) reporting “agree” or “strongly agree” on that rating item.

On the open-ended response questions about what factors negatively influenced participants from providing career guidance to students in special education, themes related to caseload size, time, lack of training or knowledge about special education resources, difficulty in knowing how to work with students with significant disabilities, and disinterest or lack of motivation on the part of the student were reported. For example, in regards to caseload size, one respondent indicated:

Caseload has a profound impact. Our SPED dept. have caseloads around 20-30, as counselors our caseloads are 10x that.

In regards to time, one respondent stated

Time- with a lot of students it’s hard to find adequate time for CCR –but that is time with all students, not just special ed.

As to knowledge or training one respondent commented

I am unaware and have not learned about very many programs, etc. for SPED students.

As to working with students with significant disabilities one respondent wrote

I don't have a clue about the severe students and their post high school options.

In regards to student motivation one respondent stated

Poor attitudes of students or their disinterest in the information.

As to the open-ended question regarding what factors positively influence participants to provide career guidance services to students who are in special education, the primary themes reported were related to having good relationships with special education teachers, collaboration with special education teachers and departments, and providing the same opportunities to all students regardless of special education eligibility. For example in regards to having good relationships with special education teachers one respondent stated

We work very closely with our SPED teachers and have great communication with what our students need.

In regards to collaborations with teachers and special education departments one respondent commented

Good collaboration with special ed. teachers/caseworkers. They always seek to involve us in collaborative efforts to provide these services to special ed. students.

As to providing the same opportunities one respondent stated

They are a student at my school, so I provide the same services I would provide any student.

## DISCUSSION

Findings of this study indicated that school counselors provided many of the college and career guidance activities to some degree for students in special education. The percentage of students in special education for whom the majority of participants provided each of the 10 identified career guidance services was 50% or greater for seven of the 10 identified college and career guidance activities. The percentage of students in special education for whom counselors provided each of the 10 identified college and career guidance services was 76% or greater for six of the 10 identified college and career guidance activities. There was not one college and career guidance activity for which the majority of participants reported services to 91% or greater of students in special education. Given these results, and given the increasing trend towards college and career entry for students with disabilities, a need for increased provision of college and career guidance services by school counselors may be indicated.

The college and career guidance activities with the highest reported rate of services to students in special education by participants were providing yearly Student Educational Occupational Planning (SEOP) meetings; providing trade, tech, or vocational college information to students; and providing information about occupational courses within the school. These findings might be attributable to the participants' familiarity with these activities and the proximity of working with students on these activities. The career guidance activities that were reported in the lowest percentages were providing assistance with work-study placement, assisting with community job placement, and providing work study and community job information to students in special education. While these data may have been influenced by participation of junior high counselors,



this may be an area of interest since having a paid job during high school and participating in work-study are strong predictors of post-high school success (Test et al., 2009). The low reported percentages of assistance with work-study information and placement in work-study and community job information and placement assistance, may have implications on transition outcomes for students in special education. The low percentage rates for these services might be attributable to participants' unfamiliarity with how to access, or accommodate, work-study and/or community job placements for students in special education, particularly with students with significant disabilities as this was reported as a negative factor in the open ended response questions.

The majority of participants reported being "prepared" or "very prepared" to provide six of the 10 college and career guidance services to students in special education. The college and career guidance activities for which participants reported the highest percentage of being "unprepared" or "very unprepared" were, assisting with work study placement (69.7%), and assisting with community job placement (75%). Nichter and Edmons (2005) found that almost all ( $n=59$  of the 60) school counselors reported that training regarding special education laws and legal issues, disability characteristics, and techniques for working with students in special education, would help them be better prepared to provide services to these students. Similarly, lack of knowledge of special education resources and policies, caseload size and demands on participants' time, and not knowing how to assist students with significant disabilities were reported in this study as factors that negatively influence participants' provision of career guidance services to students in special education.

In regards to factors that positively influence participants provision of career guidance services to students in special education, common themes reported were additional information on resources and post high school supports, reduction of caseload or duties to create more time for providing services to students in special education, and continued collaboration with special education teachers. These themes suggest that specific course work for prospective school counselors in career guidance and transition services for students in special education may be a consideration for counselor education programs in colleges and universities. Increased training and support from school districts to help school counselors be more prepared, and to have the time to provide career guidance services to students in special education, may also be considered. These results are supported by research conducted by Milsom (2002) which indicated that counselors report being more prepared to provide services to students with special needs when they have more information (complete courses, attend workshops) and had more experiences with students with disabilities.

There was high overall degree of disagreement reported on the counselor belief rating items. A majority, 92% or greater, of participants felt that it was within their scope of practice to provide college and career guidance services to students in special education, that they had time to provide college and career services to students in special education, that their school did not want them to focus on other students, and that students in special education were probably going on to college and career. Most participants (73.6%) also “disagreed” or “strongly disagreed” with the statement that “college and career services for students in special education are provided by the special education department/teachers, not school counselors” (see Table 7).

There are some discrepancies in the data when comparing reported beliefs, the percentages of service provision for college and career guidance activities, and the responses to the open ended questions on the survey. For example, while 92.7 of counselors “disagreed” or “strongly disagreed” with the belief statement, I do not have time to provide college and career guidance services to students in special education, when queried on the open ended questions time was a commonly reported factor that negatively impacted participants ability to provide college and career guidance services. It may also be of note that while the belief statement survey items indicate that the majority of counselors (96.8%) disagreed with the statement, it is not within the scope of my practice to provide college and career guidance to students in special education and, as stated previously, 92.7% disagreed that they did not have time to provide college and career guidance services, still a majority of counselors reported they did not provide any of the 10 identified college and career guidance activities in the 91-100% range for students in special education.

### **Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research**

This sample from two school districts may not be representative of career guidance services offered by school counselors to special education students in other districts or states. Therefore, while this study provides information about school counselors’ provision of career guidance services, it cannot be generalized to other districts or to all school counselors. Research with a broader sample of participants from multiple states and school districts is recommended to provide a more comprehensive analysis of school counselor-delivered career guidance services to students in special education.

Another limitation of this study was that self-report measures were used to collect data on the survey questionnaire. While these data were based on school counselors report, the data do not provide information about exactly how often, or how well, school counselors actually performed the career guidance activities surveyed with students in special education. Further research is needed analyzing actual logs of counselor service provision to investigate any potential variation in actual performance data on service provision compared to self-report. The variance in respondents, ranging from 88 to 96, across survey items might be attributable to selective responsiveness on some survey items. This may have impacted reported data if the assumption is made that selecting not to respond to a survey item indicates that the respondent did not want to report negatively and thus avoided responding. Had these respondents reported the data may have had higher ratings in the lower percentage and rating categories. Information was not gathered on why some respondents did not respond to certain survey items. Debriefing with these respondents as to why they elected not to respond, were some items more threatening, was it an accidental omission, etc... would have strengthened the survey. There may also be response bias in that respondents may have been aware that survey items were within the scope of counselors responsibilities and as such they may have reported higher levels of provision, preparedness, or beliefs based on what they thought would be desirable rather than what levels of actual performance.

This study may also have been limited by the use of a researcher-developed survey instrument designed specifically for this study. Although the instrument was developed after a review of the literature, and career guidance questions were based on

post high school predictors of success from research by Test et al (2009), it was not assessed for validity or reliability.

## **Conclusion**

Findings from this study suggest that this sample of school counselors was providing each of the identified college and career guidance activities to students in special education at some level. The percentage of students in special education for whom school counselors provided these services varied across the array of activities surveyed. Although school counselors responded positively to indicate frequent involvement in providing many of the college and career guidance activities to students in special education, there are discrepancies in the data when comparing beliefs and percentages of students served on each of the 10 identified college and career activities. Improvements could be made in the percentage of students in special education who received college and career guidance services from school counselors. The results of this study also indicated that school counselors were not prepared to provide each of the college and career guidance services to students in special education, particularly in regards to information about, and assistance with, work study and community job placement. Providing specific courses on transition and special education in counselor education programs, developing additional in-service training, and increasing support to school counselors may help them be better prepared to provide career and college guidance services to students in special education. Increasing career and college guidance activities offered by school counselors to students in special education might positively impact post high school transition outcomes for students with disabilities.

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Table 1

*Gender of Participants*

Gender	N	%
Male	32	33.3
Female	64	66.7



Table 2

*Age of Participants*

Age in Years	N	%
21-30	0	0
31-40	28	29.2
41-50	34	35.4
51-60	27	28.1
61-70	7	7.29

Table 3

*Ethnicity of Participants*

Ethnicity	N	%
Hispanic/Latino	1	1.04
Caucasian	90	93.8
Black	1	1.04
Asian/Pacific Islander	1	1.04
Other	3	3.12

Table 4

*Years Employed as School Counselor*

Cumulative Years	N	%
0 – 5	28	29.5
6 – 10	27	28.4
11 – 15	19	20
16 – 20	16	16.8
21 – 25	5	5.26

Table 5

*Number and Percentage of School Counselors who Provide each of the Career Guidance Activities for each Percentage Range to Students in Special Education*

College and Career Guidance Activities	Respondents	0-10%		11-25%		26-50%		51-75%		76-90%		91-100%	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Provide Information on Occupational Courses in the School	93	12	12.95	6	6.45	4	4.43	13	14.0	23	24.7	35	37.6
Assist with Placement in Occupational Courses in the School	92	11	12.0	9	9.78	4	4.35	12	13.0	25	27.2	31	33.7
Provide Career Awareness Information	96	3	3.12	7	7.29	8	8.33	14	14.6	34	35.4	30	31.2
Provide Trade, Tech, Vocational College Information	94	3	3.19	7	7.45	5	5.32	14	14.9	25	26.6	40	42.6
Provide College Admissions Information	93	11	11.8	8	8.6	9	9.68	15	16.1	23	24.7	27	29.0
Provide Work Study Information	94	30	31.9	11	11.7	3	3.19	17	18.1	19	20.2	14	14.9
Provide Community Job Information	93	30	32.3	13	14.0	11	11.8	18	19.4	12	12.9	9	9.68
Provide Yearly SEOP Meeting	96	3	3.12	5	5.21	8	8.33	11	11.5	26	27.1	43	44.8
Assist with Work Study Placement	91	47	51.6	5	5.49	12	13.2	13	14.3	9	9.89	5	5.49
Assist with Community Job Placement	92	45	48.9	10	10.9	9	9.78	12	13.0	8	8.7	7	7.61

Table 6

*Data on Number and Percentage of School Counselors Who Are Prepared to Provide Each of the College and Career Guidance Activities to Students in Special Education*

College and Career Guidance Activities	Respondents	Very Unprepared		Unprepared		Prepared		Very Prepared	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Provide Information on Occupational Courses at the school	92	5	5.43	12	13.0	37	40.2	38	41.3
Assist with Placement in Occupational Courses at the school	93	3	3.23	15	16.1	44	47.3	31	33.3
Provide Career Awareness Information	94	0	0	13	13.8	48	51.1	33	35.1
Provide Trade, Tech, Vocational College Information	92	1	1.09	11	12.0	49	53.3	31	33.7
Provide College Admissions Information	91	7	7.69	13	14.3	51	56.0	20	14.9
Provide Work Study Information	92	22	23.9	25	27.2	31	33.7	14	15.2
Provide Community Job Information	90	17	18.9	32	35.6	32	35.6	9	10.0
Provide Yearly SEOP Meeting	96	3	3.19	3	3.19	44	46.8	44	46.8
Assist with Work Study Placement	89	33	37.1	29	32.6	21	23.6	6	6.74

Assist with Community Job Placement	88	26	29.5	40	45.5	15	17.0	7	7.95
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Table 7

*Data on Number and Percentage of School Counselors Beliefs about Providing Career and College Guidance Activities to Students in Special Education.*

Counselor Beliefs	Respondents	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Agree		Strongly Agree	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Do not have Time to Provide College and Career Guidance to Students in Special Education	96	52	54.2	37	38.5	6	6.25	1	1.04
Services are Provided by Special Education Department, not counselors	95	18	18.9	52	54.7	24	25.3	1	1.05
My school wants counselors to focus on other students in providing college and career guidance.	96	50	52.1	44	45.8	2	2.08	0	0
Students in special education are probably not going on to college or career.	96	50	52.1	45	46.9	2	2.08	0	0
Not within the scope of my practice to provide college and career guidance to students in	95	55	57.9	37	38.9	3	3.16	0	0





*Table 8*

*Caseload Composition of Secondary School Counselors by Total Students Served and Students in Special Education.*

Caseload	Number of Respondents	N	Average Caseload
All Students	94	34,047	362.2
Students in Special Education	94	3,425	36.44

APPENDICES

## **Research Questionnaire**

School Counseling Career and College Transition Services  
for Students in Special Education

**Purpose of the study:** This survey questionnaire was developed to assess the current college and career guidance services offered by school counselors to students in special education. This research is being conducted as part of a master's project through Utah State University. Surveys instruments will be coded with a number to remove your identity. Your participation in this survey is voluntary.

**Instructions:** The survey consists of a 4 item demographics section, 2 questions regarding counseling caseload, 20 survey questions, 5 rating questions, and 2 open-ended questions. Please read each item on the survey and respond to each question in the demographic section by circling the answer that best fits. Answer the questions about caseload with the numbers of students on your current caseload. The scaled items should be answered by circling the answer that most accurately fits your current counseling experience. Respond in writing in the space provided on the survey form to the open ended questions.

### **Demographic Information**

1. What is your gender?
  - a) Male b) Female
2. What is your ethnicity?
  - a) Hispanic/Latino b) Caucasian c) Black d) Asian/Pacific Islander e) Other
3. What is your age?
  - a) 21-30 years b) 31-40 years c) 41-50 years d) 51-60 years e) 61-70 years
4. How many years have you been employed as a school counselor?
  - a) 0 - 5 years b) 6 - 10 years c) 11 - 15 years d) 16 - 20 years e) 21 - 25 years

### **Caseload Composition Questions**

1. How many students are currently on your total caseload? \_\_\_\_\_
2. How many students out of your total current caseload are students receiving special education services? \_\_\_\_\_

### **Survey Questions**

Please respond to ALL questions. Of the total students currently on your caseload **who are in special education**, for what percentage of total special education students **do you as a counselor** provide the following services? How prepared are you to provide each of these services to special education students?

1. A yearly SEOP meeting with parent(s) or guardian(s) of students in special education?

a) 0-10%   b) 11-25%   c) 26-50%   d) 51-75%   e) 76-90%   f) 91-100%

How prepared are you to participate in a yearly SEOP meeting with parent(s) or guardian(s) of students in special education?

1-very unprepared   2-unprepared   3-prepared   4-very prepared

2. Career awareness information for students in special education?

a) 0-10%   b) 11-25%   c) 26-50%   d) 51-75%   e) 76-90%   f) 91-100%

How prepared are you to provide career awareness information to students in special education?

1-very unprepared 2-unprepared 3-prepared 4-very prepared

3. College admissions information for students in special education?

a) 0-10% b) 11-25% c) 26-50% d) 51-75% e) 76-90% f) 91-100%

How prepared are you to provide college admissions information to students in special education?

1-very unprepared 2-unprepared 3-prepared 4-very prepared

4. Trade, technical, vocational college information for students in special education?

a) 0-10% b) 11-25% c) 26-50% d) 51-75% e) 76-90% f) 91-100%

How prepared are you to provide trade, technical, vocational college information to students in special education?

1-very unprepared 2-unprepared 3-prepared 4-very prepared

5. Work study information for students in special education?

a) 0-10% b) 11-25% c) 26-50% d) 51-75% e) 76-90% f) 91-100%

How prepared are you to provide work study information to students in special education?

1-very unprepared 2-unprepared 3-prepared 4-very prepared

6. Assistance with work-study placement(s) for students in special education?

a) 0-10% b) 11-25% c) 26-50% d) 51-75% e) 76-90% f) 91-100%

How prepared are you to assist with work study placement(s) for students in special education?

1-very unprepared 2-unprepared 3-prepared 4-very prepared

7. Community job information for students in special education?

a) 0-10% b) 11-25% c) 26-50% d) 51-75% e) 76-90% f) 91-100%

How prepared are you to provide assistance with community job information for students in special education?

1-very unprepared 2-unprepared 3-prepared 4-very prepared

8. Assistance with community job placement(s) for students in special education?

a) 0-10% b) 11-25% c) 26-50% d) 51-75% e) 76-90% f) 91-100%

How prepared are you to assist with community job placements(s) for students in special education?

1-very unprepared 2-unprepared 3-prepared 4-very prepared

9. Information about occupational courses at your school for students in special education?

a) 0-10% b) 11-25% c) 26-50% d) 51-75% e) 76-90% f) 91-100%

How prepared are you to provide information about occupational courses at your school for students in special education?

1-very unprepared 2-unprepared 3-prepared 4-very prepared

10. Assistance with placement in occupational courses at your school for students in special education?

a) 0-10%   b) 11-25%   c) 26-50%   d) 51-75%   e) 75-90%   f) 91-100%

How prepared are you to assist with placement in occupational courses at your school for students in special education?

1-very unprepared   2-unprepared   3-prepared   4-very prepared

### **Rating Items**

Rate the following questions based on your experience as a school counselor.

1. I do not have time to provide college and career guidance services to students in special education.

1-strongly disagree   2-disagree   3-agree   4-strongly agree

2. College and career services for students in special education are provided by the special education department/teachers, not school counselors.

1-strongly disagree   2-disagree   3-agree   4-strongly agree

3. My school wants counselors to focus on the other students, rather than special education students, in providing college and career guidance services.

1-strongly disagree   2-disagree   3-agree   4-strongly agree

4. Students in special education are probably not going on to college or a career.

