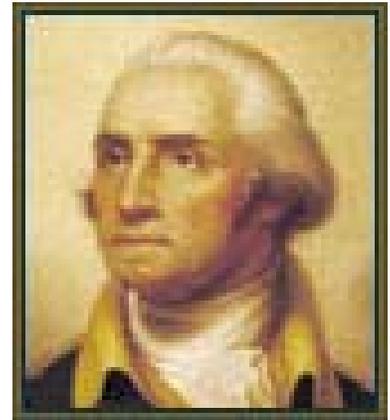


**The Picture of College Freshmen in Greater
Focus: An Analysis of Selected
Characteristics by Types of Disabilities**

**By
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In this data report, HEATH takes an in-depth look at the college freshmen with disabilities based on some of the more significant findings from student responses to the question of disability in the 2004 College Freshmen Survey, the last year for which a question about disability was included. This snapshot provides us a better picture of who these young people are and what characteristics are necessary for a successful postsecondary experience. Brought into greater focus is the discovery freshmen with learning disabilities portray a different picture than their classmates with other disabilities and without disabilities. This snapshot of college freshman serves to better inform parents, students, teachers, and others interested in knowing the face of college students with a disability.

Each year since 1966, the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) of the University of California, Los Angeles has conducted a nationally representative survey of 4-year college freshmen. The results of this annual survey suggest a profile of first-time, a disability?" and eight possible categories are provided (None, Hearing, Speech, full- time freshmen at the beginning of their college experiences. Every four years, the CIRP survey includes a question about disability.

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Respondents are asked, "Do you have Orthopedic, Learning Disability; Health-Related, Partially Sighted or Blind, and Other) with the instruction to "Mark all that apply." For purposes of this analysis therefore, it is difficult to determine that freshmen with a particular type of disability tend to have a specific set of characteristics since freshmen who reported one disability were not isolated from those who reported more than one. The reader should also be cautioned that since the data are self-reported, its accuracy is subject to respondents' candor and/or knowledge of the information they are giving.

HEATH gratefully acknowledges the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) at the University of California, Los Angeles for their cooperation. Additional information about the CIRP survey of college freshmen can be found at <http://www.gseis.ucla.edu/heri/freshman.html>. For many years, the American Council on Education in Washington, DC produced a similar profile of freshmen with disabilities using the CIRP data. HEATH also acknowledges and thanks Dr. Pamela Eckpone, recent past director of HEATH, for her continued support for this activity. As acknowledged in [Ward and Merves \(2006\)](#), this article builds on those efforts.

HEATH's initial efforts to analyze data from the 2004 Freshmen Survey produced several interesting results¹. Since the initial data request asked for a breakdown by types of disability responses to the "Do you have a disability?" question, the authors were able to cross tabulate the types of disabilities with other survey variables. This compared response data for students who indicated the presence of any disabilities with those who indicated no disabilities. The breakdown

¹ See Ward and Merves (2006) found at <http://tinyurl.com/2n8cub>

by types of disability continue the trend that more freshmen with learning disabilities enter college (35,772) than in the past and they make up a larger percentage of the students with disabilities population (41.8%) ([Ward & Merves, 2006](#)). Earlier survey data reported that the population of freshmen with learning disabilities grew from 16.1% in 1988 to 40.4% in 2000 (Henderson, 2001).

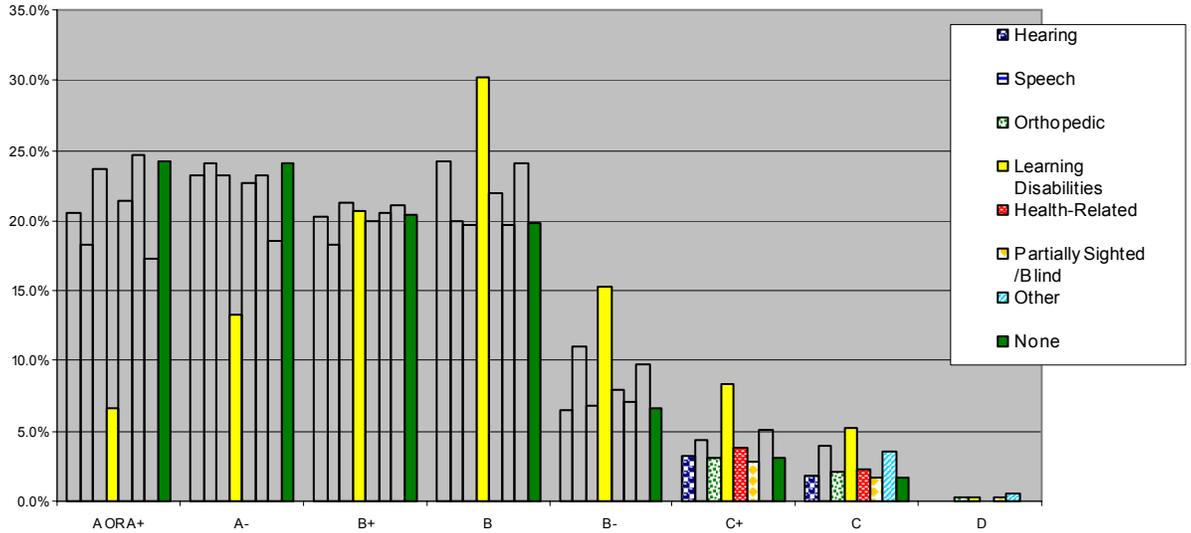
While the data for many of the variables analyzed indicated that freshmen with disabilities are very similar to freshmen without disabilities, several variables indicated a different response pattern between the two groups. These variables included: high school grades, the type of school attended (both high school and college), the father and mother's educational levels, parental income, and financial concerns related to college expenses. This article further analyzes the cross tabulations of these variables with the type of disabilities.

High School Grade

Figure 1 indicates that while a high percentage of freshmen with disabilities other than learning disabilities and freshmen without disabilities have average grades in the A to A- range, a higher percentage of freshmen with learning disabilities have average grades in the B to C range².

² For comparisons with data from previous surveys, see the analysis performed by Henderson (2001) found at <http://tinyurl.com/2pf8ee>.

Figure 1 - Type of Disability by Average High School Grade



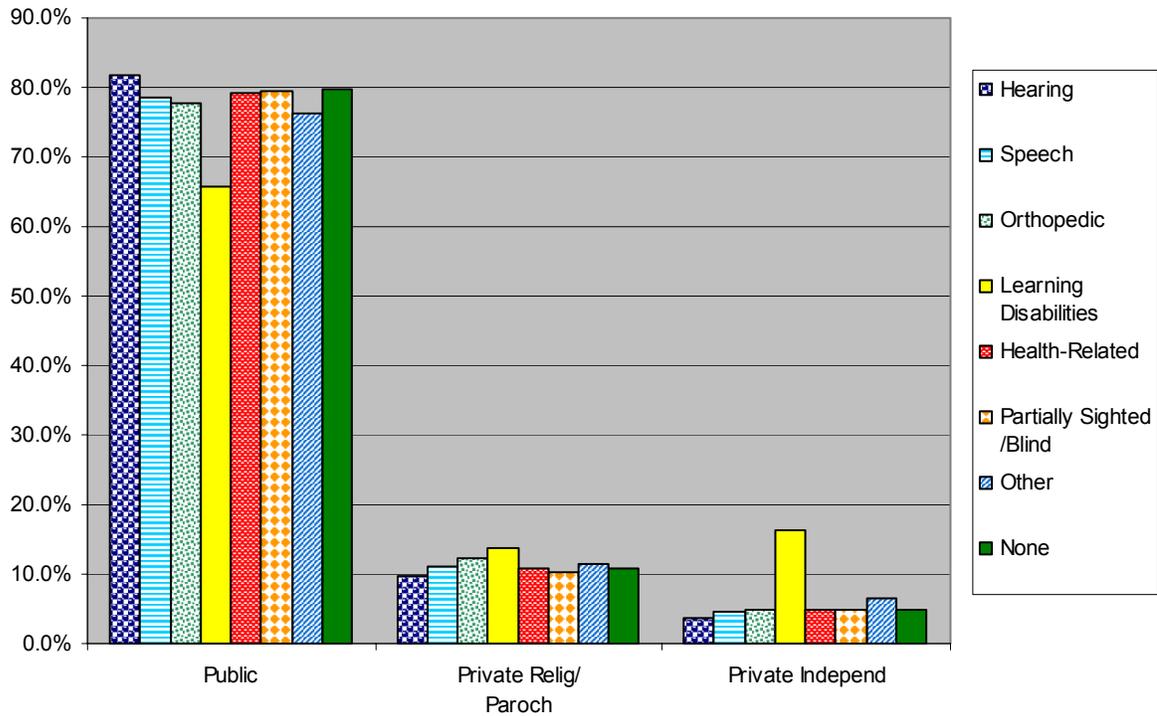
N for:

Hearing = 1241 Speech = 406 Orthopedic = 1050 Learning disabilities = 7657
 Health Related = 2741 Partially Sighted/Blind = 3075 Other = 3402
 None = 269,657

Type of School

Figure 2 indicates that approximately 80% of freshmen, with and without disabilities, attended public high school. An exception is that only 65.8% of freshmen with learning disabilities attended public high school. While a slightly higher percentage of freshmen with learning disabilities attended private religious/parochial school, 16.4% of freshmen with learning disabilities attended private independent schools. This is approximately three times the rate of freshmen with other disabilities and freshmen without disabilities.

Figure 2 - Type of Disability by Type of High School



N for:

Hearing = 1187
 Learning disabilities 7370
 Other = 3205

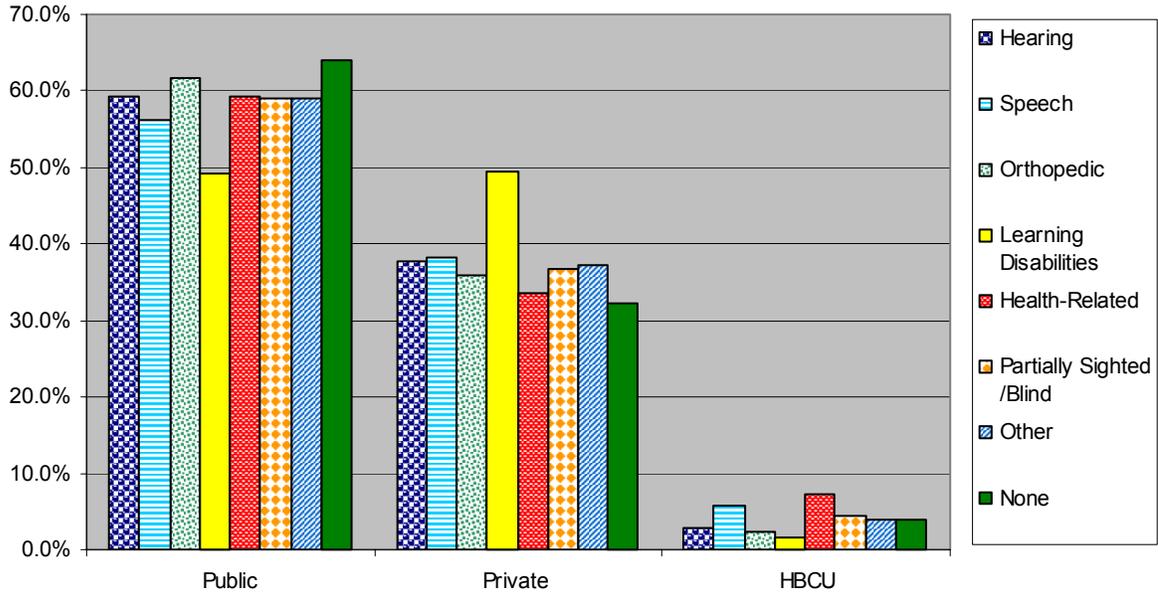
Speech = 380
 Health Related = 2615
 None = 258847

Orthopedic = 995
 Partially Sighted/Blind = 2908

Freshmen attendance in three types of colleges/universities, public, private, and historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs), are shown in Figure 3. Similar to attendance in high schools, most freshmen with and without disabilities, approximately 60%, attended public colleges and universities. Almost all of the remaining 40% attend private schools and a small percentage of each population attended HBCUs. Freshmen with learning disabilities are again the exception with

almost 50% attending public colleges and almost 50% attend private colleges. Freshmen with learning disabilities attend HBCUs to a lesser extent than other groups surveyed.

Figure 3- Type of Disability by Type of College/University



N for:

Hearing = 1264
 Learning disabilities 7781
 Other = 3466

Speech = 410
 Health Related = 2779
 None = 273059

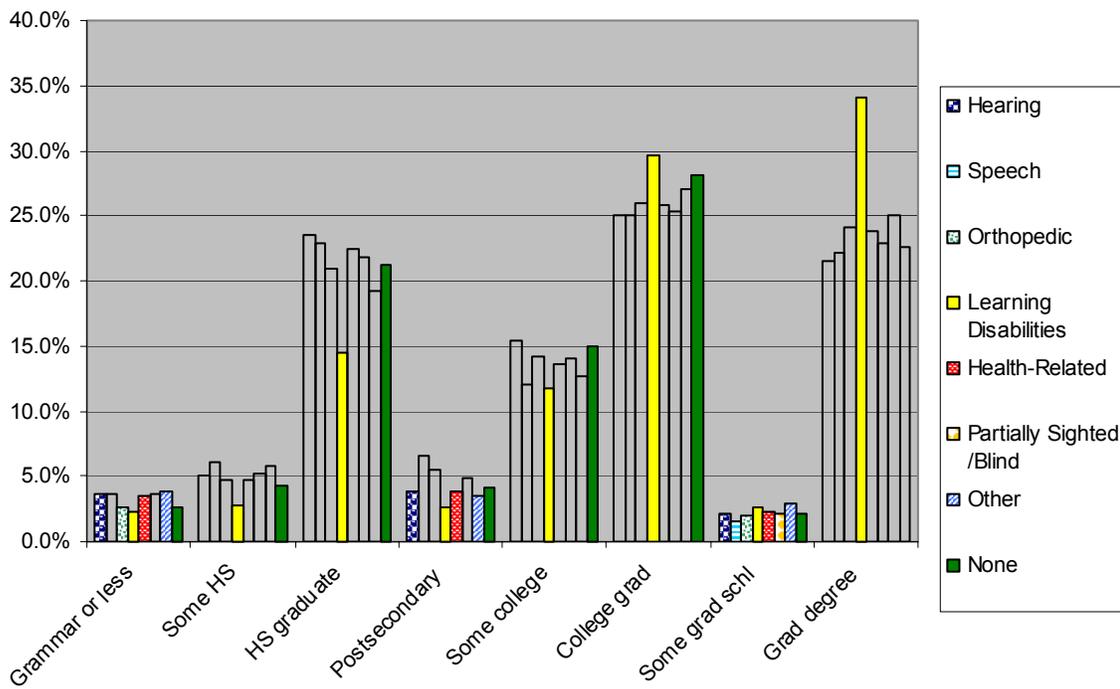
Orthopedic = 1065
 Partially Sighted/Blind = 3109

Parents Education Level

Both Figures 4 and 5 have similar if not identical patterns. The percentages of mothers and father’s education level of freshmen with most types of disabilities and freshmen without disabilities peak for those who are high schools graduates, are college graduates, and have graduate degrees. However, the pattern is different for parents of freshmen with learning disabilities in that the education level of both mothers and fathers appear to be lower than the other groups until the

college graduate category. The percentages of parents of freshmen with learning disabilities who obtain college degrees and attend graduate school are slightly higher than those among other groups. However, approximately 10% more fathers and mothers of freshmen with learning disabilities obtain graduate degrees when compared with parents of students with other disabling conditions.

Figure 4 - Father's Education Level



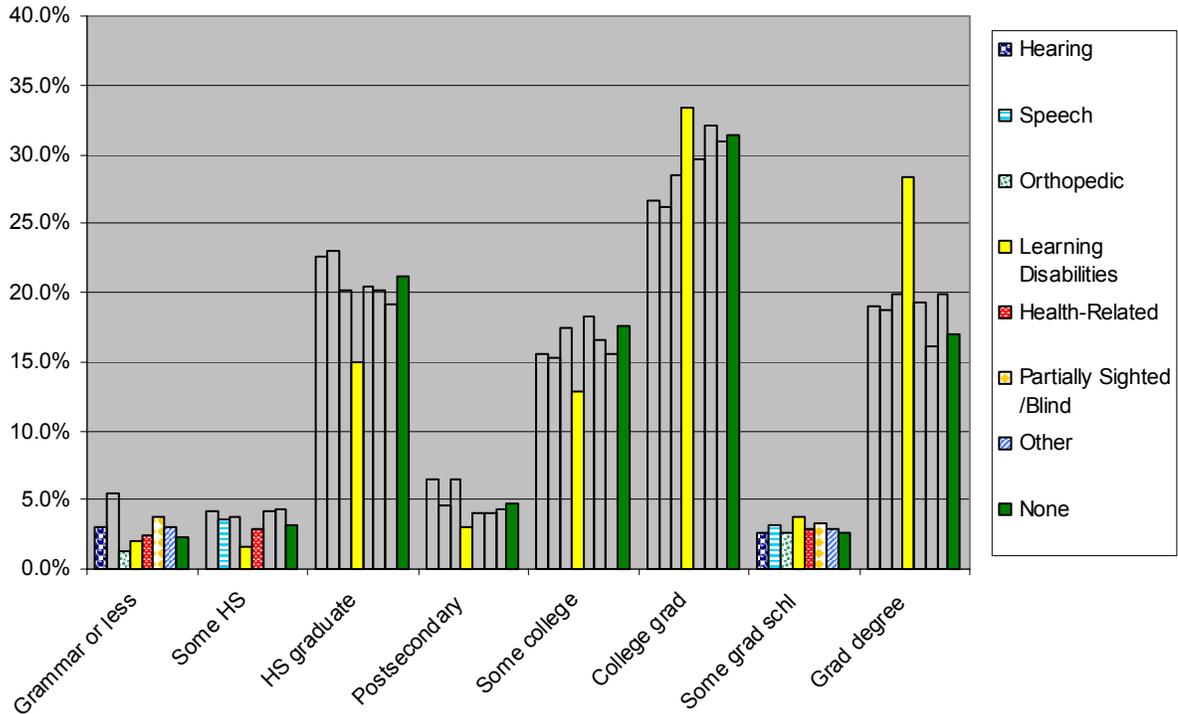
N for:

Hearing = 1220
 Learning disabilities 7483
 Other = 3309

Speech = 380
 Health Related = 2673
 None = 263972

Orthopedic = 1025
 Partially Sighted/Blind = 3015

Figure 5 - Mother's Education Level



N for:

Hearing = 1232
 Learning disabilities 7552
 Other = 3349

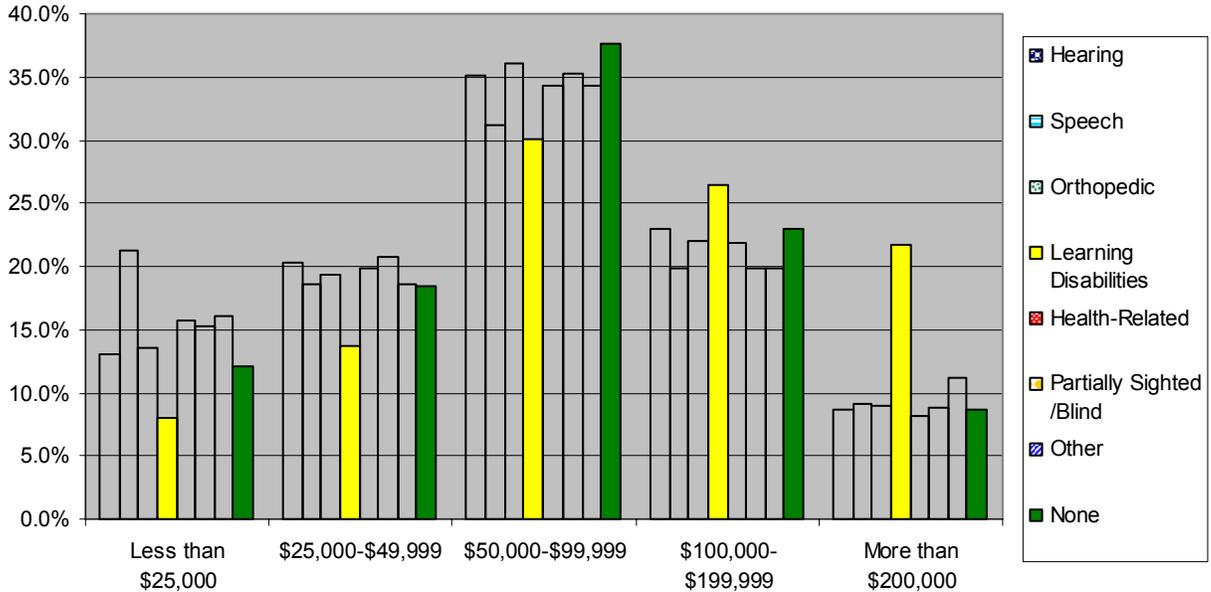
Speech = 386
 Health Related = 2718
 None = 266885

Orthopedic = 1041
 Partially Sighted/Blind = 3026

Parental Income

Figure 6 indicates the parental income levels of all freshmen. The income distributions for most disability groups are somewhat consistent except for those with learning disabilities who tend to be less than other groups for the lowest income bracket. However, freshmen with learning disabilities have higher parental incomes in the categories over \$100,000.

Figure 6 - Parental Income



N for:

Hearing = 1229
 Learning disabilities 6621
 Other = 2951

Speech = 362
 Health Related = 2481
 None = 241814

Orthopedic = 954
 Partially Sighted/Blind = 2758

Degree of Financial Concern

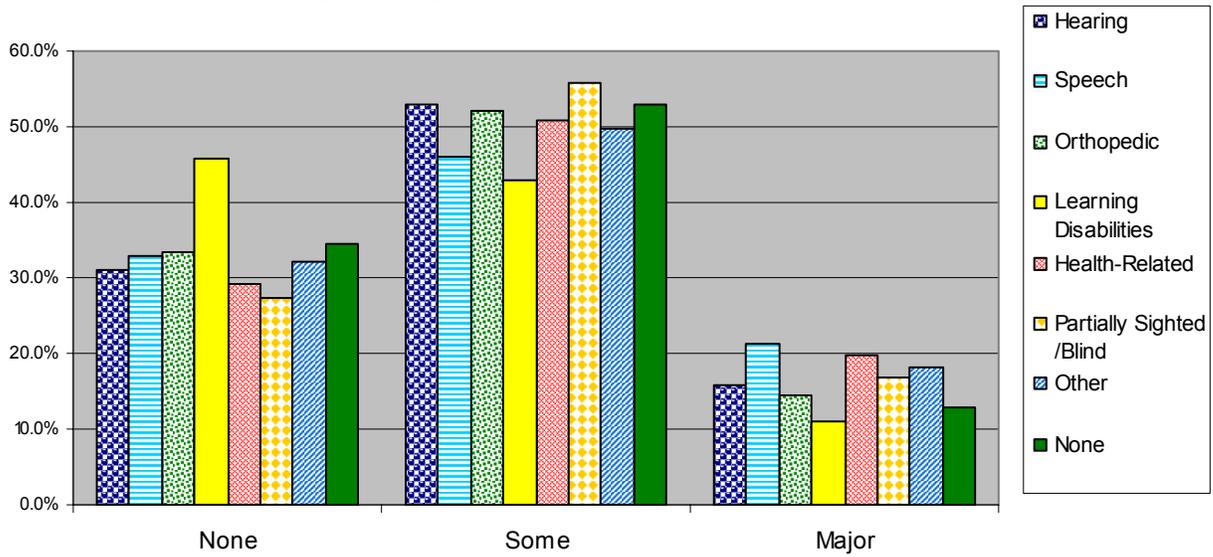
Perhaps both the parents' levels of education and income are reflected in the degree of financial concern for freshmen with different disabilities indicated in Figure 7. While the percentages of freshmen with learning disabilities who report 'some' or 'major' financial concern are only slightly less than freshmen with other disabilities and freshmen without disabilities, the percentage of freshmen with learning disabilities who reported no financial concern is 12% or more higher when compared to other groups.

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Figure 7 - Degree of Financial Concern by Type of Disability



N for:

Hearing = 1207
 Learning disabilities 7348
 Other = 3278

Speech = 387
 Health Related = 2673
 None = 261509

Orthopedic = 1040
 Partially Sighted/Blind = 2981

Summary

While freshmen with most types of disabilities mirror freshmen without disabilities on many of the variables analyzed, freshmen with learning disabilities portray a different picture. When compared to freshmen with other disabilities and freshmen without disabilities, higher percentages of freshmen with learning disabilities tend to have a lower high school grade average, attend private high schools and colleges more often, and have parents with higher family incomes and education levels. Finally, they tend to have less financial concern.

Although this snapshot should not discourage any student, particularly those with learning disabilities, from seeking postsecondary options, it is clear that additional considerations should be

taken into account while in high school. Students with learning disabilities tend to have lower high school grade averages. Therefore, students currently in public high school students may need to assure their Individual Education Plans (IEP) provide appropriate supports, services and accommodations. Extra support services beyond what high school students may be eligible to receive within their IEPs (i.e. one-to-one tutoring) may also be advisable for high schools and later when they are college students. Colleges and universities are not required to provide extra services. Therefore, even if they attend public postsecondary institutions, students with learning disabilities and their parents must be made aware that support services, such as tutoring, most likely will not be considered a reasonable accommodation by these institutions. Some postsecondary institutions charge an additional fee for tutoring and other specialized learning disability services. Where these services are not available on-campus, many students require private tutors or learning disability specialists to ensure their postsecondary success. In any event, parents most likely incur additional expenses for a college education if their student has a learning disability.

Good study skills and knowledge of the specific and beneficial learning strategies that are important for all students with learning disabilities, but they are critical for students from lower income levels. Self-advocacy skills are also critical since students will more likely have to be resourceful and advocate for necessary services which are either not available or affordable. Self-advocacy and study skills, and learning strategies mastered at the high school level are keys to successful postsecondary experiences for students with learning disabilities. Lastly, students for whom the cost of college is a financial concern are encouraged to explore possible funding through

scholarships, grants, tuition waivers, and/or fellowships. The HEATH Resource Center provides information on finding and applying for funding.

Reference

Ward, M.J., & Merves, E.S. (2006, Summer). Full-time freshmen with disabilities enrolled in 4-year colleges: A statistical profile. *Information from HEATH*. Retrieved August 31, 2006 from http://www.heath.gwu.edu/archived/newsletter/issue18/new_freshman_data.htm



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