

**A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE CAREER DEVELOPMENT
EXPERIENCES OF PARTICIPANTS OF THE *CAREERS COLLABORATIVE*
PROGRAM AT MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY**

By

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ABSTRACT

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE CAREER DEVELOPMENT EXPERIENCES OF PARTICIPANTS OF THE *CAREERS COLLABORATIVE* PROGRAM AT MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

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The purpose of this study was to understand the career development experiences of students with disabilities who participated in a unique collaborative program consisting of three university entities: Disabilities Services, Career Services, and the College of Education, as well as community-based service agency, the state vocational rehabilitation agency in the State of Michigan. Guided by the Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) and through semi-structured interviews with 12 participants, half alumni and half current students, this researcher collected information about how the *Careers Collaborative* services had assisted with the participants' career preparation and development, particularly in terms of their interaction with professional staff, how their personal and learning experiences impacted decisions related to their field of study, what role disability had in their decisions, and the supports and barriers perceived by the participants. For each of the six SCCT constructs, themes emerged that were described as follows.

Construct 1 Self-Efficacy and themes: Soft Skills Attainment, Positive Outlook on Future Employment, Barriers and Supports, Educational and Professional Past Experiences. Construct 2 Learning Experiences and themes: Previous Academic Experiences, Work Experiences and Exploration, Personal Experiences, Impact of Others. Construct 3 Person Inputs and themes: Personality Characteristics, Effects of Disability, Educational Factors Influencing Career Path,

Accommodations and Support Services in Higher Education. Construct 4 Outcome Expectations and themes: Participant's Employment Outlook, Future Plans are Guided by Expectations, Personal Fit of Job, Preparing for Potential Challenges. Construct 5 Interests and themes: Past Experiences, Personal Values, Passion, Autonomy. Construct 6 Personal/Choice Goals and themes: Continued Education or Training, Gain Experience, Active Engagement with Partners in the *Careers Collaborative*, Value-Driven Decision.

The results of this study showed promising and positive outcomes of participants who received a program that supported and provided both academic and career-related services for college students with disabilities. It demonstrated that professionals of different specialties who work collaboratively are likely to maximize the outcomes. Implications for practice, future research, and education will be discussed.

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To my parents, Keith and Mary Van Ham, for shaping me into the person I am today.
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KEY TO ABBREVIATIONS

ADA	Americans with Disabilities Act
ADAAA	Americans with Disabilities Act As Amended
ADHD	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
ASD	Autism Spectrum Disorder
ESSA	Every Student Succeeds Act
FAPE	Free Appropriate Public Education
IDEA	Individuals with Disabilities Education Act
IDEIA	Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvements Act
IEP	Individualized Education Program
NCLB	No Child Left Behind
Pre-ETS	Pre-employment Transition Services
PTSD	Post-traumatic Stress Disorder
SCCT	Social Cognitive Career Theory
SSI	Supplemental Security Income
SSDI	Social Security Disability Insurance
VR	Vocational Rehabilitation
WIA	Workforce Investment Act
WIOA	Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Many people with disabilities face employment and career development challenges such as limitations in early life experiences, career decision-making difficulties, and negative self-concept (Kosciulek, 2003). Additionally, there is a discrepancy between what people with disabilities can offer to employers and how they are treated and perceived in the employment setting. Due to this view of persons with disabilities, it may be more challenging for members of this population to obtain the employment goals they set for themselves. Given that individuals with disabilities face a distinct set of employment and career challenges (Kosciulek, 2004), further focus on the career development process and barriers faced by this population is warranted.

Postsecondary students with disabilities comprise a distinct population that faces unique challenges. As such, it behooves career development professionals to address the experiences of this population during their postsecondary careers or immediately upon graduation from their postsecondary institutions. The need exists for exploration regarding the career development process and what leads members of this population, college students with disabilities, to explore the various fields of employment which are consistent with their personal characteristics, learning experiences, interests, goals, and self-efficacy.

Statement of the Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore and gain an understanding of the career development experiences of college students who have participated in a unique collaboration between multiple stakeholders within higher education as well as vocational rehabilitation. This collaboration, appropriately named *Careers Collaborative*, is in its early stages at a major

university and provides a unique experience for postsecondary students with disabilities. In order to gain an understanding of the importance and objectives of such a collaboration, it is essential that an exploration of various topics be conducted. Topics necessary to include are career development theory, employment status of people with disabilities, and college education and employment outcomes for people with disabilities. This researcher examined each of these areas to identify any connections that may exist in relation to the career development experiences of college students participating in this collaborative program.

Career Development of Persons with Disabilities in Postsecondary Settings

As students transition from secondary to postsecondary education, it is crucial that support services are available, both in the area of disabilities services, as well as career development and employment readiness. While some students enter the postsecondary world with a clear understanding of their disability and how it impacts them specifically, that is not always the case. Likewise, in terms of career development and exploration, many students may enter college thinking they know what they will major in and where they want to work, but many students simply lack this type of direction. Hitchings et al. (1998) posited that “Although some individuals will not need services or support during their postsecondary experience, others will” (p. 23) and it is essential that students learn to advocate for what their unique needs are as they progress through the college experience and into the world of work. Therefore, the students who require supports must know how to access these supports. Additionally, self-efficacy is a necessary foundation for one to be able to advocate for oneself. This self-efficacy and self-advocacy must be clearly established in the postsecondary setting to allow the individual to continue to the world of work and have the same ability to advocate for needs in the work environment.

The Harkin Report (2012) addressed the need for postsecondary education for students with disabilities to ensure more favorable employment outcomes by stating “Postsecondary education directly translates into higher pay and lower unemployment...It is critical, therefore, to ensure that people with disabilities can take advantage of the benefits that postsecondary education provides” (p. 19). The University of New Hampshire Institute on Disability/UCED (<https://iod.unh.edu/annual-report/>) provides additional statistics to support this statement through the Annual Report, which, as a main goal is to “track the progress of people with disabilities using key social and economic indicators...as to whether an increase or decrease was detected” (p. 1). Applicable highlights from the 2018 report showed the significant difference in employment rates of people with and without disabilities including the “2017 employment-to-population ratio for people with disabilities was 35.5 percent” compared to “people without disabilities was 76.5 percent, nearly double that of people with disabilities” (p. 5). Additionally, educational attainment was also compared showing “14.3 percent of people with disabilities (ages 25-34) attained a bachelor’s degree or more, compared to 37.2 percent of their peers without disabilities” (p. 13). Such statistics emphasize the importance of identifying best practices when working with people with disabilities to assist with reaching their full potential.

Rationale/Significance of the Study

The insight gleaned from this dissertation research is useful for a variety of individuals and there are a multitude of stakeholders who will directly benefit from this study. Primarily, institutions of higher education will benefit from this information to aid in the retention and support of students with disabilities in relation to their career goals and employment outcomes post-graduation. These professionals work with a diverse population of students with disabilities

who have a wide variety of special needs that have to be considered when exploring their potential career choices. Savickas (2010) noted:

Today, individuals can no longer plan to work 30 years developing a career within the boundaries of one job or even one organization...The new job market in an unsettled economy calls for viewing career not as a lifetime commitment to one employer but as a recurrent selling of services and skills to a series of employers who need projects completed. (p.13)

Therefore, it behooves career counselors and professionals to prepare clients/students for a wide range of employment opportunities and to identify transferable skills they may possess in order to assist them in understanding how to not only utilize those skills in the world of work, but also how to market those skills to potential employers.

Additionally, employers will benefit by employing workers who have identified a job that is a good fit with their interests and abilities. These future employees will be more vested, enthusiastic, and have more to offer in the world of work due to their extensive exploration during their postsecondary education. Therefore, it is hoped that by investing time during their postsecondary educational careers, these students will be better prepared and passionate about the degrees they earn and the fields in which they end up working. One's career leads to a professional identity and self-esteem, among other important aspects. Harkin (2012) stated "Work leads to financial independence; it enhances one's ability to make choices and to control one's life" (p. 5). Thus, the students themselves benefit from this research as there may be best practices identified and applied in the future as a result of this research.

The employment rate for people with disabilities is in sharp contrast to the employment rate for those without disabilities. Harkin (2012) showed that "A comparison of workers with

disabilities with the working age population overall shows that working age people with disabilities participated in the workforce at a rate less than *one half* that of the general population” (p. 7). The United States Bureau of Labor Statistics (2015) identified the employment rate in 2014 for people with disabilities at 17.1% compared to people without a disability at 64.6% (United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015). Additionally, other highlights from the data noted “Unemployment rates were higher for persons with a disability than for those with no disability among all educational attainment groups”, and “The unemployment rate for persons with a disability was 12.5% in 2014, about twice the figure of 5.9% for those with no disability” (United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015, Retrieved from: <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/disabl.nr0.htm>). The statistics point out what can be witnessed everyday: people with disabilities are more likely to be unemployed or underemployed than individuals without disabilities.

In response to the dramatic employment contrast between people with and without disabilities, the United States Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions released a report in 2012 under Senator Tom Harkin to address the concerns and struggle with economic issues. Senator Harkin addresses the “dismal disability employment situation” and put forth a call “for public and private sector employers to set goals for boosting disability employment” among other things (Harkin, 2012, p. 1). This report shared startling statistics and a challenge for employers to increase the size of their disability workforce by 2015; a goal that was endorsed very quickly by the US Chamber of Commerce. The goal with these, and other, initiatives is to allow easier access to quality education, reasonable accommodations, and empower young adults with disabilities to be productive members of the workforce.

Research Question

The research question for this study was:

How do participants of the *Careers Collaborative* describe their career development experiences?

Conceptual Framework

The Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) is a conceptual framework aimed at understanding “(a) the formation and elaboration of career-relevant interests, (b) selection of academic and career choice options, and (c) performance and persistence in educational and occupational pursuits” (Lent et al., 1994, p. 79). This theory is an ideal fit for the purposes of this research study as the framework it offers encompasses the main constructs of career development with this particular population. Therefore, specific constructs of the SCCT were utilized as a basis for attempting to understand the steps taken by postsecondary students with disabilities as they explore potential careers. By studying what these individuals believe they can accomplish in accordance with their interests, supports and barriers, personal goals, learning experiences, and beliefs about the outcomes of their actions, it is the hope that an effective, evidence-based plan for aiding these students in their academic and career pursuits can be firmly established as a best practice within the field.

This research focused on specific individual constructs addressed by the Social Cognitive Career Theory. The constructs of interest regarding this theory (Self-Efficacy, Outcome Expectations, Person Inputs, Personal/Choice Goals, Learning Experiences, and Interests), intersect with the experiences of a college student, and more importantly, college students with disabilities participating in an innovative program, as they attempt to navigate the world of career development and preparation. This study explored the career development experiences of

participants within the *Careers Collaborative* and what practices can be collected and applied as best practices for other institutions of higher education.

Summary

Phenomenology is a qualitative research method that best fits the goals of this research, as this involves studying individuals who have a shared experience. In this case the participants have all received services from the *Careers Collaborative* program at some level and were asked to share information about their experience. This study focused on the individual's variables related to the Social Cognitive Career Theory and how each of these affected the choices and experiences related to the overall career development process. Therefore, the data obtained from the interviews with each participant could then be analyzed and grouped into shared themes experienced by the group of participants.

Postsecondary students with disabilities make up an underrepresented population with unique needs in the academic world. Because of these distinctive needs, it is important that attention is paid to the career experiences of these students as they explore the world of work and potential for future employment. The purpose of this research was to explore the question: How do participants of the *Careers Collaborative* describe their career development experiences? The Social Cognitive Career Theory was utilized as a basic construct and foundation for exploring those experiences and identifying specific areas that may impact the decisions and career paths taken by these individuals.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Individuals with disabilities comprise an increasing percentage of the population of individuals who continue their education after high school. Students with disabilities face distinct challenges that students without disabilities do not. Due to the unique nature of the needs of students with disabilities, it is important that focus is placed on best practices to assist with career development experiences during college which will lead to employment opportunities after graduation. The purpose of this study was to explore and gain an understanding of the career development experiences of participants of the *Careers Collaborative* program.

Current statistics regarding the employment of persons with disabilities show that individuals identifying as a person with a disability are employed at much lower rates than those who do not have a disability, even among those with advanced education. Laws are in place that apply to secondary education, postsecondary education, and within the world of work to promote equality and reduce barriers for individuals with disabilities.

In addition to the data and legislation already in place to provide opportunity and assistance for individuals with disabilities, evidence-based best practices that produce measurable outcomes must be utilized to assist in the career development process. Career development theory, specifically the Social Cognitive Career Theory, provides a platform and guidance for professionals working with students with disabilities.

In order to address the current body of literature regarding college students with disabilities and their career development experience, it will be helpful to identify specific areas of research and provide greater focus on this topic. This review will focus on the employment

status of people with disabilities, the education and employment outcomes of college graduates with disabilities, the postsecondary experiences of students with disabilities, and the guiding theory of career development, specifically the Social Cognitive Career Theory. To support these main topics, within the appropriate sections, applicable legislation is considered in relation to career development and guiding practices within the field.

Employment Status of People with Disabilities

“In 2019, 19.3 percent of persons with a disability were employed...in contrast, the employment-population ratio for those without a disability was 66.3 percent” (United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015, Retrieved from <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/disabl.nr0.htm>). Additionally, the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics (2020) included more specific information stating that overall people with disabilities are much less likely to be employed than those with no disability, persons with disabilities tend to be more concentrated in service occupations and less in management, and the unemployment rate for those with disabilities (7.3% in 2019) is twice the rate as their non-disabled counterparts (3.5% in 2019). This stark contrast in employment for persons with disabilities is consistent across all age groups.

Furthermore, individuals with disabilities are much less likely to obtain a postsecondary degree. “Among people age 25 and older in 2019, 29.6 percent of people with a disability had completed at least a bachelor’s degree. By comparison, 77.1 percent of people with no disability had completed at least a bachelor’s degree” and of those who have completed at least a bachelor’s degree, only 28.2 percent of people with a disability were employed in 2019 compared to 75.5 percent of people without a disability (United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020, Retrieved from <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/disabl.t01.htm>). While

individuals who complete higher levels of education are more likely to be gainfully employed, there still exists a disparity between individuals with and without disabilities who hold postsecondary degrees or certifications.

“Many persons with disabilities have difficulty obtaining competitive employment due to lack of education and inadequate supports, which often means these individuals are unable to financially support themselves and live above the poverty line” (Pingry O’Neill et al., 2012, p. 21). Although there are several misperceptions or concerns about hiring individuals with disabilities, most, if not all, of these are unfounded. The United States Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor & Pensions provided a report in 2012, titled *Unfinished Business: Making Employment of People with Disabilities a National Priority*, in which several areas were discussed and a call for action was issued. Chairman Tom Harkin addressed the low labor force participation of individuals with disabilities and the call for employers to set specific goals for boosting employment of said population. The Chairman noted “working-age Americans with disabilities dropped out of the labor force at a rate five times higher than that of workers without disabilities” (Harkin, 2012, p. 2). He went on to point out that the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 set forth specific goals for people with disabilities in the areas of equality of opportunity, participation, independent living, and being able to support oneself in the economy (Harkin, 2012). In order to reach these goals in each area listed, both the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the ADA have worked to remove barriers that in the past have made competitive employment difficult for individuals within this population. Other legislation recently enacted, such as the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) of 2014, continue to promote opportunities for individuals with disabilities to obtain both the education and collective work

experiences necessary to become competitive for employment opportunities when ready to enter the world of work.

The Harkin report continued to clearly state another benefit of work in that it leads to financial independence and allows individuals to have autonomy over one's life (Harkin, 2012). This empowerment of personally directing one's professional life is critical, especially since people with disabilities tend to be underemployed, earn less than their counterparts who do not have disabilities, and experience and remain in poverty longer than those who do not have disabilities (Harkin, 2012). To counter the low rate of employment for individuals with disabilities, former President Obama issued an Executive Order 13548 that set a goal of increasing the number of individuals with disabilities in the federal workforce by 2015. There has been some success towards this goal as evidenced by the employment rate for persons with disabilities rising to 17.9% in 2016, up from 17.1% in 2014 (United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017). Additionally, this order also created deadlines and requirements for hiring and training workers with disabilities (Harkin, 2012). It was the hope that this legislation, along with other initiatives would create an environment that encourages participation of individuals with disabilities in competitive and integrated employment settings.

Rehabilitation Act of 1973

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 specifically pertains to students with disabilities as it addresses the right of individuals to have access to Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE), regardless of the nature or severity of the disability. The United States Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights (2007) addresses this specifically in its publication produced initially in 1999 and revised in 2007, which explains that Section 504

“protects the rights of individuals with disabilities in programs that receive federal funds” and further:

No otherwise qualified individual with a disability in the United States...shall, solely by reason of her or his disability, be excluded from the participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance. (p. 1)

This affects individuals with disabilities that impact major life activities, and includes public school districts, institutions of higher education, and other state and local education agencies. Henderson (2001), discussed Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, explaining that it is a “civil rights law to prohibit discrimination on the basis of disability in programs and activities, public and private, that receive federal financial assistance” and furthermore defines the criteria of a person with a disability” (p. 5).

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), 1990 and Americans with Disabilities Act As Amended (ADAAA), 2008

Other significant legislation includes the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), which congress enacted in 1990 and its amendments (ADAAA) of 2008, which became effective January 1, 2009. Russo and Osborne (2009) describe the ADA as “a comprehensive mandate to eliminate discrimination against individuals with disabilities” and its “primary intent was to extend the protection of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act” (p. 38). The difference between the two is notable with the sectors to which they apply. The ADA has five titles, addressed in the 2008 amendments, which state requirements for specific sectors. The Americans with Disabilities Act as Amended, 2008, provided specific changes, such as the definitions of a

“disability” and “major life activities” and expanded upon each so that it matched the definition provided in Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act.

Postsecondary Educational Experiences of Students with Disabilities

“Young adults transitioning from high school to postsecondary activities are at a pivotal time in their lives in which career decision-making is a paramount concern” (Lorenz, 2011, p. 24). As at-risk youth with disabilities are identified as needing special education or 504 services, it is essential that career development and exploration opportunities are included and pursued in such a way as the individual with a disability has a voice and plays an active role in this process. In this way, the individual will be more invested and more empowered with the decision to follow a specific career path. Continuing one’s education after exiting high school often increases the individual’s employment opportunities, earning potential, and overall quality of life (Dutta et al., 2009). Timing is crucial when it comes to career exploration and identifying opportunities and interests of postsecondary students. It is important that the process of career exploration begin much before the college educational experience occurs. However, as this is often not the case currently, time and energy must be focused on the college career development process and what best practices are occurring presently for postsecondary students with disabilities. Hitchings et al. (1998, p. 27) point out that “...many college students with disabilities are not fully aware of the impact that their disabilities may have in terms of their career development”. Such unawareness may be due to a lack of education during the secondary experience or constraints on time and resources at that level. While it is the hope that the priority on vocational experiences and exploration will change in the future for our students with disabilities, the current reality is that there are many students with disabilities attending

institutions of higher learning who do not have those experiences prior to entering the postsecondary world.

College or other postsecondary training may be a time in which individuals within this population begin to struggle with the impact of the disability and adjusting to the requirement to advocate for oneself and the needs the individual has based on their specific disability. Literature notes that these specific struggles that students with disabilities encounter occur at higher incidence for students within this population and occur in multiple areas including academic, attitudinal, and the physical barriers faced while attending college (Pingry O'Neill, et al., 2012). During such a confusing and challenging time, it is essential that there are supports in place to aid students in the vocational decision-making process. "Our task as a profession is to deliver effective career guidance that is readily accessible in a manner that promotes social justice for all" (Sampson et al., 2010, p. 334). As previously stated, many students with and without disabilities enter the world of college underprepared and unsure of their career path. However, the issue of students being unprepared for postsecondary education and professional life after college is further complicated when there is a disability involved. Such students may not have had any work experience prior to entering the college world. Members of this population may have had accommodations in place throughout high school and are now expected to advocate for themselves, whereas in the secondary system self-advocacy may not have been an expectation. As they navigate the world of higher education, students within this population may find it to be a huge change from what many have been accustomed to. "Although public secondary schools must offer individualized special education to students with disabilities, colleges are not required to offer similar services. In fact, special education services end when the student leaves high school" (Shaw et al., 2009, p. 186). The fact that certain special education services end for the

student when he/she exits the secondary system does not mean that the individual's academic needs disappear. It may be the exact opposite that now these students need even more support as they navigate a new system with new experiences, routines, expectations, and a new type of learning environment. This “new world” can be scary, confusing, and oftentimes overwhelming.

The “expectation for and support of academic goals while still in high school has an obvious positive impact on the success of students in college” (Weir, 2004, p. 72). These academic goals can be directly related to career exploration and career/employment outcome goals. Depending on the postsecondary institution, there may be supplementary services available, but either at a charge for the student or under a structure in which the student must now request services or accommodations based on the disability they have. Often the student is responsible for providing current documentation regarding their disability and functional limitations. If the student is unable to provide documentation, they may be financially responsible to obtain said documentation, whereas in the secondary system, the testing and documentation would have been provided by the school system. Students need to know what legally must be provided for accessibility purposes and then what additional services may be available in addition to knowing how to ask for each of these in the higher education setting. Such awareness and responsibility can be especially challenging to balance expectations versus appropriate accommodations and understanding the difference between secondary and postsecondary supports or accommodations. To this end, the United States Department of Education (2002) has provided information on the rights and responsibilities of students preparing for and entering postsecondary education. For example, students with disabilities in the postsecondary system may be surprised to learn that they are responsible for self-identifying and following the institution's policy for requesting accommodations. Additionally, the

accommodations received may not be the same accommodations the students received in their secondary educational careers.

When navigating the world of higher education, it is essential that students with disabilities are aware of their rights and advocate for themselves. In addition to knowing their rights and responsibilities specifically regarding accommodations within the postsecondary system “...the student is expected to make important decisions related to coursework and disability related needs” (Shaw et al., 2009, p. 187). Roessler et al., (2007) state:

The goal of improving career services for postsecondary students with disabilities is entirely consistent with major social policies, such as Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and Titles I, II, and III of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). (p. 158)

Part of the responsibilities of educators, both at the secondary and postsecondary levels working with this population, is to make sure students are aware of their rights to equal access and appropriate educational opportunities at the postsecondary level. In addition, students with disabilities should be encouraged to advocate for themselves and to be sure that their needs are being met. Students should seek out support from the disabilities services offices within the postsecondary system to be sure the institution is in compliance with students’ rights and the law. In their earlier educational experiences, students with disabilities may have worked directly with the teachers or support staff for accommodations. At the postsecondary level, there may be a different process in place, requiring the student to provide documentation to the Disabilities Services office at that institution, rather than going directly to the professor. Well-intentioned general faculty may be ill-equipped due to lack of knowledge to best support a student with disabilities. Therefore, a generic accommodation may be put in place that either does not best

serve the student with disabilities or does not provide enough information on specific needs to best assist the student, whereas in secondary education often the teacher, staff, or professional has known and worked with the student for years and may have a better understanding of the unique needs of the individual. Becker and Palladino (2016) affirm this, stating that “faculty may default to limited ways of fulfilling their responsibilities, such as providing extra time on tests” (p. 67). Not only may this be a disservice to the student with a disability, but it may also have legal ramifications for the institution. It is best to leave appropriate accommodations up to the professionals who are familiar with the law and disabilities to determine reasonable accommodations.

Dutta et al., (2009) point out that “Since 1978, the number of college students with disabilities has tripled” (p. 14). “The increased number of students with disabilities enrolled in postsecondary education provides a strong rationale for examining and enhancing career services for this group” (Roessler et al., 2007, p. 158). As the number of students with disabilities within the world of higher education is increasing, likewise the awareness of the needs of such a group of individuals needs to increase. This population of students brings unique experiences and a set of requirements that students without disabilities do not have. These experiences and potential obstacles to education and future employment play a critical role in the career development process. Roessler et al. (2007, p. 158) continue to point out that “Students with disabilities simply do not benefit from postsecondary training to the same extent as their counterparts who do not report disabilities do”. Due to these unique needs within this population, attention must be paid to the techniques that will best serve students within this group. “Individual supports for college can be designed around the desires and unique needs of students” (Weir, 2004, p. 67). With the amount of time and finances invested into higher educational training, it is necessary

for professionals working with said population to determine the best way to aid in the success of students with disabilities.

In order for postsecondary students with disabilities to have a pivotal role and active voice in the career development process, those working with this population need to understand their current experiences and thus how to best and most effectively work with members within this group. The first step in order to do this is to explore the current experiences of postsecondary students with disabilities and collect information regarding the best direction to provide productive and foundational experiences throughout the career exploration process. Wolffe (2012,) states:

Although career counseling is appropriate for people with or without disabilities, working with people with disabilities demands additional information...It is critical that counselors have an understanding of the impact of disability on an individual's physical and emotional self...Counselors need to rely heavily upon information reported by their clients, particularly with regard to strengths and limitations imposed by disability. (p. 4)

It will behoove academic and career professionals employed in these areas to begin the career exploration process as soon as possible and to provide comprehensive, individualized services via a variety of tools and techniques. This means those working with individuals with disabilities for career counseling and exploration not only assist students in considering all areas of interest to the student, but they must also keep their own assumptions and biases of what the individual can or cannot do and encourage the individual to make those determinations for themselves when considering potential careers.

To complicate the process even more, individuals with disabilities also must contend with both real and perceived barriers. Therefore, it is essential that as barriers are identified for

students with disabilities, it is necessary to also look at the barriers that the individual believes may be in place. Albert and Luzzo (1999) report that:

The use of the word *perceived* to refer to such barriers implies that the career-related barriers of an individual believes currently exist or may be encountered in the future are not necessarily grounded in reality or based on factual information. (p. 431)

However, the fact that an individual may think that they will come across specific barriers may impact their career decision-making process and ultimately the outcome. As these perceived barriers directly impact the career decision-making process, professionals working with these individuals must recognize the significance this plays for the individual. Albert and Luzzo (1999) go on to explain that the Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) would suggest that if people have high levels of Self-Efficacy, Outcome Expectations, and Interests within a particular field, they may avoid that career goal if they perceive obstacles that they cannot overcome. “Perceived barriers or impediments may arise in this individual due to their conceptual processes of differential opportunities for skill development, self-beliefs, standards, and outcome expectations that may become internalized” (p. 432). The information stated would be crucial for professionals working with students at the postsecondary level. Professionals need to be aware that the students they work with may in fact be considering these perceived barriers in their career exploration regardless of whether they voice these concerns and may be disregarding certain potential career opportunities or fields of study without accurate information. In these instances, the professional should discuss all barriers the student believes they may face in each employment area so they can be addressed and either identify ways to work with the obstacle or disregard as not a significant barrier for employment.

Education/Employment Outcomes of Recent College Graduates with Disabilities

“Many reasons are given for the poor employment prospects and outcomes for postsecondary students with disabilities” (Roessler et al., 2007, p. 158). Some of the reasons suggested including stigma surrounding disability, lack of education or awareness, the perception that costs will be heightened by employing an individual with disabilities, conflict in the workplace, and so on. Similar to adults with disabilities in the workforce, it is known that youth with disabilities are employed at rates much lower than their non-disabled counterparts.

According to the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics (2017, p. 2) “Persons with a disability are less likely to have completed a bachelor’s degree or higher than those with no disability”. In addition, students with disabilities may also lack specific opportunities such as volunteering experiences, job shadowing, work experiences, or employment prior to postsecondary education. Hitchings et al. (1998, p. 29) found that “individuals with disabilities might benefit from opportunities to explore careers and occupations of interest, particularly if they have little or no related career experience”. In addition, students with disabilities may also require further assistance and training with pre-employment skills such as resume and cover letter writing, interviewing skills and preparation, professional communication and interactions in the workplace to overcome barriers to employment (Dutta et al., 2009, p. 15).

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

One piece of legislation that has attempted to provide access and opportunities for students with disabilities and alleviate barriers for those individuals is the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). This educational act is legislation administered by the Office of Special Education Programs and provides “federal financial assistance to state and local education agencies to guarantee special education and related services to eligible children with

disabilities” (Henderson, 2001, p. 3). IDEA furthers the goal of Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) for students who meet the criteria, and it requires specific content to be in the Individualized Educational Plan (IEP), including what services will be provided, objectives or goals to be met over the course of the next year, future planning, and mandates the IEP is to be reviewed annually with the team supporting the student.

No Child Left Behind (NCLB)

IDEA was amended in 2004 by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvements Act (IDEIA) and aligned with the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001. This initiative had a primary goal of increasing accountability in the secondary school system for all students. NCLB stipulated “statewide systems of accountability based upon challenging academic standards and assessment systems” requiring “student achievement results to be disaggregated into subgroup categories including a subgroup category for students with disabilities” (Cole, 2006, p. 1). While the goal of NCLB was to ensure all students succeed within the educational system, it led to educational professionals questioning best practices for assisting students with disabilities to succeed in a general education curriculum.

Throughout the educational process, students with disabilities often have a very different experience than that of their non-disabled counterparts. These experiences which students with disabilities face often begin during their secondary education and continue as students transition to the postsecondary world. For example, not only do students with disabilities have to contend with the typical issues of time management, organizational challenges, navigating a new social world with different social aspects, and identity development that their non-disabled counterparts do, but they also have to come to terms with their own disability-related challenges and barriers as they participate in a world that is most often set up for the success of individuals without these

obstacles. The career development process is just one of the many areas that requires additional attention for students with disabilities. Career exploration, interviewing skills, self-advocacy, and work experiences all need to be incorporated into the life of a student with disabilities early in their educational careers in order to remain focused and competitive with non-disabled peers for future employment opportunities. Often it is these experiences and soft skills training opportunities that are missing for students with disabilities and creates a larger gap in allowing them to be competitive with their peers for competitive employment.

Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)

The need for additional supports and opportunities for students with disabilities has been recognized and recent legislation, such as the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), signed into law on July 22, 2014 by President Barack Obama, is attempting to address and remedy how schools and vocational rehabilitation agencies work with members of this population. The WIOA legislation places an emphasis on helping individuals with disabilities access employment, education, training, and support necessary that will result in competitive employment outcomes. The United States Department of Labor (2017) states that this law “reinforces the principle that individuals with disabilities...are capable of achieving high quality, competitive integrated employment when provided the necessary services and supports” (pp. 1, 15). Another provision within the Act allows for vocational rehabilitation services to be expanded in order to assist individuals to reach their maximum potential, thus encouraging more education and training opportunities for the individual.

It is the hope that the new legislation will help close the gap between individuals with and without disabilities in the workforce. As Weir (2004, p. 67) noted, “Collaboration and person-centered planning are both key features of this approach to postsecondary education”. Thus, by

adding more supports for the individual with disabilities, the greater the likelihood for success in future employment outcomes. The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act “requires ongoing collaboration at the Federal, State, and local levels across employment and training programs” (United States Department of Labor, 2017, p. 2).

Supported Education and Supported Employment

Supported Education is an intervention that assists individuals with disabilities, primarily psychiatric, with reaching their educational goals by providing ongoing support specific to the individual needs. Higher education attainment can promote higher self-esteem, increase competitiveness in employment opportunities, lead to more options with pursuing the type of work that meets one’s interests, and lead to higher paying jobs (Manthey et al., 2012; Mueser & Cook, 2012). According to Anthony and Unger (1991) the major goals of Supported Education are to provide access to postsecondary choices and provide services to aid retention. This can be available through different options, depending on the needs of the individual to meet those educational milestones.

Similar to Supported Education, Supported Employment also seeks to support individuals with disabilities with obtaining or maintaining competitive employment. Prior to WIOA, the goal of Supported Employment was for people with disabilities to obtain competitive work in an integrated setting or real work setting with intensive supports in place (Wehman et al., 2016). With the passage of WIOA, the definition of Supported Employment now included a provision that ensures competitive integrated employment settings and added Customized Employment, which refers to a process whereby a job is flexibly designed to take into account the unique needs of the individual while meeting the needs of the employer (United States Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration, 2017; Wehman et al., 2016).

Career Development Theory

Theory is critical when determining effective, evidence-based strategies to utilize while working with clients. Theory serves as a guide to practitioners as they deliver services. Sampson Jr. et al. (2010, p. 327) expound on this stating “Applying theory to practice is viewed as an essential competency for practitioners who are engaged in delivering career guidance interventions”. Brady-Amoon and Fuentes (2011, p. 431) agreed, stating “Since the origin of the profession, counselors have facilitated client development by assisting clients in establishing and attaining vocational and educational goals”. Nevill (1997) further expounded on the above sentiments by reinforcing that:

Career decision making is certainly a complex process, involving multiple alternatives and multiple objectives. The young college student, faced with choosing a major, might be lured by various options and have several goals...Involved in this decision making might be the goals of pleasing his or her parents, making a lot of money, helping people, being creative, and so forth...Pure rationality will not make a perfect decision. Instead, the individual should wisely reply on some...other alternatives. (p. 291)

The practitioner’s role is to assist the individual in weighing all the variables and therefore must ascribe to and have a plethora of techniques at their disposal so as to utilize the most appropriate method for the individuals with whom they work.

According to Wolffe (2012, p. 5) “Career counseling is about helping people determine what kinds of roles and activities they want to pursue over the course of their lives and how well their interests, abilities, and personalities match to available work environments”. In agreement with this sentiment, Szymanski and Hanley-Maxwell (1996) state, “Career development is personal development. It encompasses the full spectrum of life roles and extends through the

lifetime. In addition, it is related to the context in which one lives, including opportunity structures” (p. 53). When looking at the process of career development, there are many areas of one’s life that must be examined. Such areas include the personal history and experiences of the individual as well as the location in which one grows up and the social environment surrounding the individual. Often, factors such as family influence and values play key roles in the direction an individual takes when exploring future careers. Additionally, one may either reject or embrace a specific career path simply because of outside forces and before the individual has explored not only that field but other fields that may be a good fit as well. It is these factors that need to be considered and discussed when a career professional is working with an individual exploring educational and career goals. If one neglects any area of the individual, a disservice is done to the person and may invalidate the outcome of that exploration. In order to make the best choice, it is essential that all components and variables are considered. The career exploration professional plays a critical role in the entire process.

While there are many theories of career development, several specific theories are more attuned to the needs of individuals with disabilities while others may lack sensitivity to the unique nature of a disability. “There is no definitive theory of career development and disability nor should there be...individual career interventions for people with disabilities must be determined on the basis of understanding the individual and the nature of career development” (Szymanski & Hanley-Maxwell, 1996, p. 49). This is to say that all components of the individual, including disability-related factors, must be considered for maximum positive outcome. As is done in the career exploration process with students who do not have a disability, the professional working with the individual should challenge that person to identify his or her interests, abilities, capabilities, and the many other factors that may play into their decision

regarding a career path. These other factors may, in fact, include the disability but may also include resources, socioeconomic status, values, future goals/desires, etc. To reach this point, it may be necessary to consider several techniques throughout the exploration process and determine which mechanisms work best for a given individual. Skilled counselors employ a variety of techniques and recognize the appropriate times to use each. The objective or goal, as O'Sullivan et al. (2014, p. 156) point out is that the individual is satisfied with the job, meaning the "job demands match his or her abilities and interests" and the individual is "valued by the organization".

Social Cognitive Career Theory

The Social Cognitive Career Theory, or SCCT, considers several aspects of an individual and consequently looks at how these aspects relate to other variables. SCCT "was conceived as an effort to complement and build linkages among existing theoretical approaches to career development" (Lent & Brown, 2013, p. 557). According to Lent et al. (2000):

SCCT focuses on several cognitive-person variables (e.g., Self-Efficacy, outcome expectations, learning experiences, and goals) and on how these variables interact with other aspects of the person and his or her environment (e.g., gender, ethnicity, social supports, and barriers) to help shape the course of career development. (p. 36)

It is this relationship that aids in a successful career search, leading an individual to consider not only their strengths and challenges, but also the environment itself. Thus, ultimately leading to a good fit for all those involved in the process and the future outcome of the exploration.

A basic assumption of SCCT, provided by Lent and Brown (1996b, p. 311) is that it "focuses on the processes through which (a) academic and career interests develop, (b) interests, in concert with other variables, promote career-relevant choices, and (c) people attain varying

levels of performance and persistence in their educational and career pursuits”. This is based in part on the work of Bandura and his Social Cognitive Theory which “holds that person attributes (such as internal cognitive and affective states), external environmental factors, and overt behavior each operate as interactive sets of variables that mutually influence one another” (Lent & Brown, 1996b, p. 312). The SCCT focuses on the following variables: Self-Efficacy beliefs, Outcome Expectations, and Personal/Choice Goals.

Self-Efficacy beliefs refer to the confidence that one has in their ability to accomplish something. Lent and Brown (1996b, p. 312) explain that this “involves dynamic self-beliefs that are linked to particular performance domains and activities...Self-Efficacy beliefs are acquired and modified through four primary informational sources: (a) personal performance accomplishments, (b) vicarious learning, (c) social persuasion, and (d) physiological states and reactions”. More specifically, Betz (2004, p. 340) states that “The concept of Self-Efficacy refers to one’s beliefs in one’s capabilities to successfully engage in a specific area of behavior...sources of efficacy information...are performance accomplishments, vicarious learning (modeling), emotional arousal (anxiety), and social persuasion and encouragement”. Each of these definitions lend themselves to use with career counseling in that these constructs, and an individual’s belief in each area, can play a crucial role in the decision-making process when determining careers of interest. Moreover, when identifying career choice, this component can lead to someone identifying educational majors that they will or will not attempt based on the components above. It is this belief in one’s own ability for success or failure in a given field of interest that impacts the steps that they will take to achieve either the goal in a particular major or field, or ultimately leads the individual down another path. In summary,

According to social-cognitive theory, when people believe that they have the ability to act and that their actions will produce the desired outcomes, they are more motivated to act, and to act in ways that are more likely to produce the desired outcome, than when they do not believe that their efforts will be successful (Brady-Amoon & Fuertes, 2011, p. 431).

The previous citation affirms that if individuals believe they will be successful in something, their interests, choices, and actions tend to align with it.

Outcome Expectations represent what an individual believes will happen based on certain behaviors. Specifically, the “beliefs about the consequences or the outcomes of performing particular behaviors” (Lent & Brown, 1996b, p. 312). These expectations play a secondary role to Self-Efficacy but are important, nonetheless. Ochs and Roessler (2004) distinguish between academic and career outcome expectations stating that “Academic outcome expectations involve direct consequences of academic performance...and a linkage between academic performance and future career and life achievements” whereas “Career outcome expectations center on the future benefits of current career-related behaviors” (p. 225). In college age students, the outcome expectation variable can greatly influence how the individual moves forward in the career development and exploration process to the end that one may either pursue or eliminate a potential career path based solely on what they believe about what can or cannot be accomplished.

According to Bandura’s work in 1986, Personal/Choice Goals “may be defined as one’s intention to engage in a certain activity or to produce a particular outcome” (as cited by Lent & Brown, 1996b, p. 312). Personal/Choice Goals may motivate someone to take action or do something regarding a desired outcome. In the world of career exploration, Personal/Choice Goals may encourage someone to strive for a specific career due to goals of earning more

money, helping people, or fulfilling one's passion or personal needs. The individual's values must also be considered when identifying a career field of interest. For example, if one's primary goal or value is to have a job where the individual will earn a substantial income, that value may deter the individual from pursuing other fields that do not meet this criterion. While such goals or values may lead an individual to seek out consultation from primary support members, within or outside of the family structure, this can also be related directly to the career exploration process as the individual may decide whether or not to engage in seeing a counselor in the first place. Additionally, the individual who is exploring a variety of career fields may also choose to participate in job shadows or informational interviewing to determine if they feel the career of choice would match with the goals they have regarding the world of work.

Figure 1: Social Cognitive Career Theory Conceptual Framework

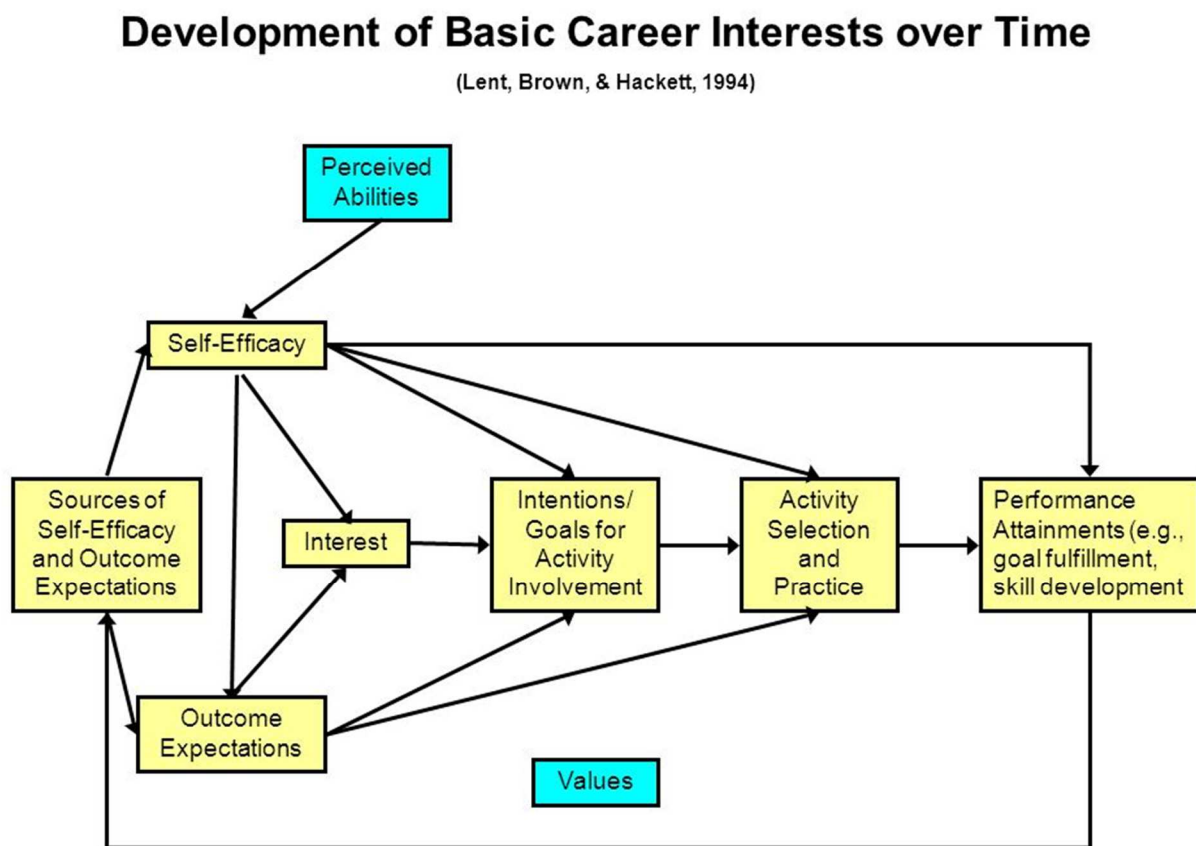


Figure 1 illustrates key components of the Social Cognitive Career Theory and how interests develop. Components such as Self-Efficacy, Outcome Expectations, Interests, Personal/Choice Goals, and Person Inputs directly impact the career development experiences of postsecondary students with disabilities. Each component influences the likelihood of the student choosing a particular major or career trajectory leading towards an employment outcome. It is therefore essential that professionals working with members of this population have an understanding of each variable and how it affects the decision-making process of the individual.

The Michigan State University *Careers Collaborative* program intertwines the variables of the Social Cognitive Career Theory with the very purpose of why the program was created. It is this intersection between the shared goals of stakeholders and participants to obtain successful, competitive employment that directly relates to Self-Efficacy, Outcome Expectations, Interests, Personal/Choice Goals, Person Inputs, and Learning Experiences. One professional summed up the program perfectly, stating that the *Careers Collaborative* provides a wrap-around service for students (C. Sung, personal communication, August 14, 2018). Indeed, this is true as several of the alumni participants shared that they are still involved with Michigan Rehabilitation Services (vocational rehabilitation) even though they have graduated from the university and are receiving assistance with job placement services.

The Bosco MSU-MRS *Careers Collaborative*

The Michigan State University *Careers Collaborative* Program for college students is a unique partnership between four separate entities, which includes the Resource Center for Persons with Disabilities (RCPD), the College of Education, the Career Services Network, and Michigan Rehabilitation Services (vocational rehabilitation). The program infuses the expertise of each unit to best support students with disabilities to ultimately lead to successful future

employment. This program developed due to the Resource Center for Persons with Disabilities wanting Michigan Rehabilitation Services (MRS) to have regular contact with Michigan State University students who qualified for vocational rehabilitation services. By placing an MRS counselor directly on campus, students were able to access such services in a more efficient manner than the previous model where the student would have to meet with a counselor in their home district based on the student's permanent address. The purpose of this collaborative program is to offer education and skills training to students and employers related to disability employment issues and to connect employers with highly skilled students with disabilities. The program offers workshops, networking events, online information, and resources, as well as one on one counseling services for participants. Other services offered include interviewing skills, resume development, disability awareness and disclosure information, assistance in finding paid internship opportunities and permanent employment after graduation, accommodations, and assistive technology information and training.

Summary of Professional Interviews

This researcher also interviewed three professionals with ties to the *Careers Collaborative*. The purpose of these additional interviews was to gather general information related to the program, such as historical information, feedback on how the program is working, including challenges and successes, and thoughts on how the program can be improved and/or replicated. The roles of these individuals include creator of the *Careers Collaborative* program and current Director of the Resource Center for Persons with Disabilities, vocational rehabilitation counselor, and faculty member serving as consultant and researcher.

Each professional highlighted the collaborative nature of the program, uniting the Resource Center for Persons with Disabilities (RCPD), Michigan Rehabilitation Services (MRS),

Career Services Network, and the College of Education, specifically the Rehabilitation Counselor Education program. The impetus for this program, as explained by one professional, was the lack of students involved with MRS as compared to the number of students registered with the RCPD. When this professional “benchmarked against the Bureau of Services for Blind Persons and kind of analyzed the percentages of students eligible for that versus how many were engaged” and determined “more work with MRS” needed to be done. This was explained further by another professional stating “the motivation for the program is a lot of students with disabilities, they have achieved a higher education, like a bachelor degree, but the outcome post-college is not as good as compared to college students with disabilities and without disabilities”.

The process to determine which students will participate in the *Careers Collaborative* was explained by each professional as beginning with the RCPD Specialist. Specifically, the “Specialist in RCPD would identify students who are in their senior year or junior year who are in need of some vocational support and then they would refer those cases to our Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor”. The Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor would meet with the student, open a case and determine eligibility. Once the individual was determined eligible for VR services, the student and counselor would work together with some other providers to provide different services to meet the needs of the student.

Each professional noted the breakdown of disabilities reported by participants include chronic health conditions, learning disabilities, mental health, autism, hearing loss, traumatic brain injuries, and mobility. Detailed information provided by one professional noted:

About one-third of the participants have psychiatric disabilities and then a quarter, about 30% have ADHD and about a quarter of them have chronic health disabilities...we have

some other like learning disabilities about 15% and mobility disability about 10%...students on the spectrum there's only like 4% were actually engaged.

This professional reported that they were tracking primary and secondary disabilities. "The only population we would find underrepresented here is blindness because the students who are blind are working with the Bureau of Services rather successfully" as noted by another professional.

Goals of the program were discussed by each professional, both in terms of individual goals of each stakeholder involved as well as common goals shared. It is no surprise that the professionals agreed on a main goal of the program is to prepare students for future employment or assist with internships/work experiences. Beyond the primary goal, other goals included self-advocacy such as how and when to disclose disability status, as well as how to request reasonable accommodations in the work environment, connecting students to available resources, assist staff with comfort and confidence working with this population, recruitment of future professionals as well as potential future donors, and creating a signature program which furthers the reputation of the university.

The outcomes of this program, as shared by the professionals, were fairly anecdotal in nature. One professional shared with excitement that "we had never had anyone employed through the Federal Government before and now we've got 2!". Another professional elaborated on the employment outcome stating that participants have higher hourly wages and obtaining employment that is a good fit for the individual. Lastly, it was noted that this program is assisting students with being better prepared for future employment by providing more work experiences, such as internships or summer employment, thus leading to a stronger resume that reflects such experiences.

As with any new or collaborative program involving various entities, challenges were discussed by each professional. All three professionals reported that scheduling has been a challenge, as college students tend to have a lot of activities going on, which makes it difficult to schedule meaningful events and get students there. As students tend to do many things online, it was noted that physically getting students to show up has not been a success. Additionally, two of the professionals discussed marketing as a challenge and acknowledged that both students and university personnel don't seem to know much about the program. As one professional put it:

One of the challenges today if you ask people what is the *Careers Collaborative* to them...I think one of the risks is they will say "I don't know what the *Careers Collaborative* is. I know I work with MRS or I know I have an RCPD case" ...so has the branding been strong enough to really mean anything to the student?

Aside from these challenges, another challenge has been turnover of personnel and trying to mesh the cultures of higher education and state government.

All three professionals offered suggestions for addressing some of the current challenges within the program. These suggestions include putting more of the content of the program online and "packaging it so they can see it or experience it when it is most meaningful, or at a time of day that works for them". Another suggestion is to increase marketing of the program by creating new brochures, an online presence via a site that will bring participants together and feel like part of a group. The following summary suggestion relates directly to furthering the program by noting the importance of:

getting the word out because we are so good at doing our work, but not really so much about telling people or being a salesman including selling it to students. So, I see a suggestion would be being more creative and innovative in terms of thinking about ideas

and ways to engage students in not even a Millennial way, but in a way that is well received by the students.

Lastly a call for improvement of the program would be constant communication amongst all of the stakeholders and “reminding ourselves what are the common goals and what we are trying to accomplish.”

Summary

Preparing students for the world of work is a crucial task for professionals now more than ever. Savickas (2010, p. 13) acknowledged “Entering today’s work world requires more effort, deeper self-knowledge, and greater confidence than ever before”. Future employees must be prepared to change jobs or adapt to new expectations on a regular basis and must be equipped with the skills to do so. Such flexibility is essential for everyone but may be a difficult challenge for some individuals with a disability. Postsecondary education and career preparation can assist with such a difficult task, which becomes further complicated when there is a disability involved. Shaw et al. (2009, p. 185) reinforced the importance of higher education stating, “Postsecondary education has been identified as an important transition outcome for students with disabilities because of the impact of a college degree on future adult outcomes”. A college education and degree will greatly affect the vocational outcomes, primarily income level, of students in general and this is similarly true for students with disabilities. It is critical that professionals working with students with disabilities are aware of the impact of a positive college experience and provide opportunities for students with disabilities to be successful at the postsecondary level.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of the career development experiences of participants of the *Careers Collaborative* program. An intended outcome of this research was to explore and gain an understanding of the career development experiences of participants within the *Careers Collaborative* program in order to identify the success of the program, leading to best practices which may be replicated by other institutions. A qualitative research methodology was utilized, guided by career development theory. Phenomenological research identifies the “essence of human experiences concerning a phenomenon, as described by the participants in the study (Creswell, 2003, p. 15). This approach allows the researcher to learn what is important from the participants and how they view the career development experience. It is essential that each individual be able to share their story in relation to this shared experience of participation in an innovative program and that commonalities are extracted from those stories. The data yielded from this study will be useful for informing practitioners about the career development needs of postsecondary students with disabilities.

Participants

The population of interest for this study was an equal number of alumni and current students who have participated in the *Careers Collaborative* program at Michigan State University. Because the intention was to look at the full experience, and in order to generate an adequate sample size, six of the participants recruited were recent graduates and six of the participants were current upper-class students. These criteria ideally allowed for the recruitment of individuals who had ample time and experience within the program. By recruiting participants who were upper-class students as well as recent alumni, the intent was to identify enough

participants for the research study. The participants were required to meet the following criteria to be included in the sample. The study inclusion criteria were:

- 18 years of age and older
- Current students or recent graduates of Michigan State University who have participated within the *Careers Collaborative* Program
- Do not have a legal guardian
- Ability to provide verbal informed consent
- Given the sample source, the participant met the criteria of having a documented disability and was registered with the Resource Center for Persons with Disabilities at Michigan State University

The sample for the current study was recruited from Michigan State University located in an urban, Midwest city. Creswell (2003) recommends that participants come from a single site. The sample for this study was recruited from Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan. This researcher gained access to sample through the Resource Center for Persons with Disabilities. An email was sent to potential participants to recruit (Appendix A). For a phenomenological study, participants must have all experienced a similar phenomenon. Creswell (2003, p. 122) stated “the more diverse the characteristics of the individuals, the more difficult it will be for the researcher to find common experiences, themes, and the overall essence of the experience for all participants”. To this end, all participants have attended the same institution of higher education, received services through the same student support services office for students with disabilities, and participated in the *Careers Collaborative* program. The target number of participants for this study was eight to ten individuals, with this being an even distribution between recent graduates and students nearing the end of their educational experience at the

institution. Prior to interviews taking place, informed consent was discussed and obtained from participants (Appendix B). Twelve participants were interviewed: six alumni and six current students. Participant demographic characteristics were also gathered via a demographic questionnaire provided to participants at the end of each interview. The Participant Demographic Sheet is provided in Appendix C.

Data Collection Procedure

Following the approval of the use of human subjects in research from the Michigan State University Social Science, Education, and Behavioral Institutional Review Board (SIRB) the researcher worked with staff from the Resource Center for Persons with Disabilities (RCPD) at Michigan State University and Michigan Rehabilitation Services (MRS) to recruit potential study participants. The vocational rehabilitation counselor from MRS identified potential participants who met the desired criterion and contacted each to gauge interest in participating in the study. When an individual agreed to participate, the MRS counselor scheduled the time and location for the interview and sent the interview guide to the participant via email prior to the interview. This process continued until the desired sample size was obtained. Participants were informed that their participation is voluntary and that all data collected will remain confidential. Both the study announcement and the informed consent documents are included in Appendix A and B, respectively.

After participants committed to meeting for an interview, the staff member scheduled and reserved a room appropriate for the interviews on the campus and semi-structured interviews were completed. The researcher followed the same process and script for each interview to ensure a standardized procedure. Interviews varied in length ranging from eight minutes and eleven seconds to thirty-one minutes and thirty-four seconds, for an average of sixteen minutes

and forty seconds. For consistency purposes all interviews began with a verbal description of informed consent procedures by the researcher and participants were informed of their right to discontinue at any time. Participants also received a hard copy of the informed consent document. Researcher also inquired if any accommodations were needed during the interview. One participant requested a copy of the questions be provided to reference during the interview.

After the completion of the interview, participants were asked to complete a Participant Demographic Sheet designed to collect data on participants' demographic characteristics in order to be able to summarize the characteristics of study participants. The Participant Demographic Sheet can be found in Appendix C.

Although the interview questions were sent to each participant via email prior to the interview, not all participants reviewed this before the scheduled meeting. All interviews were audio recorded, utilizing two separate devices, for later transcription and field notes were taken by the researcher during the interviews to aid in summarizing interview data and determining themes and patterns within the data. Field notes were also taken to document participant behaviors, interactions between participants and researcher, and non-verbal expressions during the interviews. An additional purpose of the field log was to identify any specific observations made by this researcher before, during, and after the interviews. Each interview began with an introduction, description of the study, and description of informed consent. The participants were also provided with a document containing all such information at that time and invited to ask any questions they may have. By participating in the interview, the participant provided informed consent and a signed informed consent document was not necessary in order to proceed.

Participant Demographics

Upon completion of the interviews, participants were asked to complete a demographic form to gather information to identify potential connections in the future. This information was not directly connected to the recorded interview nor the field notes. It was however labeled as either an alumni or current student participant. The demographic form can be viewed in its entirety in Appendix C and TABLE 1 below reflects some of the information obtained from the forms. Basic information included participant age, gender identification, ethnic identification, and disability. Other information solicited related to the postsecondary environment, including accommodations received while at the university, major, cumulative grade point average and when the degree was or would be completed. Finally, information related to employment, income, and receipt of social security benefits was requested as well.

Table 1: Participant Demographics

Participant	Age	Gender	Ethnicity	Primary Disability	Secondary Disability	Major	CGPA
“James”	23	Male	Asian	ASD		Media & Information	2.99
“Susan”	22	Female	Caucasian	Memory		Animal Science	3.33
“Ben”	25	Male	Caucasian	Asperger’s	ADHD	Media & Information	2.67
“Lily”	23	Female	African	PTSD		International Development	3.27
“Ronald”	30	Male	Caucasian	Hearing Loss		Interdisciplinary Studies	Blank
“Pat”	23	Prefer not to answer	Caucasian	Autism	ADHD	Environmental Biology	3.45
“Joe”	22	Male	White	ADD/ADHD		Environmental GEO Science	2.3
“Julie”	23	Female	Asian	Psychiatric		Human Biology	2.3
“Adam”	28	Male	Jewish American	Mobility	Visual Impairment	Interdisciplinary Studies	3.6
“Chris”	21	Blank	African American	Speech Impediment		Health and Society	2.5
“Megan”	23	Female	Caucasian	Asperger’s	Depression/Anxiety	Media & Information	3.3
“Matt”	24	Male	Caucasian	ASD	ADHD	Zoology	3.1

Demographic information was then broken down specifically for each group, as well as the overall breakdown for all participants. The information collected was self-reported from the participants and not compared or verified with the university staff. The information was aggregated into similar responses and is reported in the following paragraphs, beginning with a

brief description of the participants from each group. Fictitious names have been assigned to each of the participants to maintain confidentiality.

Alumni Demographics

“James” identifies as a 23-year-old Asian male who reports primary disability of Autism Spectrum Disorder. His reported major is Media and Information.

“Susan” identifies as a 22-year-old Caucasian female who described a primary disability of memory issues. She reported a major in Animal Science.

“Ben” identifies as a 25-year-old Caucasian male with reported primary disability of Asperger’s and a secondary disability of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. He listed his major as Media and Information.

“Lily” identifies as a 23-year-old African female with reported disability of Post-traumatic Stress Disorder. Her stated major is International Development.

“Ronald” identifies as a 30-year-old Caucasian male with stated disability of hearing loss. His reported major is Interdisciplinary Studies.

“Pat” identifies as a 23-year-old Caucasian individual who preferred not to respond to gender labels. The primary disability reported is Autism, with a secondary disability of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. The reported major was listed as Environmental Biology.

Summary of Various Demographics Across Alumni Participants

The average age of the alumni participants was 24.3 years of age with the range being between 22 and 30 years of age. The gender breakdown showed 3 males, 2 females, and 1 participant who preferred not to answer. The ethnic identification showed 4 participants identified as Caucasian, non-Hispanic, 1 participant identified as African American, and the remaining participant identified as Asian. Of particular interest to this researcher was the primary

and sometimes secondary disability the participants identified with. Three participants identified as Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), and the remaining three participants identified one of the following as their disability: Memory, Hearing Loss, and Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Only two of the participants noted a secondary disability and both reported Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).

Information related to the postsecondary environment was collected for the alumni participants. While self-reported terminology for accommodations varied slightly, the similar responses were grouped together. Most alumni (5) reported that they received extended time, either on tests or assignments, as an accommodation. The remaining accommodations were spread over housing accommodations, alternative testing location, recording lectures, note-taking assistance, consideration for absences, preferential seating, etc. Alumni majors included Media and Information with two participants identifying this major and the remaining participants each reporting one of the following: Animal Science, International Development, Interdisciplinary Studies, and Environmental Biology. Reported Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA) ranged from 2.67 to 3.45. The participants' graduation date was requested as the goal was to interview participants who were within two years of graduation. Four of the alumni reported graduation dates within the last six months and one alumnus graduated just over one year prior to the interview. The remaining participant reported graduating eight years ago with a bachelor's degree and just over three years ago with a graduate degree. This discovery early in the data collection process led to additional participants being recruited to enrich the study.

Information related to employment and income status were collected as well for potential future connections. Three of the six alumni reported they were currently unemployed. However, one of those individuals noted that a seasonal job had just ended and that was the reason for

being “in-between jobs”. One participant reported being in an internship. One participant reported working part-time and one participant left the question blank. There were no reports of receiving social security benefits with five participants responding “no” and one left blank. The blank responses may be due to the participant not realizing there was a second page to the demographic form.

Student Demographics

“Joe” identifies as a 22-year-old White male with primary disability identified as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. His listed major is Environmental Geo-Science. Field notes indicated the following: this individual expressed when he arrived that he had received the interview guide in his email, but he had not opened the attachment, so he took a few minutes to review the questions in the room before the interview began.

“Julie” identifies as a 23-year-old Asian female with a reported disability of Psychiatric. She listed her major as Human Biology.

“Adam” identifies as a 28-year-old Jewish American male with primary disability of Mobility and secondary disability of Visual Impairment. He noted his major of Interdisciplinary Studies. This individual was very interested in the study and advocating for people with disabilities. Upon the conclusion of the interview, he offered to be available for any follow up questions or anything he could do to assist.

“Chris” identifies as a 21-year-old African American. This participant opted to leave the gender question blank. The identified disability is a Speech Impediment. “Chris” reported a major of Health and Society with Psychology Cognate.

“Megan” identifies as a 23-year-old Caucasian female with primary disability of Asperger’s reported and secondary disability of Depression/Anxiety. Her stated major is Media and Information.

“Matt” identifies as a 24-year-old Caucasian male with primary disability of Autism and secondary disability of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. His reported major is Zoology.

Summary of Various Demographics Across Student Participants

Information collected via self-report from the current student participants showed the average age of participants being 23.5 years of age with a range between 21 and 28 years of age. The gender identification breakdown was similar to that of the alumni with three participants identifying as male, two as female, and one participant leaving the answer blank. The reported ethnic identification breakdown showed two participants identifying as Caucasian, Non-Hispanic, one identifying as African American, one identifying as Asian, and two participants choosing “other” and writing “White” and “Jewish American”, respectively. Reported disability identification showed two participants identified as ASD and the remaining participants each identified one of the following: ADHD, Psychiatric, Mobility, and Speech Impediment. Three of the participants also identified a secondary disability of Visual Impairment, Depression/Anxiety, or ADHD.

Postsecondary environment information reported showed a wide range of responses. Again, like terms were grouped together. Five of the six participants reported receiving extended time as an accommodation. Note-taking assistance and alternative testing location were the next highest accommodations reported with three participants each. Other accommodations noted by one participant each included recording lectures, preferential seating, consideration for absences, alternative format, assistive technology, ability to present information privately, and

scholarships. Reported majors included Environmental Geo-Science, Human Biology, Interdisciplinary Studies, Health and Society, Media Information, and Zoology. The range reported for the CGPA was 2.3 to 3.6. Participants were asked for their anticipated graduation dates. All current student participants reported they anticipated graduation within the next two years, indicating they are considered either a junior or senior. Three participants anticipated graduating within one year from the time of the interviews. Two participants planned to graduate in 1.5 years, and the remaining participant anticipated graduating within the next two years.

Employment and income information collected for this participant group yielded fairly expected results regarding employment status. All six participants elected the “current student” option under the employment question. For income, five participants left the answer blank with one reporting annual earnings of \$10,001 to \$20,000. Five participants indicated they do not receive social security benefits, with one participant reportedly receiving benefits.

Demographic information between the two groups was compiled and yielded the following results. The average age of the twelve participants was 23.9 years of age with the range being from 21 to 30 years of age. Six participants identified as male, four as female, one preferred not to answer, and the last participant left the item blank.

The reported primary and secondary disabilities showed a variety of disabilities being represented. Autism Spectrum Disorder was identified by five of the twelve participants. Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder was identified as either a primary or secondary disability by four of the twelve participants. The following disabilities were identified as a primary or secondary disability only once by the participants: Psychiatric, Mobility, Speech Impediment, Visual Impairment, Depression/Anxiety, Memory, Hearing Loss, and Post-traumatic Stress Disorder.

Accommodations reportedly received by alumni and current students showed some overlap in results. Although there was some discrepancy in the amount of time allotted, by far the most received accommodation listed was extended time, reported by ten of the twelve participants. The next most frequently reported accommodation showed a tie between note-taking services and alternative testing location with four participants each. The following accommodations were reported by two participants each: recording, preferential seating, consideration for absences, housing assistance, and assistive technology. Lastly, the following accommodations were noted by one participant each: alternative format, ability to present material privately, scholarships, formula/term sheets, and additional explanation of material.

The most reported major was Media and Information with three participants. This was followed by Interdisciplinary Studies, Environmental Science, and Animal Science/Zoology reported by two participants each. Lastly, International Development, Human Biology, and Health and Society majors were reported by one participant each. The overall CGPA for participants ranged from 2.3 to 3.6. Finally, of the twelve participants, only one reported receiving social security benefits, while ten reported not receiving benefits and one participant leaving this blank.

Interview Guide

The overall goal of the proposed study is to examine the career development experiences of participants in the innovative *Careers Collaborative* program at Michigan State University. For the purpose of this study, career development experiences are defined as the collective career-related experiences of participants in the *Careers Collaborative*, including exploration, decision-making, and employment outcomes. According to Brown and Lent (2012)

Career development can be seen as a process that encompasses much of the life span...It is a concept designed to capture the dynamic, changing nature of career or work behavior...The period before initial career choice may overlap with one's educational life. (pp. 9-10)

This study focused on the experience of college students with disabilities who participated in the *Careers Collaborative* program in relation to this critical part of the career development process.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with all participants. As shown in Appendix D, the questions asked during the interviews were pre-determined and developed from the career development literature. The guiding questions have been based on the construct of interest from Lent's (1994) Social Cognitive Career Theory. The major areas of focus are Self-Efficacy, Outcome Expectations, Learning Experiences, and Personal/Choice Goals.

Research Design and Data Analysis

According to Creswell (2003, p. 181) "Qualitative research uses multiple methods that are interactive and humanistic...Qualitative researchers look for involvement of their participants in data collection and seek to build rapport...based on open-ended observations, interviews". This researcher utilized open-ended questions to allow participants to direct the interview and determine what experience pertained most directly to their career development experiences.

In order to address this purpose a qualitative research design was utilized. According to Creswell (2003, p. 18) "a qualitative approach is one in which the inquirer often makes knowledge claims based primarily on constructivist perspectives...or advocacy/participatory perspectives...or both...the researcher collects open-ended, emerging data with the primary intent of developing themes from data". In this study, a qualitative research design is most appropriate as it is exploratory in nature and the primary goal of this research is to gain an

understanding of the experiences of a select group of individuals. An effective qualitative approach for this proposed study involves utilizing a phenomenological research approach as this type of research involves the study of several individuals with a shared experience as the unit of analysis. Creswell (2003, p. 15) defines this as a type of research in which the “researcher identifies the “essence” of human experiences concerning a phenomenon, as described by participants in a study” and it is important to understand “the “lived experiences” marks phenomenology as a philosophy as well as a method, and the procedure involves studying a small number of subjects”. The primary research question of interest in this study is as follows:

How do participants of the *Careers Collaborative* describe their career development experiences? This research question was answered utilizing a phenomenological qualitative design consisting of interviews, field notes, and demographic information.

Data was collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews that focus on the career development experiences of participants of the *Careers Collaborative* program. Creswell (2003, p. 188) discusses the interview process in qualitative research stating, “these interviews involve unstructured and generally open-ended questions that are few in number and intended to elicit views and opinions from the participants”. This method in qualitative research allows participants to respond to questions in a manner that is likely to elicit their views and opinions on a specific subject matter. All interviews have been recorded and transcribed verbatim and verified with the audio recording. Phenomenology and open coding theory are utilized. The audio recordings and transcriptions have been reviewed to identify themes.

Open coding was initially utilized for coding the transcripts line by line. Axial coding was then utilized to make connections between categories and emerging themes from the data. Study

data is being stored in hard copy in a locked file cabinet and in electronic format on a password-protected computer. Only this researcher and the dissertation chair will have access to study data.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

The purpose of the study was to explore and gain an understanding of the career development experiences of college students who have participated in a unique collaboration between multiple stakeholders within higher education as well as vocational rehabilitation. To this end a total of twelve individuals who participated in the *Careers Collaborative* at Michigan State University were interviewed for this study. Six of these individuals were current upper-class students at Michigan State University and the remaining six individuals were alumni of both Michigan State University and the collaborative program.

Social Cognitive Career Theory Constructs

The Social Cognitive Career Theory was utilized as a foundation for this research. Interview questions were developed from constructs specific to this framework and are available as Appendix D. The six constructs of interest include Self-Efficacy, Learning Experiences, Person Inputs, Personal/Choice Goals, Interests, and Outcome Expectations. Within each construct, four themes emerged from the data and are described in the following sections. TABLE 2 shows the six constructs and the themes under each.

Table 2: Themes by Construct

Self-Efficacy	Learning Experiences	Person Inputs	Outcome Expectations	Interests	Personal/Choice Goals
Soft Skills Attainment	Previous Academic Experiences	Personality Characteristics	Participant's Employment Outlook	Past Experience	Continued Education or Training
Positive Outlook on Future Employment	Work Experiences and Exploration	Effects of Disability	Future Plans are Guided by Expectations	Personal Values	Gain Experience
Barriers and Supports	Personal Experiences	Educational Factors Influencing Career Path	Personal Fit of Job	Passion	Active Engagement with Partners in the <i>Careers Collaborative</i>
Educational and Professional Past Experiences	Impact of Others	Accommodations and Support Services in Higher Education	Preparing for Potential Challenges	Autonomy	Value-Driven Decision

Self-Efficacy

The first construct, Self-Efficacy, refers to an individual's confidence and belief in their ability to succeed. This “involves dynamic self-beliefs that are linked to particular performance domains and activities...Self-Efficacy beliefs are acquired and modified through four primary informational sources: (a) personal performance accomplishments, (b) vicarious learning, (c) social persuasion, and (d) physiological states and reactions” (Lent & Brown, 1996b, p. 312). Therefore, this construct takes into account not only the learning experiences and past accomplishments of the individual in relation to the perceived ability to be successful in the future, but also the vicarious learning, or modeling, from those close to the individual. In relation to career development experiences, this construct may play a crucial role in the career decision-making process as the individual determines careers that may or may not be a good fit based on the individual's ability to fulfill the academic requirements for that particular career goal. If the

individual believes the goal is something they have the ability to succeed in, they may choose to pursue that type of future employment. On the other hand, if the individual believes that success is not likely, they may decide to pursue another career goal that is perceived as more likely attainable. This was summed up perfectly by one participant who stated, “Once I realized where my strengths and weaknesses were and what potential career path to where the job field more specifically would be my strength”, he chose to pursue that field. Overall, the participants’ responses reflected the importance of this construct related to their career development experiences.

Based on participant responses the construct of Self-Efficacy yielded four themes. All participants affirmed the importance of two of the themes: Soft Skills Attainment and Barriers and Supports. Most participants acknowledged themes of Positive Outlook on Future Employment and Educational and Professional Past Experiences.

Self-Efficacy Themes

Interview questions 3, 8, 12, and 13 elicited responses related to Self-Efficacy. These questions are listed as follows:

3. What past accomplishments or learning experiences prepared you for the career you are interested in?

8. Describe how you may have been encouraged or perhaps discouraged in the selection and pursuit of your college degree and chosen field of interest.

12. Do you have what you need, based on education/experiences, to get to that goal?

13. How confident are you in obtaining your “dream job”?

Based on participant responses, four themes emerged under this construct: *Theme 1: Soft Skills Attainment*, *Theme 2: Positive Outlook on Future Employment*, *Theme 3: Barriers and Supports*, and *Theme 4: Educational and Professional Past Experiences*.

Theme 1: Soft Skills Attainment

The theme of *Soft Skills Attainment* refers to a combination of all the professional and interpersonal skills necessary to be successful in the workplace. This includes professional communication and behaviors, interviewing skills, appropriate resumes and references, listening skills, social skills, empathy, etc. This theme emerged as all twelve participant responses referenced the importance of the components included in soft skills. Additionally, many participants' responses directly referenced or acknowledged their confidence in this area, often specifically citing the *Careers Collaborative* program as providing assistance in this area so the individual would be successful in the employment setting.

Participants of this study acknowledged increased confidence in this area due to participation in the program. "James" stated, "I was able to learn how to enhance, you know, and master my general workplace skills like my general interpersonal skills and other skills necessary for like interviewing and...workplace behavior". "Ben" echoed this, stating that participation in the *Careers Collaborative* "helped me to learn about getting into the workplace and like figuring out how to fill out a resume and how to conduct interviews". "Pat" noted increased self-awareness, stating "I realized where my strengths and weaknesses were and what potential career path to where the job field more specifically would be my strength". "Julie" added "I've become much more confident and I learned a lot of skills". These soft skills are essential to obtaining employment and through this program, several participants reported increased confidence in this area.

Theme 2: Positive Outlook on Future Employment

The ideal outcome for participants in the *Careers Collaborative* is that they obtain employment that is a good fit based on their interests, abilities, etc. and furthermore they are satisfied in their chosen career field. In discussing with participants their confidence in obtaining such employment in the future, an emerging theme across the participants was increased confidence in finding such employment. For example, “James” shared that he was “really confident in pursuing the job that I want to go to in the next several years”. “Joe” reported “I know that there’s a job out there for me and I know I’ll be able to find it”. Furthermore, “Megan” acknowledged not only the options in terms of a future career but some of the benefits to different settings: “I don’t have to work for a big company, I can work for a smaller one. In fact, smaller gives me more of an opportunity to learn skills that I would not have in a bigger company”.

Theme 3: Barriers and Supports

This theme contains both positive and negative aspects as it encompasses people who have been or are a support in the participants’ life, as well as those who have presented an actual or perceived barrier to the success of the participant. This theme also refers to barriers related to the environment, academic expectations, stigma, or anything preventing participants from achieving goals. Two of the questions within the interview guide solicited information from participants related to academic or career barriers as well as the resources or supports utilized while at Michigan State University. While it is not surprising that all twelve participants discussed the *Careers Collaborative* program as a support, it is noteworthy that two of the twelve did not reference the Resource Center for Persons with Disabilities as a support and one participant did not acknowledge Michigan Rehabilitation Services as a support. Additionally,

seven of the twelve participants reported experiences with professors and/or advisors in either a positive or negative manner. Overall, participants acknowledged the *Careers Collaborative* itself as a positive support in their career development experience.

The Resource Center for Persons with Disabilities (RCPD) was noted as a primary support in terms of providing accommodations related to the respective disability of the participant. Specifically, “Matt” stated:

With regards to the disability, I would have to say that, you know, MSU accommodations, such as the RCPD have proven to be useful in getting accommodations for my classes and making sure that I got the help I needed...it’s because of RCPD that these barriers pretty much are dissolved.

“Adam” went on to say that “RCPD has been extremely extremely vital in my success at MSU” and that he would not be able to succeed in college without all of the help and “tremendous” support from RCPD. In addition to accommodations, two of the participants reported the RCPD specialist was instrumental in assisting with academic skills such as time management and study skills as well as overall general support of the individual. This is evidenced by two participant statements, directly naming their respective RCPD specialist. “Joe” shared the following:

When I first started, I worked with [RCPD Specialist] and she had a big part of everything I’ve done here...I met with her every week...I learned so much from her and she really got me jump-started onto my college career...we do like speed reading exercises because it kind of helped with big reading assignments...note-taking...

“Julie recalled that “when I connected with RCPD last, this year [RCPD Specialist] suggested I go to [MRS counselor] and that’s the only two that I have gotten help from career-wise”.

Reported barriers included parental views and employer stigma. “Lily” and “Julie” both shared concerns from their parents stating, “My parents were like you’re probably not going to be able to find a job, it’s going to be really hard” and “My parents, they don’t support it because it’s really hard for international students to get into med school”. “Pat” raised concerns about stigma, stating “there’s just places that will just lock you out and say that we don’t have any place for a person like you”.

Theme 4: Educational and Professional Past Experiences

Another emerging theme from the Self-Efficacy construct is that of *Educational and Professional Past Experiences* and how those experiences influence the individual’s confidence to be successful in specific areas. As previously stated by Brady-Amoon & Fuertes (2011, p. 431), “according to social-cognitive theory, when people believe that they have the ability to act and that their actions will produce the desired outcomes, they are motivated to act”. An individual’s past experiences, specifically past successes, increase the individual’s Self-Efficacy beliefs and confidence in the ability to succeed. This was confirmed in this research as evidenced by nine participants recalling past experiences in which they were successful and thus leading the individual towards a specific goal. For example, “Ronald” affirmed and listed, similar to a resume, past professional experiences and current leadership roles when asked if he believed he had what he needed to reach his ultimate goal. “Matt” stated that he was “super confident” about reaching his dream job, noting that “you have all this experience and if you add up on that you will find yourself at a better chance of getting the dream job”. “Joe” added “coming out with such a scientific degree it’s kind of, it’s an accomplishment saying I made it through”.

Learning Experiences

The previous learning experiences of the individual also impact how one approaches activities. For example, one is more likely to engage in an activity based on a successful previous experience. This variable directly affects the individual's Self-Efficacy, Outcome Expectations and Interests. One is more likely to enjoy activities that he/she has been successful at in the past. Four of the questions within the interview guide targeted information related to the participants' learning experiences.

The majority of participants acknowledged the importance of each theme under the Learning Experiences construct. Work Experiences and Exploration and Impact of Others was acknowledged by all but one participant in each theme followed by Previous Academic Experiences and Personal Experiences.

Learning Experiences Themes

Participant responses related to the second construct, Learning Experiences, were elicited based on the following interview questions:

3. What past accomplishments or learning experiences prepared you for the career you are interested in?
5. Please talk a little about significant relationships with others that you have had during your college experience that have influenced your choice of majors/careers?
7. What resources/supports did you utilize while at Michigan State University regarding career exploration and your overall career development?
9. How has your participation in the *Careers Collaborative* influenced or shaped your college experience?

The four emerging themes within the Learning Experiences construct were *Theme 1: Previous Academic Experiences*, *Theme 2: Work Experiences and Exploration*, *Theme 3: Personal Experiences*, and *Theme 4: Impact of Others*. These themes are discussed in the following sections.

Theme 1: Previous Academic Experiences

The *Previous Academic Experiences* theme emerged based on the responses of the participants. This theme refers to the academic experiences, both secondary and postsecondary, the participants referred to in terms of their academic learning experiences. Although participants were asked a broad question regarding past accomplishments or learning experiences which prepared them for their chosen careers, it was noteworthy that many of the responses related directly to the classroom setting or degree requirements. One participant, “Ronald”, even noted the impact of learning as an upper-class student on how the current major would impact the career direction versus another major that might be a better fit. “Ronald” stated:

I discovered my junior year when I had to do some reflection if I wanted to do pre-law or just go a little more open. So, I decided to open myself up and let myself explore more so mainly the nexus of Anthropology and how that affects cultural things and how the environment affects people's quality of life.

Through additional program exploration and identifying additional options, this individual was able to make a change to an academic path that was more likely to lead to a career which would meet the interests and needs of this individual. Another example of classroom difficulty was shared by “Pat” and personal struggles related to classroom setting and teaching style, “I’ve had classes that were held in just overcrowded...noisy rooms...that was just very difficult” and

To me the hardest classes were where the professor weren't really putting a lot of work into it, whether wasn't a structure, there wasn't structured reading, there wasn't structured homework; to me being completely self-directed, especially at lower-level classes is very difficult.

Other academic learning experiences noted by participants was success, or lack thereof, in courses. Some noted difficulty in understanding concepts and information, while others noted difficulty in earning passing grades in specific courses. "Adam" reported that "as a freshman, I struggled with general chemistry" and that led to him deciding to change his major. "Joe" noted learning that the individual academic struggles encountered were due to lack of personal effort when faced with the fast pace of postsecondary education and lack of self-discipline. He stated "my grades were lucky with the amount of work I put in... You know you don't listen to anyone until you actually experienced it, so in high school I did relatively no studying".

Theme 2: Work Experiences and Exploration

The *Work Experiences and Exploration* theme emerged as all but one participant reported this as an impactful learning experience. This theme includes past employment, internships, job shadows or volunteer experiences, informational interviews, and other career exploration activities. "James" shared the importance of such activities stating that "previous work experience...Right now I'm interning at [business] as social media promo intern. But before that I worked for the State of Michigan as a social media intern". He added that he

took an assessment and actually that assessment also influenced my decision to go into media and information...it was a general career assessment that college students were able to take through Career Services Network to help them find out which major best suited them.

“Adam” also recalled completing an assessment for career exploration stating “I’m trying to think of the test I took. I think it might have been the Strong Interest Inventory...that’s when I rethought what my interests were and decided to change my major”. “Joe” also confirmed the impact of such activities, stating “I’ve done some job shadowing...when I saw that, it kind of opened my eyes...”. The experience this participant had via the job shadow allowed him to make an informed decision regarding both the degree to pursue and the type of work that would be of interest in the future. “Lily” credited “an internship with the House of Representatives” as “shaping my desire to do more work like that” within the realm of public policy and public service work. Another participant recalled a similar experience when, during the junior year of high school, a volunteer opportunity presented itself and allowed for firsthand experience in the area of interest. “Matt” noted “...the volunteering at the animal conservancy was the biggest thing that prepared me for that kind of path. I mean it gave me an idea of what’s expected in a zoo setting.”.

Theme 3: Personal Experiences

The *Personal Experiences*, similar to the *Work Experiences and Exploration*, also provided valuable information to an individual regarding the type of future career goals that may be a good fit. In this research study the theme of *Personal Experiences* refers to the learning experiences in the participants’ personal life, not related to academic courses or employment settings. These types of experiences may be just as important, as they provide information in various ways to the individual. Sometimes these experiences begin at an early age, as “Joe” noted “My dad and I used to do this big Village under like our Christmas tree and trains” and provided a natural foundation for a growing interest in hands-on types of careers, specifically engineering and physics. “Lily’s” background also played a role as she recounts how “my own

experience, coming from an economically disadvantaged community, that just made me more empathetic to people”.

“Susan” noted personal experiences from a young age and influenced the formulation of the career goal from initial ideas and evolving towards a more specific goal. This participant reported:

I've never been the person that just gets an animal handed to them to show. I've always been out there since I was like 11 years old raising everything, so I kind of get into the actual care of the animals, the problems that you have, the solutions to them, and kind of just everything to do with the background...so being in 4-H and then I went into being a leader in 4-H you kind of see on a small scale why there's rules and regulations to raising animals... I really think that's important to see that applied on a larger scale.

Based on early personal experiences, this participant has been able to take an interest and focus this into a career goal that incorporates those experiences along with personal values to lead towards an outcome that meets all facets of the individual.

Theme 4: Impact of Others

Another emerging theme within the Learning Experiences construct was the direct *Impact of Others* on the participant. This theme refers to either a positive or negative impact of others on the individual. Participants were directly asked to discuss significant relationships with others during their college experience that may have influenced their choice of either careers or majors. It was of particular interest that all but one participant noted the impact of others. These reported significant relationships included family members, advisors, faculty, and professional staff members from the *Careers Collaborative*. Seven of the twelve participants specifically named partners within the *Careers Collaborative* as directly impacting them. These members

bring a unique relationship to the campus and the students, and oftentimes overlap each other in their connections with students. As evidenced by “James” who shared that he took a general career assessment through the Career Services Network and then “showed it to my RCPD counselor at the time and she was able to help me find out which major better suited me”. “Joe” reported that he “met with [RCPD Specialist] every week, consistently weekly. I learned so much from her and she really got me jump-started onto my college career”. In terms of other positive impacts, “Ben” reported that family has always impacted the choices he makes stating that the most significant relationship was “...my family and they've always been supportive of me regardless of what I want to do”. This type of confidence in family support allowed him to explore various career goals and determine what the best fit was for him.

The *Impact of Others* in a negative way was also noted within the responses of some participants. This negative relationship was revealed through statements regarding changing of majors, discouragement in certain fields, sometimes related to disability, and from perceived stigma or discrimination felt by the participant. For example, “Ronald” reported:

There was still a lot of discrimination towards working with students. Some professors don't even know that or didn't even know that MSU takes students with disabilities, which it's pretty blind. I've come across other professors that outright refused to work with me, which was against University policies, but under those circumstances I just dropped the classes.

“Julie” also shared negative impacts, stating “I’ve been discouraged by a lot by advisors...I’ve really had, I would say bad experiences with academic advisors because they would just assume that I can’t do it”.

Person Inputs

Person Inputs refer to the individual's predispositions, gender, race, ethnicity, and of particular interest to this researcher, the disability or health status of the individual. Lent et al. (1994) stated "While social cognitive theory highlights the role of certain cognitive factors in the self-regulation of behavior, it also acknowledges the influence of other types of individual difference variables" (p. 104). These authors expound that it is not simply the biological attributes of an individual, but also the reactions that are elicited from society regarding such attributes. While these authors continue discussion on the impact of race and gender, this researcher believes a similar argument can be made in terms of disability status and societal attitudes towards those with disabilities. Therefore, it is of interest that although participants were not directly asked during the interview to reveal their specific disability, it was noted that only four participants reported their diagnosed disability to this researcher. Ten of the twelve participants noted the effects of their disability or concern related to how their disability impacts a successful outcome. Interestingly, two participants reported their disability had no impact related to future employment goals and/or academic success.

The themes in this category all received affirmation from at least half of the participants. The majority of participants acknowledged Accommodations and Support Services in Higher Education as well as the Effects of the Disability. Personality Characteristics and Educational Factors Influencing Career Path each obtained the attention of half of the participants.

Person Inputs Themes

The construct of Person Inputs was addressed by the following questions within the Interview Guide:

4. How has your disability influenced your choice of career paths?

- 4a. Prompt: Please describe the feedback you received from others regarding your choice.
6. What types of academic or career barriers did you encounter during college specific to your disability?
8. Describe how you may have been encouraged or perhaps discouraged in the selection and pursuit of your college degree and chosen field of interest.

Based on participant responses the following themes emerged within this construct:

Theme 1: Personality Characteristics, Theme 2: Effects of Disability, Theme 3: Educational Factors Influencing Career Path, and Theme 4: Accommodations and Support Services in Higher Education. These themes are discussed as follows.

Theme 1: Personality Characteristics

For the purpose of this study, the term *Personality Characteristics* refers to qualities intrinsic to the individual, such as behaviors, emotions, tendencies, preferences, type, etc. Half of the participants made statements that were identified and grouped in terms of personality.

Examples of such statements include the following from “Susan”, “Lily”, and “Joe”: “I’m a loner”, “empathetic”, “I’m a big procrastinator”, or “I just kind of went with the flow”.

Additional statements led to this researcher uncovering deeper meaning and connection to personality characteristics. Such statements include the following from “Ben”, “Ronald”, and “Chris”: “taking initiative and getting help”, “you can’t let your disability define you because that’s not who you are”, and “people always challenge...therefore you have to prove them wrong – so that’s what I do”.

Theme 2: Effects of Disability

This theme refers to the effects of the disability on daily functioning and the impact in the participant’s life. While only four participants reported their specific disability, all but two

participants noted the effects, both positive and negative, their respective disabilities have on daily functioning. Again, “Lily” shared that she felt her disability “just really held me back...I wasn’t putting myself out as much as I would have before...I was always just like I don’t have the energy for this right now”. “Susan” shared how difficult classes were because “I couldn’t focus, I hadn’t regained that ability yet”. “Pat” and “Julie” both shared similar effects of disability in not being able to fully participate in activities. “Pat” reported “I can’t deal with a lot of noise, I can’t work with kids...I can’t deal with like a lot of people talking at once, a lot of high stimulation environments”. “Julie” shared the disability “interfered with my ability to finish classes...mainly not being able to attend class...not being able to focus in exams due to discomfort”.

Another perspective emerged reflecting the positive effects of disability. “Ronald” stated that the disability “taught me, even before coming to MSU, to advocate for myself – you can’t let your disability define you because that’s not who you are as a person”. “Adam” noted that he is “in a unique position to share my experiences or what has been difficult for me or what has been easier for me”. Both “James” and “Megan” noted the positive impact their disabilities have on their work with “James” reporting that “it has definitely given me a better key attention to detail” and “Megan” sharing

With my particular disability, you have a very specific interest and that specific interest you get obsessive about it...if you have a specific focus you actually do well with that particular focus...I want to make sure that my work is done well.

Theme 3: Educational Factors Influencing Career Path

Of the ten participants reporting their disability impacting success, six noted a real or perceived barrier as a direct result of the disability. “Adam” noted taking longer to complete the degree out of necessity. He stated:

With having many many many multiple disabilities, I’ve just had to work harder...with my mobility disabilities, it’s difficult to get around campus...it would be tough for me to take more than one class per day because of the distance between classes.

“Pat” noted that “there’s a lot of things that I just can’t do long-term... I am concerned that I’m not physically or mentally capable of putting in 50-60-hour weeks like I might be expected to”.

In addition to barriers specific to the disability, societal barriers or stigma were noted as well.

“Ronald” reported issues with faculty, stating “I’ve come across other professors that outright refused to work with me...it’s not worth putting up with someone that you know wasn’t going to work with you when you need to be successful in your classes...”. “Pat” also reportedly felt that the accommodations necessary to be successful “might also disqualify me from working there at all because of the way employers tend to treat disabled people...there’s just places that will just lock you out and say that we don’t have any place for a person like you”.

Theme 4: Accommodations and Support Services in Higher Education

For the purpose of this research, the term *Accommodations and Support Services in Higher Education* refers to the reasonable accommodations received in the academic or work environment and/or treatment the individual is receiving due to the disability. Overall information regarding accommodations was extracted from the demographic form (See Appendix C). Based on the information provided via anonymous self-report, extended time was by far the most common accommodation. Ten of the twelve participants reported receiving

accommodations or the impact of such accommodations during their time participating in the *Careers Collaborative* program. “Megan” stated that “I was able to overcome quite a bit and, with a couple small accommodations like extended time on tests, that kind of helped”. Other accommodations included note-taking services, alternative testing location, recording lectures, preferred seating, consideration for absences, housing, and use of assistive technology. Beyond the classroom setting, “Pat” gave credit to partners with the *Careers Collaborative* for providing “some help on just advice on how to use accommodations in the classroom and how they work in the workplace”. Unique to the *Careers Collaborative* program is the partnership between different entities on campus. This was again highlighted by “Megan” stating that what was helpful to her was “talking to people at career services, at RCPD, MRS”.

Outcome Expectations

Outcome Expectations refer to the individual’s beliefs about outcomes, or consequences, of performing particular behaviors; specifically, what the individual believes will happen based on certain behaviors. In relation to the participants within this study, it is important to note that this variable may have a significant impact on how the participants have chosen to pursue or eliminate a potential career path based on what they believe about their own abilities and what they can accomplish.

Overall, each of the themes resonated with the majority of the participants. All participants reported the Personal Fit of the Job as significant. Both Participant’s Employment Outlook and Preparing for Potential Challenges were referenced by all but two participants each. Lastly, Future Plans are Guided by Expectations theme was noted by three-fourths of the participants.

Outcome Expectations Themes

Four themes within this construct emerged based on two questions from the interview guide. Questions addressing this construct were:

10. What would be the ideal job that you see for the next year or two?

11. Where do you see yourself in 5-8 years?

The emerging themes discussed as follows are *Theme 1: Participant's Employment Outlook*, *Theme 2: Future Plans are Guided by Expectations*, *Theme 3: Personal Fit of Job*, and *Theme 4: Preparing for Potential Challenges*.

Theme 1: Participant's Employment Outlook

For the purpose of this study, the term *Participant's Employment Outlook* refers to the participants' beliefs about future employment, real or perceived beliefs, including job prospects, security, income, and so forth. Most of the participants referenced this theme during the interview in some way. Some responses were aimed towards the amount of money or the amount of opportunity in various fields, while others noted concerns related to future employment opportunities. In terms of the former, "Joe" stated:

I would love to do environmental consulting ... it's different, you're doing mediation type meetings and stuff like that. Especially if you can get in the private sector too, I know there's a great deal of money to be made in that area as well.

"Susan" also referenced employment opportunities stating that "anybody that's in a government job, they have a pretty good career ahead of them". From the other perspective, "Megan" stated:

Many times I was discouraged...because of how the economy has been, and being from Michigan, rural area and not very many opportunities you know for the type and even if I did there's so many people going into the field that I want.

In a similar line of thinking, “Pat” responded “I’m not confident that I’m going to reach a dream job but I also understand that’s just kind of the way things are right now and I’ll take what I can get”. “Julie” added “I was pretty convinced that if I don’t do well in college, I can’t find a job at all”.

Theme 2: Future Plans are Guided by Expectations

Within this study, *Future Plans are Guided by Expectations* refers to the next steps or future planning of the participant. This included plans for further education or training or anticipating changes in job roles or careers in the future. Most of the participants addressed plans for the future as either gaining additional experience or further education. “James” considered how the career may evolve once in the workforce stating, “I see myself moving up into a managerial type of role, becoming like the social media manager and having, like higher roles and responsibilities”. “Julie” shared “I could start small and learn and do whatever I can on the way...I want to work in a hospital setting”. “Ronald” shared concerns regarding the type of employer that would be necessary to identify in order to have successful employment in the future. He stated “...when you have a disability you want to make sure you're going to find an employer that works with people with disabilities, that appreciates them for who they are, and the type of work we put in”.

Theme 3: Personal Fit of Job

For the purpose of this study, the term *Personal Fit of Job* is used to represent the participants’ fit for employment based on background, experiences, disability status, personal convictions or values. The fit of the employment setting is based on the participants’ beliefs, as discussed through the interview. Particularly noteworthy is that all twelve participants’ responses contributed to this theme in some way. “Susan” related to this theme on the basis of personal

convictions and how the disability could play a role in the employment setting. She shared the following consideration:

I really think it's important to follow regulations and that's why I kind of like that career option... I don't think it's fair to myself or to any clients I would have, if I am forgetful and maybe slip-up and forget that one little detail that was really important to treating an animal.

While disability played a part in the response of this participant, it is also noted that personal values and convictions are an important consideration for workplace fit for future employment settings. “Julie” noted her interest in healthcare and felt that “a career in healthcare would suit me...I could assist doctors and learn from them”. “Lily’s” statement highlighted the personal values and convictions by stating “I really just want to do something where I can work and impact people either directly or indirectly”.

Theme 4: Preparing for Potential Challenges

The theme of *Preparing for Potential Challenges* within the Outcome Expectations construct refers to limitations, real or perceived, due to factors such as the economy, disability, stigma, and so forth that the participant believes will impact a successful outcome. Ten of the twelve participants noted real or perceived challenges related to Outcome Expectations. Five participants noted disability related challenges. One of these challenges was relayed by “Ronald” who reported “If you come across many hindrances it’s not, in my opinion, it’s not worth going in that area where the employer has certain expectations...”. Two participants shared concerns due to the economy being likely to impact their ability to obtain employment. “Pat” stated, “The biggest discouragement to me...the state of the economy, and two, the state of the job market of my field specifically”. Likewise, “Megan” stated, “I was discouraged to the fact of graduation,

because of how the economy has been, and being from Michigan, rural area and not very many opportunities...”.

Interests

Interests are people’s patterns of likes, dislikes, and indifferences regarding different activities. People tend to develop an interest in activities that they feel they are successful at as opposed to those activities that they find difficult. As Lent and Brown (1996b) noted, “...it is difficult to imagine interests flourishing in activities for which people perpetually doubt their efficacy or harbor negative outcome expectations; indeed, people are likely to avoid or develop aversions to such activities” (p. 313).

Autonomy and Past Experience were themes which the majority of participants identified as significant. Personal Values and Passion were themes reported by half and one-third of participants, respectively.

Interests Themes

Four themes emerged within the Interests construct as a result of the following two questions from the interview guide.

1. How did you choose the major or career path to pursue while at Michigan State University?
2. What interested you in your chosen career field?

These themes are *Theme 1: Past Experience*, *Theme 2: Personal Values*, *Theme 3: Passion*, and *Theme 4: Autonomy*.

Theme 1: Past Experience

Past Experience refers to the participants’ self-reported experiences related to career choice. Some of these reported experiences occurred at an early age and continued to mature,

while others discussed interests developing as a result of classes taken at the postsecondary level. For those responses related to personal experiences, “Ben” discussed how these experiences impacted him as he grew up, reporting “I’ve just been watching TV, playing video games, listening to music all my life...I’ve been drawing since I was little and I’ve just always enjoyed that”, which has also led to wanting to learn how films, TV shows, and video games are made. “Pat” acknowledged “I’ve always had a very long-standing interest in the natural world... I guess just a lifelong interest”. While this participant noted the early and continued interest, “Adam” discovered an interest ignited by higher level classes: “I just found psychology, sociology, economics, and those kind of classes...most interesting to me...”. The experience gained from such courses were the foundation for this participant’s interest to advance. Other academic experiences of interest included “Lily” who talked about her International Development class being “really so much fun”, “Ronald” who stated “what I liked about interdisciplinary studies is that it had a variety to choose from so I was able to explore things more openly...I developed a passion for policy”, and “Pat” who pointed out “I really like professors that are really competent and really exciting...really did encourage me and having friends in the major who are really encouraging”.

Theme 2: Personal Values

The *Personal Values* of the participant also surfaced as a theme within the Interest construct. This theme refers to how the work or interest matches the participant’s estimated importance or worth of a particular activity and the belief signifying how beneficial that activity is. Responses supporting this theme included discussion regarding how the individual chose the major or career path to pursue and what specifically interested the participants in their chosen career field. “Lily” noted that the original chosen major:

wasn't making me happy...just the fact that [new major] was super broad and allowed me to focus on different things like poverty alleviation, food security, just basically in essence helping people, which is something that's really close to my heart.

The personal value highlighted in this response reflects her core value of helping other people as well as the value of bringing specific struggles faced by many to the forefront and re-prioritize how such struggles impact others on a daily basis.

Personal values have the ability to impact an individual's level of interest in different ways. In contrast to "Lily's" interest in helping people in a very personal way, through poverty alleviation, food security and so on, "Joe's" personal values manifested in a more global context. His interest in environmental science stemmed from the need to consider how the world is impacted by people's choices, as evidenced by the following response: "You're tying everything together...so you can see the behind-the-scenes of just how the Earth reacts, like human impact and stuff like that, and I think that's actually kind of cool you get to help it".

Theme 3: Passion

This term refers to a participant's strong feeling or emotion towards a topic. It is specifically of interest that this term was utilized, unprompted, by participants. The concept, and specific term, of *Passion* was mentioned by several participants during the interview. For example, "James" stated "...what first of all encouraged me to pursue media and information was my passion for technology, computers, and digital media arts...". Similarly, "Matt" stated the following: "I guess overall my passion for animals... most of the time it's I think it's just the whole passion thing that I mentioned earlier is the driving, the main driving force". "Ronald" added "I always had a passion for working with students, trying to advise other people...I ended up going into community sustainability which was my other passion".

Theme 4: Autonomy

The theme *Autonomy* refers to the individual's freedom and flexibility within the work or academic environment. This concept was referenced by a majority of participants when discussing their interests in their respective career paths and divided evenly between referring to academic choices and career freedom. "James" shared that he decided to change his major, "it was computer science, creative, digital media, arts related. I was able to take courses in social media, marketing, digital communications". "Ronald" also pointed out the importance of autonomy in the chosen major by stating that "... in interdisciplinary studies you cover several fields ranging from political science, sociology, anthropology... so you get a bigger picture of everything". This particular major allowed him to have more control over the types of courses that would lead to a degree and thus lead to more opportunity of choice in the future career. "Joe" highlighted the role autonomy will play in the structure of the future employment on a daily basis:

It's always going to be different. I'm not doing the same thing every day, it's always going to be different, which is nice. I mean, I like sticking to routine but having... I don't know how to say it... just different things to do every day is nice - changing it up a little bit.

"Megan" shared a similar sentiment of "I like the creativity, imagination...use it for my personal liking and others as well so it's a win-win situation. I get to have fun while doing this and be making money too!".

Personal/Choice Goals

Personal/Choice Goals refer to the intention of an individual to engage in a particular activity or to produce a particular outcome (Bandura, 1986). Such goals may serve as motivation for an individual to take action to obtain a specific outcome. This construct is particularly

relevant to the population of this study in that such goals may either encourage or deter someone from pursuing a specific career path during the career exploration and development experiences.

Most of the participants responded to themes under this construct. All but one participant reported the importance of the theme Gain Experience. This was followed by all but two participants noting Value-Driven Decision. Next, Continued Education or Training garnered three-fourths of the participants attention followed by just over half reporting Active Engagement with Partners in the *Careers Collaborative*.

Personal/Choice Goals Themes

The following questions elicited responses in relation to this construct:

1. How did you choose the major or career path to pursue while at Michigan State University?
7. What resources/supports did you utilize while at Michigan State University regarding career exploration and your overall career development?
9. How has your participation in the *Careers Collaborative* influenced or shaped your college experience?
- 12a. Prompt: what is your next step to get to your long-term career goal?

Based on data analysis, the themes that emerged within the construct of Personal/Choice Goals are *Theme 1: Continued Education or Training*, *Theme 2: Gain Experience*, *Theme 3: Active Engagement with Partners in the Careers Collaborative*, and *Theme 4: Value-Driven Decision*.

Theme 1: Continued Education or Training

Participant responses showed an emerging theme to be related to *Continued Education or Training*. Several participants stated that further education is expected or aspired to in the future. Specifically, “Pat” reported that “The big thing is I would like to do a masters ...So the ideal

would be that I work, get some money together, and then I'm financially and mentally and physically able to do a masters". While "Julie" discussed next steps in terms of further training and moving forward: "I want to get certified and I'm looking into that any program that I could take...I want to just go definitely go further than a medical assistant, see how far I could go maybe push myself".

Theme 2: Gain experience

All but one participant noted the value of gaining experience towards highest level of success within the chosen career field. The methods for obtaining additional experience related to the chosen career field included work experience, internships, and participation in the professional world through avenues such as committees or other professional memberships. Two participants specifically acknowledged the importance of experience right away in order to be competitive in the future. For example, as stated by "Joe", "I just want to build up experience. I know that's a goal right out of college: build up experience, get that job experience, just everything because it will build you up for the career". "Ronald" echoed this idea that "Right now it's really about getting more exposure, getting more years of experience under my belt". "Susan" also talked about ways to gain experience such as "...any kind of a temporary position within Michigan or just a low-level entry position...just to get my foot in the door and gain experience that I can then apply and move up".

Theme 3: Active Engagement with Partners in the Careers Collaborative

This theme refers to the participant's interaction with members or partners of the *Careers Collaborative* program. It is important to note that while not all participants recognized the actual title of the program, they may have referenced specific entities or partners that would be

associated in the program. This is discussed further in chapter 5 but is evidenced by the following response from “Joe”:

I use the - I forgot what it was called but there was the state program, I forget what it stands for, but it's for people with disabilities...it's like one program a week and you get the tutoring and stuff, so I did that last semester or last year for the first time.

“Susan” spoke about distinctive services provided through the program that provided the tools necessary to be successful in the employment search and professional setting by stating “I just got back really helpful information on how they want, your resume wrote and how they want your cover letter wrote, interview questions they may ask you”. “Chris” referenced different partners specifically, stating “I met RCPD and they were a big help and then I met MRS”.

Theme 4: Value-Driven Decision

Ten participants referenced the notion of *Value-Driven Decisions* by their responses. This theme refers to the individual’s decision to engage in specific activities due to personal values or reasons for such engagement. Several responses related to altruistic reasons or factors outside of self. This is evidenced by “Julie” describing the reason for the chosen career field directly related to familial reasons: “My family members don't really have good health and I want to learn more about it and help”. Other responses were aimed at education and benefits of education. “Susan” shared how postsecondary education is something valued and pursued as evidenced by stating that “I knew I wanted to at least get a bachelor’s in something because you kind of need a bachelor's to go anywhere today...”. Six responses were related to internal motivation or values such as persistence, creativity, work ethic, etc. For example, “Ben” emphasized the importance of creativity and reported that he “just felt like I wanted to be part of the process of creating that...”.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Chapter 5 provides a summary and interpretation of the results reported in Chapter 4. The purpose of the current study was to explore and gain an understanding of the career development experiences of college students at Michigan State University, who participated in a unique collaboration, the *Careers Collaborative* program between multiple stakeholders within the higher education setting and the community vocational rehabilitation services. To accomplish this goal, current students (n=6) and recent graduates (n=6) were interviewed. Summary and analysis of aggregated data yielded distinct themes based on the six Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) constructs of Self-Efficacy, Learning Experiences, Person Inputs, Outcome Expectations, Interests, and Personal/Choice Goals. This theory provided a strong framework as it “focuses on the processes through which (a) academic and career interests develop, (b) interests, in concert with other variables, promote career-relevant choices, and (c) people attain varying levels of performance and persistence in their educational career pursuits” (Lent & Brown, 1996b, p. 311).

This chapter will first provide a discussion on the themes of each of the six SCCT constructs, followed by an integrative discussion of the overall results. Next, although not the intention of this study, an exploration on the similarities and differences of the career development experiences between the current students and alumni who were served by the program will be provided. This chapter will end with a discussion of the strength and limitations of the study, as well as implications for research, practice and education.

Self-Efficacy

Within the construct of Self-Efficacy, four interrelated themes emerged: *Theme 1: Soft Skills Attainment*, *Theme 2: Positive Outlook on Future Employment*, *Theme 3: Barriers and Supports*, and *Theme 4: Educational and Professional Past Experiences*.

Theme 1: Soft Skills Attainment

Soft Skills Attainment emerged as a prominent theme, confirming the importance of such skills in relation to employment. The participants' unanimous report of gaining these skills and increased confidence in this area due to participating in the *Careers Collaborative* program is significant. The importance of soft skills in relation to successful outcomes for individuals with disabilities is well documented in literature (Lorenz, 2011; Robles, 2012; Sung et al., 2019). Participants in this study specifically reported increased confidence in their skill sets, interviewing skills, and self. This finding is consistent with literature in that such structured programs that provide these specific skill training leading to a positive impact on one's confidence and overall employment success (Sung et al., 2019).

Theme 2: Positive Outlook on Future Employment

Participants expressed confidence about their hopeful outlook on future employment. This outlook is often expressed in terms of their Outcome Expectations. One speculated that the *Careers Collaborative* program helped facilitate a positive future orientation among participants by providing individualized skill development and academic and career resources. As noted in literature, many of the variables within the SCCT are inter-related. For example, Self-Efficacy is thought to play a central part in one's goals and actions, which manifest through Outcome Expectations in that individuals who are confident in the career exploration process are also more likely to have higher expectations of a positive result from engaging in such behaviors (Lent et

al., 2016). The *Careers Collaborative*'s personal approach to service delivery enables individuals to explore and focus on the areas that most concern them in order to resolve issues in a way which increases the likelihood of attaining their individual goals. Participants are assisted in identifying future career goals that meet their individual interests and have a supportive relationship in which to navigate the world of work in order to alleviate individual barriers, leading to a positive outcome.

Theme 3: Barriers and Support

In this theme, support encompasses individuals' experience through the *Careers Collaborative*, family, and friends, whereas barriers include the economy, advisors and future employers, as well as parental input. Almost all participants discussed the *Careers Collaborative* program in some way related to barriers and supports that existed. The relationship between barriers and supports and their effects on the individual self-efficacy in relation to academic tasks and career decision-making aligns with previous studies. When individuals feel they have more social support and less career barriers, they have higher academic and career self-efficacy beliefs (Quimby & O'Brien, 2004; Wright et al., 2014).

Furthermore, this theme also touched on barriers preventing the participant from achieving his/her goals. These barriers include those related to environment, academic expectations, or stigma. Participants specifically referenced external barriers, including parental input, future employers, financial, the economy, and vicarious learning through the experiences that friends have had. This is consistent with literature that supports and barriers, or perception of barriers, play a crucial role in the career development experience and confidence of an individual (Byars-Winston & Fouad, 2008; Lent et al., 2003; Quimby & O'Brien, 2004; Wright et al., 2014). Though barriers were noted in the current study, the participants also noted strategies in

which to overcome such barriers, especially via support from partners within the *Careers Collaborative* program. Thus, this further attested not only the importance of being able to identify barriers but also learning strategies to reduce these barriers. The results further confirmed that the perceived barriers were addressed between the participants and the collaborative partners with which they interacted.

Theme 4: Positive Educational and Personal Past Experience

The past educational and professional experiences of the participants emerged as the last theme within this construct of Self-Efficacy, referencing either past academic experiences, past professional experiences or both. Byars-Winston & Fouad (2008) addressed this concept in their study when discussing distal contextual factors, or the relationship between an individual's background and the experiences responsible for not only the confidence level but also expectations which the individual develops. These authors speculated that these previous learning experiences inform one's self-efficacy beliefs due to the individual's skill level and performance in these academic, professional and personal experiences.

Learning Experiences

The emerging themes from the second construct of Learning Experiences include: *Theme 1: Previous Academic Experiences, Theme 2: Work Experiences and Exploration, Theme 3: Personal Experiences, and Theme 4: Impact of Others.*

Theme 1: Previous Academic Experiences

The secondary and postsecondary academic experiences were indicated as one important theme. Education prepares individuals for the world of work, as the impact of postsecondary education on future employment and economic success is affirmed in literature (Shaw et al., 2009; White et al., 2014). As noted in the current study, education provides the foundation for

the individuals' professional career in the future. In addition, previous academic experiences also serve as a reality check for individuals to reconsider their educational and career path when necessary to do so. After facing challenging coursework, some participants in the current study discovered a different career path that they were better suited for. Thus, such learning experiences play an important role in career development and decision-making.

Theme 2: Work Experiences and Exploration

The work exploration and work experiences were mentioned as another emerging theme, thus attesting to the value of work-related activities. This is not surprising due to the nature of the *Careers Collaborative* program. The collaborative partners involved in the *Careers Collaborative* program have shared goals to help participants to obtain meaningful internships or work experiences, thus ultimately securing successful employment at the end of the program. The goal was to secure a job that would be a good fit based on the individual's exploration, interests, abilities, and goals (C. Sung, personal communication, August 14, 2018; M. Hudson, personal communication, July 26, 2018; W. Hilliker, personal communication, July 23, 2018). By virtue of participating in this program, participants were encouraged and assisted in obtaining work experiences, such as internships, job shadows, volunteer experiences, or completing career exploration activities, such as informational interviews. Such opportunities for students with disabilities are critical, as work experience and exploration have shown to be crucial in the future success of students. Individuals with disabilities benefit from opportunities to explore careers and occupations of interest, particularly if they have little or no related career experience (Hitchings et al., 1998). For instance, Bellman et al. (2014) highlights evidence-based practices at the University of Washington on several projects promoting work-based learning and career exploration opportunities. Based on the longitudinal data collected, it suggests that these

experiences increase the potential of greater employment success compared to those who do not engage in such experiences. Additionally, another nationally recognized program that assists with career development and work-based learning opportunities is Project SEARCH. Project SEARCH, initially developed in 1996, is a collaborative program between a host business site, vocational rehabilitation, and the local school district, with the goal of providing work experience to individuals with disabilities. This program, typically offered during the client's last year of their secondary education consists of three ten-week work experiences, on-site education for approximately two hours per day, and on-site support as needed for each intern (Gross et al., 2018; Whittenburg et al., 2020). These two examples further support the importance of not only the actual work experience but also the need to integrate education and support for clients to be successful.

Theme 3: Impact of Others

The third theme in this construct conveyed the impact of others, either positive or negative in nature. The responses conveyed mostly positive impact from the *Careers Collaborative* program, family members, and professors. Specific examples of the positive impact from the *Careers Collaborative* include meetings with the university disability center and state vocational rehabilitation agency staff members, networking through the career fairs and other activities set up by the program, learning how to use accommodations both in the academic setting as well as the world of work, and obtaining assistance from the vocational rehabilitation counselor with setting up a summer internship and financial assistance for summer housing in another city. These career-related services were effective in helping college students with disabilities in their overall career development to prepare them for the workforce. Having such a formalized program with multiple partners supporting an individual is imperative in providing

systematic and evidence-based strategies in successful career pursuits, as demonstrated by many existing endeavors, including the University of Washington's Work-based Learning Projects and Project SEARCH (Bellman et al., 2014; Gross et al., 2018; Whittenburg et al., 2020).

Another source of positive impact was from family members and professors/advisors. These relationships with others include the influence of professors or advisors on students as they navigated their academic careers and extended into a network to assist with future career aspirations. Family members were especially noted on how they supported students with disabilities in their career interests and related decisions. Such positive relationships are essential for students with disabilities and lead to increased confidence as well as increased positive outcomes related to career exploration, decision-making, and goal pursuits (Lent et al., 2016; Wright et al., 2014).

Despite the positive impacts indicated by our participants, there were also unfavorable situations that negatively affected their career development and outcomes. Specifically, one area pertained to faculty members in relation to accommodations. Even well-intentioned faculty struggled when understanding the needs to accommodate students with disabilities. Becker and Palladino (2016) conducted a study of 127 postsecondary faculty members to investigate their attitudes about accommodation for students with disabilities. Overall, these faculty members were willing to provide accommodations, mostly extended time on tests. However, a subgroup of these faculty members did not understand the importance of accommodation and considered it as being unfair. Such negative perceptions of faculty pose significant hindrance to the success of students' academic pursuits.

Theme 4: Personal Experiences

The theme of Personal Experiences emerged within this construct and refers to the individual's personal learning experiences other than academic course work or employment. These personal experiences referred to the individual's background such as socio-economic status, discrimination, opportunities, or lack thereof based on geographic location, and volunteering experiences. One's background and the availability or limitation of resources may influence the opportunities to develop specific skills and to pursue personal interests (Wright et al., 2014). Socio-economic status or social class often refers to one's income and educational level, where one lives and works, and/or how one is viewed in terms of class. Previous studies have noted a relationship between social class and personal learning experiences (Flores et al., 2017; Thompson & Dahling, 2012), specifically the impact of social class on one's experiences and exposure to educational and career opportunities. In the current study, participants came from places that were vastly different from the university setting, such as small, rural communities, or international students. They experienced a different culture within the university setting as compared to their home settings, which accounted for the differences in opportunity and available resources. Other personal experiences included personal interests, such as reading, working with animals, and family influence.

Person Inputs

The third construct of Person Inputs revealed the themes of *Theme 1: Personality Characteristics*, *Theme 2: Effects of Disability*, *Theme 3: Educational Factors Influencing Career Path*, and *Theme 4: Accommodations and Support Services in Higher Education*. The themes identified in the current study were consistent with Lent and Brown's (2013) discussion of Person Inputs, including "gender, culture, personality, ability, health/disability status" as well

as “contextual affordances (e.g., educational quality, socioeconomic resources) that, together, comprise the individual’s initial “social address””.

Theme 1: Personality Characteristics

Personality Characteristics refer to qualities such as the behaviors, emotions, and tendencies which are unique to the individual. These personality characteristics display self-awareness or self-determination. This concept of self-awareness is critical in the career development process. Savickas (2010) discussed the importance of knowing oneself and having confidence in oneself before one enters the world of work. In fact, knowing oneself is the first step in career exploration. Other personality characteristics including procrastination and lack of motivation are not uncommon for undergraduate college students (Hen & Goroshit, 2014; Howell & Watson, 2007). The *Careers Collaborative* program aimed to address these potential personality characteristics by helping students to develop skills, understand successful academic and work behaviors, and to provide wrap-around support to students with disabilities (W. Hilliker, personal communication, July 23, 2018).

Theme 2: Effects of Disability

The effects of students’ disabilities were discussed in terms of the impact on their daily functioning, both positive and negative. The majority of negative effects of disability included academic challenges and concerns for future employment settings. These responses indicated the concerns regarding how to navigate any future barriers that may arise due to the disability. As noted in existing literature, evidence-based career-related interventions provided by counselors, specialists, and professional staff were imperative in assisting individuals with obtaining skills necessary to be successful in employment settings and to address the barriers associated with the disability (Smith & Milson, 2011; Sung et al., 2019). The participation in the *Careers*

Collaborative and the resources available have allowed the negative effects of disability to be reduced.

Theme 3: Accommodations and Support Services in Higher Education

This theme refers to the reasonable accommodations received in the academic environment or support that the individual received as being a part of the *Careers Collaborative* program. These accommodations are critical to the success of a student with a disability and are required by federal laws. Kim and Lee (2015) conducted a study of 1,248 students registered with the office of disability services at a large institution to determine if accommodations, and what accommodations impacted academic performance. These authors emphasized the importance of registering with support services, such as the disabilities services office, as a top priority to ensure obtaining accommodations in the higher education setting. They further found that test accommodations, such as extended time and modified exams influenced better GPA. In the current study, this theme incorporated the direct accommodations utilized including extended time on tests, audio recording of lectures, use of memory aid/term sheet, among others. Prior to the postsecondary experience, students with disabilities are entitled to accommodations and services within the secondary system and should begin planning for the transition to higher education early (Becker & Palladino, 2016; Shaw et al., 2009). Though the accommodations are likely to be different in the higher educational setting, they are essential nonetheless and access to such services affected the success of the student in higher education (White et al., 2014). The learning experiences of students were often connected to the accommodations received and the experiences they had with teachers and other students (Hong, 2015). Particularly unique to the *Careers Collaborative* program was that there were disability specialists who have expertise in and serve specific populations such as visual impairments, hearing impairments, and learning

disabilities. This specialized expertise is a valuable asset to assist participants as they navigate the world of higher education.

Theme 4: Educational Factors Influencing Career Path

This theme primarily relates to external factors that impacted the trajectory of the participants career paths. This specifically included prolonged time to complete degree, need to change majors due to mobility and accessibility issues, as well as discrimination from professors and employers. Participants discussed that these barriers came from within the individuals as well as environmental factors. Hong (2015) conducted a qualitative study in which 16 college students with disabilities kept a journal reflecting on their experiences as a student with a disability. Results showed four major themes: faculty perceptions, fit of advisors, college stressors, and quality of support services. Similar to Hong's study, results from this study shared the common barrier that related to negative interactions with faculty members. Lindley (2005) further noted that barriers, even though they were subjective, had an impact on one's career decision-making and influenced the likelihood of one pursuing a specific occupation. This is reflected in the current study with multiple participants reporting the need to change majors or careers due to disability-related barriers. Most of the barriers identified by our participants were external or environmental barriers. Such barriers included additional time required to complete the degree due to both disability related memory issues and physical limitations due to access and mobility restrictions. It was also felt discrimination from a professor as well as future employers posed significant barriers as well.

Outcome Expectations

The theme Outcome Expectations refers to what the individual thinks or believes will happen based on certain behaviors. The following themes emerged from the fourth construct of

Outcome Expectations: *Theme 1: Participant's Employment Outlook, Theme 2: Future Plans are Guided by Expectations, Theme 3: Personal Fit of Job, and Theme 4: Preparing for Potential Challenges.*

Theme 1: Participant's Employment Outlook

Employment Outlook refers to beliefs about future employment, either real or perceived that were directly related to the job. This is consistent with the definition of Outcome Expectations set forth by Lent and Brown (2013) that these expectations were what the individual believed would happen based on the action he or she chose. Several beliefs that were conveyed included: that the initial/entry level job was a steppingstone to advance in one's career; the specific beliefs about the actual work environment; beliefs regarding how competitive the industry of choice is; and concerns with obtaining employment due to the economy or stigma around disability. These beliefs were consistent with Roessler et al. (2007) noting that discrimination, lack of job-seeking skills, and lack of knowledge and experience contribute to students with disabilities struggling to obtain and maintain employment. Further, Hitchings et al. (2001)'s study indicated that one-third of the participants reported feelings that they would have difficulties in their future careers and that they expected to need accommodations in their future employment. The *Careers Collaborative* program prepared college students with disabilities for the world of work and to make an informed choice about the employment goal or career the individual planned to pursue. This was done by facilitating career exploration and discussion of realistic expectations in relations to the labor market information and the individual's interests and abilities (W. Hilliker, personal communication, July 23, 2018). Thus, helping college students with disabilities to have a positive and realistic outlook is an important aspect of career counseling.

Theme 2: Future Plans are Guided by Expectations

The theme of Future Plans are Guided by Expectations describes the next steps or future planning, including further education, training, or changes in job roles or careers. This theme builds on the previous theme as Participant's Employment Outlook refers to the beliefs about the job, whereas this theme focuses on what participants believe they will need as they are planning next steps. Outcome Expectations, or the beliefs about what will result from certain behaviors, is one example of how the constructs intersect with one another. For example, one is likely to engage in an activity which one enjoys doing (Interests). When one has high confidence (Self-Efficacy) in doing the job, one is likely to believe the behavior will result in a favorable outcome (Outcome Expectation) thus, more likely to choose (Personal/Choice Goals) that behavior (Lent et al., 2015). Responses within this theme have been broken down into three additional categories: planning to begin with entry level employment and work one's way up; planning to gain experience in chosen career or field, and planning for continuing education – either graduate school or on-the-job learning. These responses exemplify the expectations of these participants based on their future plans related to employment. This is consistent with literature in that the expectations of beginning in an entry level position and moving up, gaining experience, and the need for further education reflect the belief that these behaviors will have benefits in the future by engaging in them now (Lent & Brown, 2016; Ochs & Roessler, 2004).

Theme 3: Personal Fit of Job

This theme takes the background, experiences, disability status, personal values or convictions into account when considering the personal fit of the individual to employment. One's success within a job is often measured by how the individual views his or her fit within the workplace and the overall fit with the organization (Hemphill & Kulik, 2017). With respect to

the current study, personal convictions and values were discussed as a primary consideration, followed by experiences and disability status when determining the expected fit of the employment environment and the person. In a study conducted by Xin et al. (2020), the researchers drew attention to the fact that jobs are less static today than in the past. Furthermore, employees are more aware of what they value in a job and are able to seek out what best meets those needs and expectations. As personal fit of the job becomes increasingly important, one way to determine the fit of a potential career field is through internships. As noted by Lindstrom et al. (2009), internships work well for individuals who may struggle with book learning but excel with hands-on learning. This type of experience can help the individual determine if there is a connection between oneself and the specific work environment, thus, assessing the fitness of the individual with the job. Additionally, work-based learning opportunities not only assist with the gain of firsthand experience but also increase motivation to work towards a career. Furthermore, hands-on experience also assists in professional networking and increased employment success (Bellman et al., 2014).

Theme 4: Preparing for Potential Challenges

This theme refers to limitations, real or perceived, on Outcome Expectations related to disability, personal experience, and/or economy as challenges for work success. There is strong support that major challenges for students with disabilities include lack of knowledge and experience (Lindstrom et al., 2009; Roessler et al., 2007), self-advocacy skills (Hong, 2015; Roessler et al., 2007), and personal skills such as time management (Hong, 2015; Roessler et al., 2007). These challenges are consistent with those discussed in the current study, specifically, the need for additional experience to be competitive in the job market. Participants discussed that additional work experiences, such as internships or work experiences, were necessary to add to a

resume and to secure a good job. Literature supports that internships, structured learning experiences, and applied work experiences increase opportunity for future successful employment by gaining valuable skills (Corrigan et al., 2001; Kline & Kurz, 2014). In this regard, the *Careers Collaborative* program showed a positive impact on participants securing internships and additional opportunities to gain experience.

Interests

This construct reveals an overlap and interaction with other constructs, particularly Self-Efficacy and Outcome Expectations. As previously noted by Lent et al. (1994):

...perceptions of self-efficacy and outcome likelihood figure prominently in the formation of interests...people develop goals for activity involvement partly because of their interest in (liking for) these activities and partly because of the rewards (both extrinsic and intrinsic) that they anticipate. (pp. 89-90)

Within the current study, the four themes were: *Theme 1: Past Experience*, *Theme 2: Personal Values*, *Theme 3: Passion*, and *Theme 4: Autonomy*.

Theme 1: Past Experience

The theme Past Experience refers to self-reported experiences related to career choice that stemmed from academic experiences and personal experiences. This is consistent with the Social Cognitive Career Theory (1996) that people are more likely to engage in doing things that they are interested in. Furthermore, they are more likely to improve at what they do, which in turn are more likely to form an interest in these activities (Lent & Brown, 1996a). People are also likely to have more long-term satisfaction with their employment with two conditions. One was that they are in an employment setting that is a good match with their abilities and interests (O'Sullivan et al., 2012; Willie, et al., 2014), and the second was that they are working with

people who are similar to themselves (Swaney, et al., 2012). Although the *Careers Collaborative* program may not have directly contributed to the participants' past experience, this program engaged in related career counseling support activities that helped them to tie their past experience and to consolidate their career paths for the future.

Theme 2: Personal Values

The theme of Personal Values refers to how the work or interest matches one's perceived importance of a particular activity and belief regarding how beneficial it is. Our personal values shape who we are and influence how we approach various parts of our lives. Lent et al. (1994) discussed this idea stating "...interest in a particular academic or career-relevant activity depends, in part, on the outcomes that are anticipated to result from participation in the activity, along with the relative value or importance of these outcomes to the individual" (p. 91). In the current study, examples of specific personal values of helping others and being environmentally conscientious and taking care of the planet were mentioned and such values drove the participant in choosing their majors.

Theme 3: Passion

One's strong feeling or emotion towards a topic emerged as a theme within this construct and is identified as Passion. Passion for one's field of interest and how others, in this case, the advisor, for the subject matter, had inspired and influenced students. Thus, passion can be a powerful and motivating force which strives one towards his/her career goals (Brandy-Amoon & Fuertes, 2010). In the *Careers Collaborative* program, the vocational rehabilitation counselor, and the staff in the career center, two of the partners, both assisted students with identifying their passions and how those passions could transfer into a potential career.

Theme 4: Autonomy

In this theme, Autonomy refers to the individual's freedom and flexibility within the work or academic environment. Autonomy was discussed in relation to two areas: academic choices and freedom within the employment or career setting. In academic choice, freedom refers to identifying a major which was very broad and allowed for freedom to choose certain classes. For the autonomy related to the career setting, this included having the ability to be creative, not having a job that is routine, and freedom to pursue projects of interest. This theme also emerged within the construct of Interests, as it would be expected that one's interest led to pursuing a career that one felt confident and comfortable making independent choices within the academic or work setting. This is consistent with the findings of Lent & Brown (1996a) indicating that interests would be difficult to imagine in activities where people doubt themselves or their abilities and when they have negative expectations. It is more likely in those instances that people would try to avoid such activities where they may expect negative consequences. The benefit to participation in the *Careers Collaborative* program was that the staff assisted students in identifying potential employment that met the individual interests and allowed for some of the desired autonomy.

Personal/Choice Goals

Personal/Choice Goals serve as an impetus for individuals to take action. Four themes emerged from the construct of Personal/Choice Goals. These identified themes include: *Theme 1: Continued Education or Training, Theme 2: Gain Experience, Theme 3: Active Engagement with Partners in the Careers Collaborative, and Theme 4: Value-Driven Decision.*

Theme 1: Continued Education or Training

This theme refers to plans for pursuing additional education or training throughout the academic career and in the future. The economic and employment ramifications of education for people with disabilities has been well-documented in literature (Barnow, 2008; Bellman et al., 2014; Dutta et al., 2009; Mueser & Cook, 2012; White et al., 2014). The United States Bureau of Labor Statistics (2020) emphasize that individuals with disabilities typically have less education and a higher unemployment rate. Many of the respondents in the current study discussed plans to continue their education and earn graduate degrees. Within the *Careers Collaborative* program, the vocational rehabilitation counselor discussed plans of continuing education. Both the career services personnel and the vocational rehabilitation counselor assisted with career exploration and discussed the benefits of pursuing graduate education immediately versus employment to gain experience first. Professionals also assisted with exploring graduate programs that met the individual's needs, options for potential funding through the state vocational rehabilitation program, as well as accommodations for the entrance exam.

Theme 2: Gain Experience

The theme Gain Experience refers to the importance and intention of accumulating experience within one's chosen field, through on-the-job experiences, entry level employment to learn the job, or work in general. This was discussed in terms of obtaining work or on-the-job experience, as well as one's intention of obtaining entry level employment in order to learn and move up within their respective careers. Literature informs us that work experiences and/or internship opportunities assist students with disabilities in exploring careers of interest, gaining valuable work experience, and helping them to obtain valuable soft skills, such as interviewing skills and professional behavior. These are means to alleviate barriers to employment (Dutta et

al., 2009; Hitchings et al., 1998). Partners within the *Careers Collaborative* have assisted with securing internships and work experiences for participants, thus making individuals more competitive when they were ready to pursue career employment.

Theme 3: Active Engagement with Partners in the Careers Collaborative Program

Active Engagement with Partners in the *Careers Collaborative* Program refers to the individual's interaction with members or partners of the *Careers Collaborative* program. Seven participants discussed engaging with any of the partners, with the state vocational rehabilitation agency being mentioned the most, followed by the university disability center and the career services office. Kuh (2009) defines student engagement as "the time and effort students devote to activities that are empirically linked to desired outcomes of college and what institutions do to induce students to participate in these activities" (p. 683). As it is important to consider not only what motivated students but also what higher education institutions offered to engage students, the *Careers Collaborative* offered wrap around services in multiple areas to build relationships and connections with these professionals and to be part of the larger community beyond the university setting. In addition to professional relationships, each of these entities offered further programming which encouraged activities with other students. Participants in the current study reflected on the connections made with the various collaborative partners and how such engagement provided critical links to their overall success.

Theme 4: Value-Driven Decision

The Value-Driven Decision theme refers to the individual's decision to engage in specific activities due to personal values or reasons for such engagement. "Goals achieve their self-motivating quality by linking self-satisfaction to goal fulfillment and to the enactment of behavior that meets internally-set standards" (Lent et al., 1994, p. 85). Examples of internal

values or motivators to the individual included persistence, creativity in work, or a strong work ethic. Education was also identified as being highly valued and providing more opportunities for future employment. Lastly, values leading to positive results outside of self or altruistic motivation such as protecting the Earth, advocating for people with disabilities, helping others, and being driven towards public service in order to impact policy. These values drove how students with disabilities made their educational and career choices.

Construct Intersectionality

In the first section, discussion was represented in the context of each of the themes among the six SCCT constructs. The specific themes generated added to the details of the overarching constructs guided by this theory. Collectively, these themes also affirmed the interconnectedness of the themes and constructs. For example, within the Self-Efficacy construct, students discussed how the *Careers Collaborative* program helped them to improve Self-Efficacy by equipping them with knowledge and skills in addressing barriers and supports. In the Outcome Expectations construct, students also mentioned that the *Careers Collaborative* program has prepared them to address barriers so that they had a positive outlook and expectations of seeking a job. The following discussion serves to integrate the themes across all constructs to present a broad landscape of the results.

Self-Efficacy is the central tenant of the SCCT, which drives one's confidence in their educational and career pursuit is imperative for their success (Lent et al., 2016). Study results demonstrated that Self-Efficacy encompassed more than an overall confidence in their career outcome. More importantly, Self-Efficacy entailed not only acquiring soft skills at work, but also confidence in the ability to identify and overcome any barriers associated with future planning for successful education completion and job attainment (Quimby & O'Brien, 2004; Wright et al.,

2014). Participants further indicated that both educational and work history in the past provided hands-on experience that facilitated confidence. The past experiences as well as knowledge in soft skills and ability to resolve any barriers collectively attributed to a confidence and positivity in their outlook and outcome expectations (Byars-Winston & Fouad, 2008). Furthermore, the importance of personal fit to a job or career became an important contribution to future success. These spoke to the importance of both the practical aspects and the psychological aspects of preparation in strengthening the confidence for one's career development (Bellman et al., 2014; Lindstrom et al., 2009). The *Careers Collaborative* program had provided professional career counseling to ensure that college students' background, personality, values, interests, passion and autonomy were carefully considered and matched to facilitate a career goal and future. The *Careers Collaborative* program also equipped and prepared students with the knowledge and skillset to identify barriers and necessary supports to alleviate challenges (Byars-Winston & Fouad, 2008; Lent et al., 2003; Quimby & O'Brien, 2004; Wright et al., 2014). These supports enhanced the self-efficacy level for these participants to set realistic expectations and goals, as well as positive employment outlooks.

Perhaps not surprising to know, work exploration and experience, as well as learning experiences often lay a foundation to prepare one's future career. The concept of past experience was touched upon earlier when talking about Self-Efficacy. Even personal experiences and affordance such as demographic background, influence from families and friends all contributed to one's learning experience and to shape who these college students were. This speaks to the importance of understanding both work and non-work factors that could facilitate or hinder one's career development, as well as the development nature of one's career (Bellman et al., 2014; Hitchings et al., 1998; Wright et al., 2014). One of the unique features of the *Careers*

Collaborative program was the early planning and implementation of work-related experiences, which allowed students with disabilities to apply the skills learned, to experience the fitness of the job, and to build up their work experience.

In looking at the Person Inputs variables that had an impact on the career development among college students with disabilities, study results showed that the context of the person and the disability were attenuated, as well as that education was a precursor to future career (Savickas, 2010). Specifically, personality factors such as empathy and self-determination were attributes that must be cultivated to facilitate success in one's educational and career pursuit. However, the impact of disability still posed challenges even though these students were receiving support, attesting to the pervasiveness and negative effect of disability on one's career (Lindley, 2005; White et al., 2014). Another imperative aspect of the study result was that educational preparation could be as important as career preparation, as a successful education was the foundation to a good job and career. This was central to the mission of the program driven by the supported education and supported employment model, that, education and employment preparation must be considered as an entity when providing career counseling for students with disabilities. Many themes across the six SCCT constructs contained aspects of both education and work, particularly in the areas of how both education and past work experience shaped self-efficacy and how educational factors influenced the career path. In addition, how accommodations and support services in higher education were important for future success, and how continuous education is a future building block of a good career. The importance of providing accommodation and support for successful education, as well as the implementation of career planning early in the educational process must be emphasized. The *Careers Collaborative* program's mission addressed this very important concept of integration of both educational and

employment support while college students with disabilities were pursuing their higher education, as well as providing continuous support for graduates while they are in the workforce.

In summary, the *Careers Collaborative* program has shown its utility and effectiveness in helping college students with disabilities. The holistic perspective in understanding all aspects of the person's career development, including providing support and training to address deficits, has helped college students with disabilities to be prepared and to feel confident in their future career pursuit. This program also has provided the hands-on skills for these students, including career counseling to address the identification and problem-solving of barriers, and to provide internship experience. The *Careers Collaborative* also empowered the students by understanding their personal inputs, backgrounds, interests, and passion, as well as providing these collective services to increase their self-efficacy to continue with their career development. The *Careers Collaborative* also implemented integrative services that support successful education and employment, as well as a smooth transition so that graduates could continue to receive vocational services after they graduate from college.

Potential Group Consistency and Differences

In this study, half of the participants were current students engaging in the *Careers Collaborative* program while the other half were alumni, i.e., they graduated from the university and had participated in the program. Although not the intention to conduct a cross group comparison, two discussion points were worth expansion. There were more similarities among the different themes on the six SCCT constructs (refer to Figure 2 and Figure 3 as follows).

Figure 2: Alumni/Student Responses: Self-Efficacy, Learning Experiences, & Person Inputs

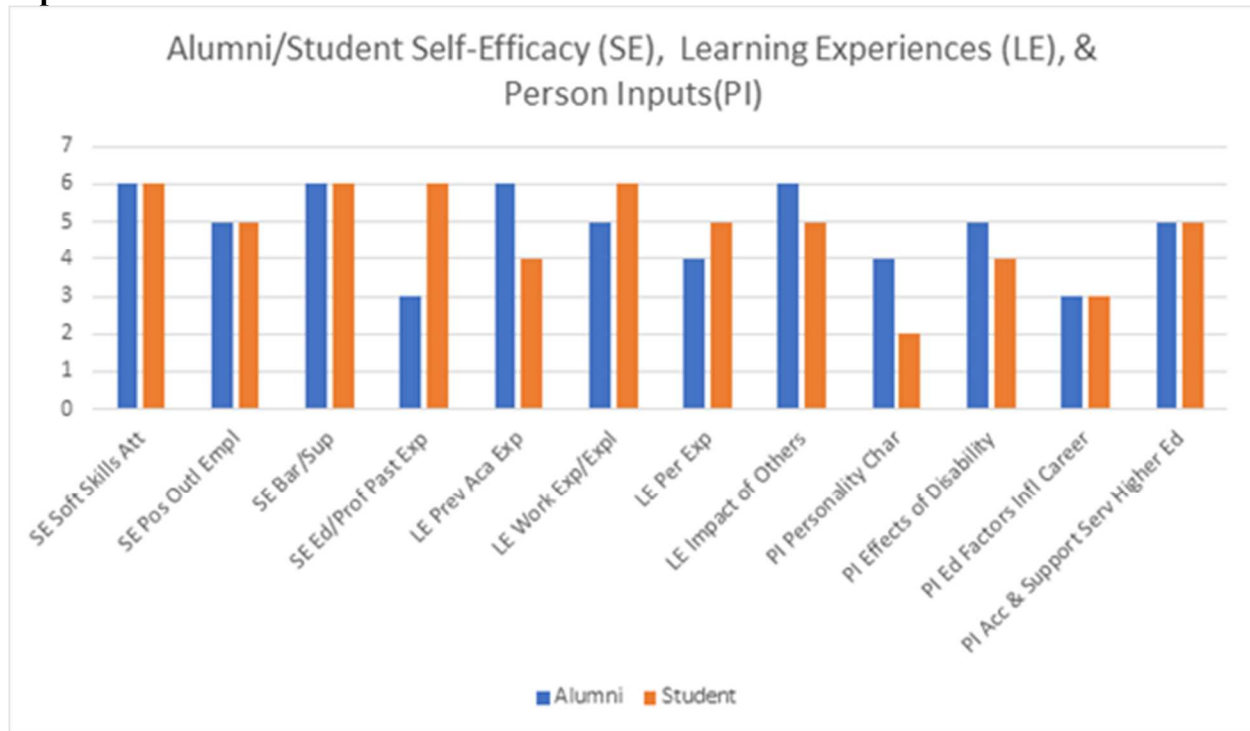
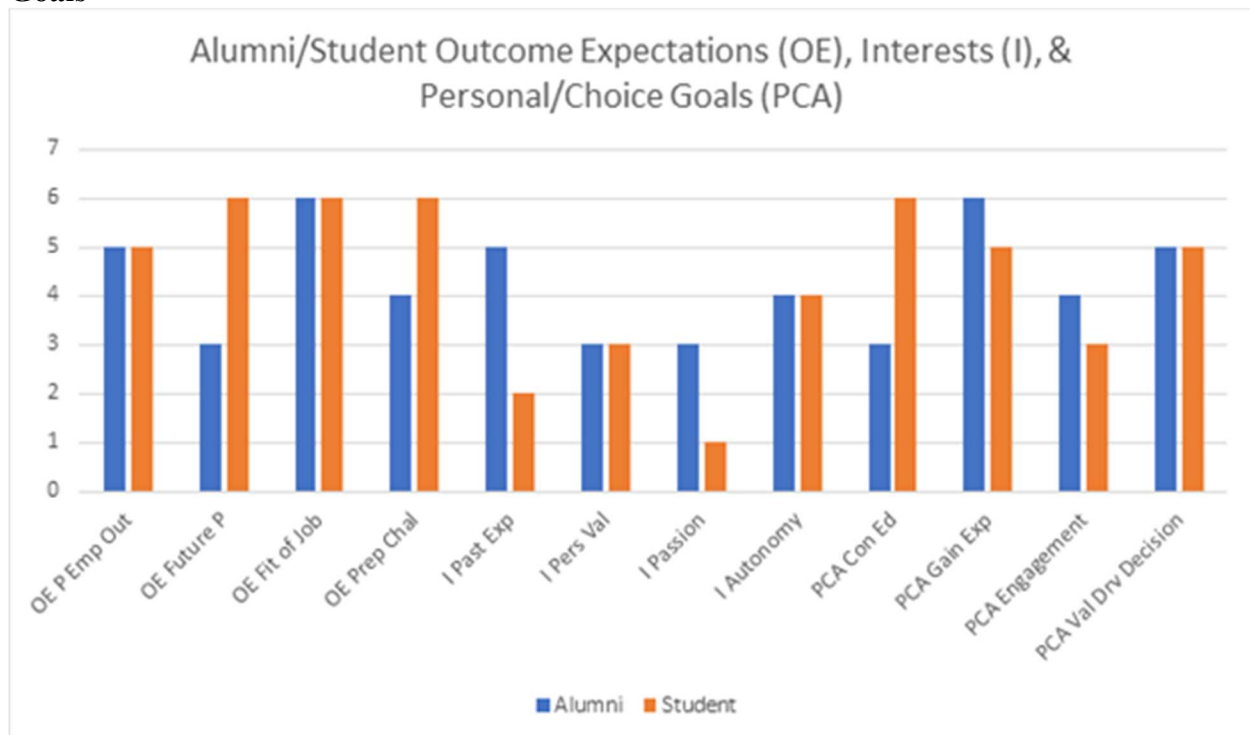


Figure 3: Alumni/Student Responses: Outcome Expectations, Interests, & Personal/Choice Goals



Themes that were consistently identified as important across both groups were as follows:

For Self-Efficacy Construct: (a) Soft Skills Attainment; (b) Positive Outlook on Future Employment (c) Barriers and Supports. For Learning Experiences Construct: (b) Work Experiences and Exploration, (d) Impact of Others. For Person Inputs Construct: (d) Accommodations and Support Services in Higher Education. For Outcome Expectations Construct: (a) Participant's Employment Outlook, (c) Personal Fit of Job. For Personal/Choice Goals Construct: (b) Gain Experience, (d) Value-Driven Decision. All twelve participants reported the importance of the following themes: Self-Efficacy Construct: (a) Soft Skills Attainment; (c) Barriers and Supports, and Outcome Expectations Construct: (c) Personal Fit of Job. These similarities across the two groups may be indicative of a good understanding of the individuals in terms of the disability and reasonable accommodations in both academic and employment settings. Furthermore, having all participants comment on Personal Fit of Job related to Outcome Expectations demonstrated insight and self-awareness surrounding an employment setting and how the individual's background, experiences, disability status, and personal values would match with a potential employer.

Eleven of the participants reported the following themes: Learning Experiences Construct: (b) Work Experiences and Exploration, (d) Impact of Others, and Personal/Choice Goals Construct: (b) Gain Experience. Ten of the participants, split evenly between each group, reported the following themes: Self-Efficacy Construct: (b) Positive Outlook on Future Employment, Outcome Expectations Construct: (a) Participant's Employment Outlook, Person Inputs Construct: (d) Accommodations and Support Services in Higher Education, and Personal/Choice Goals Construct: (d) Value-Driven Decision. It is not surprising that these themes were reflected as important to both alumni and current students as each of these themes

were interconnected with each other and with the *Careers Collaborative* program. The *Careers Collaborative* program assisted with accommodations and support services in higher education as well as setting up work experiences and exploration leading to a better understanding of self and individual values. Work experiences led to gaining experience which ultimately increased participants' outlook on future employment. The program itself exemplified a resource that has made an impact on these students.

Additionally, although the numbers were lower, a proportional number of participants from each group responded similarly in the following: Interests Construct: (b) Personal Values; (d) Autonomy, and Person Inputs Construct: (b) Educational Factors Influencing Career Path with half or just above half of the participants from each group noting these. Response rates did not seem to be different within the two groups.

Although differences exist between current students and alumni in many of the construct themes, the most noticeable differences included the following: Self-Efficacy Construct: (d) Educational and Professional Past Experiences; Outcome Expectations Construct: (b) Future Plans Are Guided by Expectations; Interests Construct: (a) Past Experiences; and Personal/Choice Goals Construct: (a) Continued Education or Training.

For the following construct themes, all six of the current students noted as important compared with only three participants from the alumni groups: Self-Efficacy Construct: (d) Educational and Professional Past Experiences; Outcome Expectations Construct: (b) Future Plans Are Guided by Expectations; and Personal/Choice Goals Construct: (a) Continued Education or Training. Current students reflected on their positive past experiences and envisioned greater possibilities for future planning including potential continuing education or

training. Perhaps this was due to current interactions with professors, advisors, or other professionals who may be encouraging graduate education or further training.

Alumni noted higher emphasis on the following: Learning Experiences Construct: (a) Previous Academic Experiences; and Interests Construct: (a) Past Experiences. This may be due to the current focus of alumni. Specifically, alumni may be focused on the more immediate need to obtain employment rather than consider additional education or training. Therefore, the alumni participants may be considering previous academic experiences and other past experiences in relation to applying and interviewing for employment opportunities.

Researcher Bias/Reliability/Validity

Qualitative study particularly is more prone to researcher bias because the researcher serves as the agent to interpret the findings. Thus, researcher bias was addressed here. The researcher is part of the small rehabilitation and local disability community where this study was conducted. Thus, she is familiar with the *Careers Collaborative* program and the key collaborators. Additionally, the researcher currently works as a vocational rehabilitation counselor in the local area and has previously worked in higher education as an educational and career counselor. Each of these roles overlap with the function of the essential partners within this collaborative program. Therefore, this researcher is likely to hold positive beliefs of the best practices for working with college students with disabilities.

To minimize researcher biases, necessary steps were taken. First, the researcher was not involved with the selection of participants. Participants were chosen and contacted by the vocational rehabilitation counselor from the state agency in the community. Creswell (2014) further recommended several strategies to incorporate into qualitative research when analyzing the data in order to reduce bias and increase confidence in the validity of the research study. The

strategies utilized in this study included triangulation, using rich descriptions to convey findings, clarifying researcher bias, extended time in the field, and peer debriefing. The process of triangulating “different data sources of information” was done by examining evidence from the sources and using it to build a coherent justification for themes. If themes were established based on converging several sources of data or perspectives from participants, then this process was considered as “adding to the validity of the study” (Creswell, 2014, p. 201). This strategy was utilized by the researcher, who collected data through semi-structured interviews while noting any observations during the interviews with field notes to assist with the data analysis. This researcher then applied open coding, or coding data line by line from transcript, followed by axial coding, where themes were created by making connections between the responses of the participants. Rich, thick descriptions were also utilized by providing direct quotes from participants in each identified theme in order to provide support for how those themes were identified and created. This was done by providing multiple quotes and sharing perspectives on each theme. During meetings with the former advisor throughout the dissertation process, this researcher acknowledged and shared what biases may have been brought into the research study and how this may have an impact on the interpretation of the findings. Next, Creswell (2014, p. 202) recommended the researcher “spend prolonged time in the field” in order to develop “an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under study...The more experience that a researcher has with participants in the settings, the more accurate or valid” the findings will be. This researcher, through professional experience and extensive time spent, has a substantial understanding of the population studied. Finally, peer debriefing was another strategy utilized to increase confidence in the findings. This researcher worked with the former advisor to discuss and code data.

Additionally, another doctoral student was utilized who reviewed, asked questions, and discussed the findings and interpretations of the data.

Study Strengths, Limitations, and Future Research Directions

The current study investigated the career development of college students based on a well-defined theory, the Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT), in the career development literature. Thus, in-depth investigation was conducted guided by the constructs that were theory driven. Another strength of this study was that the application of the SCCT was tested on a program called the *Careers Collaborative*, which was specifically designed to address the key constructs. However, despite the strength of the study, there were several limitations that may affect the interpretation of the results. These limitations included recruitment, research design, improvement of the interview protocol, and data analysis. First, the researcher recruited from one institution of higher education to evaluate the potential robustness of the program. Specifically, this could involve a comparison group where students with disabilities who did not participate in the *Careers Collaborative* program, or who participated in a program in another institution that had no integration and collaborative programming or a different model of programming. Even within the available pool of participants within the *Careers Collaborative* program, they were not randomly selected, and/or that participants were biased if they chose to participate or not. Therefore, the participants in the study most likely had a strong relationship with the staff member conducting the recruitment.

Along the line of recruitment, soliciting other stakeholders to corroborate the benefits of the program to participants would help to further validate if the perceptions provided by the participants were consistent. This could include staff and representatives from the different partners. Having multiple groups certainly could further strengthen the validity of the study.

Furthermore, the disability office where the *Careers Collaborative* is housed has a diverse group of ability specialists with expertise in working with specific populations with disabilities. It is noteworthy that the process of referring a student to the *Careers Collaborative* program was initiated by the disability specialist at the institution to the state vocational rehabilitation counselor outside the institution that serves as one of the partners. However, not all disability groups and their disability specialists participated in this *Careers Collaborative* program. Future studies could investigate how different the *Careers Collaborative* program could capitalize the strengths of the different disability specialists and the benefits on the different disability groups.

Realizing that to make a positive impact on one's career development is a process, a more deliberate effort in documenting and recruiting participants of the program at different time frames would have helped to understand the different levels of successful outcomes on the participants. In this study, participant involvement in the program ranged from one participant who had as little as one to two initial meetings to other participants who had been in the program for years. Thus, it was less likely for a student who had only had a few meetings with program staff would have benefitted from the program. Another method to understand the developmental nature of this process was to conduct follow up studies to track the career development progress of these participants once they completed the program

While the interview protocol was carefully designed based on the input of the dissertation committee members, the interview protocol could use some improvement. Further information would have been useful to solicit in order to provide more enriching information to explain the potential differences between the two groups. Students tended to focus on the past and current experiences of academics while alumni tended to focus less on the past but on the future of job

attainment. Instead of asking the general career development of these participants, questions could deliberately tie to academic preparedness and career preparedness. Further, specific questions in program evaluation and program improvement could help understand how the *Careers Collaborative* has and could benefit college students with disabilities. For instance, questions could ask about strengths, limitations, ways to enhance the collaboration and integration of services, and the philosophy of infusing both academic and career support in such a program. This would further tie the study not only to a theoretical model of the Social Career Cognitive Theory, but also the integrative delivery model of supported employment and supported education. Other questions could ask the number of times of meeting with different partners, types of services they received, and the quality of those services in order to provide the intensity and variety of services that may impact on the career outcomes.

Although the existing protocol had built in several probes, there could have been better structure and more thoughtful prompts in terms of clarifying specific questions. For example, with the question “how the student’s/alumni’s participation in the program itself may have shaped their experiences”, participants may not have considered all partners or components of the collaborative program due to lack of understanding and specific branding of the program itself. Thus, a prompt in asking how each of the collaborative partners have benefitted them would have been helpful.

Finally, another limitation pertained to the data analysis procedure. While the researcher followed the proper procedure to conduct the data analysis, and results were presented to the former advisor for validation and input, this data analysis process could have been improved in order to increase the validity and reliability of the findings. Specifically, an independent coder

and rater of the transcripts, having a summary sent and checked with all participants would have enhanced the validity and reliability.

Study Findings and Contributions to the Field

The findings of the current study further confirmed the existing literature in understanding the pertinent factors that affect the career development profile of college students with disabilities based on the Social Cognitive Career Theory (Lent & Brown, 1996b, 2013; Lent et al., 1994). The SCCT has decades of evidence in supporting Self-Efficacy, Learning Experiences, Person Inputs, Outcome Expectations, Interests, and Personal/Choice Goals as pertinent factors in affecting the career development process and how educational and career outcomes could be achieved successfully. Findings of this study confirmed the importance of each construct, but also offered further refinement of construct definitions. This study also added a unique aspect in that these pertinent constructs were mapped onto a program, the *Careers Collaborative*, that takes the collaborative and integrative approach to combine supported education and supported employment services to provide services for college students with disabilities. This supported education and supported employment model is innovative in the sense that this has been shown to be effective for the psychiatric disability population (Manthey et al., 2012). As such, this study provided further insight to how this model of service development could have an impact on the career development and outcomes among college students with disabilities.

Implications for Practice

Roessler et al. (2007) posited that “there are a number of steps that transition specialists and other service providers could take to strengthen the connection between higher education and career success for students with disabilities” (p. 164). Consistent with the successful

integrative employment model of supported education and support employment in the psychiatric literature (Anthony & Unger, 1991; Manthey et al., 2012; Mueser & Cook, 2012), this integrative model of service delivery that calls for multiple stakeholders was further confirmed. To that end, the current study offers valuable information for a variety of stakeholders.

Implications for Postsecondary Professionals as Collaborative Partners

The impetus for the *Careers Collaborative* program originated in the university disability center at Michigan State University (MSU), who traditionally provided students with disabilities with academic accommodations to promote successful education. As often the lack of timely and effective transition from college education to successful work, the disability office at MSU realized the needs to integrate career-related services and employment support for students with disabilities during their academic pursuit. Students while in college often face difficulties in registering with local vocational rehabilitation services that support employment services for individuals with disabilities. To alleviate these barriers, the MSU disability office created a partnership encompassing three other entities.

One entity was the career services office that connected students with disabilities to specific pre-vocational services, preparing students for future employment and immediately upon graduation. Such services included assisting students to write resumes and cover letters, interviewing skills, as well as providing opportunities to seek employment such as creating job fairs, internships, or directing students to job boards for current job postings.

The second entity involved a rehabilitation counselor from a local state vocational rehabilitation agency in the community. This partner brings a financial component as well as other expertise and services. This agency is able to partner with the university and draw federal

funding to match what the university is contributing. This financial partnership has allowed for a full-time vocational rehabilitation counselor to be on site and exclusively serve MSU students. This allows for access to vocational rehabilitation services in a timely manner. In addition to being on site, this vocational rehabilitation counselor can provide transition services and create unique programming for participants in collaboration with the other partners of the program.

The third entity involves the Office of Rehabilitation and Disability Studies, an academic unit at MSU where faculty brings a background in research and an expertise in working with transition youth to achieve their career goals. This partner provides consultation services and analyzes data to inform practice. Additionally, this partner assists with student surveys, tracking outcomes, and how to engage students.

Being part of such a collaboration further utilizes a variety of resources and a more seamless transition for students graduating and entering the workforce. This collaborative program suggests a model and best practice. The benefits of linking disabilities services and career services has allowed for improved alignment of academic development, early career preparation to drive effective future career goals, actions and successful career outcomes. The model of adding a full-time vocational rehabilitation counselor on site, while engaging and utilizing the career services office and the academic unit for research and program evaluation from the same university is a unique collaborative effort. It provides for many needed areas for students and produces the research background and expertise to support such an endeavor. Each collaborative partner brings expertise and perspective with a common goal for student success. This type of collaboration serves to provide quality referrals to vocational rehabilitation, likely resulting in successful outcomes post-graduation, while also assisting the postsecondary institution with additional resources and coordination for students with disabilities.

Results from our study in general showed positive immediate impact on students with disabilities at the university. This further confirms the importance of each of these services in promoting successful career outcomes. This is especially true that a highly collaborative program that taps into the expertise of disability accommodation, career preparation, post college employment and research. Students consistently showed positive results in terms of timely accommodation to facilitate academic support, as well as increased a sense of self-efficacy by providing not only career-related preparation services but also hands-on internship experiences. Furthermore, supports by this collaborative program helped students with disabilities to gain knowledge and skills to identify barriers and supports, while capitalizing supports and problem-solving barriers that may hinder their academic pursuit, career goals and expectations. Though with the alumni, specific employment results had not been documented at the time of the interviews. While part of the limitations in the research design and recruitment (lack of longitudinal follow up, recruitment of students with diverse duration of program enrollment) may have contributed to the less robust results in successful employment outcomes, thus further follow up must be done in order to relate to employment outcomes after students graduated from the program.

Furthermore, what was surprising was that while participants expressed positively about the benefits of the different services, some participants failed to reference the collaborative program by the name and the specific collaborative partners or professionals. It may be indicative that this program may be under marketed. For the *Careers Collaborative* program to be successful, an increase in marketing by branding is essential for both participants and other stakeholders, including university personnel. Suggestions for increasing such recognition may

include marketing across campus, developing new brochures, creating a login page for participants, as well as resources available to those active in the program.

As in many collaborations, each entity adds to the uniqueness but there may also be overlapping of duties and responsibilities. For example, the Career Services Network and the state vocational rehabilitation agency both assisted with preparation for employment, interviewing skills, or resumes. Through communication and identifying the best way to service students, each entity can provide services related to their area of expertise. These clearly defined roles not only would assist to provide effective and streamlined services for students, but also define the role of each expertise.

Implications for Vocational Rehabilitation

All participants have had an open case with the local vocational rehabilitation program as this collaborative program serves as a referral source from the disability office directly to the vocational rehabilitation counselor stationed on campus. This working relationship not only allows for an increase in referrals of college students to the vocational rehabilitation counselor, but it also serves the students in connecting with and accessing vocational rehabilitation programs with ease. Thus, follow up with the students continuing to receive community-based services may allow tracking of data for the long-term effect of this collaborative effort.

As mentioned above, the duties and responsibilities between the professionals from the career services office and counselors from the state vocational rehabilitation agency may overlap. Thus, while the state vocational rehabilitation agency provides employment related services, it is a relatively “new entity” as this has historically been a non-university unit. It is likely that a more clearly defined contribution to the collaborative effort would further enhance

the quality of the services. Assuming the addition of community-based partners can contribute to additional service utilization, similar collaborations with community partners could benefit.

Implications for Educators

Uniquely, one of the collaborative partners was the Office of Rehabilitation and Disability Studies, an academic program at the university that trains master's level students in Rehabilitation Counseling. Staff who are equipped to work in the disability offices, career services and state vocational rehabilitation agencies can be a range of professions who have expertise such as disability, career counseling, employment, labor markets, and accommodation. Rehabilitation Counselors are optimal in having training in many if not all the areas stated. Thus, it becomes imperative for educators to train practitioners on best practices which are effective in working with college students with different types of disabilities, and to be aware of available resources, such as this program or similar collaborative programs. Courses and internships that infuse career development, career counseling strategies, labor markets and world of work, accommodations and impacts of disabilities on successful employment must be incorporated in the training curriculum.

Implications for Future Research

As indicated in the study limitation sections, future research can further provide evidence about the importance of SCCT constructs and an example of an innovative collaborative program can be of clinical utility and benefit for college students with disabilities.

In order to aggregate evidence to test the effectiveness of the *Careers Collaborative* program, continuous efforts to collect participant data and outcome data with different research designs are recommended. Given that not all disability groups participated, the inclusion of other disability types potentially can test the applicability of the program to other disability groups. To

minimize the potential biases, random selection and assignment could be beneficial, though it is understandable that timely and fair services must be given to all participants. A comparison group of participants who may not be participating in the *Careers Collaborative* program can be matched with those in the program. Another comparison group could be completed and compared with another university where different types of educational and/or employment supports are provided. All these are likely to increase the sample size to generate more diverse participants, as well as saturation of themes for qualitative methods and adequate power for quantitative methods. In conjunction with the quantitative approach, surveys can be used to quantify relevant SCCT constructs, including Self-Efficacy, Outcome Expectations, Learning Experiences, Personal/Choice Goals, and perceived supports and barriers. Specific educational and/or employment outcomes can be delineated to measure towards the end of the program. As career development and workplace success is a process, using longitudinal methods to follow up with participants could be another asset. In order to assess the benefits of the program to participants, as well as the effectiveness of the program, a multi-informant approach can be taken by interviewing and/or collecting survey data from employers, internship or work supervisors, families, as well as program staff.

Aside from the overall research design and recruitment improvements mentioned above, there are two instrumentation and data analysis aspects that could be conducted differently. Data analysis approach could be improved by a more stringent data analytic approach, such as having additional coders, external reviewers, members check-in, etc. to add additional levels of validity and reliability. In retrospect, the demographic and interview protocol could be improved. More thoughtful prompts could allow more in-depth conversations on certain aspects of the constructs. Furthermore, this study intended to ask about the career development experience of those

participants who benefited from the program. More explicit questions that address the benefits, limitations, and methods to improve the service structure and delivery could further allow the results to speak to the effectiveness of this innovative approach of integrating academic and vocational services for college students with disabilities.

Conclusions

The increasing number of students with disabilities attending postsecondary education leads to the need for effective support services to aid students throughout their academic careers and transition to successful employment. The purpose of the current study was to understand the career development experiences of students with disabilities who participated in the *Careers Collaborative*, an innovative program at Michigan State University. The findings of this study identify common themes amongst this population and demonstrate the need and benefits for appropriate support services to assist with the overall career development and navigation of the postsecondary setting. The twelve participants were either current upper-class students or recent alumni from the program who shared their experiences based on constructs from the Social Cognitive Career Theory. Based on the six constructs, themes were broken down into the following. Four themes emerged from the first construct of Self-Efficacy: (a) Soft Skills Attainment, (b) Positive Outlook on Future Employment, (c) Barriers and Supports, (d) Educational and Professional Past Experiences. Four themes also emerged for the second construct on Learning Experiences: (a) Previous Academic Experiences, (b) Work Experiences and Exploration, (c) Personal Experiences, (d) Impact of Others. As for the third construct, Person Inputs, four themes emerged: (a) Personality Characteristics, (b) Effects of Disability, (c) Factors Influencing Career Path, (d) Accommodations and Support Services in Higher Education. For the fourth construct of Outcome Expectations, four themes emerged:

(a) Participant's Employment Outlook, (b) Future Plans are Guided by Expectations, (c) Personal Fit of Job, (d) Preparing for Potential Challenges; Four themes were formed for the fifth construct of Interests: (a) Past Experience, (b) Personal Values, (c) Passion, (d) Autonomy. Finally, four themes were formed for the sixth construct Personal/Choice Goals: (a) Continued Education or Training, (b) Gain Experience, (c) Active Engagement with Partners in the *Careers Collaborative* program, (d) Value-Driven Decision. These themes under each of the six constructs have contributed to some refinement of what contributed to these constructs. However, our findings also showed that some themes within one construct could overlap with other themes within another construct. Finally, although this study was not explicitly aimed at program evaluation, our participants shared the positive influence of the *Careers Collaborative* program.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: Recruitment Email

Email to MSU/*Careers Collaborative* participant for potential interview:

Dear Student/Alumni,

You are being contacted by the Resource Center for Persons with Disabilities (RCPD) because you have been nominated to participate in a research study being conducted by a doctoral candidate from the Rehabilitation Counselor Education program at Michigan State University. The purpose of this research study is to explore the career development experiences of individuals who have participated in the *Careers Collaborative* Program at Michigan State University. Your participation will provide information useful for better understanding the career development process of postsecondary students with disabilities.

You are being contacted because you were registered with the RCPD and identified as a participant in the either currently or during your time at Michigan State University. You are one of several student participants who have received services that will be contacted and asked to participate in an interview. The interview format will consist of several questions regarding your career development experiences while at Michigan State University and participating in the *Careers Collaborative* Program.

Interviews will be no longer than one hour in length and will take place at a location convenient to you and the researcher. Ideally a private room will be scheduled on campus or at a library. If you are no longer in the East Lansing area, it is possible for the interview to take place via phone or web conferencing software. The specifics will be discussed and agreed upon prior to scheduling the interview. Please request any accommodations needed at this point to participate.

Your identity will be kept confidential. The researcher will assign you a number at the beginning of the interview and keep that number with your responses. Your participation is completely voluntary. You can refuse to answer any question as well as stop participating at any time. If at any point you wish to discontinue, the information collected will not be used in the analysis and results of this project.

Thank you for your consideration! Please contact this researcher with any questions or if you are willing to participate. You can contact this researcher via email at VanHamRo@MSU.edu. Again, your voluntary participation is greatly appreciated!

Sincerely,

Rosemarie Van Ham
PhD Candidate
Michigan State University

APPENDIX B: Informed Consent

July 16, 2018,

CONSENT FORM TO ANSWER A QUESTIONNAIRE AND TO PARTICIPATE IN AN INTERVIEW

Dear participant,

I am asking you to participate in a research study to explore the career development experiences of college students who have participated or are participating in the *Careers Collaborative* Program at Michigan State University. Your time and the responses provided will help me to better understand the processes related to the career development of persons with disabilities at the postsecondary level.

You have been contacted because you have worked with the Resource Center for Persons with Disabilities (RCPD) and participated in the *Careers Collaborative* Program at some point during your academic career at Michigan State University. You are one of several potential participants that have been contacted and asked to participate in an interview. The interview format will consist of several questions regarding your experiences with the career development process during your time in the *Careers Collaborative*.

Interviews will be no longer than 60 minutes in length. Your identity will be kept confidential.

Your participation is completely voluntary. You can refuse to answer any question as well as stop participating at any time. If at any point you wish to discontinue, the information collected will not be used in the analysis and results of this project.

No records of your participation in this research will be disclosed to others. Because the research is qualitative in nature, excerpts of your interview with me may be included in a resulting manuscript text along with others, but no identifying information will be attached to it. Your

name will not be revealed in any document resulting from this research. Only an identification number or fictitious name will be recorded with your data; your name, affiliation, or other identification will not be recorded with the data.

If you have questions about your participation in this research project, you may contact *Rosemarie Van Ham*, 447 Erickson Hall, vanhamro@msu.edu or Dr. John Kosciulek at Michigan State University (517-353-9443, jkosciul@msu.edu). If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a study participant, or are dissatisfied at any time with any aspect of this study, you may contact - anonymously, if you wish, the Michigan State University's Human Research Protection Program (HRPP) at: (517) 355-2180, fax: (517) 432-4503, email: irb@msu.edu, or regular mail: 4000 Collins Rd, Suite 136, MSU, Lansing, MI 48910.

Thank you for your time

Sincerely,

Rosemarie Van Ham

Doctoral Candidate, Michigan State University

Your participation in this interview means that you voluntarily agree to participate in this research study

APPENDIX C: Participant Demographic Questionnaire

Please fill in the blank or circle the appropriate response for each of the following questions.

1. What is your age? _____yrs
2. What is your gender? Female Male Transgender Prefer not to answer
3. What is your ethnic group?

African American

American Indian

Asian

Caucasian, non-Hispanic

Hispanic

Multiracial

Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander

Other (Specify)_____

Prefer not to identify

4. Disability: Primary _____
Secondary_____

5. What accommodations did you receive while at Michigan State University?

6. College Major: _____

7. Cumulative Grade Point Average: _____

8. When will/did you earn your degree? August 20____ December 20____ May 20____

9. Employment Status: Current Student Graduate Student Volunteer Unemployed

Employed: Full-Time or Part-Time (Occupation: _____)

10. If you have graduated please circle your annual income post-graduation below:

Less than \$10,000

\$10,001- \$20,000

\$20,001-\$29, 999

\$30,000-\$39,999

\$40,000-\$49,999

\$50,000-\$59,999

\$60,000-\$69,999

More than \$70,000

11. Are you currently receiving social security benefits? Yes No

APPENDIX D: Interview Guide for Participants

Date/Time: _____ Location: _____ Participant: _____

Requested Accommodations: _____

1. How did you choose the major or career path to pursue while at Michigan State University? (*Interests, Personal/Choice Goals*)
2. What interested you in your chosen career field? (*Interests*)
3. What past accomplishments or learning experiences prepared you for the career you are interested in? (*Self-Efficacy, Learning Experiences*)
4. How has your disability influenced your choice of career paths? (*Person Inputs*)
 - 4a. **Prompt: Please describe the feedback you received from others regarding your choice. (*Person Inputs*)
5. Please talk a little about significant relationships with others that you have had during your college experience that have influenced your choice of majors/careers? (*Learning Experiences*)
6. What types of academic or career barriers did you encounter during college specific to your disability? (*Person Inputs*)
7. What resources/supports did you utilize while at Michigan State University regarding career exploration and your overall career development? (*Learning Experiences, Personal/Choice Goals*)
8. Describe how you may have been encouraged or perhaps discouraged in the selection and pursuit of your college degree and chosen field of interest. (*Self-Efficacy, Person Inputs*)

9. How has your participation in the *Careers Collaborative* influenced or shaped your college experience? (*Learning Experiences, Personal/Choice Goals*)
10. What would be the ideal job that you see for the next year or two? (*Outcome Expectations*)
11. Where do you see yourself in 5-8 years? (*Outcome Expectations*)
12. Do you have what you need, based on education/experiences, to get to that goal? (*Self-Efficacy*)
 - 12a. **Prompt: what is your next step to get to your long-term career goal? (*Personal/Choice Goals*)
13. How confident are you in obtaining your “dream job”? (*Self-Efficacy*)

APPENDIX E: IRB Approval

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

EXEMPT DETERMINATION

June 12, 2018

To: John F Kosciulek

Re: **MSU Study ID:** STUDY00000703
Principal Investigator: John F Kosciulek
Category: Exempt 2
Exempt Determination Date: 6/12/2018

Title: A Qualitative Analysis of the Career Development of Participants of the Careers Collaborative.

This project has been determined to be exempt under 45 CFR 46.101(b) 2.

Principal Investigator Responsibilities: The Principal Investigator assumes the responsibilities for the protection of human subjects in this project as outlined in Human Research Protection Program (HRPP) Manual Section 8-1, Exemptions.

Continuing Review: Exempt projects do not need to be renewed.

Modifications: In general, investigators are not required to submit changes to the Michigan State University (MSU) Institutional Review Board (IRB) once a research study is designated as exempt as long as those changes do not affect the exempt category or criteria for exempt determination (changing from exempt status to expedited or full review, changing exempt category) or that may substantially change the focus of the research study such as a change in hypothesis or study design. See HRPP Manual Section 8-1, Exemptions, for examples. If the project is modified to add additional sites for the research, please note that you may not begin the research at those sites until you receive the appropriate approvals/permissions from the sites.

Change in Funding: If new external funding is obtained for an active human research project that had been determined exempt, a new initial IRB submission will be required, with limited exceptions.

Reportable Events: If issues should arise during the conduct of the research, such as unanticipated problems that may involve risks to subjects or others, or any problem that may increase the risk to the human subjects and change the category of review, notify the IRB office promptly. Any complaints from participants that may change the level of review from exempt to expedited or full review must be reported to the IRB. Please report new information through the project's workspace and contact the IRB office with any urgent events. Please visit the Human Research Protection Program (HRPP) website to obtain more information, including reporting timelines.



**Office of
Regulatory
Affairs**
Human Research
Protection Program

4000 Collins Road
Suite 136
Lansing, MI 48910

517-355-2180
Fax: 517-432-4503
Email: irb@msu.edu
www.hrpp.msu.edu

MSU is an affirmative-action,
equal-opportunity employer.

APPENDIX F: Glossary

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA): Legislation enacted in 1990 in order to eliminate discrimination against individuals with disabilities in the private sector and specifically to place obligations on employers, public services and accommodations, and transportation.

Americans with Disabilities Act As Amended (ADAAA): Amendment to the original legislation of 1990, enacted in 2008; this legislation made changes to the definition of disability and added more stipulations to reasonable accommodations, and the five areas of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990.

Career Development Experiences: The collective experiences of postsecondary students with disabilities in relation to the career exploration process and decisions surrounding the areas in which students may end up working.

Career Development Process: The process by which individuals explore and make decisions regarding which careers have potential to be a good fit and match the interests and abilities of the individual as well as have a positive outlook for future employment.

Career Development Professionals: Those individuals, including but not limited to counselors, professors, disabilities services staff, etc. who aid a student in setting academic goals and making career-related decisions.

Personal/Choice Goals: Intention to engage in a particular activity or to produce a particular outcome.

Competitive Integrated Employment: refers to employment in which individuals with disabilities are working with individuals without disabilities, allows for wages comparable to peers with and without disabilities, and is at or above the minimum wage. This type of employment also provides the potential for promotional opportunities.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA): Legislation that mandates free appropriate public education for all students, regardless of disability and stipulates that students with disabilities must be identified, provided evaluation(s) and appropriate services to aid in student success.

Interests: People's patterns of likes, dislikes, and indifferences regarding various activities.

Learning Experiences: Academic and personal experiences of individuals, both directly and vicariously/selectively reinforced.

No Child Left Behind (NCLB): Legislation enacted in 2001 with the goal of increasing accountability in the secondary school system for all students.

Outcome Expectations: Beliefs about outcomes of performing particular behaviors.

Participants: Individuals either currently enrolled or alumni who were enrolled in the *Careers Collaborative* program during their postsecondary educational program.

Person Inputs: Predispositions, gender, race, ethnicity, disability/health status.

Pre-Employment Transition Services: Services outlined in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act that require collaboration between schools, Vocational Rehabilitation agencies, and various community partners to be provided to students ages 14 – 26 (in Michigan) who are enrolled in credentialed educational programs. Eligible services fall in the following categories: Job Exploration Counseling, Work-based Learning Experiences, Counseling on opportunities for enrollment in comprehensive transition or postsecondary educational programs, Workplace readiness training, and Instruction in self-advocacy.

Recent Graduates: Those graduating within two years from a postsecondary institution.

Rehabilitation Act of 1973: Legislation enacted to revise the authorization of grants to States for vocational rehabilitation services which places a special emphasis on providing services to

those with the most severe disabilities, as well as provides additional provisions for entities who receive federal financial assistance.

Self-Efficacy: the confidence that one has in his/her ability to accomplish a goal.

Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT): A theory of career development that considers several aspects of an individual and how these variables interact with other aspects of the individual and his or her environment.

Students with Disabilities: Individuals who have been enrolled in an institution of higher education and have been registered with the Disabilities Services Office within that institution.

Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA): Legislation enacted in 2014 with the purpose of addressing how schools, vocational rehabilitation agencies, and local community agencies provide services for students with disabilities.

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